

Policy paper

Culture Agenda for the EU island territories

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Summary

Islands are physical formations, detached from the continental mainland and culturally represent unique microcosms unto themselves. The European Island landscape consists of thousands of islands, some 2,200 of them inhabited, representing a diverse mix, ranging in size from large and urbanized island, sometimes political entities in their own right (e.g. Ireland and Cyprus) to small islands – representing the majority

This research finds that although EU Island territories share concerns around territorial cohesion, accessibility, sustainability, demographic resilience, and cultural continuity, the EU Member States' cultural policies for island territories are highly fragmented and heterogeneous. The EU Island strategy also clearly notes that the development of policies for islands is distributed across different governance levels, requiring dialogue between the EU, member states, regional governments and local authorities and stakeholders. While some EU Member States rely primarily on constitutional autonomy and legislative differentiation, others focus on compensatory mechanisms and regional development tools. Mechanisms for policy and best practices exchange among EU Member States are not in place.

At the same time, there is a growing recognition of the need for dedicated and coordinated policy responses. The European Commission is currently in the process of developing its first ever **EU Islands Strategy**. However, the topic of culture is not recognized as a standalone priority. On the other hand, the Culture Compass Guidelines contain objective 5.2. Promoting culture-led regional, territorial and local development including in peripheral, rural, island, coastal and remote areas, and the EU outermost areas, which face challenges e.g. depopulation, geographical barriers and fewer and poorer services, which means that the European-level strategies require improved integration.

These developments mean that in the present circumstances of dynamic policymaking, the arts and culture sector from the European island territories must continue to create visibility for themselves and the benefits they bring to the European Union and these activities must span across territories and governance levels, to achieve better integration of arts and culture into the overall island policy agenda.

There are several upcoming European Capital of Cultures, including Larnaca – European Capital of Culture 2030 and the competitions for the Maltese and Spanish European Capital of Culture 2031, which offer an excellent opportunity for streamlined and structured dialogue among the actors across the EU governance levels and EU island territory arts and culture ecosystem, to jointly drive the visibility of the European island territories and identify new approaches and tools to facilitate the evolution of the EU island territory cultural sector.

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1. Background

1.1. Introduction

Islands are physical formations, detached from the continental mainland and culturally represent unique microcosms unto themselves. The European Island landscape consists of thousands of islands, some 2,200 of them inhabited, representing a diverse mix, ranging in size from large and urbanized island, sometimes political entities in their own right (e.g. Ireland and Cyprus) to small islands – representing the majority.

The European Island communities represent the physical periphery of Europe, and almost all European islands are characterized by prevalence of rural communities, low population density and lesser socio-economic development.

The acknowledgement of their developmental needs due to insularity and remoteness is addressed in major European public policy approaches, including the fundamental texts on the European Union, e.g. Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Article 174. Specific setbacks elaborated in various EU policy documents include: (1) lack of transport connection to other territories, (2) fragile environmental ecosystems (droughts, limited arable land, rising sea levels), (3) economic stagnation and overreliance on tourism, (4) demographic decline outside of major islands, migration flows and lacking professional opportunities limited to tourism, agri-fish sector, (5) high unemployment, lack of professional development opportunities and erosion of human capital¹.

1.2. Needs of Culture sector in Island territories

The cultural sector in the island territories shares characteristics and needs of the culture sector in non-urban areas of the EU include (e.g. Voices of Culture – The role of non-urban areas of the European Union, February 2020):

- lower density of cultural institutions and cultural interactions (Amann, 2021) which means fewer professional opportunities for local artists and limited access to arts and culture for local audiences;
- less densely populated local artistic ecosystems (Ammann, 2021), meaning that artists from rural communities are creating at a disadvantage compared to those living in urban centres in terms of their ability to attract visitors and, consequently, to make a living,
- local investment focus on 'hard' infrastructure for tourism and lacking the integration of arts and artists into the local funding schemes; also, less funding and lower funding available for arts and culture in non-urban settings compared to urban settings

These needs and challenges are taken to the extreme in the case of the European island communities due to their physical disconnect from the continental mainland and the additional difficulty in creating local infrastructure and creative ecosystems. However, the policy documents also point out that the non-urban communities have specific local artistic and cultural assets - both tangible and intangible assets - which are under-utilized, meaning that there is significant potential for artistic and cultural activity and that could be tapped into and developed with appropriate interventions.

