

**"Collaborative Innovation for Hybrid and Sustainability
Uptake in Cultural and Creative Industries"**

CREA-CULT-2022-COOP

Name of the Project: Collaborative Innovation for Hybrid and Sustainability Uptake in Cultural and Creative Industries

Acronym of the Project: Collab 4 HySust CCI

Proposal Number of the Project: Project 101099866

Project Duration and start date: 01/02/2023 and ending on 31/01/2026.

Lead partner/coordinator: CONSORZIO MATERAHUB INDUSTRIE CULTURALI E CREATIVE, Italy

Partners:

- P2 Intercultura Consult, Bulgaria
- P3 Nova Iskra, Serbia
- P4 Syn+ Ergasia, Greece
- P5 The flying theatre, Denmark

Contact: Paolo Montemurro

(*email:*) paolomontemurro@materahub.com

(*website:*) <https://www.materahub.com/>

Deliverable Number: WP2 D2.7 (D4)

Title of Deliverable: Lessons Learned Report

Version of Deliverable: Version 1

Date of Submission of Deliverable: 21/07/2025





Collab 4 HySust CCI Collaborative Innovation for Hybrid and Sustainability Uptake in Cultural and Creative Industries

Call: [CREA-CULT-2022-COOP-1] – [European Cooperation projects Small Scale]

EU Grants: Application form (CREA CULT and CROSS): V2.0 –15.01.2022

[DURATION: 36 months]

Lessons Learned Report



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Deliverable

Number and Name of Deliverable	D2.7.Lessons Learned Report
Date of delivery	15/07/2025
Author	Intercultura Consult
WP Number	WP2
Version	1.0
Description	A comprehensive report on the lessons learned from the knowledge sharing action based on feedback by participants, mentors, partner teams and external organisations as well as internal reporting deliverables.
Quality check	

Contributors

Contributors	Petya Koleva - Intercultura Consult Milena Berbenkova - Intercultura Consult
---------------------	---

Versions

Version	Date	Content
0.1	30/05/2025	Draft of the document
0.2	13/06/2025	Revision of layout and formatting
0.3	14/07/2025	Approval by the Quality Board
1.0	21/07/2025	Submission to the EC

This Deliverable is part of the project Collaborative Innovation for Hybrid and Sustainability Uptake in Cultural and Creative Industries which has received funding from the CREA-CULT-2022-COOP.

The content of this Quality Plan represents the views of the authors only and is their sole responsibility; it cannot be considered to reflect the views of the European Commission and/or the Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises or any other body of the European Union. The European Commission and the Agency do not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.

Table of Contents

1. Background	4
1.1 The knowledge sharing approach and assessment methods	4
1.2 Four clusters of KSS feedback	5
2 SEE innovation support - needs & context	6
2.1. Need 1. Accessible form of innovation support	6
2.2. Need 2: Mentorship support for innovation	7
2.3. Need 3: Peer learning workshops	7
2.4. Need 4: Building a community of practice in the SEE region	8
3. Emerging Innovation challenges and recommendations for incubation support	8
4. Break-through moments	11
5. The way KSS stimulate change	11
5.1. Knowing the diversity of CCI organizations in the region	11
5.2. Topics, addressed in the KSSs:	13
6. Annex	14

1. Background

The Collab 4 Hy Sust CCIs project revolved around an Incubation process with three main lines of support provided to a shortlisted pool of 15 organizations from the cultural and creative sectors following an [open call](#):

- A micro-grant (EUR 3.000) - to undertake an incubation-based prototyping effort leading to a demonstration or improved result.
- Long-term Mentorship support of 16 months.
- 5 Knowledge-sharing sessions - served to strengthen the SEE regional network and wider EU collaboration opportunities.

The current report offers an analysis of the experience and direct feedback collected digitally and in group discussion by the participants involved in the 5 Knowledge sharing sessions of the project.

