

CultHeRit Insights

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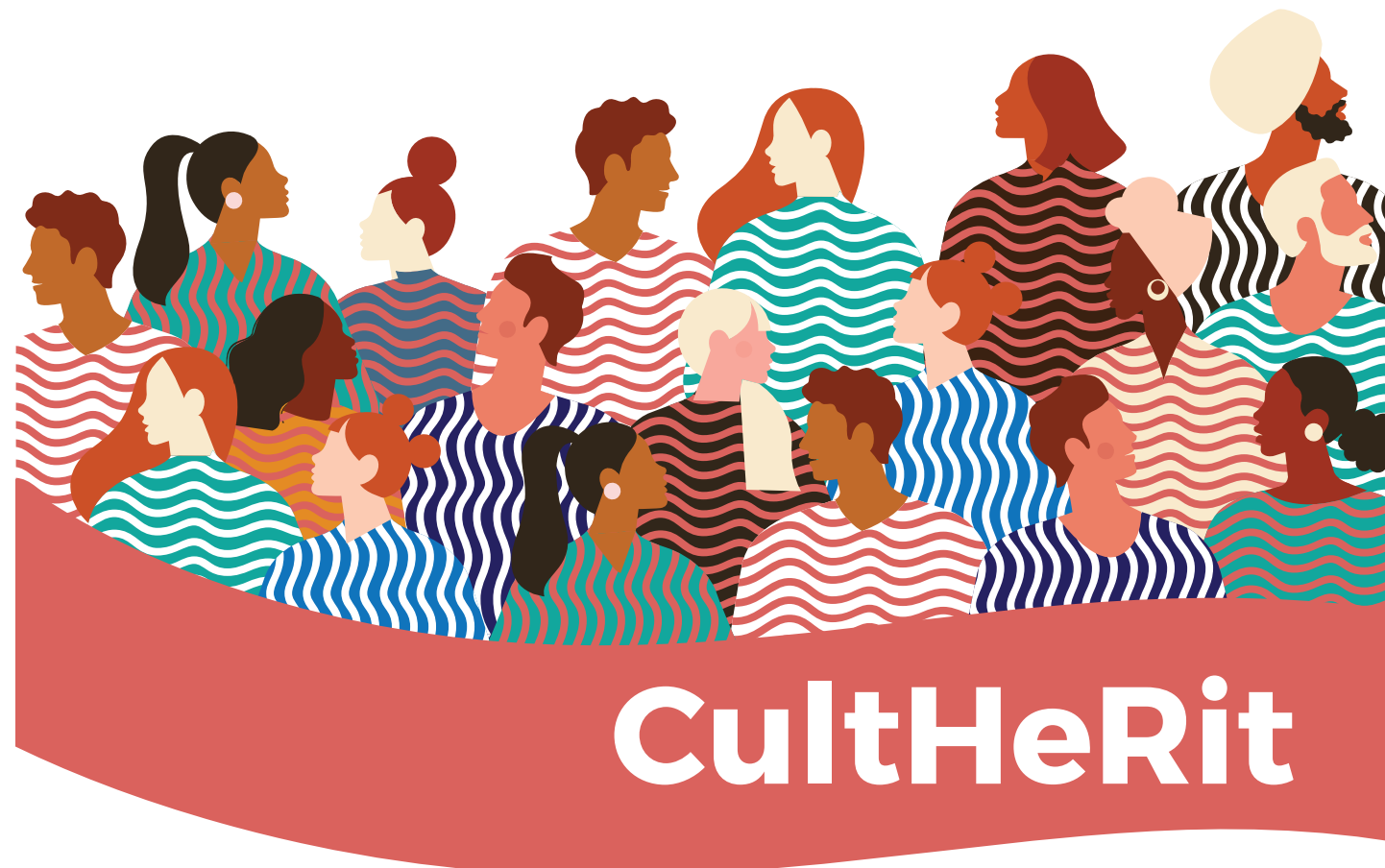
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Invisibility of Work in Cultural Heritage Institutes and Museums (CHIM)

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



2.043.590 €

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Core Team and Contributors

The development of this publication was a collaborative effort involving numerous professionals.

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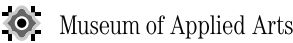
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Lead Partner



Project Partners



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About This Publication

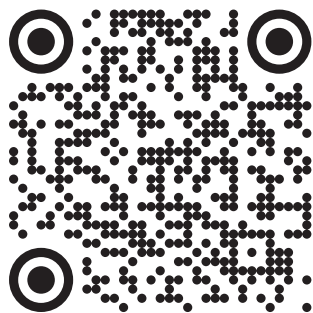
This volume is the third in the four-part series **CultHeRit Insights**. It focuses on the invisibility of work in cultural heritage institutes and museums (CHIM). The series also includes:

Improving Employment Situation and Accessibility of Jobs in Cultural Heritage Institutes and Museums (CHIM) for Young Professionals,

Mentorship in Cultural Heritage Institutes and Museums (CHIM), and

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

This volume is accompanied by two annexes available on the project website [link for digital version or QR code for printed].



The series *CultHeRit Insights* was elaborated within the CultHeRit project (1 January 2024 – 30 June 2026) which was funded by the Interreg – Danube Region Transnational 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 identify and address barriers which young professionals encounter when accessing quality jobs in the CHIM sector.

Executive Summary

This publication synthesizes insights from the CultHeRit project and serves as an open invitation to peers, stakeholders and authorities to join conversations about the employment situation in the sector. While not a formal scientific study or systemic analysis, this is an experience-based document designed to help professionals assess whether they face challenges similar to those identified within CultHeRit. It offers solutions developed within the project and invites colleagues to explore alternative, potentially more effective approaches while joining visibility and advocacy efforts.

The material derives from workshops, interviews and debates among nearly sixty CHIM professionals from Central and Southeastern Europe. Over two and a half years, they worked jointly within the CultHeRit project team and alongside colleagues at their institutions to identify problems, propose feasible solutions and consult stakeholders from their countries. The insights presented here reflect the lived realities of work in the sector, grounded in analysis and interventions that were limited in scope yet strategic in design. They suggest that visibility initiatives can enhance public appreciation, boost staff motivation and strengthen advocacy for improving sectoral employment situation. Moreover, consistent and transparent communication about the work in CHIM can benefit both institutions and the societies they serve.

One of the core missions of CultHeRit was to identify fields of intervention where employees themselves could effect change. Recognizing that the scale and complexity of the challenges facing the sectoral employment market can easily become overwhelming, the project aimed to prevent paralysis and a sense of helplessness. Instead, it sought to empower professionals and restore their agency by identifying, categorizing, and solving issues within their reach, given their available resources and skills. One of the identified fields of intervention is informing and educating the public about the work in CHIM through visibility interventions. This approach walks a fine line: it seeks to empower employees of CHIM

institutions to act, without overburdening them or replacing the specialized knowledge of professionals in communication, outreach and PR. While communication experts and their instruments and interventions remain irreplaceable, the CultHeRit DIY process enables CHIM professionals to better understand their audiences and regain agency in solving the problems they can actually address.

As many challenges require structural changes beyond the reach of individual employees or institutions, CultHeRit worked in parallel to identify problems necessitating policy reform, directing advocacy campaigns toward policymakers and authorities. These efforts included placing the topic of employment conditions on the agendas of professional associations, meetings and conferences as well as engaging (inter)national 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 begins by framing the problem of the invisibility of work and reflects on the concept of frugal innovation in a resource-scarce environment. It then describes the methodology used in CultHeRit, a DIY mini-survey designed to uncover the knowledge gap between professionals and the public. Its findings reveal a surprising disconnection: a knowledge gap about knowledge gap, where staff often overestimate public understanding of the work in CHIM. Finally, practical interventions are proposed, from extended credit listings to broader advocacy strategies. To support practitioners in applying these insights, CultHeRit also published an example of a diagnostic DIY mini-survey for audience engagement and a separate document containing practical interventions for improving visibility of work in CHIM. Readers are invited to explore these publications and insights, adapt them to their reality and join the effort in making the work in the cultural heritage sector visible.

CultHeRit Project

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 Transnational 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 the expectations of prospective employees. Building on these findings, the partners jointly developed a transnational employment model emphasizing transparent recruitment procedures and mechanisms for onboarding and workplace integration.



The CultHeRit team at the project meeting hosted by the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Romania (MNAC) in Bucharest, June 2025. Photo credit: INP.