¹https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/communications/2022/putting-people-first-securing-sustainable-and-inclusive-growth-unlocking-the-potential-of-the-eu-s-outermost-regions

1.3. State of the art

Development strategies aiming to strengthen European island territory cultural ecosystems remain in infancy. The Island Connect Initiative, which emerged in 2017 as a small bottom-up initiative of two newly founded artistic residency spaces, located on islands Mallorca (Spain) and Bornholm (Denmark) - completed pioneering work developing a vibrant ecosystem of cultural operators from across numerous European island territories.

The project Island Connect II is a broad transnational cooperation project, the goal of which is to mobilize the vast potential of the European island landscape to function - and become broadly visible - as a setting for artistic excellence and innovation, with benefits for the European arts sector, the European island territories and Europe as a whole. The cooperation concept relies on an innovative artist mobility scheme: consortium members jointly select artistic companies from European island territories and provide them with space to work, a place to live and mentoring to improve their professional careers and professional networks. Participating artists and cultural operators thus have unprecedented access to professional development, international networking and visibility opportunities, while the network operators evolve their institutional capacities and expand the Island Connect network.

The original consortium has since 2017 developed into a vibrant cultural network spanning most of European island territories, attracting the participation of major regional institutions, yet still remaining the only pan-European island territory cooperation initiative in arts and culture.

2. Aims and objectives

The objective of this policy paper is to review the framework conditions for activity and development of the European arts and culture communities, located in European island territories, with the aim to identify areas for improvement.

3. Methods and data collection

The methodology for developing this policy paper combines policy analysis, comparative research and gap analysis in order to identify structural challenges, emerging trends, and opportunities for future cultural policy development.

The first phase consists of a multi-level policy review examining existing cultural, territorial, and development policies relevant to island regions at the European, national, regional, and local levels. This includes the analysis of EU frameworks and programmes as well as national and municipal cultural strategies affecting island territories. Particular attention is given to how island conditions are addressed within broader cultural and regional policies, and whether existing frameworks adequately respond to issues such as accessibility, mobility, audience development, cultural infrastructure, and professional sustainability in insular contexts.

Alongside the policy review, the project conducts a comparative mapping exercise across selected European island territories in order to identify common patterns, territorial specificities, and innovative practices. This mapping focuses on both structural conditions and operational realities within the cultural and creative sectors, including working conditions for artists and cultural operators, access to funding, international mobility, infrastructural limitations, and the role of culture in community cohesion and local development.

We conclude the research with a gap-analysis approach, comparing existing policy measures with the identified needs of communities and the arts and culture sector.

This enables us to detect areas where current policies are insufficient, fragmented, or inaccessible, as well as to identify successful models that could be scaled or transferred across territories. Particular attention is given to emerging trends related to sustainability, digitalisation, cultural mobility, participatory governance, and the role of culture in strengthening democratic resilience and social inclusion.

Island Connect II's own seven-partner consortium is a ready basis for this: Domino, based on Vis and in the city of Komiža (Croatia); BIRCA on Bornholm (Denmark); C.IN.E., associated with Mallorca and the Balearic Islands (Spain); Laboratorio Artes Vivas on Tenerife and the Canary Islands (Spain); Sardegna Teatro on Sardinia (Italy); Theatre Alibi in Corsica (France); and the Irish Aerial Creation Centre in Limerick (Ireland). Each of these partners operates under distinct national and regional cultural-policy frameworks, funding mechanisms, and mobility conditions, so the residencies, exchanges and capacity-building activities already delivered at each site are used as concrete, site-specific evidence when substantiating the policy paper's comparative and gap analyses, rather than treating "island territories" as a single undifferentiated category.

4. Findings

4.1. European policy Framework

The European Island communities represent the physical periphery of Europe, and the acknowledgement of their particular developmental needs due to insularity and remoteness is addressed in major European public policy approaches.