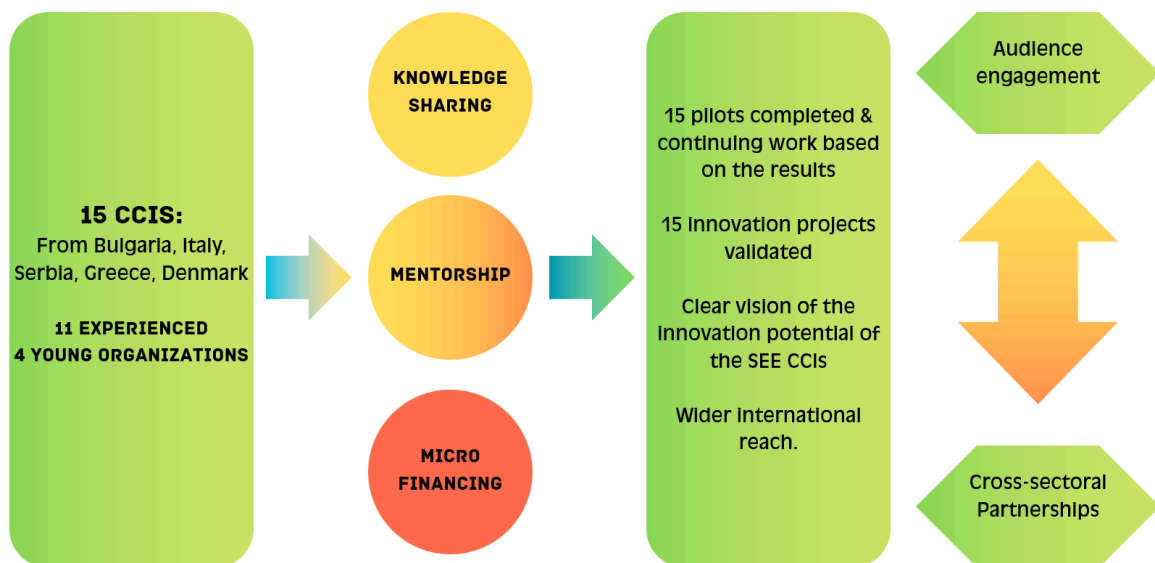


Figure 1: Collab4HySust CCIs process and results

1.1 The knowledge sharing approach and assessment methods

- Two online and three hybrid KSS events (intermittent across the project timeline) served to raise visibility of the open call (KSS1) and showcase pilots' progress (KSS2-5) as well as to leverage new opportunities for development and growth for the pilot teams and the SEE network. The KSS have been attended by an average of 62 persons, some reaching close to 100 registered participants. (See Annex, Table 2)
- Digital methods and tools as well as direct feedback collection were utilized to offer the

participants the opportunity to interact and assess the sessions. Feedback was gathered via Sli.do and Google form feedback surveys.

- The report also refers to internal deliverables of the project, D2.2, D2.3, D2.4 and D2.5 and D 2.6 (Knowledge Sharing Session 1 to 5 reports). Additionally, publications expressing the achievements of several KSS sessions have been made public and shared widely by the partners on [the project platform DEUS](#) and by partners on their sites or linkedin pages.

1.2 Four clusters of KSS feedback

This report summarises four feedback clusters derived from the continuous feedback collection from participants in the project:

- 1) common challenges regarding the innovation challenge
- 2) attention points for colleagues and similar incubation projects
- 3) break-through moments from the Collab4HySustCC project
- 4) general reflection on the knowledge sharing process and networking activities that have facilitated change from the perspectives of pilot teams, mentors, partner teams and external organisations

