



CultHeRit Insights

Senka Gavranov

Sebastian Boniș

Improving the Employment Situation and Accessibility of Jobs in Cultural Heritage Institutes and Museums (CHIM)



Identifying Solutions for Labor Market Imbalances
in the **Cultural Heritage Sector** in the
Danube Region by Improving Its Accessibility
to Young Professionals



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Core Team

The development of this publication and the associated survey was a collaborative effort.

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Lead Partner



Hungarian National Museum
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AGENZIA JUDEȚEANĂ
PENTRU OCUPAREA FORȚEI
DE MUNCĂ BIHOR



Muzaj za
umjetnost
i obrt

Museum
of Arts
and Crafts





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About This Publication

This volume is the first in the four-part series **CultHeRit Insights**. It focuses on the employment situation in cultural heritage institutes and museums (CHIM).

The CultHeRit Insights series also includes:

Mentorship in Cultural Heritage Institutes and Museums (CHIM), with its five Annexes

Annex I: Methodology and Inquiry Framework – The Evolving Dialogue

Annex II: Voices from the Field – Perspectives on Mentorship in the CHIM

Annex III: Mentoring Young Professionals – From Model to Practice and Evaluation

Annex IV: The Mentorship Lab – Concepts, Proposals and Activities

Annex V: The Mentorship Rulebook

Invisibility of Work in Cultural Heritage Institutes and Museums (CHIM) with its two Annexes:

Annex I: Beyond the Exhibit – A Catalogue of Good Practices for Improving Visibility of Work in CHIM

Annex II The Diagnostic Mini-Survey – A Step-by-Step Guide for Practitioners,

Employment of Persons with Disabilities in Cultural Heritage Institutes and Museums (CHIM).

The series **CultHeRit Insights** and accompanying Annexes was elaborated within the CultHeRit project (1 January 2024 – 30 June 2026), funded by the Interreg – Danube Region Programme with a total budget of 2 043 590 EUR (80% EU support). The initiative united thirteen organizations from eight Southeastern and Central European countries to address structural barriers facing young professionals in the sector.

This publication was supported as part of CultHeRit, an Interreg Danube Region Programme project co-funded by the European Union.

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Executive Summary

This publication synthesizes insights from the CultHeRit project and serves as an open invitation to colleagues, practitioners, stakeholders and authorities to join conversations on the employment situation in the cultural heritage field. It is not a formal scientific study, but an experience-based resource. Colleagues in the sector can use this material to determine whether they encounter similar challenges to those identified and adapt the solutions developed during the CultHeRit project. The publication also encourages peers to explore alternative, potentially more effective approaches and to join broader visibility and advocacy efforts to improve the employment situation in the sector.

The content originates from workshops, interviews and debates involving nearly sixty CHIM professionals across Central and Southeastern Europe. They collaborated over two and a half years, working both as members of the CultHeRit project team and together with colleagues at their respective institutions and across the sector to identify challenges and propose feasible solutions. The insights stem from a focused yet strategic analysis and interventions carried out during the CultHeRit initiative and reflect the realities of work in the sector.

One of the core missions of CultHeRit was to identify fields of intervention where employees themselves could effect change. As the scale and complexity of the challenges facing the sectoral employment market can easily become overwhelming, the partnership adopted a modular approach to keep the expectations realistic and the scope manageable. Overly ambitious initiatives or attempts to solve everything at once risk paralysis and demoralization. To prevent this, the project focused on categorizing challenges and solving those within the capacity of professionals and CHIM institutions, given their available resources and skills. This approach walks a fine line, though. It seeks to empower employees and CHIM institutions to act, without overburdening them or replacing specialized expertise.

Because many challenges require structural changes beyond the reach of individual employees or institutions, CultHeRit worked in parallel to identify issues

necessitating policy reform, directing advocacy campaigns toward policymakers and authorities. These efforts included placing the topic of employment conditions and outcomes on the agendas of professional associations, meetings and conferences as well as engaging national and international stakeholders. The applied multi-level approach ensures that while staff are empowered to act locally and effect change within their reach and area of influence, broader systemic issues are addressed through collective advocacy.

This volume also collects and presents insights from transnational working encounters where participant needs and feedback shaped the agenda. The material offers a window into lived experiences, capturing nuances, challenges, doubts and breakthroughs. Practice alone could not account for the patterns professionals observed in their daily work, so the partnership tested several theoretical frameworks to explain these phenomena. The most promising frameworks, including precarity, the feminization of labor, frugal innovation, the economy of care and invisibility, proved instrumental and also enabled partners to develop resource-conscious approaches yielding realistic, accessible and effective methods for tackling urgent issues. These concepts informed the advocacy campaigns and alliance-building measures pursued for the achievement of the long-term goals.

Because these analytical tools proved instrumental for identifying, tackling and contextualizing problems, the CultHeRit Insights series integrates them across all four volumes as a connecting thread. Each volume incorporates the relevant concepts and definitions anew. This recurrence ensures that every volume remains self-contained and accessible to readers who may not consult the entire series, while providing a shared analytical vocabulary for understanding the structural forces at play. These frameworks represent only one way of understanding the problems the sector faces, specifically the approach that proved useful within CultHeRit. Other analytical perspectives may yield valid insights as well. Readers are invited to share theirs, join the ongoing conversations and engage with this work.

CultHeRit Project Overview

Project Title:	Identifying solutions for labor market imbalances in the cultural heritage sector in the Danube region by improving its accessibility to young professionals
Duration:	01 January 2024 – 30 June 2026
Total Budget:	2 043 590 EUR (EU support: 1 634 872 EUR – 80%)
Funding Source:	Interreg - Danube Region Programme

The CultHeRit initiative united thirteen organizations from eight Southeastern and Central European countries to address the barriers faced by young professionals seeking quality jobs in CHIM. In its first phase, the consortium mapped the current labor market by gathering comparable data on hiring practices, university curricula and expectations of prospective employees. Building on these findings, the partners jointly developed a Transnational Employment Model emphasizing transparent recruitment procedures and effective mechanisms for onboarding and workplace integration.



CultHeRit team at the meeting in Bucharest, at the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Romania, June 2025. Photo credit: INP. Paul Soare.

Ten CHIM institutions from the partnership piloted this model, each hiring an early-career professional for 12 months. Ongoing evaluation of these pilots enabled the consortium to monitor the practical implementation of the employment model, intervene when needed and improve hiring, retention or job satisfaction processes.

In parallel, the partnership produced a series of short films presenting work and employment situation in the cultural heritage sector. The films aim to increase the visibility of work in CHIM and enhance public understanding and appreciation of the professions. The knowledge and experience gained throughout the project form the basis of a transnational strategy to improve job accessibility for young professionals. To amplify the impact of these activities, the partnership launched an advocacy campaign targeting decision-makers. Alongside the tested region-wide employment model, the results of the joint work in CultHeRit contribute to improving accessibility of the sectoral labor market, attracting and retaining young professionals and diversifying the workforce.

CultHeRit Partnership

The project brought together a diverse consortium of institutions across Southeastern and Central Europe.

Lead Partner (LP):

Hungarian National Museum Public Collections Center – Museum of Applied Arts (MNMKK-IMM),
Budapest, Hungary



Zombor Jékely and Sebastian Boniș, coordinators of CultHeRit project, at the opening conference at MAK in Vienna, January 2024. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.

Project Partners (PP):

PP2: MAK – Museum of Applied Arts (MAK), Vienna, Austria

PP3: KUPF OÖ – Cultural Platform Upper Austria (KUPF OÖ), Linz, Austria

PP4: National Institute of Heritage (INP), Bucharest, Romania

PP5: National Museum for the History of Transylvania (MNIT), Cluj-Napoca, Romania

PP6: Bihor County Employment Agency, (AJOFM), Oradea, Romania

PP7: Republic Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments (RIPCM), Belgrade, Serbia

PP8: Intermunicipal Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments – Subotica (IPCMS), Subotica, Serbia

PP9: Serbia Trade Union of Employees in Cultural Institutions (SKS), Belgrade, Serbia

PP10: Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague (UPM), Prague, Czech Republic

PP11: Institute for Protection of Cultural-Historical and Natural Heritage of Republic of Srpska (IPC), Banja Luka, Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina

PP12: Museum of Arts and Crafts (MUO), Zagreb, Croatia

PP14: Notranjska Museum Postojna (NMP), Postojna, Slovenia

Associated Strategic Partners (ASP):

ASP1: Ministry of Culture and Innovation State Secretariat for public collection and cultural developments (Hungary)

ASP2: Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration (Romania)

ASP3: Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia (Serbia)

ASP4: Institute for Cultural Concepts (Austria)

ASP5: Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia (Croatia)

From Observation to Action: The Origins of CultHeRit

The recurring pattern of young professionals leaving the cultural heritage sector was first identified not through large-scale data sets but through observations from earlier initiatives. During international cooperation projects spanning the last fifteen years, the departure of early-career staff surfaced repeatedly in conversations. Initially, these departures seemed isolated to individual institutions. Over time, evidence showed these were not isolated events, prompting discussions about persistently high employee turnover. Partners noted that while interest in vacancies for sector-specific professions, such as art historian or archaeologist, remained steady and competitive, retaining staff proved challenging. Moreover, low interest and high attrition were especially pronounced for general positions requiring backgrounds in accounting, architecture, graphic design and others, as professionals could find more lucrative opportunities elsewhere.