4.1.1. 'Island Article' - Article 174 TFEU on regions with geographic and demographic handicaps

The Amsterdam Treaty on the functioning of the European Union (1997) introduced Article 174 recognizing the special nature of island territories and the need to acknowledge the permanent handicaps resulting from their insularity and to implement policies that are best suited to their condition.

France, together with Spain and Portugal, is also part of the EU framework for outermost regions, which provides specific policy support for territories affected by permanent structural disadvantages related to remoteness and insularity.

Specific difficulties common to all EU island regions have been recognized by the European Parliament resolution on the special situation of islands that insists on the need to 'support balanced territorial development of island regions, provide education at all levels and exploit the specific potentials of the islands'. Other EU initiatives have recognized the need to address the disadvantaged island communities: Erasmus+ Programme facilitates 'the access to people from remote or rural areas; people living in small islands or in peripheral regions'; DiscoverEU allows certain travel benefits to youth living on islands or remote areas; EU Interreg has been financing development projects in many island regions.

However, the same cannot be said of the EU initiatives in the domain of culture as there have not been any specific actions to improve cultural programs in the European island regions or to support better integration of island countries' artists and cultural operators into the EU cultural market and community

4.1.2. EU Islands Strategy

However, many institutions and island regions argue that the EU still lacks a coherent "island dimension" or dedicated island strategy. Recent initiatives from the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee have called for a formal European Islands Strategy or "Islands Act."

In response, the European Commission is in the process of developing its first ever EU Islands Strategy which includes as one of its core objectives "addressing structural demographic challenges and helping to encourage people to remain in their regions if so desired (right to stay), by improving access to affordable housing and public services including education, training and health, as well as supporting cultural heritage and local identity"², which appears linked to cultural policies.

4.1.3. Culture Compass Guidelines

Finally, new promise in fostering developmental approaches for the EU Island Territories is anchored in the Culture Compass Guidelines objective 5.2. Promoting culture-led regional, territorial and local development including in peripheral, rural, island, coastal and remote areas, and the EU outermost areas which face

²https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/16992-EU-strategy-for-islands_en

challenges e.g. depopulation, geographical barriers and fewer and poorer services. This development positions the European island territories as a priority for the EU cultural policy agenda in the future.

4.2. National policy framework

Across the European Union, national approaches to island territories vary considerably, ranging from highly developed autonomous governance systems to more targeted territorial compensation measures addressing the structural disadvantages of insularity. Despite these differences, a common policy logic can be identified: islands are widely recognised as territories facing permanent constraints linked to remoteness, fragmented geography, limited accessibility, demographic vulnerability, and dependence on narrow economic sectors.

Some member states have developed particularly strong island-specific governance frameworks. Greece has one of the most explicit traditions of island policy in Europe, integrating the principle of “insularity” into territorial planning and public service provision. Greek island policy includes transport equalisation mechanisms, differentiated development measures, and accessibility support for its numerous inhabited islands. Similarly, Croatia has adopted a dedicated legislative framework through the Act on Islands (Zakon o otocima), which establishes strategies and subsidies for sustainable island development and introduced “Island coordinators”, responsible for coordinating development plans and projects.

However, across EU Member States, cultural policy for island territories is not defined in a single dedicated policy instrument. Instead, island territories are primarily addressed through a combination of constitutional autonomy arrangements, regional cultural legislation, and decentralised cultural governance frameworks, often embedded in broader territorial cohesion and heritage policies.

4.3. Regional policy framework

In many EU Member States, island governance is often linked to regional autonomy arrangements. Italy grants special autonomous status to regions such as Sardinia and Sicily, while Spain applies differentiated measures to both the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands.

The Canary Islands benefit from a special economic and fiscal regime as an EU outermost region, while Spain also defines the Canary Islands, Balearics, Ceuta, and Melilla as “non-peninsular territories” for certain regulatory purposes.