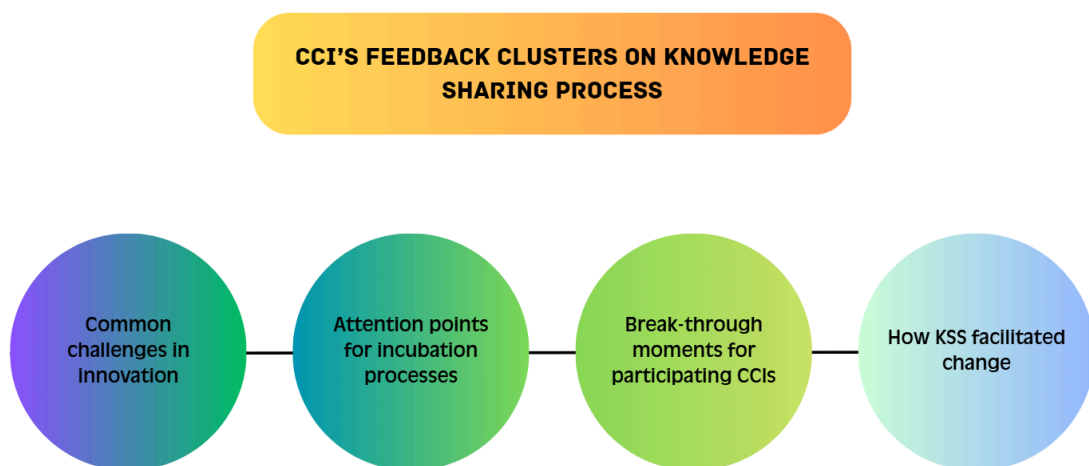


Figure 2: Feedback clusters in Collab4HySustCCIs

2 SEE innovation support - needs & context

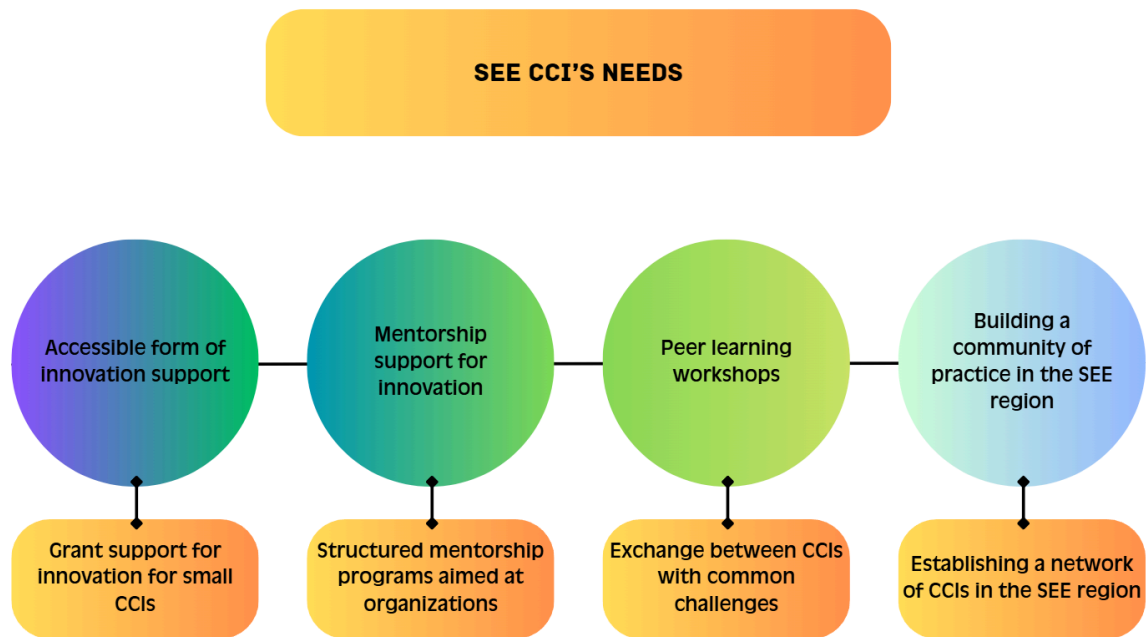


Figure 3: SEE CCI's needs

2.1. Need 1. Accessible form of innovation support

The feedback from the participants in the Collab4HySustCCI project was that innovation support is vital for them. They all agree that without a dedicated grant they would not probably have taken the risk of dedicating resources (time, team effort and additional funds) to processes that are strategic but normally overlooked by funding instruments or remain on the “to-do list” that is never taken up.

Colleagues from countries outside of the project scope who attended the project events on-site or in a hybrid way have pointed out that innovation support in the European context is mostly targeting larger organisations, especially institutions. However, the capacity to apply quickly to largely bureaucratic and demanding program formats is a challenge even for museums or creative hubs. Moreover, the support for innovation typically addresses start-ups or scale-ups rather than cultural or creative organisations.

It is mostly the much bigger entities or profit-driven tech-sector organisations who are known to engage with EU innovation and competitiveness support funding programs. Therefore, the support made available by Collab4HysustCCI has propelled change and validated a model that serves the future.