Cross-referencing these accounts with evolving EU policy documents and growing activism within sectoral networks revealed that issues which initially appeared as localized staff shortages echoed across numerous documents, studies and reports published throughout Europe. Consequently, the dialogues that eventually gave rise to CultHeRit began to align with broader, systemic challenges identified across the European cultural and creative sectors (CCS), marking a transition from isolated observations of real-world employment problems to a coordinated response aligned with broader European initiatives.

CultHeRit, therefore, grew organically from a decade and a half of transnational cooperation on various professional topics, where HR issues consistently surfaced in discussions. A core group of partners has collaborated on several initiatives since the Partage Plus era in the early 2010s, including two ArtNouveau projects, establishing a history of trust and cooperation.



CultHeRit team at the project meeting in Postojna, October 2025. Photo credit: CultHeRit.



A Legacy of Collaboration

The following projects formed an integral part of the partnership's organic evolution and its growing capacity to identify shared problems. As the network expanded, conversations regarding the employment situation deepened.

Partage Plus (2012–2014)

A transnational digitization initiative that united 25 partners from 17 countries to expand access to Art Nouveau heritage. This project established the initial network of trust among core partners: Zombor Jékely and Museum of Applied Arts Budapest, Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel and MAK - Museum of Applied Arts Vienna, Radim Vondráček and Lucie Vlčková from the Museum of Decorative Arts Prague, Vesna Lovrić-Plantić and the Museum of Arts and Crafts Zagreb.

ArtNouveau (2017–2019)

Focusing on the sustainable protection and promotion of Art Nouveau heritage in the Danube Region, this project brought together ten partners from seven countries. Celebrating the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, it deepened the partnership's focus on structural integration of Art Nouveau heritage and urban development. The core group of museums formed within Partage Plus was expanded with institutes for protection of cultural heritage, being joined by Irina Iamandescu and the National Institute of Heritage from Romania as well as by Vladimir Džamić and the Republic Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments from Serbia.

ArtNouveau 2 (2020–2022)

Building on previous successes, ArtNouveau2 project strengthened the cultural identity of the Danube region by addressing shared challenges in heritage protection and professionalizing heritage tourism. It further solidified the consortium's capacity to address increasingly complex sectoral issues.

Over a decade of encounters and joint work, partners recognized that challenges were remarkably consistent across institutions: the employment of young professionals, knowledge transfer and the retention of skilled staff.



Vital to CultHeRit were also the partners who joined the initiative through encounters and conversations with the core group: Thomas Diesenreiter and KUPF OÖ - Kulturplattform Oberösterreich, George Cupcea and the National Museum for the History of Transylvania Cluj-Napoca, Csaba Békési and the Bihor County Employment Agency, Balaž Sič and the Intermunicipal Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments Subotica, Dragana Đorđević and the Trade Union of Employees in Cultural Institutions from Serbia, Milijana Okilj and the Institute for Protection of Cultural-Historical and Natural Heritage of Republic of Srpska, as well as Tatjana Hvala and the Notranjska Museum Postojna. Together, these institutions and their teams formed a network united by shared challenges and commitment to join forces to understand and address them. The partnership, thus, represents a convergence of long-standing collaborators and new allies, all driven by a determination to improve the sectoral employment market.

Throughout this evolution, the partnership was guided by a small but consistent coordinating team, Sebastian Boniş and Senka Gavranov, who

provided continuity across the successive projects since the mid-2010s. They served as the connective tissue for the network, helping partners articulate concerns recurring across institutions and recognize shared patterns in their seemingly isolated challenges. By channeling the collective energy of the consortium toward structured inquiry, they facilitated a shift from individual observation to collective diagnosis and joint problem-solving, transforming shared concerns into a coordinated transnational response. Ultimately, these dynamics culminated in the development of CultHeRit, a joint initiative of thirteen organizations to address the identified challenges of employing and retaining young professionals in the sector.

Given this diverse consortium, the partnership focused on identifying actionable solutions within its immediate sphere of influence while expanding outreach beyond its members. This approach allowed the project to address local employment barriers directly and in parallel lay the groundwork for broader sectoral change. Ultimately, this work underscored that the stability of the workforce is essential to fulfilling the institutions' core mandate.



The project meeting in Prague, February 2026. Photo credit: UPM.



Why It Matters: Valuing the Work Behind the Heritage

The role and status of art, culture and cultural heritage have been scrutinized for centuries, with debates stretching back millennia. For example, in the 4th century BCE, Plato's *Republic* examined the place of poetry in the ideal state. Discussions about the value, purpose and impact of art, culture and heritage continually expand across extensive literature. Modern and contemporary scholarship has further enriched the conversations through research on sociological, mental health, wellbeing or economic impacts. Simply put, the literature spans a spectrum between two extremes: utilitarian and instrumentalist approaches, which measure cultural value by economic, political or social returns, to arguments for the autonomy of art, which hold that cultural production possesses intrinsic worth irreducible to external metrics. This volume acknowledges the debate, but does not attempt to map it. Instead, it highlights policy documents and studies that describe the tangible benefits of heritage work to underscore the critical importance of improving the employment situation in the sector. For the purposes of this volume, the primary function of CHIM institutions is the custody, interpretation and transmission of cultural heritage and historical memory through material evidence. This function serves the public interest.

While recent studies and EU policy documents are

often broader in scope and examine the cultural and artistic field, their findings and recommendations are used in this publication because they are generally applicable to cultural heritage institutes and museums as a subset of this ecosystem. There are, however, several caveats. As the cultural heritage partners in the CultHeRit project are drawn exclusively from the CHIM subset, they do not encompass the full spectrum of the GLAM¹ sector. Additionally, the current statistical frameworks, including NACE² codes, may not always provide the granularity needed to fully capture the employment figures and distinct impacts of CHIM. This specificity is significant when considering how the sector is measured and categorized, including European policy frameworks. Statistical frameworks like NACE classify these organizations under specific codes (e.g., 91.02 for museums) and broader EU policy often groups them under the umbrella of the Cultural and Creative Sectors (CCS) or Industries (CCI). Although the sector's unique contributions may be obscured in aggregate data³, they extend far beyond the metrics of the current classifications.

Research indicates that "the CCS play a pivotal role in shaping the identity of the European Union, contributing not only to its artistic vibrancy but also having a significant economic and social impact"

1 GLAM - Galleries Libraries Archives Museums

2 NACE - Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community.

3 Initiatives such as *Charter Alliance*, an EU blueprint project with 47 partners, have identified classification and codification issues and the resulting lack of recognition of the impact of the cultural heritage sector: "The EU Culture and Creative Sectors (CCS) account for EUR 413 billion in terms of value added i.e. 5.5%. At the EU Member State level the CCS employ on average 6.2% of the workforce. Cultural heritage is part of the CCS, but very little statistical data supports the economic impact of the CH sector alone. We find that without statistical recognition, the sector is affected on all levels – from educational to professional." See more: <https://charter-alliance.eu/about-us/why/>



(Clarke et al., 2024, p. 6). The CHIM sector is a vital component of this ecosystem. Even though it might be perceived as an inconsequential economic activity, it functions as a significant employer. Numerous studies and extensive research indicate that the sector contributes substantially to the economy through building restoration, cultural tourism and related service industries (e.g., Kostakis & Lolos, 2024). Analysis and promotion of societal and economic benefits of the sector through business case studies are instrumental for challenging stereotypes and misconceptions about the work and impact of the sector.

However, the value of the cultural sector extends well beyond what is monetized. Focusing exclusively on financial metrics often overlooks the broader cultural significance of heritage work. As Iacob et al. remind, “the methods from the economics literature regarding the valences of the ‘cultural value’ concept prove the obsolescence of the common opinion according to which the economic approach is primarily interested in financial metrics” (2012, p. 61). Mafalda Dâmaso (2021) clarifies that “culture is an ecosystem that generates social and cultural impact: it strengthens European identity and democratic participation, advances a future-oriented education, and contributes to the overall quality of life and wellbeing” (2021, p. 39). The contribution to wellbeing and mental health is particularly salient. The sector’s impact on community cohesion and individual mental health has been documented, for example by Bundhoo et al. (2025). This suggests that cultural engagement serves as a vital resource for public health.

Yet, these contributions remain difficult to promote and argue for if the work itself is invisible,

its impact unrecognized or employment conditions within the sector are precarious. The disconnect between the sector’s high value and the low valuation of its workforce, therefore, appears to be a central tension. The prevalence of narratives such as the ‘professionalized hobby’ frames cultural work as fueled by passion as a sufficient motivation in itself. It obscures the education, knowledge and professional expertise required, as well as the volume and diversity of the work.

As one of the outcomes, this also hinders advocacy efforts to mobilize support for improvements of the employment situation. Experiences from CultHeRit suggest that increasing the visibility of work can significantly contribute to educational, promotional and advocacy efforts aimed at improving the employment situation and conditions. The companion volume *CultHeRit Insights: Invisibility of Work in CHIM* explores this finding in greater detail. When the contributions of CHIM professionals are clearly explained and their impact convincingly presented, perceptions shift, meaning that the public perception of the importance and value of both the institution and its employees tends to increase. This visibility is instrumental in dispelling the narrative that passion is sufficient to sustain the sector. Recognition of cultural work as a vital skilled profession underpinning the social and economic fabric is essential for ensuring fair working conditions and attracting and retaining the young professionals the sector needs. Without such recognition, structural reforms are difficult to advocate for and remain unlikely. Understanding why reforms remain elusive requires examining both the policy environment shaping the sector and the conceptual frameworks explaining its persistent challenges.