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

In parallel, the partnership produced a series of short films presenting work and employment situations in the cultural heritage sector. They 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 underpin 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. Combined with the tested region-wide employment model, these efforts contribute to improving access to 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

- 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-Bihor, 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 and Information of the Republic of Serbia (Serbia)
 - ASP4: Institute for Cultural Concepts (Austria)
 - ASP5: Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia (Croatia)



Zsombor Jékely, CultHeRit Project Manager.
Photo credit UPM



The CultHeRit team at the first project meeting at the MAK Library in Vienna, Austria, January 2024.
Photo: Zoltán Szalontai.

Within such a diverse consortium, partners defined shared problems, prioritized them and proposed viable solutions. While focusing on challenges of the sectoral labor market, the theme of invisibility of work emerged organically during implementation and transnational encounters. It surfaced repeatedly in conversations, workshops and meetings, intersecting with nearly every other topic. Discussions on attracting young professionals frequently circled back to the fundamental question of whether the public understood what the work in CHIM entailed and how best to present and promote it. Similarly, debates regarding advocacy measures for better working conditions highlighted the urgent need to improve public understanding of the sector's role, responsibilities, work and achievements. The partnership could not sidestep this recurring theme.

To navigate these interconnected challenges, theoretical foundations and concepts that could better illuminate the employment situation and guide

subsequent discussions and interventions were explored. Senka Gavranov anchored this inquiry as team leader and coordinator of the investigation into the invisibility of work and the strategies to address it. She convened the transnational sessions, gathered input and feedback, devised the diagnostic survey, facilitated discussions and proposed solutions. During the process, a community of practice emerged where participants mutually supported one another, creating a safe space for brainstorming, honest yet constructive feedback and iterative loops. Her research and facilitation ensured that the theoretical frameworks were relevant for interpreting observed patterns. To explain and understand the reported experiences, phenomena and patterns, various analytical tools, concepts and approaches were considered: transdisciplinarity, microfailures, feminization of work, the glass elevator, the glass ceiling and others. Some proved instrumental for analyzing and tackling not only one, but multiple aspects of sectoral employment markets, including power and gendered dynamics.



The CultHeRit project team at the meeting in Prague, February 2026. Photo credit: UPM.

These conceptual tools are described across the *CultHeRit Insights* series because they were instrumental for identifying, contextualizing and tackling diverse problems. As the four volumes are designed for modular reading, certain theoretical concepts and definitions appear across more than one volume, serving as a connecting thread. This repetition is intentional. It ensures that each volume remains self-contained and accessible to readers who may not consult the entire series.

In this volume, the invisibility of work in CHIM emerges as a core problem that the text examines in depth. Seeking practical and accessible solutions for diverse institutions, the partnership identified resource-conscious approaches, such as frugal innovation, as a realistic, immediate and effective response.

Conceptual Framework: Invisibility of Work and Frugal Innovation

The term *invisibility of work* used in this publication refers primarily to the lack of knowledge about work performed in the cultural heritage sector and how this deficit shapes public perception of work in this sector. Physical constraints such as inaccessible museum depots, warehouses and laboratories, limitations imposed by laws and regulations, security and safety concerns, resource scarcity or established conventions like selective credit-listing practices contribute to limited public awareness of the volume, nature and complexity of the work done in CHIM. As a result, the public encounters only a fraction of cultural heritage activity. Lacking insight into the substantial portion of the sector's labor also contributes to obscuring its diversity and minimizing its impact. It is not uncommon for many professions to remain unseen outside their immediate circles. Yet, in CHIM, a significant portion of work in appears invisible, to the point of mystification at times. In the absence of accurate information, stereotypes portraying cultural heritage work as a mere professionalized hobby proliferate or remain unchallenged. Moreover, as the lack of understanding breeds misconceptions and hinders advocacy for adequate resources and better working conditions, mobilizing public support

becomes increasingly difficult. Often, defeatism, powerlessness and (learned) helplessness ensue. This skews the perception of initiatives to improve attractiveness of careers for young professionals as less likely to succeed, also affecting the likelihood of the sector to initiate or join them. A resulting paralysis exacerbates the existing problems, for example the demographic shift in the institutions and intergenerational transfer of knowledge. Namely, the retirement rate of senior staff without employing and training replacements contributes to loss of institutional memory and tacit knowledge, affecting the care for the cultural heritage.

However, this is not inevitable. The experiences, work and insights from CultHeRit suggest that increasing the visibility of work can contribute to advocacy efforts aimed at better conditions and improved access to quality jobs. When the contributions of CHIM professionals are explained clearly and their impact presented convincingly, the public perception of importance and value of both the CHIM institutions and the work of their employees tends to increase. Sustained, factual and honest presentation of work is likely to produce desired effects. It must steer away from



Unskilled workers working with the archaeologists on the archaeological excavation of Bologna conducted by MNIT, July 2025. Still frame from CultHeRit films.

complaints, blame a ssignment or antagonizing. Rather, demonstrating the sector's societal and economic contributions contributes to campaign success. For this, business case studies on income from cultural tourism are instrumental and so are analyses of cultural heritage as the engine for job creation and its role as a significant employer, especially in remote and rural areas.

Additionally, research on wellbeing and the mental health benefits of cultural heritage could also support these efforts. Yet, these studies are not affordable to procure, especially for the sector which functions with limited financial resources. Showcasing the full range of performed activities is probably the most accessible and least demanding intervention. If planned and executed well, it can be an efficient and effective way to operationalize the available skills, knowledge and infrastructure by only slightly adapting the outreach messages, channels or tools. As all of these already exist in the institutions and function seamlessly, additional effort, beyond the initial set-up, is likely to be minimal. Nevertheless, results of efforts to improve employment outcomes in the sector by increasing visibility of its labor are not immediate. Rather, they are cumulative. As results are likely to be tangible only in the years to come, they initially require significant action which should be accompanied by patience, perseverance and trust in the process.

Their success also depends on willingness to critically assess and adjust work habits, routines and conventions as well as on mobilizing a critical mass of practitioners from the sector to apply the proposed interventions. To achieve tangible change and practical benefits, therefore, the visibility initiatives and interventions require long-term and sustained commitment of many.

The Case for Visibility: Policy, Advocacy and Staff Wellbeing

However, the expectation that communication and visibility measures can resolve structural issues soon proves unrealistic, often resulting in setbacks and disappointments. If this cycle is repeated, it can contribute to a growing sense of futility. To counter this, the communication and visibility interventions proposed by CultHeRit and in this publication are deployed realistically to address issues well within their sphere of influence. Their effects are primarily external, as they are instrumental in changing beliefs and attitudes among the wider public and decision-makers. Nevertheless, they bring benefits internally as well, to the sector and its institutions.

First, visibility can serve as an external lever influencing policymaking decisions. The lack of public awareness about the societal and economic impact of CHIM work frequently hampers advocacy and reinforces stereotypes that diminish the sector's perceived role. One of the prerequisites for successful advocacy, therefore, is public awareness, as decision-makers are more likely to allocate funding and provide a supportive regulatory framework when both the public and decision-makers view cultural heritage work as valuable and economically productive. Admittedly, many sectors face visibility challenges, yet the cultural heritage sector contends with stereotypes that sometimes question the necessity of the work or even its legitimacy. Sustained presentation of the volume, diversity and impact of work that occurs within institutions or at heritage sites helps dispel these and similar misconceptions.



Delivery of artefacts for the UPM Exhibition of a Cubist Interior Photo credit: UPM.

It can show that the sector employs a large number of individuals and contributes significantly to the economy, for example, through building restoration and cultural tourism. According to Kostakis and Lolos (2024), “[c]ultural heritage affects economic growth through cultural tourism demand, boosting job creation and attracting investment and businesses” (p. 1220). While economic approaches focusing exclusively on financial metrics may overlook the broader cultural significance of heritage work, research suggests these contributions are substantial. Iacob et al. (2012) explain that “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” (p. 1). Moreover, the sector’s impact on wellbeing, mental health and community cohesion has also been documented (Bundhoo et al., 2025). Mafalda Dâmaso (2021) emphasizes 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. In polarized societies, artists can build bridges” (p. 39) and cultural practitioners can strengthen social cohesion.

Yet, these contributions remain difficult to claim and argue for when the people whose work sustains them remain invisible. Because this problem of invisibility manifests across individual, institutional, sectoral and societal layers, addressing it demands a corresponding multi-level response. This means working strategically across individual, institutional and policy levels, aligning efforts with allied sectors and organizations and cooperating to amplify impact. Isolated visibility initiatives by institutions rarely achieve tangible or lasting impact. Rather, they gain force and amplify outreach when connected to broader advocacy coalitions. This alignment prevents dissipation of resources or duplication of work resulting from isolated efforts and transforms them into a cohesive sectoral voice, maximizing their impact.