2.2. Need 2: Mentorship support for innovation

There are no innovation programs yet emerging in the context of South East Europe, as evident from the dedicated internal project survey presented at KSS5 - February 2025. What is more, in the duration of the project it became evident that mentorship for cultural and creative projects is also rare.

Wherever it exists, it is mostly offered to individuals in the [format of coaching](#). When it comes to supporting the capacity of organisations to integrate change, there are one-day events or conferences which are not fully effective when it comes to real professional scenarios and challenges. Virtually none of the available formats of coaching or trainer support is following the key phase of problem definition and needs analysis before introducing an innovation.

There is no support, for the moment, in the SEE region, providing knowledge or tools to assess the impact of the implemented innovation on the project's stakeholders (public, users/clients or partners), nor impact on achieving a new value proposition of the organisation in general. The Collab4HySustCCI pilots have been very clear that mentorship was useful in these aspects.

2.3. Need 3: Peer learning workshops

Due to its open call format Collab4HySustCCI has proven very effective in allowing the existing bottom-up initiatives to surface and connect. It became evident that borders are not being crossed even when needs are similar. None of the Bulgarian, Serbian or Greek pilots had collaborated or even visited professionally, the creative ecosystem of the countries where shared needs and resources are to be found.

This was an unexpected and eye-opening discovery for all of pilots and partners, especially when it appeared that several of them were working on public space, community and green aspects, dedicating efforts to reengage the young audience or promote local music talent in SEE, to give a few examples. More broadly the pilots from Italy and Denmark also proposed themes that were synergetic, particularly on island communities, demographic and climate change. All of these aspects signalled that bottom up and peer learning formats are the way forward for empowering South East and wider European scale change. (See also point 5)

Thus, the need to connect regularly and also traverse physically the routes that shape cultural networks was seen as important in the project. It offered the CCIs the unique opportunity to build capacity for innovation in practice, to reflect upon a well-directed goal and to measure the innovation impact, while also using the benchmarks set via peer-learning and networking.

In addition, the collaboration has a cross-regional focus via a strategic innovation incubation partner from Denmark, from the most advanced European region (Northern) in which the innovation ecosystem is horizontally advancing all sectors.

2.4. Need 4: Building a community of practice in the SEE region

To address the complex challenge of being relevant to the audience and needs at local or regional level, it was necessary to look beyond the individual grant support that is generally offered to CCIs in the SEE region for content creation of artistic or cultural outputs distribution.

There is an unlocked potential in connecting organisations, disciplines and networks to collaborate around emerging innovation needs that connect organisations as directly relevant to their capacity to create or distribute their work and knowledge to connect people and urgent topics by integrating digital innovation or cross-disciplinary support in view of tech or other domains of knowledge.

The coming years will continue to demand new types of engagement and more organisations would seek to establish bonds with the local communities that are also changing due to conflict-driven, post-industrial (be it AI or more generally tech driven innovation), economic crisis, new forms of restrictions and forced migration or unemployment. Innovation is vital for the organisations in the countries of the partnership that are located in the South and East region of the European Union bordering on other vital regions, particularly in the region of the Balkans and the Eastern countries.

3. Emerging Innovation challenges and recommendations for incubation support

The methodology of incubation support in the project was a format free of disciplinary silos. This has allowed the project to ‘map’ in a very organic manner the type of themes and innovation challenges that organisations from the cultural and creative sector address as most relevant to them.

Feedback from the pilots has grouped them into 3.1. common innovation challenges and 3.2. valuable recommendations for improvement of the format of incubation support.

3.1. Common innovation challenges

The project invited organizations to focus on development of innovation proposals in two main areas: cross sectoral partnerships and audience engagement. The focus of the Knowledge sharing program also revolved around these areas with constant adjustment in accordance with the needs of the CCIs and the feedback they provided.