The CultHerit team at the MAK Library in Vienna, January 2024. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



The Policy Context: From Recognition to Action

The timing of the CultHeRit project aligns with a shift in the European policy agenda on culture. Employment conditions in the cultural heritage sector are no longer confined to sectoral debates. Driven by activism, research and advocacy of cultural workers, their associations and networks, these issues have risen to prominence with considerable urgency. The project enters this conversation at a moment when EU institutions are actively addressing the structural vulnerabilities of cultural work, recognizing that the precarity within the sector demands systemic intervention. *The EU Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026* stands as a concrete example of this shift, embedding the improvement of working conditions for cultural professionals among its overarching priorities. The alignment between grassroots experience and top-level policy attention creates a critical window of opportunity for advocacy, one that this publication aims to contribute to.

The economic reality of the sector is largely shaped by its fragmentation and the atypical nature of work. As the *Work Plan* notes, the ecosystem is “characterised by self-employment, small and micro-enterprises, high competitiveness and fragmented markets” (Council of the European Union, 2022, Annex I, Section II(a)). This description suggests that the instability often associated with freelance artists is not an anomaly but a systemic feature that likely permeates the broader CCS, where project-based funding is increasingly common. For young professionals entering CHIM, this implies that the traditional model of stable long-term institutional employment may be the exception rather than the rule, replaced by a more volatile landscape of multiple short-term contracts. This phenomenon, also known as the gig economy, is observed in many sectors.

However, it appears more severe for the cultural sector, which has been historically characterized by irregular income and the necessity of holding multiple jobs to supplement earnings. Policy documents acknowledge this reality, stating that professionals “often have an irregular and unpredictable income and combine several jobs to earn a living” (Council of the European Union, 2022, Annex I, Section II(a)). Such employment realities are likely to affect professional focus and disrupt career continuity, often forcing talent to take on multiple jobs and assignments or divert to non-specialized work outside the cultural field simply to meet basic financial needs.

Recent global shocks are compounding this structural fragility. The *Work Plan* acknowledges that “[t]hroughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the CCS have displayed great adaptability and innovativeness. Nevertheless, they have been seriously impacted and continue to be affected by the consequences of the pandemic” (Council of the European Union, 2022, Annex I, Section II(a)). New geopolitical realities and armed conflicts further intensify these impacts. The lingering economic fallout threatens to further constrain hiring capacities of institutions and job security, prolonging the period of uncertainty for new entrants trying to establish themselves in the field. Dâmaso warns that “the atypical nature of artistic and cultural work and its precarious characteristics cannot be fully addressed without taking into account broader structural vulnerabilities and challenges faced by the European cultural and creative ecosystem” (Dâmaso, 2021, p. 1). To tackle these challenges, there is a clear political intent to rectify the identified imbalances. Specifically, the *EU Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026* identifies the “urgent need to further strengthen the resilience of



the CCS, [...] and to ensure fair working conditions for all cultural and creative professionals so that more voices can be heard from this independent and dynamic sector” (Council of the European Union, 2022, Annex I, Section II(a)).

Fair employment, therefore, is not merely an administrative or HR concern but a strategic imperative for the sector’s vitality. The diversity of voices within cultural heritage is one of the factors essential to ensuring democratic access to knowledge and information as well as the participation in culture. This diversity is also contingent upon the economic security of the professionals who curate and manage its spaces, programs and content. Without fair remuneration and good working conditions, the sector risks losing the very talent required to maintain its independence and relevance. Policy interventions aimed at stabilizing employment ultimately should be viewed as interventions to protect the democratic function

of culture itself. Without structural interventions, including financial stabilization, the sector risks a slow erosion of talent and diversity, threatening its capacity to serve as a vibrant, democratic space for all people and future generations.

The economic and social realities of the sector are defined by systemic dynamics that policy has yet to fully resolve. The gap between high-level mandates and their translation into the daily reality of CHIM professionals requires sustained collective effort to close. Bridging this divide has required sustained advocacy driven by grassroots activism, institutional efforts, professional networks and the EU’s call for coordinated action at both supranational and national levels. CultHeRit joined with its multi-level approach. To devise relevant and effective interventions addressing issues identified across individual, institutional, sectoral and societal levels, the project explored an array of theoretical frameworks and concepts.



Senka Gavranov presenting the project at the opening conference at the MAK in Vienna, January 2024.

Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Precarity, Feminization and Care: Conceptual Lenses for Analyzing Sectoral Employment

The examined theoretical frameworks and concepts served as interpretive lenses to unpack structural forces and inform the development of feasible measures during the project's implementation. CultHeRit was not designed as a formal research study to establish definitive causal relationships. Rather, through joint work, inquiry and analysis, the participants explored concepts and mechanisms that offer relevant solution-oriented, though not exhaustive, perspectives on the sectoral employment market. The most promising ones center on precarity, feminization and care. They provided useful analytical frameworks for diagnosis and intervention, helping to make sense of complex realities, obtain actionable information and find meaningful connections among seemingly disjointed occurrences and observed phenomena. Still, further research is needed to deepen the understanding of the connections suggested here.

Precarity and the Passion Dynamic

The employment situation of the cultural sector is often characterized as precarious. For the purposes of this volume, it is assumed that the findings of the studies on the work in cultural field, CCS or CCI are generally applicable to CHIM, as its integral part. Clarke et al. (2024) note that while the CCS shape European identity, workers face irregular income and are “vulnerable to abusive subcontracting, bogus self-employment, underpaid or unpaid work and coercive buy-out

contracts” (p. 6). Dâmaso (2021) observes that artistic and cultural work is “characterized by intermittence, heterogeneity and instability that is much more pronounced than in other sectors” and is “often not fairly paid or sufficiently protected as in other sectors” (p. 7). This precarity is frequently obscured by the romanticized narrative of passion. She notes that “the passionate dedication of many to their craft, as well as high levels of market competition in the sector, which may mean that creative workers will accept work for low or even no pay, hoping that it may lead to other opportunities” (pp. 14–15). Similarly, Guadalupe Jiménez-Esquinas (2025), focusing on cultural heritage, warns that framing this work as being done “for love” is particularly problematic because it “can be instrumentalised to make work invisible and unpaid” (p. 1479).

Taken together, these findings suggest that the sector faces a situation where the willingness to accept low or no pay is fueled by the very passion that should be a source of professional pride. This dynamic, in turn, contributes to a cycle where the labor that sustains heritage is devalued precisely because it is perceived as passion-driven work rather than professional expertise. What appears as voluntary commitment may thus function as a mechanism that sustains the very conditions it claims to transcend. The impact of these conditions on professional growth, employment stability and, ultimately, mental health can be significant. Better understanding and quantifying the extent of stress and burnout resulting from these pressures, however, require further analysis and perhaps longitudinal data.



The Feminization of Labor and the Economy of Care

The dynamic of undervaluation may also relate to the feminization of labor. In this volume, the feminization of a profession or sector is understood as a process where an occupation becomes culturally associated with women's roles, often resulting in occupational segregation, wage suppression and a shift toward emotional labor, irregular work schedules or short-term contracts. Jiménez-Esquinas contends that heritage regimes depend heavily on "often-invisible, trivialised and unpaid forms of care work" (p. 1472), spanning from physical maintenance to community building, which are disproportionately performed by women and minoritized groups. This specific type of labor is described as "the ensemble of often invisible, feminised and undervalued activities that ensure the continuity, maintenance, transmission, and affective engagement with cultural practices, places and heritage objects" (p. 1478). If perceived as a natural extension of women's duty rather than professional expertise, the essential work that sustains heritage risks being rendered invisible.

As Jiménez-Esquinas observes, despite women making up the majority of technical staff, they occupy less than one-third of executive positions (p. 1474). Discussions within the project included open and honest examination of gendered dynamics and their manifestations. Navigating tensions between career and family planning without exacerbating job instability is of high importance for early-career professionals. In a feminized sector, many of them are young women. Conversations therefore, included concepts such as the *glass ceiling*, which refers to (slow)

advancement of women to senior roles, while men in these feminized fields may experience a *glass elevator*, rising rapidly to management positions. Participants also considered how dynamics such as the *parenthood effect*, where childcare affects career advancement or the *sticky floor* trapping workers in low-wage roles further entrench this inequality.

Moreover, informal feminized domains of care remain structurally marginalized, rarely recognized or compensated within formal heritage systems (Jiménez-Esquinas, 2025, p. 1473). This affects diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Precarity and feminization intersect with the issue of invisibility of work, though the nature of this relationship requires further investigation. In this and companion volumes, the invisibility of work refers primarily to the lack of public awareness about the diversity, volume and impact of tasks performed in CHIM. This lack may also contribute to the devaluation of the work itself. If work is feminized and framed as passion-driven, there is a tendency for society and its institutions to overlook the complexity, volume and skill required. The result appears to be a double erasure. The work is unseen because it is hidden behind the scenes, and it is undervalued because it is assumed to be a natural, unpaid extension of care or passion. Therefore, while care is central to cultural heritage, its value and benefits are often obscured and impact often underappreciated. The convergence of the described dynamics and their manifestations creates a landscape of systemic vulnerability for professionals. Communication campaigns that make the work visible can remedy the lack of public awareness of the work in CHIM, while structural issues demand additional measures.