Sebastian Boniş and the CultHeRit project team discuss project implementation at meetings in Vienna, Austria, January 2024, and in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, June 2024. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.



Sebastian Boniş and the CultHeRit project team discuss project implementation at meetings in Vienna, Austria, January 2024, and in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, June 2024. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.

Second, greater visibility of the diverse work performed in CHIM can improve the employment situation of staff. By functioning as an internal incentive, visibility enhances transparency around daily tasks and workload distribution, contributing to workplace fairness. It also ensures recognition of employees’ efforts, raising their motivation. This process may translate into higher productivity and more effective collaboration. Further research is needed to clarify the extent to which transparency and visibility of work in this sector contribute to healthier team dynamics and foster a balanced, supportive work environment. Conversely, the persistence of this invisibility is likely to negatively affect the institution as well as the productivity and job satisfaction of its employees.

Invisible Work and Invisibility of Work

It is important not to confuse the *invisibility of work* with the broader sociological concept of *invisible work*. Both notions describe how labor can be (under)valued. While their manifestations can overlap and their effects are similar, they tend to arise from different mechanisms and require distinct interventions. A brief review of the literature on this complex topic reveals that the term ‘invisible work’ is applied to many types of labor, and there seems to be a lack of consensus regarding what invisibility means in a labor context. For example, Sardadvar explains that “[t]he concepts of invisible work or hidden work emerged as a response to dominant understandings of labor that privilege visibility, formalization, and monetary compensation” (Sardadvar, 2026, p. 3). She also quotes Daniels (1987) emphasizing “how unpaid domestic labor, predominantly carried out by women, is systematically devalued[.]” (as cited in Sardadvar, 2026, p. 3).

For the purposes of this volume, and as a practical illustration rather than a strict theoretical definition, invisible work is understood as culturally and economically devalued labor. This concept is best illustrated by considering the individuals who perform socially perceived low-status and manual labor, such as cleaners, waste collectors or security staff. These are the workers encountered daily, witnessing their work and its tangible impact as they maintain shared spaces. Yet, paradoxically, they often remain socially overlooked – invisible. While this dynamic is distinct from the lack of public awareness regarding the work of CHIM professionals, the two phenomena can intersect. This intersection complicates the path toward recognition and fair valuation.



This volume focuses on the invisibility of work in CHIM by first examining the availability and accessibility of knowledge about this work within public discourse. It briefly discusses the manifestations,

implications and possible solutions for the lack of public awareness. In this context, communication measures appear to be the most appropriate and effective response.



Rudolf Forstinger, exhibition team MAK, assembles a poster exhibition in Vienna. Still frame from the CultHeRit short film.

Addressing the identified knowledge gap requires committed, sustained and broad action across the sector.

Due to scarce resources and the inability of many institutions to afford external expertise, the CultHeRit partnership focused on empowering CHIM professionals to identify problems and devise accessible and adequate self-reliant solutions. The approach aligns with the concept of frugal innovation. According to Hossain et al. (2016), frugal innovation is defined as “a resource scarce solution (i.e., product, service, process, or business model) that is designed and implemented despite financial, technological, material or other resource constraints” without sacrificing the quality of outcomes (p. 133). Escudero Cipriani et al. (2024) elaborate that “[i]t involves finding creative, efficient and affordable solutions

to problems, most notably in contexts where resources are limited” (p. 1). Traditionally investigated in relation to emerging economies, frugal innovation is increasingly relevant in advanced economies (Pisoni et al., 2018). Based on the experiences and observations from CultHeRit, in the CHIM sector frugal innovation is related to limited resources and societal valuation of culture and the arts. Its prevalence can partly be explained by the atypical nature of work, the dedication, ingenuity and creativity of people working in the sector and the implied imperative to problem-solve in the face of resource scarcity. Gender dynamics may also help explain reliance on this approach.



Atypical Work and the Gendered Dimension of Invisibility

While distinguishing between the lack of public knowledge (invisibility of work) and the social devaluation of labor (invisible work) is a useful analytical maneuver, it is essential to recognize that neither phenomenon exists in isolation. To add further complexity, as social reality often does, the invisibility of work in CHIM may also encompass the cultural and economic (de)valuation of that work as invisible work. A thorough examination of the interplay and entanglement of these dimensions falls outside the scope of this volume. However, ignoring this convergence risks oversimplifying the challenges facing the sector. Observations and a brief literature review suggest that the cultural heritage sector, like many care-intensive fields, depends on labor that is historically feminized, informal and undervalued.

As the cultural heritage sector is part of the broader cultural and artistic work, it is likely to face many of the challenges that professionals and institutions in those fields encounter. Mafalda Dâmaso highlights 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. 6). This precarity stems from several intertwining factors: the non-standard nature of working conditions, the time- and labor-intensive nature of creative work and, somewhat counter-intuitively, a passionate dedication. Dâmaso explains 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, Clarke et al. (2024) observe that while the Cultural and Creative Sectors (CCS) shape European identity and have significant economic and social impact, professionals in these sectors face atypical working patterns and irregular income, leaving them “vulnerable to abusive subcontracting, bogus self-employment, underpaid or unpaid work and coercive buy-out contracts” (p. 6). This structural vulnerability can contribute to the invisibility of parts of the work, as the labor performed under such conditions is rarely formalized or recognized.

Within this context of precarity, the burden is likely to fall disproportionately on women and minoritized groups. Jiménez-Esquinas (2025) examines how heritage regimes “rely on often-invisible, trivialised and unpaid forms of care work – ranging from physical upkeep and emotional labor to community maintenance and intergenerational transmission – most often carried out by women and minoritized communities” (p. 1472). She defines heritage care work 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). For the purpose of this volume, feminization of labor or work is understood as a process where an occupation comes to be culturally associated with women’s roles, frequently accompanied by occupational segregation, reductions in pay and a shift toward part-time or emotional labor. According to Guadalupe Jiménez-Esquinas (2025), in heritage, women constitute the majority of technical staff yet hold fewer than one-third of executive positions in heritage management institutions (p. 1474). This underrepresentation

in decision-making manifests through an imbalance in labor division and areas of influence in the sphere of cultural authority and the shaping of dominant heritage values. In gendered power dynamics, she argues, the informal feminized domains of care and transmission remain undervalued. She contends that feminized labor is central to heritage-making, yet it remains structurally marginalized, rarely recognized or compensated within formal heritage systems. Quoting Federici (2013), she calls for scrutinizing the ideas of “[c]ultural labour framed as being done ‘for love’ [...] as it can be instrumentalised to make work invisible and unpaid” (as cited in Jiménez-Esquinas, 2025, p. 1479).

Addressing the invisibility of work in CHIM requires both public awareness campaigns and

further research into gendered power dynamics. While frugal innovation offers a pragmatic response to resource scarcity, it must not obscure the need for systemic investment in the labor that sustains the sector. Without tackling structural vulnerabilities and gendered inequities, even the most resourceful interventions risk becoming temporary fixes that fail to secure the long-term well-being of the workforce and the heritage they steward. Crucially, visibility initiatives must ensure that all, including feminized care tasks, are part of the presentation and promotion of work, alongside leadership and technical work.

Excluding them risks reinforcing the gendered divide. Fortunately, the sector already possesses the necessary expertise and resources to implement these measures.



A summer school at the Roman fort of Mehadia, part of the Frontier of the Roman Empire – Dacia UNESCO site, featured workshops on primary conservation interventions for the domus procuratoris and enclosure walls, organized by INP in 2025. Photo credit: Laurențiu Angheluță.



Tule Grazyna cleaning staff at the MAK in Vienna, explains the specificities of maintaining and caring for artifacts in an interview for the CultHeRit film.



Thomas Phillip facilitates a workshop on ten parameters for quality employment with young professionals employed during CultHeRit: Dorotea Aščerić (RIPCM), Tessa Bachrach-Krištofić (MUO), Andra-Cezara Comiati (MNIT), Sara Đumić (IPC), Tereza Hrdlička (UPM), Erika Nagy (INP), Dalma Pszota (MNMKK-IMM), Richárd Morvai Rác (IPCMS), Jenny Unterkofler (MAK) and Vital Jurca (NPM) in Bucharest, June 2025. Photo credit: INP.