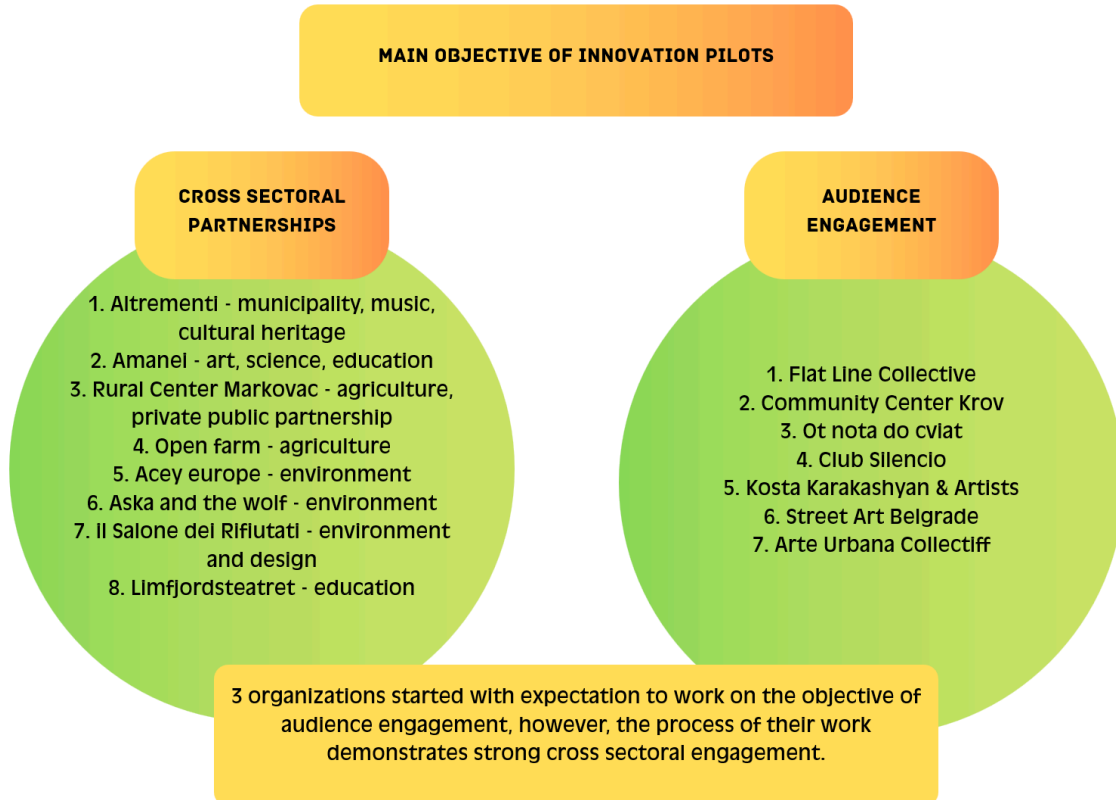


Figure 4: Collab4HySust CCIs Pilots' main objectives of innovation

While there was no disciplinary division among the organizations, several common themes of work emerged among the participants:

- **Outdoor/public space activities**

6 organizations have engaged with projects that offer outdoor/public space artistic and cultural activities and many of them have directly questioned /connected sectors that regulate or preserve the use of public space including natural habitats.

- Isolated geographies/climate change/depoulation working with islands - 2 organizations + 1 more on a fjord
- Nature/Agriculture/Forestry - 3 organizations

- **Informal education**

4 organizations have leveraged opportunities for communities and schools proposing also decentralised forms for creative skills learning (e.g. filmmaking, music) or other knowledge opportunities (e.g. nature).

Among them 3 organizations have developed more complex digital outreach to new and existing audiences (digital platform, hybrid event, online radio). Two of them focusing on reaching beyond the borders of their own countries and connecting the wider Balkan CCI scene.

- **Supporting the arts scene - talent & public connection**
 - 3 organizations have worked to boost Music talent exposure
 - 3 organizations have worked on Audiovisual content (film/gamification)

3.2. Key recommendations for improvement of incubation support

The following recommendations were derived directly from the participating CCI's. They are straightforward and can be directly applied in new formats with suitable analysis and test phases.

- A slightly more formalized timeline with KPIs and milestones to support organizations in tracking their progress.
- Even more development materials that can be directly utilized by the CCIs - document templates and tools that can guide organizations through processes and make them more accessible for less experienced CCIs.
- Even more opportunities for targeted peer exchange - deep collaboration within small groups as well as opportunities to experience the work of one another - such as a shared residency.
- Cross-mentor knowledge-sharing - to provide organizations with access to wider expertise and learning opportunities.
- More space for reflection on collective actions
- Improved time / content ratio in knowledge-sharing sessions - participants shared diverse views on the length and intensity of the KSS. While some found certain topics and sessions to be too long and intense, others shared the opposite view. These diverse views relate to the different levels of experience participants in the project came with, as well as their diverse expertise.