Frugal Innovation as an Emerging Pattern

Responses to structural and communication challenges are many and varied. Participants in CultHeRit working sessions, transnational encounters and advocacy events frequently discussed the constraints limiting sectoral responses. The discussions also revealed an emerging pattern of problem-solving that relies on frugal innovation: resource-conscious solutions born of necessity. As Hossain et al. (2016) and Escudero-Cipriani et al. (2024) explain, this approach involves finding creative, efficient and affordable solutions in contexts where resources are limited. In cultural institutions facing chronic underfunding, it often arises from necessity rather than strategic choice. Initial observations from the project suggest that it does not affect all institutions equally and that its impact varies significantly across capitals, urban centers, rural areas and along the East-West axis. It is likely

to emerge acutely during political and economic instability, budget cuts and similar socioeconomic pressures, varying significantly across national and regional contexts.

Frugal approaches demonstrate the ingenuity and adaptability of the sectoral workforce and allow for immediate action and effective problem-solving. However, a systemic reliance on staff to fill gaps left by underfunding poses a significant risk. Relying on ingenuity in the face of scarcity entails significant trade-offs. It risks normalizing chronic scarcity and placing an undue burden on employees, particularly those performing feminized care work, which may inadvertently exacerbate mental health challenges, work-life imbalance and burn-out rates. The project therefore advises caution: while frugal innovation is a valuable short-term strategy for facilitating urgent response, it cannot serve as a permanent substitute for adequate funding and structural support.



An Invitation to Further Inquiry

The frugal innovation, the feminization of labor and other discussed concepts, connections and interpretations presented in the *CultHeRit Insights* series should be treated as directions for further inquiry rather than definitive conclusions. The frameworks presented in this volume informed the development of some diagnostic tools within the CultHeRit project. The applied concepts emerged as interpretive tools to help make sense of observations and obtain actionable information, allowing the partnership to navigate the complexity and scale of the challenges.

The project was not designed as a formal research study; therefore, extended research is required to better understand which factors and

their interplay affect the employment situation in CHIM and shape its attractiveness to young professionals. For example, comprehensive investigation is needed to examine the relevance and influence of power dynamics, gendered dimensions and structural barriers on the employment situation and outcomes in the sector and broader cultural field. Additionally, further study is needed to understand the extent and long-term impacts of resource scarcity or frugal innovation on staff wellbeing and institutional sustainability, as the expectation of doing more with less risks to become a permanent *modus operandi* rather than an emergency measure. Analysis and comparison with other fields that have successfully addressed similar challenges would also be beneficial to explore their solutions and possibilities for mutual support and alliance building.



Project meeting in Prague, February 2026. Photo credit: UPM.

CultHeRit Mapping: A Multi-Level Perspective on Employment Challenges

The policy landscape outlined previously establishes a clear mandate for change, yet the sector's ability to translate these aspirations into practice is often hindered by the volume and complexity of encountered issues, their deep-rootedness and systemic inertia. Existing research, policy proposals and advocacy initiatives have diagnosed the

dysfunctions characterizing the employment ecosystem in the cultural field. Most of these findings were discussed during CultHeRit encounters. They are not isolated phenomena but interconnected, mutually reinforcing symptoms manifesting across four levels: individual, institutional, sectoral and societal.



CultHeRit project meeting
at the MAK Library in
Vienna, January 2024.
Photo credit:
Zoltán Szalontai.

Understanding the interplay among these levels is essential for designing interventions that address root causes rather than merely treating recurring symptoms.

The Individual Level: Professional Realities

The toll of systemic dysfunctions is perhaps most apparent at the individual level. The exodus of young professionals from the sector is rarely a matter of voluntary career mobility. It often represents a pragmatic response to chronic employment uncertainty, low remuneration and a lack of clear advancement opportunities.

The interplay of structural barriers and gender ideologies can significantly constrain career trajectories. The project encounters provided a platform to also discuss concepts and examples from literature and analyze observed patterns. Many factors contribute to stalled or erratic career paths, including unclear career pathways, haphazard advancement, the parenthood effect or limited access to training and upskilling.

The cumulative stress of navigating atypical work patterns, combined with the lack of stable income or career prospects, affects the planning of life events, relationship development and often results in the postponement of parenthood for those who wish to have children. Women, more



CultHeRit project meeting in Belgrade, October 2024. Photo credit: CultHeRit.

so than men, experience the parenthood effect, where the lack of flexible working arrangements, the pressure of irregular income and overall job instability make it difficult to balance family life with career progression. Parents, mostly mothers, often encounter the *maternal wall*: bias and diminished professional standing after having children. All of this can take a toll on mental health and wellbeing, leading to burnout and a sense of isolation among employees, early-career professionals particularly. These issues do not exist in a vacuum.

The Institutional Level: Revolving Doors, Disrupted Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer and Monoculture

Individual struggles can be amplified or mitigated by the institutional environment. Where structural arrangements allow and leadership fosters supportive environments characterized by transparency, clear job descriptions, equitable task division, understanding of personal struggles and strong interpersonal bonds, the workplace can buffer some of these pressures and encourage mutual support. However, structural constraints often prevail, contributing to high attrition rates. This dynamic evokes a 'revolving door' image:

high turnover where new talent enters but does not stay. CHIM institutions risk transforming into *launchpads*. Repeating the cycle of hiring, training and attrition drains institutional resources. Facing high attrition, management of the institutions eventually confronts a dilemma: invest already scarce resources in training and risk losing the employee to a more lucrative sector, or withhold investment and risk stagnation. Some also resort to repeated volunteering and unpaid internships as stopgap measures, which can further exacerbate job instability for young professionals, prompting them to leave the sector in search of more stable employment prospects.

The urgency of solving high attrition increases due to the critical challenge of the demographic shift. As senior staff retire, there is a risk of disrupted intergenerational knowledge transfer and loss of institutional memory. The departure of experienced professionals without adequate mechanisms for succession planning or mentorship means that tacit knowledge, institutional memory and specialized skills are lost for the institution. As unwritten institutional memory sustains daily operations, its loss with senior staff threatens the continuity and transmission of professional standards, especially when structured programs or communication measures for transferring this knowledge to early-career professionals are absent. This gap is not simply a staffing issue.



It represents a break in the continuity of the profession, leaving younger colleagues without the guidance necessary to navigate complex heritage practices.



Senka Gavranov facilitates the workshop with CultHeRit mentors in Bucharest, June 2025. Photo credit: INP. Paul Soare.



Vesna Lovrić-Plantić (MUO), co-author of the *CultHeRit Insights* series, at the project meeting at the MAK Library in Vienna, January 2024. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Furthermore, when young professionals leave or senior staff retire, institutions often cannot fill these positions immediately. Frequently, due to a lack of steady funding, vacancies remain unfilled for long periods, compelling the remaining staff to absorb the impact. This leads to increased workloads.

The operational strain of overburdened staff, limited funding and low income ultimately affects a diversity of perspectives and approaches in workplaces and the sector. It can contribute to the development of a monoculture of thought and work practices. When remuneration for work requires individuals to possess independent financial resources to survive, the workforce tends to skew toward those with such means. The perspectives represented in programs, content and services that institutions offer risk narrowing. Such homogeneity may also limit the ability of the sector and institutions to reflect and engage with the diverse communities they serve. Preventing or tackling this homogeneity through fair and stable employment measures and programs contributes to the democratization of both employment access and cultural programming. Ensuring access to quality employment for professionals from diverse backgrounds, including those from low-income families and different marginalized groups, helps institutions diversify their programs and services and produce cultural offerings that serve and include the full spectrum of society. Achieving this requires fair remuneration, transparent hiring, equitable workplaces and stable funding for the cultural sector.

The Sectoral Level: A Fragmentation of Professional Community

The institutional dynamics overflow into the sectoral level. The *launchpad effect*, initially observed at the level of individual institutions, risks becoming a defining characteristic of the entire CHIM ecosystem. The persistence of the launchpad effect results in a sector depleted of its already scarce resources in attempts to integrate and provide training to young employees. Their departure ultimately benefits other industries. Across the region, a similar pattern is observed and exacerbated by reduced funding and restricted access to financial resources. Instead of a supportive ecosystem, competition for limited funds appears increasingly prominent. This dynamic threatens to sever inter-institutional ties, making it difficult to form and maintain a cohesive and supportive professional community. A lack of sectoral support, in turn, weakens negotiation positions in advocacy efforts and reinforces instability within individual institutions and for their employees.

The resource drain may compel institutions to rely on frugal innovation, leveraging in-house staff and ingenuity to fill gaps where external funding is reduced or absent. While this demonstrates adaptability, it also risks perpetuating a cycle in which the absence of adequate investment leads to an over-reliance on staff resourcefulness. Such a dynamic threatens to increase burnout and further accelerate the very attrition the sector seeks to prevent.



Project meeting in Prague, February 2026.

Photo credit: UPM.



Project meeting in Cluj-Napoca, June 2024.

Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.

Because the sector is composed of institutions and their employees, the cumulative effect of internal challenges propagates outward, threatening to reshape the entire ecosystem and affecting the nature of relationships established and maintained at all levels. For example, insufficient and/or unstable funding contributes to the prevalence of short-term contracts, which in turn further fragments the workforce, making it difficult to build the long-term relationships of trust necessary for a stable and inclusive heritage sector.