Portugal has developed one of the clearest constitutional frameworks for island autonomy through the autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira. These regions possess legislative powers and constitutionally recognised autonomous status, allowing them to shape territorial and cultural policy according to island-specific conditions. Likewise, Finland maintains a distinctive autonomy arrangement for the Åland Islands, including extensive self-governance and cultural protections rooted in international agreements. In practice, Åland’s cultural life is organised around a large number of civil-society societies rather than large institutions, with roughly fifty of them funded through returns generated by the publicly owned gaming company Ålands penningautomatförening, and its theatre tradition – rooted in late-19th-century youth movements – still typically brings professional artists and amateurs together in the same productions.

France combines decentralised territorial policy with differentiated arrangements for Corsica and its overseas and outermost regions. French island territories benefit from targeted measures linked to transport continuity, regional development, and cultural decentralisation. Denmark does not maintain a single island policy framework, yet it supports peripheral and smaller islands through regional development policies and special governance arrangements for the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Although these

territories are not fully integrated into the EU framework, they represent important examples of differentiated island governance within the wider European sphere.

Table 1: Decentralisation of cultural policies in Member States with island territories

Member State	EU Island territory	Legislative/Policy Act	Cultural policy implication
France	Corsica	Statute of Autonomy of Corsica (Collectivité de Corse, Law No. 2017-285)	Provides enhanced powers over cultural policy, heritage, and Corsican language promotion.
France	Overseas island territories (e.g. Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion, Mayotte)	Overseas Territories Framework (Article 73 & 74 of the French Constitution)	Enables differentiated governance for island territories, including cultural policies.
Spain	Balearic Islands	Spanish Constitution (1978), Articles 143–151, Statute of Autonomy of the Balearic Islands – Organic Law 1/2007	Establishes autonomous communities, enabling islands to develop their own cultural policies. Grants competence over culture, heritage, and cultural promotion
Spain	Canary Islands	Statute of Autonomy of the Canary Islands – Organic Law 1/2018 (reform of 2018)	Strengthens cultural autonomy and recognition of insularity.
Portugal	Azores	Autonomous Region of the Azores – Political-Administrative Statute (Law No. 39/80, revised 2009)	Region has competence over cultural policy, heritage, and cultural development.
Portugal	Madeira	Autonomous Region of Madeira – Political-Administrative Statute (Law No. 13/91, revised 2006)	Region has competence over cultural policy, heritage, and cultural development.

4.4. Local policy framework

At the municipal level, cultural policy in European island territories is typically embedded within broader local development, community cohesion, heritage preservation, and tourism strategies rather than operating as a fully autonomous policy field. Nevertheless, municipalities play a particularly important role in island contexts because local authorities are often the primary providers of cultural infrastructure, organisers of cultural life, and mediators between communities, artists, and regional or national institutions.

Across the EU, several shared characteristics and trends can be identified in the way island municipalities approach culture.

One of the defining features of municipal cultural policy in island territories is the strong connection between culture and territorial identity. Culture is not treated solely as an artistic sector, but as a fundamental mechanism for maintaining local identity in island contexts (e.g. geographic isolation, demographic decline, migration pressures, or seasonal economies). Island municipalities therefore frequently prioritise the preservation of local traditions, languages, crafts, music, festivals, and intangible heritage as central elements of community continuity and social cohesion, through actively supporting community festivals, local cultural associations, oral traditions, and heritage-based programming.

A second major characteristic is the integration of cultural policy with tourism and place-branding strategies. Many island municipalities use culture as a tool to strengthen visibility, attract visitors, and diversify local economies through staging cultural festivals, implementing heritage routes, and interdisciplinary cultural events. While this can create new opportunities for local artists and organisations, it also plays into tourism-

driven commodification of islands, especially in smaller islands with fragile local infrastructures and limited year-round populations.

Another important trend are participatory and community-based cultural practices. Due to the smaller scale and stronger social interconnectedness of island communities, municipal cultural policies and activities often place emphasis on participation, intergenerational exchange, and civic engagement. Local authorities frequently collaborate with schools, community organisations, amateur cultural groups, and local artists to maintain cultural activity despite limited institutional resources. In many cases, municipal cultural policy functions less through large-scale institutions and more through networks of local initiatives and multifunctional cultural spaces.