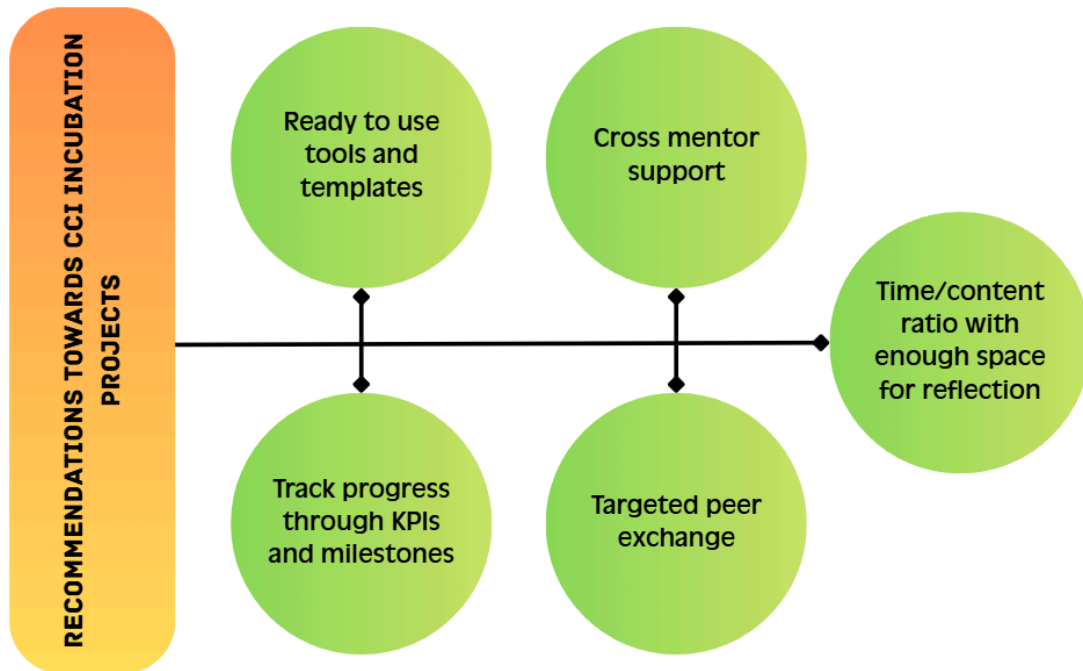


Figure 5: Recommendations towards CCI incubation projects

4. Break-through moments

The incubation support in this SEE focused project was itself a pioneer. It has managed to achieve progress which led to several break-through moments for the involved pilots and KSS participants:

- Clearer vision of the innovation potential of the SEE CCIs for their work and its value today.
- Clear recognition that creative practices can drive sustainable change.
- Wider international reach.
- Recognised need to understand the wider European context and scale up the regional network of creative ecosystems.
- Recognition of the positive impact of in-person/hybrid meetings.

5. The way KSS stimulate change

5.1. Knowing the diversity of CCI organizations in the region

For the involved pilots and KSS participants the aspect of the Collab program of getting to know a range of diverse organizations in the region was seen as the second most impactful after the dedicated mentorship support.

Before the project, many of the organizations had limited knowledge or connections with CCIs from their neighbouring countries. For some of them, the Knowledge-sharing sessions were the first opportunity to visit a neighbouring country especially in professional context (i.e. KSS1 in Plovdiv, Bulgaria; KSS3 in Belgrade, Serbia; KSS5 in Athens, Greece). (see also Need 1)

The CCIs recognize the value of “the cross-border and cross-disciplinary network” the project has fostered. It opened up new horizons for them and encouraged long-term thinking, collaboration, and systems change.

The participants have also underlined the value of not only getting to know other initiatives, but also the exchange of meaningful ideas and benchmarking best practices. It gave them a feeling of belonging to a community of shared values and struggles. This sense of regional ecosystem they deemed important for reaching their own potential and abilities to work independently and meet their goals.