Frugal Innovation in CHIM: Necessity and Limits

The experiences from the CultHeRit project suggest that resource-friendly interventions, if targeted and executed well, can be an accessible and efficient tool for empowering employees and building their capacity for audience engagement. This, in turn, can significantly contribute to increasing the visibility of work in CHIM, countering stereotypes and strengthening advocacy, all without demanding extensive financial resources. There is, however, a critical nuance. Frugal innovation in the cultural heritage sector is often a necessity born of chronic underfunding and societal under-prioritization of culture and even its neglect, rather than a strategic choice to be celebrated. While ingenuity and inventiveness are commendable, relying on them as a primary mode of operation risks normalizing chronic scarcity and the lack of adequate public investment.

This dynamic places an undue burden on CHIM employees, who, in addition to focusing on their core preservation duties, may find themselves constantly innovating to survive. The reliance on ingenuity in the face of scarcity is likely to disproportionately affect those performing feminized care work. Such ad-hoc innovative solutions often function as clever quick fixes or temporary patches that are unlikely to endure, requiring more energy and additional interventions down the road. This cycle can be demotivating. Experiences have shown that these repeated measures prove to be neither dependable nor sustainable, especially given the high cost to staff in terms of stress and time. Consequently, this may inadvertently affect mental health, work-life balance and burn-out rates. Further research is needed to better understand the extent of this problem, its underlying mechanisms, dynamics and consequences, but preliminary observations suggest that in some contexts frugal innovation has become a normalized unsustainable practice in the sector.

Not all institutions, however, are affected equally. A deeper systemic analysis would better assess the impact of territorial dynamics, such as rural-urban divides, capital-city concentration or East-West and North-South regional variations. Additionally, the type of institution and other contextual factors may also play a significant role.

Nevertheless, beneath these varied local realities lies a shared structural vulnerability. Mafalda 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” (2021, p. 1). While frugal innovation offers a pragmatic short-term response, its immediate soothing effect risks obscuring the need for systemic investment in the very labor that keeps the sector functioning. Ultimately, all innovation efforts, including frugal innovation, must be supported by policymakers, authorities and the public. Without this support, the pressure to constantly innovate risks becoming an additional burden on already overworked staff rather than a genuine solution.



Lucia Leca, Erika Nagy and Irina Iamandescu from INP, Romania conducting fieldwork and talking to Marian Mincu, worker in the mining area of Valea Jiului, Romania. Still frame from CultHeRit film.

From Theory to Practice: DIY Approaches

The project utilized a DIY approach and participatory research that differed markedly from commissioning external experts. The “Do-it-yourself” (DIY) method involves building, modifying or repairing things by oneself without the direct aid of professionals or certified experts. Professional audits are indispensable and insightful, yet they remain inaccessible and unaffordable for many smaller cultural heritage institutions. They also tend to leave institutions dependent on outside expertise. However, the DIY approach, while often necessary, carries inherent risks. Solutions devised without expert input may fail to address root causes, appear unprofessional to stakeholders or inadvertently achieve counterproductive results. Given these vulnerabilities, caution is advised. Self-assessment and self-awareness of one’s limited knowledge and skills are crucial to navigating this terrain. Equally vital is a commitment to capacity building and the continuous

acquisition of new skills to bridge the gaps left by the inability to afford external expertise.

The Diagnostic DIY Mini-Survey

When designed carefully, a brief, insightful survey can help build internal capacity, gain knowledge and actionable information. For this reason and bearing the potential pitfalls in mind, the CultHeRit partners conducted localized surveys using three diagnostic questions to map public perceptions and identify critical knowledge gaps regarding work in cultural heritage institutions. The findings enabled the consortium to prioritize urgent communication needs and tailor resource-efficient strategies that align with the specific skills and constraints of each institution.

During 2025, the CultHeRit team at UPM, Prague produced an advocacy film about work in CHIM.



The team behind the Exhibition of a Cubist Interior
Photo credit: UPM (Still frame)

Timeline of Key Activities

June 2024: Senka Gavranov facilitated a workshop in Cluj-Napoca to discuss the issues and possible avenues for action.

October 2024: Senka Gavranov facilitated a workshop in Belgrade to launch the diagnostic DIY mini-survey and co-development process.

October – November 2024: Ștefania Dogărel (MNIT); Marija Jurkić-Flis, Vedrana Ceranja and Vesna Lovrić-Plantić (MUO); Klara Evetović (IPCMS); Carlotta Schiller (MAK); and Anna Böhm-Vinceffy (MNMKK-IMM) co-designed and conducted the survey across partner institutions with visitors and extended networks.

April 2025: Senka Gavranov facilitated a workshop in Banja Luka to analyze findings and refine strategies. These included discussing extended colophons, educational materials, promotional content, advocacy tools, and films to promote work in CHIM.

June 2025: The CultHeRit project team presented findings and brainstormed with award-winning filmmaker Mihai Dragolea on producing short films to showcase work in CHIM.

June 2025 – April 2026: Mihai Dragolea recorded films at partner institutions and heritage sites to document work processes. Ongoing visibility activities.

June 2026: Project conclusion: a final advocacy event in Budapest and strategy dissemination.

Colleagues from six institutions designed questionnaires, collected responses and analyzed results. This **low-budget, high-impact** exercise placed the learning process directly within the organizations, building staff communication skills for audience engagement. It stimulated reflective discussion

and highlighted the value of continuous audience listening. By involving staff directly, the method prepared them for community building, proved that audience engagement is accessible and fostered a culture of evidence-based outreach.



Senka Gavranov facilitates workshops in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, June 2024. (photo: Zoltán Szalontai) and in Belgrade, Serbia, October 2024 (photo CultHeRit project)



Lucia Vlčková leads a guided tour for the CultHeRit project team at the UPM exhibition *L'Esprit Français: French Interwar Advertising Posters* in Prague, February 2026. Photo credit: UPM.

Throughout the working sessions, the implications of the DIY approach were carefully considered. While the method undoubtedly empowers staff, builds capacity and diversifies skills, it also carries an implicit assumption that employees possess the spare capacity to absorb audience research and communication tasks alongside their regular duties. This expectation, if unmanaged, can exacerbate existing pressures and contribute to burnout. Much like frugal innovation, the DIY approach is not a permanent substitute for professional support structures. It serves as a valuable tool for immediate diagnosis and capacity building, yet it cannot replace dedicated resources and personnel. If the sector relies on staff to fulfill these additional roles without compensation or relief, the method risks transforming into another form of unpaid labor.

Piloting the approach within an externally funded project proved its efficacy and value for staff capacity building. This success underscores that such efforts are effective and sustainable when supported by dedicated resources. Long-term viability requires that DIY measures be seamlessly woven into existing workflows, minimizing additional time or energy for staff. Most critically, its success depends on accompanying formal recognition and rewards for this extra effort.

The participatory process of conducting the DIY mini-survey affirmed that communication



Claudia Popescu leads a guided tour for the CultHeRit project team at the Museum of Architecture in Bucharest, June 2025. Photo credit: INP.

professionals remain irreplaceable. Still, limited resources, particularly in smaller institutions, often pose significant barriers to involving them. By engaging employees in this interactive, audience-centered process, both institutions and professionals benefited. CHIM professionals reported gaining self-knowledge that proved transformative in some instances, compelling them to identify problems, assess their capacity to act, brainstorm solutions and become agents of change. The experiences from the CultHeRit project suggest that, if applied cautiously, resource-friendly, low-budget interventions can significantly contribute to the visibility of work, countering stereotypes and strengthening advocacy, all without demanding extensive financial resources.

Transformation of public perception is not a small feat. It is not the result of sporadic or isolated efforts. Rather, it emerges from the collective efforts of professionals across the entire sector. When these individual actions align, they contribute to a cumulative effect of rendering work better visible and valued, helping shift public perception. The applied solutions need to be sustained and consistent to achieve this scale. This is realistic if the proposed solutions are accessible, low-resource and high-impact. Some of them, such as expanding the list of credits (colophon), are relatively affordable, require minimal additional effort and can seamlessly become part of working routines and conventions.

Recognizing that structural change requires time, the project sought to counter the sense of powerlessness and defeatism that can arise when awaiting large-scale reforms. Instead, it turned to immediate, actionable methods to reclaim agency and effect change within the reach of institutions and their employees. This led to the development of a low-cost, participatory survey designed to identify the problem and its extent and to assess the capacity to solve it, influence outcomes or drive meaningful change.

The survey also served as a tool for reflective learning for the staff, helping them recognize their own lack of familiarity with audience needs and the consequences of this gap. Central to this journey, therefore, was the discovery of a dual deficit: the public's knowledge gap regarding CHIM work, and the CHIM staff's own **knowledge gap about knowledge gap**, specifically the realization that professionals often overestimate public insight and understanding of their work. Recognizing these gaps is a prerequisite for well-targeted communication and effective audience engagement. Presenting the actual work, its volume, diversity and achievements addresses this invisibility, but it requires a sustained, long-term strategy rather than occasional appeals to the public. Ultimately, diagnosing the disconnect between professionals' assumptions and public perception provided the necessary baseline for designing targeted, resource-efficient interventions.