The Societal Level: Perception and Value of Work in CHIM

Without a unified voice, the sector struggles to tackle the devaluation of work, allowing the cycle of undervaluation to continue. As explained earlier, cultural, artistic and heritage work is often perceived by the public as a pursuit fueled by passion or as a ‘professionalized hobby.’ Such stereotypes obscure the complexity, skill and impact of the work. Misconceptions are not merely misrepresentations but damaging narratives that affect the valuation of work and can undermine livelihoods. They contribute to masking, if not justifying, the structural barriers that prevent artists and cultural workers from making a sustainable living. This societal perception influences funding allocation and policy priorities, creating a feedback loop where the lack of visibility

and recognition for work leads to underfunding, which in turn reinforces the reliance on precarious labor.

As mentioned previously, art, culture and heritage are recognized as vital to community cohesion, democratic participation, and wellbeing, yet the professionals who sustain them are often expected to accept unfavorable conditions as the cost of doing meaningful work. The disconnect between the sector’s high societal contribution and the low valuation of its workforce appears to be a central tension. Until this perception shifts, the structural reforms necessary to attract and retain a diverse, skilled workforce are unlikely to gain the political and public support they require.

To target these interconnected vulnerabilities, the CultHeRit project adopted a multi-layered approach. This entailed operating across multiple levels: supporting individual needs for mentorship, piloting institutional models for improving hiring procedures and workplace stability, fostering intra-sectoral collaboration and advocating for improved employment conditions. Recognizing that single projects or isolated solutions cannot solve the structural problems of the sector, the project aimed to identify areas of intervention where employees and their institutions can be empowered to disrupt the cycle of precarity and contribute to a more sustainable future for the cultural heritage workforce.

CultHeRit Approach to Empowerment: (Re)claiming Agency

One of the core missions of CultHeRit was to identify fields of intervention where the sector, its institutions and employees could effect change. The project aimed to (re)build the capacity of professionals to act: to identify problems and devise solutions for challenges within their reach, given available resources and skills. This approach navigates a delicate balance: it seeks to empower staff without overburdening them or replacing the specialized knowledge of external experts. Their support remains irreplaceable, yet for many smaller CHIM institutions, it is inaccessible due to limited resources. The CultHeRit self-reliant approaches enabled professionals to identify, contextualize and assess problems, reclaiming the agency to devise solutions for the challenges they can actually address.



Project meeting in Cluj-Napoca, June 2024.

Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.

Central to this approach is empowerment. It does not imply exerting control over one's environment or circumstances, a feat impossible in a structurally constrained sector. Empowerment, rather, entailed building the capacity to identify problems, propose solutions and realistically assess the ability to act meaningfully, purposefully and impactfully. It operated on the assumption

that even within structural constraints, individuals and their institutions possess agency and the capacity to navigate, adapt and influence their immediate surroundings. To achieve this, it is imperative to avoid dissipating energy and resources on overly ambitious undertakings that carry a high risk of failure and disappointment. Repeating this cycle can lead to learned helplessness, defeatism and a profound sense of futility. Instead, the project sought to empower proactive approaches and transform feelings of powerlessness into the practice of meaningful action. It promoted a proactive, targeted approach to overcoming the sense of powerlessness in the face of overwhelming systemic barriers. It is, therefore, vital to shift the focus from unattainable mastery over the system to practical, actionable measures that allow and encourage professionals to identify ways to improve their immediate working environments. Empowerment also implies the wisdom to realistically evaluate the likelihood of success and recognize the limitations of individual or local action. This entails critical assessment of the situation, categorization and prioritization of problems as well as the time and energy required to achieve desired outcomes.

It also entails reaching out, pooling resources and building alliances.

Recognizing that many challenges require structural changes beyond the reach of individual employees or institutions, CultHeRit worked in parallel to identify problems necessitating policy reform. The project directed advocacy campaigns toward policymakers and authorities. These efforts included placing the topic of employment conditions on the agendas of professional associations, meetings and conferences, and



Mentorship workshop in Bucharest, June 2025.
Photo credit: INP, Paul Soare.

organizing advocacy events. The applied multi-level approach ensured that staff are empowered to act locally and effect change within their reach and area of influence, while fostering collaboration with others to address broader systemic issues through collective advocacy and strategic alliances for amplifying impact.

This strategy unfolds across four interconnected tiers:

Individual Level: Identifying problems and devising solutions which are within the reach and sphere of influence of employees and their teams. For example, the identified problem of invisibility of work was tackled through DIY surveys, revised credit lists and promotion of work in CHIM.

Institutional Level: Participatory development of the Transnational Employment Model to improve institutions' hiring and workplace integration practices. The model was tested through the 12-month employment of young professionals, with mentorship as its integral part. It aimed to provide structured, reliable guidance for new colleagues, test the feasibility of mentorship within institutions, preserve institutional memory and improve institutional cohesion.

Sectoral Level: Sharing knowledge, findings and recommendations with colleagues from the sector, joining national and international initiatives and increasing the visibility of sectoral work to shift public perception.

Societal Level: Engaging in collective advocacy for structural change, policy reform and the recognition of cultural labor as work requiring fair remuneration, stable funding and quality employment.

Given the sector's scarce resources and multiplicity of challenges, the most efficient course of action requires prioritizing measures that cross and benefit all levels. Isolated and sporadic interventions are neither effective nor efficient. Instead, they should form a dynamic feedback loop. Empowerment at the local level improves the work at the institutions. Improved functioning of institutions strengthens the sector and provides the evidence base for global advocacy. Conversely, the benefits of policy change extend beyond the societal level. They

create the environment necessary for institutional and local reforms to succeed and improve work and lives of individuals working in CHIM.

Within this complex landscape, a range of responses exists. Some merely manage symptoms, while others address root causes. The path forward requires distinguishing between measures that merely perpetuate the status quo and integrated approaches necessary to efficiently tackle identified problems.



Responses: From Inadequate to Desirable

The diagnosis of systemic vulnerabilities across individual, institutional, sectoral and societal levels reveals a stark reality: the challenges facing the cultural heritage sector are too entrenched to be resolved by isolated measures. Professionals frequently feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of interconnected problems. This reaction is compounded by a history of half-solutions, mistargeted interventions and processes or technologies inherited from other sectors that fail to translate to the specific context of CHIM. A number of solutions failed to produce lasting change because

they targeted a narrow problem without addressing the broader structures. If repeated, the cycle of attempting to solve a problem and failing can lead to a state akin to learned helplessness, resulting in paralysis and inaction.

The observations regarding inadequate responses emerged from conversations during project preparation and subsequent encounters with professionals both within and beyond the CultHerit partnership.

Inadequate Responses

Inadequate responses often stem from a need to respond urgently or a reluctance to confront uncomfortable truths. They include, but are not limited to:

Silence and Denial: Ignoring the problems, hoping that they will resolve themselves, often exacerbates them. For example, institutional or sectoral leadership does not respond to increasing attrition rates or signs of burnout. This avoidance allows underlying issues to fester.

Deflection (Whataboutism): Responsibility is often deflected by pointing to difficulties faced by other sectors, minimizing the severity of the employment crisis within CHIM.

Reliance on Individual Resilience: A common pitfall is expecting staff to navigate precarious conditions through sheer grit and personal resilience. This approach places an undue burden on individuals, often leading to learned helplessness, defeatism and fatalism when their individual efforts fail to alter the systemic reality.

Top-Down Mandates: Solutions imposed without input from the workforce often miss the mark, failing to address the lived experiences of those working on the ground.

Cosmetic Changes: Launching a new website, social media presence or rebranding campaign without altering underlying employment practices can create a facade of progress while core issues remain untouched.

Technological Fixes (Tech-Hacks): Relying on technology to solve problems that are fundamentally social and economic provides a false sense of security. Technology alone cannot fix structural or institutional issues, such as the lack of career pathways.

Unrealistically Ambitious Projects: Initiatives that promise transformation without the necessary resources or timeframes often collapse, further eroding trust and morale.

Divisive Approaches: Strategies that fracture the sector by blaming specific groups or creating internal conflict weaken the collective capacity for change. Antagonizing other sectors is equally counterproductive.



Desirable Responses

In contrast, desirable responses as identified and practiced by the CultHeRit partnership are characterized by honesty, inclusivity and a commitment to structural reform. They begin with open and respectful conversations that acknowledge the reality of the situation without assigning blame. These conversations must be constructive, ensuring that the right questions are asked and that answers reflect the lived experiences of people working in the sector. The approach must be inclusive and participatory, involving diverse voices in the design and implementation of solutions. Responses should be experience-based and validated by data, ensuring a move beyond anecdotal evidence to generate actionable information for decision-making.

The shift from inadequate to desirable responses demands commitment and collective effort. The consequences of failing to make this shift are severe. Continued reliance on inadequate responses contributes to reinforcing the precarity and the feminization of undervalued labor that threatens to undermine the mental health and wellbeing of the workforce. As a result, the cycle of talent drain and attrition repeats at an accelerated rate, depleting the sector of its talent and

diversity. Ultimately, it threatens the sector's ability to fulfill its democratic and cultural functions, as the very professionals who sustain it feel compelled to leave.

Effective interventions are horizontally connected and coordinated, fostering collaboration across institutions, sectors and borders. They aim for structural and systemic solutions rather than temporary patches, recognizing that problems are embedded in the fabric of the sector. Finding and implementing solutions requires broad (multi)sectoral alliances that can amplify the voice of cultural workers and advocate for policy changes. They require time, energy and patience, as well as the willingness to engage in difficult but necessary conversations. They also require agreeing on the goals: to break the cycle of precarity, improve the employment situation in the CHIM sector, particularly for young professionals and vulnerable groups, and promote intergenerational cooperation in its institutions. Flexibility is key. In some instances and depending on the problem, incremental or local measures can achieve the goals. In others, work on structural reform is needed. In most, they should be combined.