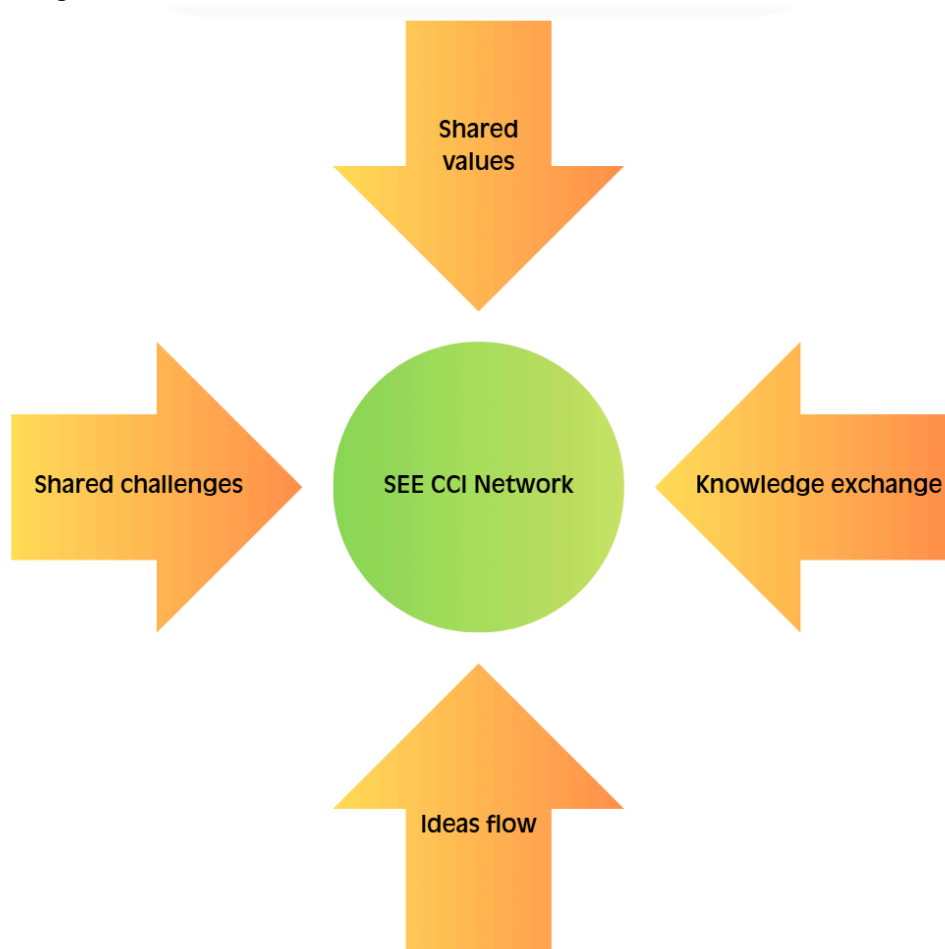


Figure 6: SEE CCI Network advantages

5.2. Topics, addressed in the KSSs

Knowing the pilots' needs was the basis for providing them support via the knowledge sharing sessions. Each session was directly informed by the needs observed and feedback shared by participants from the previous event of the Collab program. This is why the shortlisted topics can be seen and traced as integral to the pilots and the collective growth of experience in innovation-driven skills and knowledge.

- Audiences and Creative Industry Value Chain.
- SDG and Agenda 2030: closer than we think.
- Organizational Self-assessment to work with audiences and partners.
- Communication with target audiences in digital and hybrid environments.
- Sharing urban art practice with hybrid audiences.

The above five topics were recognized as important and beneficial by the participants. They also directly connected with the two focus areas of the project and the pilots in it: cross sectoral partnerships and audience development.

5.3. Practical workshops/group work titles with the KSS sessions:

Apart from knowledge sharing and providing new information, the knowledge sharing sessions focused on providing opportunities for practice to the participants. The CCIs in the project worked on the topics below, taking into account the specific needs of their own organizations as well as in collaboration with one another, in order to reach more scalable results.