Survey Process and Findings

The survey represented an initial step toward mapping public knowledge about the work performed in CHIM. *Annex 1: The Diagnostic Mini-Survey, A Step-by-Step Guide for Practitioners*, available on the project website, provides detailed

guidelines on how to replicate it. Deliberately brief, the questionnaire relied on respondents outside the sector who were readily accessible. Designed as an exploratory diagnostic tool rather than a statistically representative study, this approach prioritized accessibility for institutions with constrained budgets. The CultHeRit partners obtained actionable information, **bypassing costly external consultants for basic diagnostics**, while acknowledging that DIY methodology has inherent limitations when seeking more sophisticated or precise data. As the findings are indicative rather than exhaustive, the absence of external validation may affect perceived credibility among some stakeholders. Unlike a professionally designed audit, this approach lacks rigorous methodological controls, yet it demonstrates that resource-constrained institutions can still generate valuable audience insights and tailor engagement measures accordingly.



Marija Jurkić-Flis presenting communication strategies, tools and channels in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, June 2024. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.

CultHeRit project meeting and brainstorming session with Mihai Dragolea, Photo credit: CultHeRit



The primary purpose was to identify knowledge gaps and uncover misconceptions. This diagnosis helped prioritize the aspects of work that were most urgent to present to non-expert audiences, guiding decisions based on the extent of the gap and available resources. Each partner institution developed a survey consisting of three diagnostic questions in local languages, administered to visitors and extended networks during October – November 2024.

The survey uncovered critical patterns. Notably, respondents generally expressed a preference for interactive formats over traditional questionnaires, suggesting that quizzes and gamified tools might increase responsiveness and engagement. Several participants hesitated to answer, partly due to uncertainty about the subject matter. Anonymized formats could potentially mitigate these concerns and reduce bias. More significantly, the process encouraged professionals to interact directly with their audiences, prompting them to articulate their work and discover what people actually know. This direct engagement revealed a critical knowledge gap about knowledge gap: CHIM professionals often failed to realize the

extent to which the public lacked understanding of their roles, duties and daily tasks. This realization served as a powerful catalyst for better-targeted and effective communication strategies.

Key Findings

The survey yielded useful insights and revealed a considerable knowledge gap even among semi-informed audiences. A primary finding was the **conflation of institutions and their roles**. For example, the Intermunicipal Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments (IPCMS, Subotica) found that the public often confuses heritage protection institutes with museums. Additionally, while the public recognizes some professions, many respondents assumed cultural heritage work was confined to curatorial tasks and exhibitions. They, therefore, remain unaware of the full scope of work. This narrow view was reinforced by the focus on exhibitions observed by the MAK - Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna. Respondents there primarily viewed the museum as an exhibition space. This is understandable, as the exhibition area is the primary point of direct interaction, despite the



museum performing many other functions. This also demonstrates the importance of visibility and access to spaces, information and work processes.

Aside from familiarity with public-facing roles and accessible spaces, the survey uncovered significant gaps regarding the less-visible **roles, professions and tasks** that sustain CHIM institutions. For example, the National Museum of Transylvanian History (MNIT, Cluj-Napoca) found that although visitors are aware of the slow bureaucratic processes in public institutions, they lack specific knowledge regarding the separation of different departments within a museum. The partners’ reports also show that non-exhibition activities such as custodial duties, catalogue entry, ad hoc restoration works, IT tasks, the role of photographers, documentation staff, educational workshops, administration (such as insurance policies and contracts) and site security were largely unknown or unrecognized. Similarly, many respondents could not differentiate what a museum collection is, how it is acquired or where it is stored.

Significantly, the observed lack of awareness correlated and extended to the **underestimation of effort**. Specifically, estimates of the time, number of people and teams of specialists required to organize an exhibition were either unknown or significantly underestimated.

The survey also highlighted a strong public interest in deeper engagement and alternative presentation methods. The Hungarian National Museum Public Collections Center (MNMKK-IMM, Budapest) found that respondents accurately estimated the time required to prepare an exhibition and recognized the duties of a curator, yet expressed a strong desire to learn more about

the organizational work behind mounting exhibitions. Colleagues from the Museum of Arts and Crafts (MUO, Zagreb) emphasized the importance of highlighting alternative ways to present collections, such as guided tours, which allow visitors to gain more information and deepen their experience of the exhibition and artifacts. Complementing this, colleagues from the Notranjska Museum Postojna (NMP, Postojna), based on podcast feedback, stressed the need to educate the public about contemporary museology rooted in inclusivity and participatory approaches. According to them, daily public relations efforts across various channels are crucial for achieving this.

These findings suggest that, as expected, visibility plays a crucial role in shaping the public image of CHIM work. Central to this journey was the discovery of a significant gap between professional assumptions and public understanding. Recognizing this disconnect is a prerequisite for well-targeted communication and effective audience engagement. While presenting the actual work, its volume, diversity and achievements addresses the invisibility, achieving impact requires a strategic approach with sustained, regular and repeated interventions rather than occasional appeals. Within the CultHeRit project, diagnosing this gap provided the necessary baseline for designing targeted, resource-efficient interventions.



Interventions to Narrow Knowledge Gaps

Once the problem was diagnosed, the CultHeRit project identified two main avenues for intervention. The first involves **embedding** selected visibility measures into everyday work practices, while the second comprises **dedicated activities** that require more resources, often necessitating external expertise, specialized tools and specific skills.

Embedding to Increase Visibility of Work in CHIM

Embedding selected visibility measures into everyday work practices is the most affordable option. It requires initial effort to rethink routines and the willingness to adapt established conventions, yet with consistent application, these practices become habitual over time. Widespread uptake across the sector depends on reaching a critical mass of practitioners adopting these measures. This represents a low-risk strategy once initial institutional inertia is navigated. While not entirely failure-proof, it relies on knowledge, skills and technologies already in place, avoiding the need for additional training or new competencies. Revising credit conventions serves as a prime example. Listing the names and roles of all individuals involved in a project, akin to film credits, showcases the volume and diversity of work occurring behind the scenes. This highlights the institution and the sector as significant employers and a productive economic force. Embedding can take many forms and utilizes existing communication infrastructure, making it highly resource-friendly.

During CultHeRit encounters, partners identified the following impactful activities and initiatives that can be implemented with minimum effort and cost:

ECHIPA / TEAM / CSAPAT

Management: Felix Marcu, Zsolt Csók, George Cupcea
Curatori / Curators: Alpar Dobos, Ágnes Gázdac, Ioana Gruță

Conservator expozitje / Exhibition conservator: Ioana Cova
Responsabil tehnic / Technical responsible: Cristina Topan
Grafică / Graphic: Dana Gheorghe-Serban
Conservare, restaurare / Conservation and restoration: Diana Birdea, Radu Cordoș, Ana Gologan, Sabin Grapini, Luminka Sásáran, Laura Trojan
Echipa tehnico-administrativă / Technical and administrative team: Alexandru Moruțan, Daniela Popa, Alexandru Runcan, Florin Runcan, Rozalia Horváth
Traducere și corectură texte / Translation and text proofreading: Eugenia Beu-Dachin, Gázdac Cristian, Ana Maria Gruia, Melinda Mihály, Mihaela Mehedinti, Dorottya Nyulas, Andrea Papp, Alina Piticar, Malvinca Urák

Concept architectural, design expozitional, coordonare executie / Architectural concept, exhibition design, execution coordination: Atelier Mass (Camelia Sisak, Violeta Frișan, Roxana Udrescu)
Design grafic / Graphic design: TD Studio (Sorin Tirt)
Animații / Animations: Unda Obscura
Scanare 3D / 3D Scanning: Universitatea Tehnică, Cluj-Napoca (Călin Neamțu)
Execuție / Execution: Creativ Bau (István Székely), Lignum Power Cnc, Bucea Mihai I.I., Accent Advertising, Narativo, Media Imagination, Complet Security, Prof. Tech Consulting, Hungart, Kunsttrans, Orbit, Safety Broker, Tehniscol
PR Cultural / Cultural Public Relations: PR&More (Adrian B. Gog)

Alți colaboratori / Other collaborators: Anca Bălc, Monica Gul, Sanda Hădărean, Szabolcs Nagy, Cristina Popescu, Viorica Rusu Bolindeț, Oana Toda, Diana Varga - MNIT, Elena Ivanka, Ioan Isaiu, Cristian Grosu, Réka Csutak, Robert Laczko Vass, Robert Kardos, Ilina Meșter, Cătălin Filip, Cristian Har, Szilárd Sándor Gál

Parteneri media / Media partners: Radio Cluj, TVR Cluj, Mediafax Foto

Alți susținători / Other supporters: Priscus Panitos, Iordances, Ammianus Marcellinus ©

The colophon of the *Forgotten Warriors and Eternal Ornaments* exhibition at MNIT (November 2024–October 2025) acknowledges the curators and conservators as well as the support staff including the driver who transported loaned artefacts, the technicians and the cleaning department. Photo credit: MNIT.