CultHerit Opening conference at the MAK in Vienna, January 2024. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Project meeting in Cluj-Napoca, June 2024. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.

The CultHeRit Response: A Multi-Level Approach

The CultHeRit project aligned with these core principles. By combining institutional and sectoral interventions, such as the Transnational Aspirational Employment Model, with societal actions, such as visibility campaigns and advocacy, the project addressed the multi-level nature of the structural challenges. It emphasized

transnational cooperation, recognizing that challenges cross borders and require joint solutions. The goal was to move beyond inadequate responses and build a future where the cultural heritage sector is a viable, attractive and sustainable career path for young professionals.



Project meeting at the MAK Library in Vienna, January 2024. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



To achieve this, the project, therefore, prioritized six guiding principles:

Inclusive and Participatory: Solutions involve diverse voices in their design and implementation, ensuring that those affected by the problems are central to the process.

Experience-Based and Data-Driven: Moving beyond anecdotal evidence to generate actionable information is essential. This includes participatory design, surveys, pilot programs and comparative data to inform strategy.

Horizontally Connected and Coordinated: Fostering collaboration across institutions, sectors and borders amplifies impact. No single institution can solve these problems alone. Broad multisectoral alliances are necessary to advance policy reform.

Structural: Effective interventions aim for long-term solutions rather than temporary patches, recognizing that problems are deeply woven into the structure, culture and daily operations of the cultural heritage landscape.

Dedicating Time and Resources: Sustainable change cannot be achieved through volunteerism or ad-hoc efforts alone. It requires investment of time and resources to support necessary reforms, including formalized mentorship programs and stable employment pathways.

Self-Reliance without Self-Isolation: Professionals must be empowered to solve problems within their reach, but they must also connect to a broader network of support and advocacy. Self-reliance does not mean isolation.

These principles guided the partnership's interventions. Given the project's focus, scope and thirty-month duration, adjusting expectations was crucial. A single initiative cannot solve many, let alone all, deep-seated structural problems. The goal was, thus, to test specific models, generate actionable knowledge and contribute to a longer-term process of change.

Recognizing that problems spanning individual, institutional, sectoral and societal levels cannot be solved by a single measure, the partnership adopted a multi-level intervention strategy. This targeted, resource-efficient approach operates simultaneously across different levels of the environment, aiming for a cumulative effect where individual actions align to produce sector-wide change and

societal impact. This change benefits individual employees, improving their employment conditions and outcomes. The project's response is not a linear sequence of steps but an integrated framework where institutional interventions, policy reform, societal visibility and advocacy reinforce one another to improve the employment situation and improve job stability for professionals in the sector, especially young professionals entering the field.

While these interventions are presented across four distinct levels for clarity, in practice they function as an integrated system. A change at the institutional level reverberates through the sectoral and societal spheres. The tools deployed are cross-cutting. Their primary entry point may be individual or institutional, but their impact is designed to extend outward.



The Individual Level: Immediate Action and Transparency

The first level of intervention focuses on the local context, targeting immediate problems that institutions and their employees can solve with existing resources. This level is characterized by self-reliance and immediacy. In CultHeRit, one

of the identified problems was the invisibility of work in CHIM. Primary tools used to address it included DIY diagnostic surveys, communication and visibility activities and revising sectoral conventions, such as credit lists and open communication about daily work, as described in the volume *CultHeRit Insights: Invisibility of Work in CHIM*.



Co-authors of *CultHeRit Insights* series

Anna Böhm-Vinceffy (MNMKK-IMM) at the meeting in Bucharest, June 2025. Photo credit: INP. Paul Soare.



Ștefania Dogărel (MNIT) and Carlotta Schiller (MAK) at the project meeting in Cluj-Napoca, June 2024. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.





The DIY survey was designed to be implemented by staff themselves to better understand the public perception of the work in CHIM and uncover the knowledge gap between professionals and the public. Conducting the survey empowered employees to gather actionable information about their audiences, building their capacity and skills for audience engagement. It is a tool for diagnosis and immediate action, not a substitute for professional support or the structural changes that only policy and advocacy can secure. By generating local data, these surveys also provide the evidence base needed for broader sectoral advocacy.

Beyond visibility, CultHeRit also addressed the challenge of bridging the generational gap and responding to the disruption of knowledge transfer when senior staff retire, without replacement. Intergenerational dialogue and cooperation are crucial. These interactions primarily support professional growth and workplace integration of new colleagues. They are also bi-directional. For example, they help narrow the digital divide through collaboration in mentorship teams where senior professionals offer historical context and younger colleagues bring digital fluency. Such interactions foster mutual learning, enriching each person and allowing heritage stewardship to evolve. They strengthen institutional cohesion and prepare the next generation of heritage stewards to navigate an increasingly complex sector, ensuring that the loss of knowledge, skills and networks is prevented. The mentorship piloted within the employment model exemplifies this cooperation, supporting the onboarding and integration of young professionals.

The Institutional Level: Transnational Analysis, Employment Model and Mentorship

The second level focuses on the institutional context, targeting employment and professional development. Early in the project, the partnership conducted a **Transnational Analysis** to reveal common employment practices in CHIM across participating countries. Coordinated by Csaba Békési and the team of experts from the Bihor County Employment Agency (AJOFM), the partnership gathered over 1 500 responses to the questionnaires from eight countries. Beyond quantitative data, the responses revealed perceptions of employment held by employers, current employees and prospective staff and allowed the comparative analysis.



Csaba Békési in Postojna, October 2025.
Photo credit: CultHeRit.



The analysis established the foundation for the **Transnational Aspirational Employment Model**. The model organizes the employment relationship into seven categories and twenty-six elements, covering the lifecycle from recruitment to separation. Co-developed through the consortium's collective experience, it defines efficient and desirable employment procedures emphasizing transparent processes, clear career paths and specific solutions for professions in deficit.

The model was developed in two stages. First, the partnership defined an aspirational framework: an ambitious yet realistic account of HR practices designed to balance idealism with feasibility across diverse contexts. Second, the partnership tested this framework under real-life conditions in ten CHIM organizations, recruiting young professionals for a 12-month period to trial selected elements from the model.

Thomas Philipp from KUPF OÖ – Kulturplattform Oberösterreich coordinated the model's development and ongoing evaluation. The AJOFM team and the Serbia Trade Union of Employees in Cultural Institutions (SKS) provided support. Defined at the transnational level, the model is broadly applicable across the sector while adaptable to national regulations and local circumstances. It was developed in close cooperation with the national Key Stakeholder Groups (KSGs), which included experts from museums, universities, HR management, employment agencies, trade unions, public authorities and civil-society organizations. The result is a feasible, realistic solution grounded in practitioner experience. Ultimately, the tested model serves as a practical manual for institutions seeking to improve HR practices.



Thomas Philipp facilitates a workshop in Belgrade, October 2024. Photo credit: CultHeRit



Mentors and mentees at the project meeting in Banja Luka, April 2025. Photo credit: IPC.



Mentorship was one of three elements selected for intensive testing during the 2025 pilot actions. As a core component of onboarding and orientation, mentorship supports new employees as they acclimatize to their roles and organizational culture. Its purpose is to make new staff feel welcome, reduce the time to productivity and strengthen engagement and retention.

The pilot tested various arrangements, from traditional one-on-one mentoring to co-mentoring and peer-support models, to ensure applicability across diverse contexts. While the pilot demonstrated the value of structured mentorship, it did not automatically result in universal formalization. Four partner institutions, however, adopted mentorship as the standard onboarding practice beyond the pilot.



Senka Gavranov facilitates a mentor-mentee workshop in Postojna, October 2025. Photo credit: CultHeRit.

Workshops and transnational encounters facilitated by Senka Gavranov complemented regular evaluation reports, supporting mentors and mentees in their professional growth and joint work. Noteworthy interest from sector professionals, institutional leadership and policymakers in the insights emerging from the workshops served as the impetus for her to synthesize the collective input from mentors, mentees and partners into the second volume of the four-volume *CultHeRit Insights* series, *Mentorship in CHIM*. This dedicated volume provides a detailed account of the methodology, challenges and breakthroughs of workplace mentorship as discussed during the supportive transnational encounters and interactions. If formalized, planned and set-up well, mentorship is a viable way to ensure intergenerational transfer of knowledge and enhance workplace integration of new colleagues and their professional development.

The Sectoral Level: Sectoral Alliances and Community

The third level operates at the sectoral scale, connecting institutional, national and Europe-wide initiatives. At this level, the consortium also contributed to ongoing conversations and initiated new ones about work and employment conditions in the cultural field. The transnational pilot and encounters demonstrated that while local contexts differ, underlying structural vulnerabilities are common and solutions can be shared just as easily. The key is flexibility and adaptability to different contexts. Within CultHeRit, participatory design in a transnational multigenerational setting facilitated this. As a result, the Transnational Employment Model is adaptable to many institutional contexts and regulatory frameworks. The cumulative effect of its adoption across large parts or, more ambitiously, the entire sector is likely to significantly improve the sector's employment landscape.