These strategies tie in with the island municipalities' persistent structural constraints. Limited financial capacity, lacking cultural infrastructure, difficulties in attracting and retaining cultural professionals, and high mobility costs continue to affect the sustainability of local cultural ecosystems.

As a result, the cultural ecosystem in the EU island territories relies heavily on regional, national, or European funding programmes to sustain cultural initiatives. EU-funded cooperation projects, particularly through programmes such as Creative Europe, serve as important mechanisms for enabling international collaboration, mobility, and visibility for island-based cultural actors.

5. Gap analysis: Cultural policy for European island territories

Despite the existence of diverse national frameworks addressing island territories across EU Member States, a structured analysis reveals significant gaps in the coherence, effectiveness, and cultural specificity of these policies. While islands are widely recognised as territories facing permanent structural constraints, cultural policy responses remain fragmented, uneven, and largely embedded in broader regional or autonomy frameworks rather than developed as a dedicated policy field.

5.1. Lack of a coherent European framework for island cultural policy

Although Article 174 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the EU recognises islands as territories requiring particular attention due to permanent handicaps, the policy strategies do not single out culture as a topic of importance. Cultural activities are rather conceived as dispersed across other policies, e.g. cohesion policy and regional development instruments.

Latest example is The EU Island Strategy, which makes reference to culture in the context of “improving access to affordable housing and public services including education, training and health, as well as supporting cultural heritage and local identity”.

This results in:

- inconsistent recognition of island-specific cultural needs,
- limited comparability of policy approaches across Member States,
- a lack of strategic alignment between EU cultural objectives and territorial realities.

Gap: Absence of an integrated EU-level cultural strategy for island territories.

5.2. Fragmented national approaches without policy convergence

National approaches to addressing cultural need of islands are highly heterogeneous:

- Some countries rely on constitutional autonomy frameworks (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Finland),
- others implement decentralised territorial governance systems (France, Denmark, Greece),
- only one EU Member State (Croatia) appears to have a dedicated island development law integrating cultural dimensions.

This fragmentation leads to:

- unequal levels of cultural support between islands in different Member States,
- lack of shared standards or benchmarks,
- and limited policy learning across borders.

Gap: No structured mechanism for cross-national policy transfer or island cultural governance best practices exchange.

5.3. Insufficient integration of culture into island development policy

Where island policies exist (e.g. Croatia's Act on Islands, Portugal's autonomy statutes, Spain's insularity measures), culture is often:

- indirectly addressed through heritage or tourism,
- or subsumed under broader socio-economic development goals.

There is limited recognition of culture as a standalone development sector contributing to:

- social cohesion,
- democratic participation,
- local resilience,
- and economic sustainability.

Gap: Culture is under-recognised as a strategic development driver in island policy frameworks.

Example in Island Connect II consortium: In Tenerife, Laboratorio Artes Vivas's SpringLab programme treats culture as a territorial development driver rather than an ancillary heritage or tourism asset – its 2025 edition, MALPAÍS, positioned site-specific artistic practice as a critical, decolonial response to the island's volcanic landscape, showing what culture-led development can look like in a national and regional policy environment that otherwise still frames islands mainly around tourism and insularity measures.

5.4. Structural weaknesses in cultural mobility and professional conditions

Across all examined frameworks, island-based cultural actors face persistent structural challenges:

- high costs of mobility for artists and productions,
- limited touring circuits and circulation opportunities,
- fragile and seasonal cultural infrastructures,
- reduced access to European funding networks due to geographic isolation.

While some compensation mechanisms exist (notably in Greece and Spain), they are often:

- transport-focused rather than sector-wide,
- inconsistent across regions,
- and insufficient to ensure equal participation in European cultural circuits.

Gap: Lack of integrated policy addressing working conditions and mobility for island-based cultural professionals.