Extended Colophon

This practice ensures the visibility of diverse skills and professions while demonstrating the number of people working on cultural heritage protection, valorization and promotion. While validating each person’s contribution, the extended colophon simultaneously highlights the sector’s role as a major employer. For example, the colophon wall for the exhibition *Forgotten Warriors and Eternal Ornaments* in the final exhibition room listed not only the curators and conservators but also the support staff: the institution’s driver who transported artefacts loaned from other museums (Alexandru Moruțan),

the technicians who built the exhibit cases (Alexandru Runcan, Florin Runcan) and the cleaning department (Rozalia Horváth), alongside the ancient literary sources used in creating the narrative framework of the entire exhibition.

Educational Activities Including Demonstration of Work and Tasks in CHIM

Educational activities that include information about work in CHIM, preferably with a demonstration or practical component, are highly effective in improving visibility and increasing knowledge about the extent and diversity of skills needed in the sector. They are also effective for recruiting future employees.



Andra-Cezara Comiatî, a museum educator at MNIT, coordinates a workshop for creating Gepidic-type fibulae. Photo credit: Ştefania Dogărel.



Educational workshops on cultural heritage for elementary school children organized by RIPCM in Serbia. Photo credit: RIPCM.



Restauration work of the Cantacuzino-Paşcanu manor during the summer schools of 2020 and 2021. Photo credit: INP Daria Onofrei, Catinca Mănăilă, Daria Călinescu.

Site Visits and Open Days

Organizing site visits and Open Days allows the public to witness work processes firsthand.

In November 2024, the MAK - Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna organized an Open Door Day where they invited young professionals interested in applying for the pilot actions position in the Library and Works on Paper Collection/Archive as part of the #CultHeRit project.



Carlotta Schiller (project assistant CultHeRit), Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel (project manager CultHeRit and Head of Library and Works on Paper Collection/Archive) and Jasmin Sommerer (HR-expertise MAK, Deputy Managing Director, Head Human Resources and Legal Affairs) greet interested applicants at the Open Door Day at the MAK.



Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel welcomes applicants in front of the Library and Works on Paper Collection/Archive at the MAK.

November 2024.
Photo credit: Christian Mendez/MAK



In Romania, announcements for open-door days organized by MNIT at the Sarmizegetusa Regia and Costești-Cetățuie archaeological sites illustrate efforts to engage the public with heritage preservation. INP also gathered local stakeholders for site visits and workshops to discuss the potential restoration of the Cantacuzino-Paşcanu manor.

Muzeul Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei
★ Favourites · 17 July · 🌐

Sâmbătă, 19 iulie, vă invităm între orele 10.00 – 17.00 la Ziua porților deschise în situl arheologic Costești – Cetățuie. Evenimentul este organizat în cadrul Școlii de vară ArheoArhitectura. Cetățile Dacice din Munții Orăștiei, ediția a V-a.



Muzeul Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei
★ Favourites · 27 August · 🌐

Ziua Porților Deschise la Sarmizegetusa Regia
Sâmbătă, 30 august 2025
10:00 – 17:00

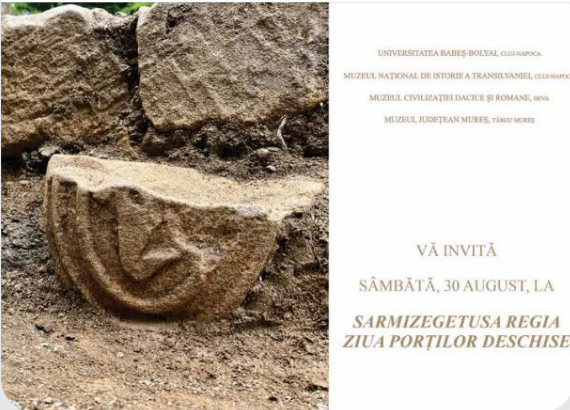
Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai din Cluj-Napoca, în colaborare cu Muzeul Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei, Muzeul Civilizației Dacice și Romane (Deva) și Muzeul Județean Mureș (Târgu Mureș), vă invită la Ziua Porților Deschise la Grădiștea de Munte – Sarmizegetusa Regia.

Cu această ocazie, arheologii și studenții Facultății de Istorie și Filosofie (UBB) vor oferi vizitatorilor explicații despre monumentele capitalei dacice și vor prezenta rezultatele campaniei de cercetări arheologice sistematice din anul 2025.

Printre descoperirile recente se numără:

- noi elemente de arhitectură monumentală
- numeroase artefacte aparținând epocii dacice

Evenimentul reprezintă o ocazie unică de a descoperi istoria Sarmizegetusei Regia chiar alături de specialiști.



Announcements for the open-door days at the Sarmizegetusa Regia (left) and Costești-Cetățuie (right) archaeological sites in Romania were released in July and August 2025. Photo credit: MNIT.



A site visit and workshop with local stakeholders discussed the potential use of the Cantacuzino-Paşcanu manor in a future restoration project, organized by the ACOLO Association founded by former participants of the 2022 INP summer school.
Photo credit: INP Gabriela Țîrlie.

Presented initiatives underscore the sector’s dedication to transparency and active community engagement in heritage management.



Dedicated Activities to Increase Visibility of Work in CHIM

This approach is more resource-intensive and comprises dedicated activities such as producing films and videos that tell stories about work, organizing meta-exhibitions or commissioning business case studies. These activities often require external expertise, specialized tools and specific skills that institutions, especially smaller ones, rarely have in-house. When planned, targeted and executed well, they can be highly impactful and insightful for audiences.

The CultHeRit partnership selected the following examples as representative of this approach:

Visiteering

Visiteering is a portmanteau blending visiting and volunteering. It describes an activity where individuals volunteer their time and skills specifically to tour, inspect or engage with a heritage site, often combining educational observation with active participation in preservation or documentation tasks. In the context of the INP activities, it refers to volunteers or students who visit sites to assist with monitoring, data collection, or community outreach while learning about the heritage in situ.

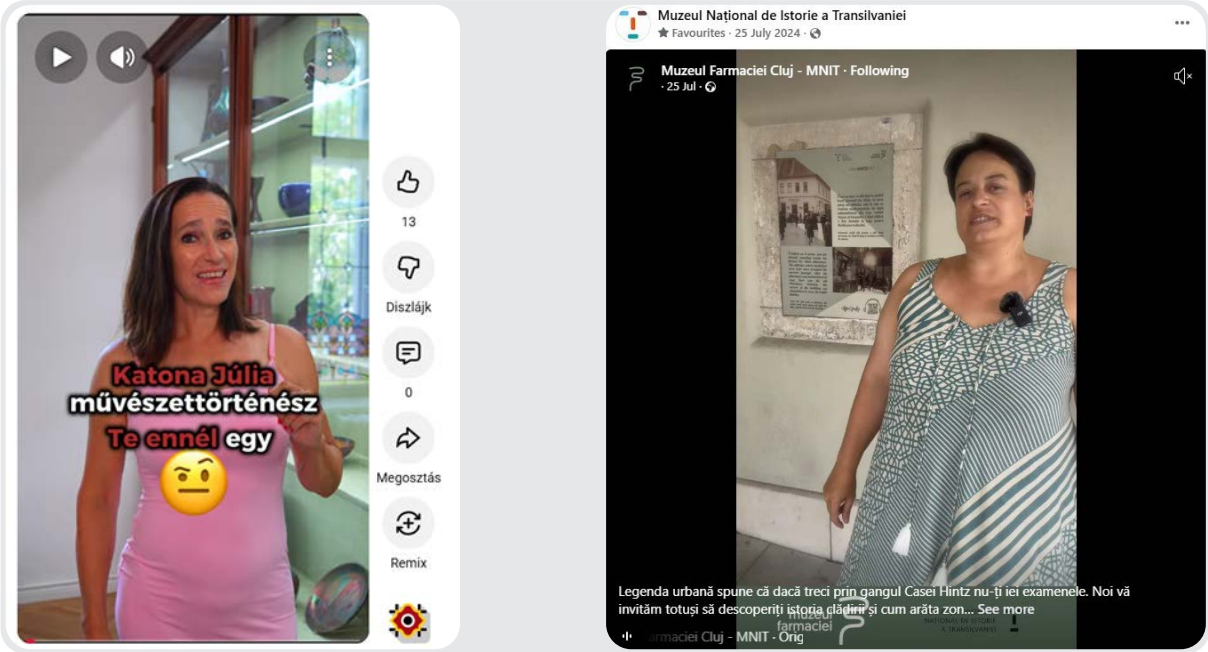


Lucia Leca from INP presents the institute’s activity during visiteering. Photo credit: INP Ioan Grămadă.



