

## CultureLabs. Recipes for social innovation

A collaborative digital platform at the service of social innovation

<https://recipes.culture-labs.eu/#/>

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What is the best recipe for combining cultural heritage, participatory approaches and social inclusion? There is no such thing as the best recipe. There are recipes for every taste, where the ingredients are combined according to the needs of different palates.

In the COVID-19 era, the ability to effectively combine the appropriate ingredients that effectively serve a particular context and objective requires special efforts and new methods. This is especially so since COVID-19 has impacted and reshaped all three factors of the chemical reaction that we are looking to put into force (because recipes ultimately depend on chemistry, right?): it has shaken the stability of museums and the cultural heritage sector at large; it has reshaped the meaning of participation, which becomes more and more digital; and it has exacerbated deep-rooted exclusions, making it even more difficult for the most marginalised to access basic services. How can you plan projects that foster participation and social inclusion through interactions with cultural heritage under the special circumstances of the post-COVID-19 environment?

It becomes evident that we need to find new ways to tackle the new problems - or rather the new form old problems take-, by taking full advantage of state-of-the-art digital means but without forgetting the indispensability of human communication. At the same time, we have to look at established and successful past good practices with new lenses, borrow from existing recipes the most useful elements, remix the ingredients, and enrich them with new tools and approaches. We need to work remotely but collectively, reuse, collaborate, adjust, and create something new! These are exactly the possibilities that the open CultureLabs platform seeks to offer.

Hence the sense and the purpose of the CultureLabs platform, a collaborative digital space, completely free of charge, which responds flexibly to the needs of organisations from the cultural sector, civic society, and beyond, who are interested in experimenting with different approaches, looking for ideas, support material and collaborations to implement participatory projects using cultural heritage as an inclusive lever.

Digital innovation can thus be put at the service of organisations promoting social inclusion initiatives especially for people at higher risk of marginalisation; or cultural institutions interested in strengthening their social mission; or public administrations looking for new



ways to tackle social challenges; or simply people looking for support to turn their ideas into real projects.

The CultureLabs digital platform is a completely free tool that provides access to a rich repository of resources and a network of potential collaborators interested in participatory projects in the social field.

Developed thanks to European funds from the Horizon2020 funding programme, the platform has been designed around the needs of various types of stakeholders: from researchers and NGOs to public administrators and communities that are - or wish to become- active in the cultural and social fields.

Building on the culinary metaphor, the CultureLabs platform enables users to:

- **find** material on a wide variety of already realised projects, methodologies, and tools
- **share** their own experiences, initiatives and support material, allowing other users to get inspired by their work
- **document** not only the successful outputs of a project but most importantly the process that was followed, including the internal knowledge, the challenges, and the “unsuccesses”
- **shape** their ideas into structured projects by using a well-defined template that makes the project
- **co-create** projects by working collaboratively with other users/organisations
- **receive feedback** from other users, exchange ideas and expertise with them
- **reuse** existing good practices and resources made available by other users on the platform and **adapt** them to their own needs
- **expand** their network of contacts and find new collaborators

Through its rich variety of functionalities and multiplicity of content it provides, CultureLabs aspires to become a single point of reference for those who wish to organise participatory projects by taking advantage of digital technologies through a human rights lens.

At the time of the pandemic crisis, the CultureLabs platform and its digital tools offer an added value, allowing users to re-shape and re-think participation in a "virtual" manner.

Our wish, of course, is to be back in presence as soon as possible, and when the meetings will be permitted again, the CultureLabs platform will continue to offer valuable support, streamline, and facilitate the organisation of participatory projects in a *phygital* perspective.