- Audiences and Creative Industry Value Chain
- SDG and Agenda 2030: closer than we think
- Measuring project impact on the predefined target audiences
- Communication Strategy for Art Interventions
- Defining Performance Indicators - peer collaboration
- Mentor Feedback on set Indicators
- Feedback & open discussion potential for scaling up/reiteration of activity
- Pitch session - important realizing the vision and mission of the organization, as well as the value of their work on the innovation pilot. The pitch presentations were a key tool for organizations to communicate their message to funders and peers.

The practical sessions were integral in giving CCIs the much needed experience in self-presentation and self-promotion. This contributed to the organizations' development of a clearer vision for their purpose and value of their work. The growth of the organizations in this aspect was markedly visible by their improved presentational skills in the final pitch session (KSS5) as compared to their first and progress presentations (KSS2 and KSS4).

6. Annex

The knowledge sharing process was executed in the following steps for each session (KSS):

#	Activity	Time	Responsible party
1.	Conceptualization of key focus/ topics	3 months before KSS	ICC and Steering Committee
2.	Selection of and reach out to contributors to KSS	3 – 2.5 months to KSS	ICC and Steering Committee
3.	Concretization of topics	2.5 – 2 months to KSS	ICC and Contributors to KSS
4.	Communication to participants – Save the date, main topics	2 – 1.5 months to KSS	ICC and partners
5.	<i>If in person:</i> travel arrangements and logistics	2 – 1.5 months to KSS	Contributors and participants under the coordination of organizing partner
6.	Preparation of materials and evaluation form	2 – 1 months before KSS	Contributors to KSS under the coordination of ICC
7.	Communication to participants – Reminder, programme, registration, other important topics	1 month before KSS	ICC and partners
8.	Technical and logistical preparation for the execution of KSS event	1 – 0.5 months before KSS	Organizing partner and contributors
9.	Technical test (obligatory for online events)	1 week before KSS	Organizing partner and contributors
10.	Communication to participants – Reminder, final details, preliminary materials	1 week before KSS	ICC and partners

11.	Execution of KSS	Day of KSS	Organizing partner, contributors, participants
12.	Evaluation of KSS and further needs from participants	Day of KSS – 1 week after KSS	ICC and partners, contributors, participants
13.	Evaluation by the mentoring experts on advancement in the applied knowledge	1 month after KSS	ICC and partners, mentoring experts
14.	Assessment of collected feedback	1 week – 1.5 month after KSS	ICC and Steering Committee
15.	Adjustment of methods and topics for the next session	1.5 month after KSS	ICC and Steering Committee

Table 1 (From Knowledge Sharing Methodology): Knowledge Sharing Process

KSS	Target	Actual result
KSS 1: Part of Transnational launch event	Hybrid event - Bulgaria and online Audience: 20 participants	Audience: 22 in person and 96 online participants Materials developed: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sustainability and audience involvement 2. Soft energy - creativity transforming post-industrial and postagrarian communities 3. Audience engagement with green topics 4. Practical activities: creative canvas, Art reactor
KSS 2: Sustainable practices, audience engagement and targeted collaboration	Online event Audience: 15 attendees from the CCI project participants	Audience: 56 participants Materials developed: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Audiences and Creativity Industry Value Chain

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. SDGs and Agenda 2030: closer than we think 3. Organizational Selfassessment to work with audiences and partners
KSS 3: Hybrid Horizons: Cultivating Creativity and Audience Engagement	<p>Hybrid event - Serbia and online</p> <p>Audience: 15 attendees from the CCI project participants</p>	<p>Audience: 21 participants on site and 55 online</p> <p>Materials developed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communication with target audiences in digital and hybrid environments 2. Measuring project impact on the predefined target audiences 3. Communication Strategy for Art Interventions
KSS 4: Collab Pilots: tracking progress in a transnational collaboration environment	<p>Online event</p> <p>Audience: 15 attendees from the CCI project participants</p>	<p>Audience: 41 online participants</p> <p>Materials developed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Template for organizational presentation 2. Reflection and CCI presentations
KSS 5: Tracking progress in a transnational collaboration environment	<p>Hybrid event - Greece and online</p> <p>Audience: 15 attendees from the CCI project participants</p>	<p>Audience: 17 in person and 24 online</p> <p>Materials developed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare to pitch 2. Pitch presentations by CCIs 3. Results from preliminary survey