Short films

Short films serve as effective tools to make CHIM professions visible and to explain roles through engaging show-and-tell formats. Ana Gruia, a museographer at MNIT, shares insights into the history of the Pharmacy Museum building in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Júlia Katona presents an Art Nouveau object to illustrate the diversity of collection care. Michaela Neškerová appears in an advocacy film depicting the preparation of a Cubist Interior exhibition in the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague. These visual narratives introduce artefacts and objects, relate the past and help demystify the specialized work occurring within cultural institutions.



Júlia Katona presents an Art Nouveau object.
Photo credit: MNMKG-IMM.

Ana Gruia, a museographer at MNIT, shares insights about the Pharmacy Museum building. Photo credit: MNIT.



Michaela Neškerová appears in a short advocacy film detailing the preparation of the Exhibition of a Cubist Interior.
Still frame: UPM.

Meta-exhibitions

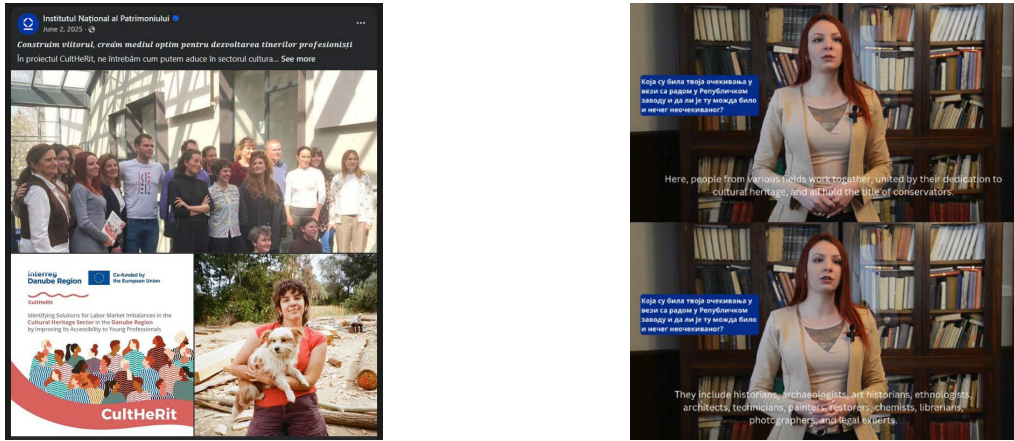
Exhibitions can focus on the intricate processes of heritage protection or the meticulous preparation required to handle artefacts or mount displays for exhibitions. Such meta-exhibitions render the research, documentation and administrative work of heritage protection and valorization visible to the public. The exhibition dedicated to Braće Radić Street in Subotica exemplifies this approach by highlighting the significance of immovable heritage.



The exhibition dedicated to protection of the Braće Radić Street in Subotica highlights immovable heritage. Photo credit: IPCMS.

Introducing Young Professionals

Highlighting the role of young professionals brings fresh perspectives and humanizes the sector. Several partner institutions within the CultHeRit project introduced their newly hired young professionals to the public through creative digital campaigns. For instance, Erika Nagy of the INP in Bucharest was introduced via Facebook, while Dorotea Aščerić of the RIPCM in Belgrade was presented through a video interview published on the institution's YouTube channel.



Erika Nagy of INP Bucharest (left) and Dorotea Aščerić of RIPCM Belgrade. Photo credit: INP and RIPCM

Similarly, the NPM hired Vital Jurca, a public relations expert, and introduced him to the public via a dedicated TikTok video. The MAK in Vienna also launched a series of engaging and innovative TikTok videos featuring Jenny Unterkofler, a young professional, to showcase her daily work and role.



Jenny Unterkofler, young professional at the MAK, in a TikTok video.



Vital Jurca in a TikTok video

Dedicated Activities During Building Restoration

The main buildings of two partner museums, the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest and the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb, Croatia, were closed for renovation. To maintain public engagement and ensure continuity of their mission during these closures, both institutions implemented distinct strategies and innovative initiatives.

Museum of Applied Arts (IMM, Budapest) In 2017, the main building of the Museum of Applied Arts was closed for renovation. Despite this closure, the museum maintained a strong presence in the region’s cultural life and ensured visibility of its work through various communication channels and strategic interventions. The institution achieved this by promoting the renovation period as a time of continued productivity and creativity, not as a pause. This approach was exemplified by the publication *Iparkodunk*, which won a Silver Medal in the Graphis Design category of the Graphis Magazine International Design Competition. Furthermore, in 2022, the institution marked its 150th anniversary by briefly reopening its doors for a singular, unconventional event: *Opus 735: Traces of War on Artworks from the Treasury of the Princess Esterházy*.



Borsos Roland – Koren Zsolt: *Iparkodunk*, 2024
Photo credit: MNMKG-IMM



Colophon of the „Opus 735. Traces of War on Artworks from the Treasury of the Princess Esterházy” exhibition

Museum of Arts and Crafts (MUO, Zagreb): Following the earthquake in 2020, the MUO in Zagreb has been closed for renovation since 2022. To maintain public engagement during this period, the museum shifted its activities outdoors and opened the *MUO Gallery*, a dedicated space for hosting events and sustaining interaction with its audiences. Initiatives included educational workshops for adults and also for children. Additionally, the museum hosted lectures within the MUO Gallery, ensuring that cultural dialogue continued despite the building’s closure.



A lecture is held at the MUO Gallery.

Photo credit: MUO



Children participate in a designer bird workshop.



Works created during a workshop are displayed at the MUO Gallery.

CultHerit Films

From June 2025 to June 2026, a series of films was recorded and produced at CultHerit partner institutions to capture and promote work in museums and cultural heritage institutes. Award-winning director and filmmaker Mihai Dragolea directed the series, which is available on the project website.

In this section the still frames illustrate key moments from this footage, highlighting diversity of roles and professional practices across the sector.



The still frames presented in this section, document the meticulous preparation for a perfume bottle exhibition, showcasing the collaborative efforts between restorers, curators, and department heads at the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest. These images illustrate the specialized skills required to conserve, interpret and install delicate artifacts within their original context.



Restorer Viktória Szemán demonstrates her restoration work at the IMM.



Curator Ildikó Kálosi shows a precious perfume bottle and elaborates on its origin and function.



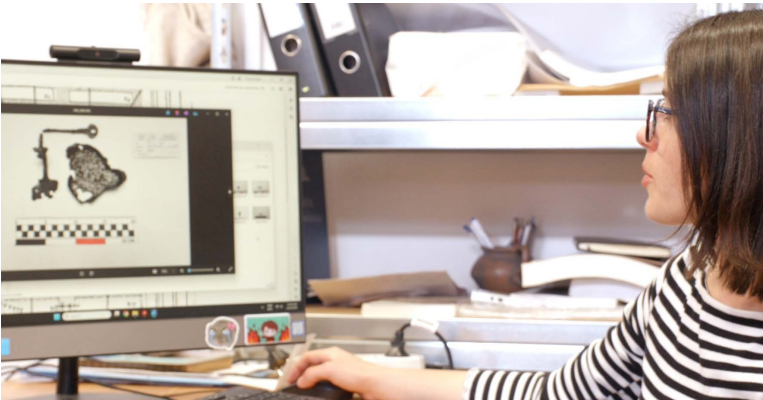
Curator Ildikó Kálosi and Anna Böhm-Vinceffy prepare the artworks for transportation.



Diána Radványi, Head of the Ceramics and Glass Department, and restorer András Kovács join curator Ildikó Kálosi to place the artifacts in the original furniture.



The following still frames capture the dual nature of archaeological work in Romania, from interpreting artifacts in the museum to active field excavation at the Bologa site. The film footage also highlights the essential collaboration between professional archaeologists and local workers in uncovering the past.



Andra-Cezara Comiati (upper-left) and Ștefania Dogărel from MNIT explain the significance of archaeological artifacts.