The interest was evident throughout the project. Several key outputs, including the short films and the *CultHeRit Insights* series, emerged from



Lenka Stolarová presents the advocacy campaign in Postojna, October 2025. Photo credit: CultHeRit.

the growing interest among peers and colleagues across Europe regarding the partnership's work on improving employment conditions and accessibility of quality jobs. Expressed repeatedly during the project, this interest motivated amplified outreach and presentation of findings and tools. The short films and this publication are a direct response to the sector's demand for shared knowledge, good practices and platforms for exchange and cooperation.

Experiences from the project underscore the necessity of collaboration, pooling resources and aligning actions across borders. Reaching out to join existing initiatives advocating for the improvement of artists' and cultural workers' conditions is essential to amplify impact. Establishing working relationships within and outside the sector and building alliances contribute to solidifying an international community of practice engaged in meaningful action. These alliances strengthen the collective effort to improve the employment situation by preventing the dissipation of scarce resources and extending outreach.

The Societal Level: Films, Advocacy and Transnational Strategy

The challenges facing the sector, therefore, transcend national borders. They are shared across the European context. By connecting internationally and working together, the partnership amplified the impact of its efforts. The cumulative effect of individual actions aligned across borders contributes to shifting public perception and policy more effectively than isolated national efforts. Consequently, the fourth level focused on societal and transnational dimensions.

The advocacy campaign targeting decision-makers was led by Lenka Stolarová and the team from the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague. It utilized evidence gathered from the surveys, the pilot of the employment model and insights collected during the project's implementation to advocate for better conditions and increased funding.



To operationalize the unity of this consortium and stakeholder interest, a **Transnational Strategy** was drafted by Ștefan Cibian and the Făgăraș Research Institute. This document synthesizes lessons learned from the pilot and co-creative workshops into a strategic direction and concrete

agenda for action. It outlines a roadmap for moving from isolated pilot successes to a cohesive, sector-wide movement, amplifying the voice of cultural workers across borders. The strategy communicates a shared long-term vision and provides a reference point for future policy dialogues.



Ștefan Cibian moderates a workshop in Postojna, October 2025. Photo credit: CultHeRit.



The project addressed the invisibility of work and improved its public perception through targeted visibility and communication activities. Marija Jurkić-Flis from the Museum of Arts and Crafts (MUO) coordinated the partnership's communication efforts. She promoted project events and

results, ensuring the visibility of team members, especially the young professionals employed during the pilot. This communication strategy made the work of professionals visible, associating it strongly with the sector's impact and achievements.



Marija Jurkić-Flis presents communication activities at the project meeting in Belgrade, October 2024. Photo credit: CultHerit.



Similarly, **short films** documenting daily operations in CHIM aimed to improve public awareness and strengthen advocacy. Award-winning filmmaker Mihai Dragolea created the films during the project's final year. He visited CHIM partners, documented activities in their institutions and heritage sites and interviewed their colleagues. These films familiarize audiences with the work behind the scenes, on heritage sites and within the walls of CHIM institutions. The films' impact extends across all four levels. Having their contributions documented and promoted empowers staff by improving visibility and public appreciation of the sector.

All documents, films and tools are available on the project website.

Combined, visibility activities, films and advocacy efforts ensure the project's continuing impact and sustainability. They continue to highlight the sector's achievements while challenging misconceptions that reduce cultural work to a hobby or a passion-driven pursuit. By showcasing the volume, diversity and complexity of the work, these interventions enhance public appreciation and strengthen advocacy outcomes.

Interconnected Levels: A Dynamic Feedback Loop

The mechanism connecting these levels is a dynamic feedback loop. It operates not as a linear process but as a cycle where empowerment at the local level fuels institutional reform, which in turn informs and strengthens policy advocacy. This advocacy feeds back into the individual level by improving job stability and employment conditions. The project operationalized this loop to maximize

impact, while working within resource constraints, ensuring efficiency and preventing burnout. Thus, sustainability was embedded in the design of the actions. By linking multiple levels, CultHeRit ensured interventions were immediately actionable and strategically aligned with long-term goals. The approach enabled the identification of accessible solutions within employees' and institutions' reach while building a case and alliances for structural changes beyond their reach.

Achieving tangible results, needless to say, requires time and collective effort. The synergistic interplay among the four levels is essential to achieve desired impacts efficiently and sustainably. Through this approach, benefits propagate across individual, institutional, sectoral and societal spheres. For example, measures to increase the visibility of work benefit individual employees by ensuring their labor is recognized and valued. Transparency in task division improves team dynamics and institutional cohesion. The visibility efforts extend outward, promoting the value and impact of work in the sector, helping to dispel misconceptions about the profession in wider society, which is crucial for rallying support for improved working conditions. Mentorship serves as another example of this multi-level interplay. When implemented well, its benefits multiply. It connects people at the individual level, strengthening team dynamics and institutional cohesion. Stronger institutions secure knowledge transfer and continued heritage stewardship. Society benefits from better care for heritage and a deeper understanding of the work required to sustain it. This, in turn, helps mobilize support for fair remuneration and improved access to quality jobs for young professionals and vulnerable groups.



Although these measures are primarily designed to improve access to quality jobs, they are fundamental to the democratization of institutions, ensuring equitable access to heritage, knowledge,

culture and the arts for all. Diversifying the workforce is a prerequisite for developing diverse programs and cultural content that truly reflect the societies these institutions serve.



Project meeting in Postojna, October 2025.
Photo credit: CultHeRit.

CultHeRit awarded Flagship Certificate

In early November 2025, CultHeRit team represented by Sebastian Bonis and Marija Jurkić Flis were in Sarajevo during 14th Annual Forum - EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

It was an important moment for the CultHeRit project to receive the Danube Strategy Flagship certificate.



LEFT: Sebastian Bonis receives the Flagship project certificate from Irina Cozma. Photo credit: Marija Jurkić Flis.

CultHeRit Final Conference and International Advocacy Event: Future of Employment in CHIM Sector

The CultHeRit project culminated in a vibrant final conference and international advocacy event at the historic Petőfi Literary Museum in Budapest on 17 June 2026. Under the theme ***Future of Employment in CHIM Sector***, the gathering brought

together seventy professionals and stakeholders from across Central and Southeastern Europe to celebrate two and a half years of intensive collaboration and to chart the path forward for the cultural heritage institutes and museums (CHIM) sector.



Dr. Zsolt Sári, State Secretary at the Ministry of Social Relations and Culture of Hungary, delivers opening remarks. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Mirjana Vidanović, Communication Officer of the Interreg Danube Region Programme, addresses the audience. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



His Excellency Dr.sc. Mladen Andrić, ambassador of the Republic of Croatia to Hungary, attends the conference. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Sebastian Boniș, project manager of CultHeRit, moderates the event. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Zsombor Jékely, director of Collections at the Hungarian National Museum Public Collections Center – Museum of Applied Arts (MNMKK-IMM) and CultHeRit project manager, greets the participants. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.

The event was moderated by Sebastian Boniș, CultHeRit project manager, and Dr. Zsombor Jékely, director of collections at the Hungarian National Museum Public Collections Center (MNMKK-IMM). Participants were greeted by Dr. Zsolt Sári, State Secretary at the Ministry of Social Relations and Culture of Hungary, and Mirjana Vidanović, Communication Officer of the Interreg-Danube Region Programme. The conference was honoured by the presence of His Excellency Dr. sc. Mladen Andrić, Ambassador of the Republic of Croatia to Hungary.

In line with CultHeRit's participatory approach, the conference featured a multiplicity of voices, perspectives and messages. The programme opened with an introduction by Senka Gavranov, CultHeRit professional coordinator and team leader, who provided a comprehensive overview of the project, the challenges it sought to address and the solutions it developed, highlighting the participatory approach adopted for problem solving. These include

addressing chronic underfunding, low remuneration, the low interest of young professionals and high attrition; increasing the visibility of the diversity, volume and impact of all work performed in CHIM; establishing flexible workplace mentorship programs not just as an individual act of goodwill but as a formalized policy and institutional arrangement for intergenerational knowledge transfer, solidarity and professional development of early-career colleagues, welcoming them into a multigenerational community of practice; fostering a sense of belonging in the workplace, teams and profession; opening the sector for employment of persons with disabilities; building broader alliances in an international setting for mutual support and joint problem solving; and embedding participatory approaches at all levels of work from the policy to the institutional and individual level. She concluded by stating that care for heritage must include care for the people who work with and on heritage; sustaining the workforce is inseparable from sustaining the heritage itself.



Senka Gavranov, professional coordinator and team leader of CultHeRit, presents the project journey, results and impact. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.

Leadership and management representatives from the project's partner institutions reflected on what CultHeRit changed for their organizations. Contributions came from Zsombor Jékely, Hungarian National Museum Public Collections Center (MNMKK-IMM), Hungary and from Romania from Irina Iamandescu, National Institute of Heritage, George Cupcea, National Museum for the History of Transylvania (MNIT), and Csaba Békési, Bihor County Employment Agency (AJOFM). From Serbia, the audience heard from Vladimir Džamić, Republic Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments (RIPCM), Belgrade, Neda Džamić, Intermunicipal Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments (IPCMS), Subotica, and Dragana Đorđević, Serbia Trade Union of Employees in Cultural Institutions (SKS). From Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milijana Okilj addressed the audience on behalf of the Institute for Protection of Cultural-Historical and Natural Heritage of Republic of Srpska (IPC). Michaela Neškerová from the Museum of Decorative Arts in

Prague (UPM), Czech Republic, Tatjana Hvala from the Notranjska Museum Postojna (NMP), Slovenia and Vesna Lovrić-Plantić from the Museum of Arts and Crafts (MUO), Zagreb, Croatia, also spoke about the beneficial impact of the project on the HR practices in their institutions.