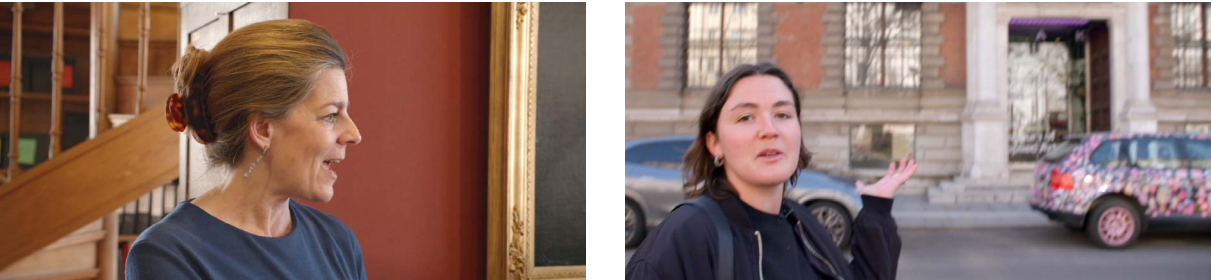
Archaeologist George Cupcea from MNIT works on the excavation of the Bologa archaeological site.



Archaeologist Ioniță Petiș at the MNIT excavation site at Bologa.



Showcasing the work of staff and dedicated volunteers, the following still frames reveal the diverse roles that sustain the MAK - Museum of Applied Arts. The images demonstrate the collaborative spirit and specialized expertise essential to the institution’s daily operations.



Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel (left) and Carlotta Schiller (right) present the professions, staff and their work at the MAK.



Selma Wesener, a retired art historian and current volunteer at the MAK Library and Works on Paper Collection/Archive, March 2026.

The following still frames depict fieldwork conducted by the National Institute for Heritage (INP) in the mining area of Valea Jiului, Romania, where experts engaged directly with local workers to assess industrial heritage. These images capture the collaborative process of evaluating preservation challenges and exploring valorization strategies with the community.



Erika Nagy and Irina Iamandescu from INP in Valea Jiului, assess and present the challenges of preserving and valorizing industrial heritage.



Recorded at the Museum of Arts and Crafts (MUO) in Zagreb, these still frames feature leadership perspectives on restoring the building after the 2020 earthquake. The footage captures the specialized design work and intergenerational knowledge transfer that drive the institution’s daily operations and resilience.



LEFT: Sanjin Mihelić, Director of MUO, explains the reasons for the museum building’s restoration and outlines challenges and opportunities associated with rebuilding and preservation.



ABOVE: Vedrana Ceranja and Vesna Lovrić Plantić discuss the intergenerational transfer of roles as future and current heads of the Clocks and Watches Collection at MUO.



LEFT: Tessa Bachrach-Krištofić from MUO explains the specifics of graphic design required for work in a museum of arts and crafts.

The still frames document the importance of public service and scientific conservation work at the Republic Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments (RIPCM), Belgrade, Serbia. The visuals highlight the specialized roles and expertise essential to sustaining heritage protection efforts.



Tatjana Tripković explains the role and tasks of a chemist working on heritage protection and conservation within the RIPCM laboratory.

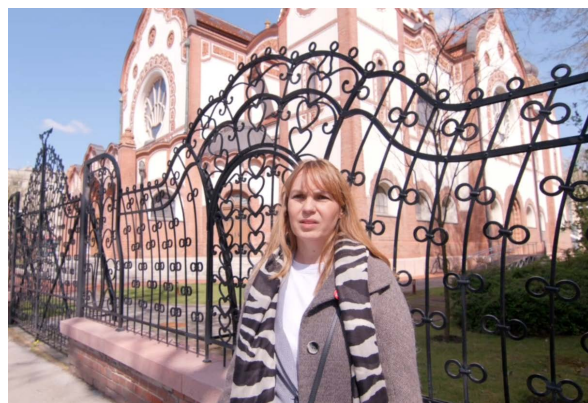


Vladimir Džamić discusses the role and significance of the Institute for Heritage Protection in Serbia.

The following still frames showcase the dynamic range of expertise within the sector, spanning archival management and architectural preservation at the Intermunicipal Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Subotica (IPCMS). Richárd Morvai Rác presents the intricacies of archival work while Neda Džamić highlights the city's architectural heritage including its Art Nouveau landmarks.



Richárd Morvai Rác, a young professional at IPCMS, presents the nuances of archival work.



Neda Džamić, an art historian, presents the Subotica Synagogue, an architectural Art Nouveau gem of the region.

These still frames from the Institute for Protection of Cultural-Historical and Natural Heritage of the Republic of Srpska (IPC) document archaeological work at the Poprača Monastery. The images highlight the collaboration between heritage professionals and the monastic community. They also capture the strategic planning and expert guidance essential to investigating this significant site.



Milijana Okilj and Father Nektarije review excavation plans for the archaeological site at the Poprača Monastery.



Aleksandar Jašarević, lead archaeologist at the Poprača Monastery site.



Milijana Okilj and Father Nektarije review excavation plans for the archaeological site at the Poprača Monastery.

The following still frames highlight the diverse expertise within the Notranjska Museum in Postojna (NPM), spanning education, history and biological conservation. The images showcase how curators and educators interpret the region's unique natural and cultural heritage for the public.



Ana Čič, a curator and educator, presents her aspects of her work at the NPM



Tine Kaluža, a curator and historian, showcases the caves and natural heritage of the area.



Slavko Polak, a curator biologist, presents the human fish (*Proteus anguinus*).

The visual testimonies presented throughout this section underscore a shared reality: heritage protection relies on a constellation of specialized labor that often remains hidden from public view. Discussing this work, its results and obstacles openly and constructively is vital for advocacy and external recognition. Placing these topics on the agenda of conferences and professional associations reinforces the understanding that daily operations are essential to heritage protection. By reaching out to peers to share experiences, insights and solutions, the sector builds alliances and amplifies its message. Collectively these efforts contribute to normalizing the visibility of the full spectrum of heritage work and making it a familiar and recognized part of public discourse.



Instead of a Conclusion: An Invitation

Aware of financial constraints most CHIM institutions face, CultHerit proposes solutions that prioritize realistic, sustainable actions over large-scale redesigns that strain limited budgets. As immediate measure, the project advocates for modest interventions that draw on existing staff knowledge, such as updating exhibition promotional materials with comprehensive credit lists, creating short video explainers or training public-facing staff in storytelling. These measures are implementable at the institutional level in the short term and can be scaled as additional funding becomes available.

True sustainability, however, extends beyond institutional-level efforts. While self-reliance allows for immediate action, it must not be mistaken for the relinquishment of public responsibility. The care of cultural heritage is a shared duty among citizens, communities and authorities. Consequently, the proposed line of action is a multi-layered intervention that operates across interconnected levels. One critical layer involves increasing visibility through internal, resource-friendly measures. Other essential layers involve reaching out to forge strategic alliances across sectors and advocating for the structural reforms and funding that visibility measures alone cannot secure.

The CultHerit experience underscores the importance of tempering expectations. Deep-rooted stereotypes about the arts, such as the myth of the ‘starving artist’ have evolved over centuries and cannot be overturned overnight. A synergistic approach to increasing visibility of work and its impact appears most effective. It also demands time, dedication and perseverance. The path forward lies in combining everyday visibility and continuous audience engagement with occasional, ambitious initiatives that capture public attention. However, the efficacy of these interventions ultimately depends on a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms at play. Further study is needed to examine the complex power dynamics,

including the gendered dimensions of labor valuation and the structural barriers that perpetuate invisibility. This critical knowledge should guide the definition of structural support, ensuring that short-term gains translate into long-term equity.

This publication does not claim to offer a panacea. Rather, it shares insights from the CultHerit project with an aim to initiate conversations about the invisibility of work and its consequences. It offers a practical tool, the DIY survey, alongside examples of solutions collected from partners, inviting peers to adapt these resource-friendly measures to their own contexts.

To facilitate this process, the publication includes two annexes designed to inspire and guide practitioners. *Annex I: Beyond the Exhibit – A Catalogue of Practical Visibility Interventions* [link] presents a curated collection of good practices for increasing visibility, while *Annex II: The Diagnostic Mini-Survey – A Step-by-Step Guide for Practitioners* [link] provides detailed instructions for conducting the mini-survey. Together, these resources equip professionals to navigate both layers of change: making their work visible today while building the coalitions necessary for tomorrow.

Collective, sustained effort can cumulatively contribute to improving the employment situation, attracting young professionals and securing a viable future for the sector. Readers are invited to join in this work.



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