Expert team leaders who developed specific tools during the project presented their work: Senka Gavranov, professional coordinator and team leader of the project, who also worked on the invisibility of work, flexible and alternative solutions for mentorship at the workplace and the employment of persons with disabilities; Csaba Békési, who with his team from AJOFM performed the transnational analysis; Thomas Philipp from KUPF OÖ, who coordinated and edited the Transnational Aspirational Employment Model; Ștefan Cibian, who led the development of the Transnational Strategy; and Mihai Dragolea, the award-winning filmmaker who created the series of short films documenting daily work in CHIM institutions.



Zsombor Jékely, Hungarian National Museum Public Collections Center (MNMKK-IMM), speaks on the impact of the project. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Irina Iamandescu, National Institute of Heritage (INP) in Romania, speaks on the impact of the project on the institution. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



George Cupcea, National Museum for the History of Transylvania in Cluj-Napoca, speaks on the significance of the project for the institutions. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Csaba Békési, Bihar County Employment Agency, speaks on the value of the participation in this project for the employment agency. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Vladimir Džamić, Republic Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments in Belgrade, speaks on HR practices and the rulebook developed during the project. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Neda Džamić, Intermunicipal Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments in Subotica, speaks on the impact of the project on the institution. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Milijana Okilj, Institute for Protection of Cultural-Historical and Natural Heritage of Republic of Srpska, speaks on the importance of the piloted co-mentoring model. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Vesna Lovrić-Plantić, Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb, speaks on the impact of the project on the institution. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Michaela Neskerová, Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague, speaks on the importance of the project for HR practices. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Tatjana Hvala, Notranjska Museum Postojna, speaks about the value of joining international cooperation project. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Dragana Đorđević, Serbia Trade Union of Employees in Cultural Institutions, speaks on employment situation in the cultural sector. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.

The first panel discussion, *Future of Employment in the CHIM Sector*, was moderated by Senka Gavranov and featured Dr. Zsolt Sári, State Secretary at the Ministry of Social Relations and Culture in Hungary; Graham Bell, board member of Europa Nostra and president of Cultura Trust; and Dr. Zsombor Jékely, director of collections at MNMKK-IMM and university lecturer. Grounded in personal reflection and a thorough understanding of the institutional and sectoral landscape, the panelists traced their own career beginnings, acknowledging the pivotal role of formal and informal programs and the individuals who encouraged them to enter the field of cultural heritage. The conversation addressed persistent and emerging challenges affecting employment outcomes for those considering or entering the sector. The panelists emphasized the concerning lack

of university-workplace programs that accommodate school-to-work transitions while highlighting the potential of work-study opportunities and initiatives designed to engage NEETs (young people not in employment, education or training) to narrow the gap between talent and opportunity. They proposed that participatory problem solving entails engaging young colleagues directly by establishing advisory groups, asking the right questions and listening to the responses. Concluding with cautious optimism, the panelists affirmed that while much has been achieved, more work remains and the conversations must continue. Their message of encouragement to young colleagues was clear: cultural heritage offers meaningful and rewarding work, flexible working arrangements and genuine opportunities for organizing time and work in ways that balance life and career.



The panel discussion, *Future of Employment in the CHIM Sector*, was moderated by Senka Gavranov and featured Dr. Zsolt Sári, State Secretary at the Ministry of Social Relations and Culture in Hungary; Graham Bell, board member of Europa Nostra and president of Cultura Trust; and Dr. Zsombor Jékely, director of collections at MNMKK-IMM and university lecturer.



Panelists Dr. Zsolt Sári, Graham Bell and Dr. Zsombor Jékely discuss the future of employment in the CHIM sector. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Senka Gavranov engages with the panelists. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.

The second panel, *Career in CHIM*, centred on early-career professionals. Moderated by architect Lucia Leca, National Institute of Heritage, Bucharest, Romania, the discussion brought together seven young colleagues: Andra Cezara Comiati and Ștefania Dogărel from the National Museum for the History of Transylvania, Romania; Anna Böhm-Vinceffy and Dalma Pszota from the Hungarian National Museum Public Collections Center – Museum of Applied Arts, Hungary; Vital Jurca from Notranjska Museum Postojna, Slovenia; Richárd Morvai-Rácz from the Intermunicipal Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments – Subotica, Serbia; and Carlotta Schiller from the MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna, Austria. They spoke candidly about the realities of entering and staying in the field, highlighting the critical need for transparency in hiring processes and daily work environments, alongside the need for

guidance, orientation and a sense of belonging. A recurring theme was the necessity of audience engagement and museum education, as well as the need to increase visibility and inform the public better about the work. Much of their labor often remains behind the scenes, in storage rooms, on archaeological sites or buried under bureaucratic paperwork and rarely receives the attention associated with public-facing exhibitions. Yet, they reminded the audience, this labor is the bedrock of heritage protection, conservation and promotion. Without it, the stories cannot reach the public. They called for a cultural shift within institutions: to recognize, value and promote all roles, tasks and jobs. They advocated for participatory approaches that allow young colleagues to contribute to shaping the very policies that govern their employment, ensuring that their insights are not just heard but acted upon.



The second panel, *Career in CHIM*, centred on early-career professionals. Moderated by Lucia Leca (INP), it featured (left to right): Richard Morvai-Rácz (IPCMS), Dalma Pszota (MNMKK-IMM), Andra Cezara Comiati (MNIT), Carlotta Schiller (MAK), Ștefania Dogărel (MNIT), Anna Böhm-Vinceffy (MNMKK-IMM) and Vital Jurca (NMP).



Lucia Leca, architect and representative of the National Institute of Heritage, moderates the panel of early-career professionals who share their experiences working in CHIM and cooperating within CultHerit. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



The closing of the conference was not a finish line but a starting point. While the project has delivered a robust suite of tools, from the Transnational Aspirational Employment Model to the mentorship frameworks and the advocacy strategy, the attendees acknowledged that the work is far from over. The challenges of inclusive hiring and retention of new colleagues, intergenerational cooperation and improvement of the employment situation in the sector require sustained effort. The event concluded with a festive spirit and a renewed commitment to join forces with more international organizations and to continue the conversations initiated in Vienna, Cluj-Napoca, Belgrade, Banja

Luka, Bucharest, Postojna, Linz and now Budapest. The Transnational Employment Model, the strategy, the films, the visibility tools and the advocacy campaigns developed within CultHeRit are starting points, not endpoints. They are invitations to colleagues, institutions and policymakers across Europe to carry this work forward together.

The future of the CHIM sector depends on the collective ability to listen, adapt and support one another. With the foundation laid by CultHeRit, the path forward is clear: a multigenerational community of practice where every voice contributes to the preservation and vitality of shared heritage.



CultHeRit team at the closing conference at the Petőfi Literary Museum, Budapest. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



An Invitation to Join the Journey

The CultHeRit project demonstrates that the challenges facing the cultural heritage sector are neither isolated nor inevitable. They are interconnected and responsive to coordinated action. The CultHeRit response to them aimed to transform resource-conscious and targeted methods into a strategic approach to build capacity, foster collaboration and drive systemic change. The ultimate goal was to strengthen and promote the cultural heritage sector as a viable, exciting and sustainable career path for the next generation of professionals.

The project also acknowledges its limits. While initiatives like CultHeRit operate within finite timelines and rely on short-term contracts, they provide essential tools for institutions to provide quality employment and supportive working environments and to advocate for programs that favor permanent employment. Transitioning away from the volatility of short-term contracts and working towards the stable long-term employment arrangements requires persistent efforts, stable funding, sustained advocacy and concerted action. A 30-month initiative involving thirteen organizations across eight countries can generate insights and build momentum, laying the groundwork for change. Yet, securing cultural heritage as a viable, attractive and sustainable career choice extends far beyond the scope of any single project. It requires the ongoing engagement of professionals, institutions and policymakers across Europe. Further study is needed to illuminate complex power dynamics, including the gendered

dimensions of labor valuation. The intersection of feminization, precarity and the devaluation of care work requires dedicated, extensive research that falls outside the scope of the present volume. Ignoring this convergence risks oversimplifying the challenges facing the sector.

The path forward is neither quick nor straightforward. Deep-rooted stereotypes about cultural and artistic work have evolved over centuries and continue to require consistent effort to dispel. A synergistic approach, where grassroots initiatives, policy engagement and transnational collaboration reinforce one another, proves most effective and impactful. This path combines everyday visibility with ambitious initiatives, pairing self-reliance in immediate action with advocacy for the structural support that only policy reform and adequate funding can provide. Progress demands time, dedication and perseverance.

The focus on improving employment conditions, enhancing accessibility to quality jobs and fostering better working environments is, fundamentally, an act of care for heritage. CultHeRit underscored the necessity of expanding the understanding of heritage care to include the people who steward it. Care for the people who work with cultural heritage is heritage work.

Readers are invited to join a growing network of professionals committed to improving the employment situation and making the sector's achievements visible. The conversation and work continue.



CultHeRit project team meeting in Bucharest, at National Museum of Contemporary Art of Romania, June 2025.
Photo credit: INP. Paul Soare.



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