Illustrative example (Island Connect II): The consortium's own residency sites show this gap concretely, and each does so differently. In Corsica (Theatre Alibi), an acute housing crisis – one in three dwellings now a second home, rising to roughly 55% in Bonifacio, with short-term tourist lets absorbing over 80% of the private rental stock – directly drives up the cost and scarcity of accommodation for visiting artists, yet no island-specific cultural-mobility policy addresses it. On Vis (Domino, Komiža), the island is reachable only by ferry or catamaran, a structural mobility cost that today falls entirely on individual projects and mobility schemes such as Island Connect II rather than being addressed by any dedicated policy instrument. On Bornholm (BIRCA), a residency housed in renovated farm buildings near Klemensker sustains professional working conditions for performing artists on an island already recognised as Europe's first World Craft Region – a sign of real cultural infrastructure, but one built almost entirely through the residency's own international outreach rather than a dedicated national mobility scheme. In Ireland (Irish Aerial Creation Centre, Limerick), the only purpose-built aerial-dance and circus space in the country grew out of the 2014 Limerick City of Culture programme and now runs the state's first professional aerial training pathway with the University of Limerick – illustrating how project-level, city-driven investment, rather than a national island-mobility framework, has had to carry the discipline's professional development. On Mallorca (C.IN.E., Sineu), a research centre housed in a former cinema was co-founded explicitly to counter the isolation of Balearic performing artists, and in 2019 became a founding member of the Island Connect network itself – a bottom-up response to exactly the mobility and professional-conditions gap this section identifies, rather than the product of any Balearic or Spanish cultural-mobility scheme.

5.5. Weak transnational cooperation between island territories

Despite shared challenges in the culture sector across Mediterranean, Atlantic, and Northern European islands, there is:

- limited structured cooperation between island regions,
- few permanent transnational cultural platforms focused on insularity,
- and minimal exchange of best practices in cultural governance.
- Existing cooperation is often project-based and temporary rather than institutionalised.

To the best of our knowledge, the Island Connect network remains to this day the only pan-European initiative focusing on fostering cooperation among the European island territories in the field of arts and culture (Table 2).

This makes the Island Connect II initiative in and of itself a European-level innovation, that complements the existing schemes and fills a critical developmental gap while granting exceptional visibility to the Creative Europe program within the EU institutional and policy frameworks.

Table 2: Existing initiatives for European Islands - 2026

No	Name	Short description	Participating countries
1	Clean energy for EU islands	European Commission initiative, started in 2018 in cooperation with European Parliament	Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Italy, Croatia, Germany, France, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Finland, Estonia
2	New energy solutions optimized for EU island	Island Facility under HORIZON 2020 providing small project grants	Spain, France, Belgium, Germany, Croatia, Italy, Greece
3	Island of Innovation	INTERREG PROJECT	Greece, Estonia, Denmark, Netherlands, Portugal
4	Smart islands initiative	Bottom-up initiative of island authorities	All 16 EU island Member states
5	Observatory for Tourism for Island Economy	NGO offering data and research to support strategic policy making	Italy, Spain, France, Portugal, Greece, Malta, Cyprus
6	FORWARD – Unlocking the R&I potential of EU's outermost regions	HORIZON 2020 project launched as part of EU strategy for outermost regions	EU Outermost regions

5.6. Limited evidence base and policy intelligence

There is a general lack of data on the EU island territory cultural ecosystems, such as:

- comparative data on cultural ecosystems in island territories,
- systematic evaluation of cultural policy impacts in insular contexts,
- and consolidated research linking cultural participation, mobility, and territorial development on islands.

This weak evidence base limits policymakers' ability to design targeted interventions.

Gap: Insufficient research infrastructure and policy intelligence dedicated to EU island cultural systems.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research finds that although EU Island territories share concerns around territorial cohesion, accessibility, sustainability, demographic resilience, and cultural continuity, the EU Member States' cultural policies for island territories are highly fragmented and heterogeneous. While some EU Member States rely primarily on constitutional autonomy and legislative differentiation, others focus on compensatory mechanisms and regional development tools. Mechanisms for policy and best practices exchange are not in place.

At the same time, there is a growing recognition of the need for dedicated and coordinated policy responses. The European Commission is currently in the process of developing its first ever EU Islands Strategy which includes as one of its core objectives “addressing structural demographic challenges and helping to encourage people to remain in their regions if so desired (right to stay), by improving access to affordable housing and public services including education, training and health, as well as supporting cultural heritage and local identity”, which appears linked to cultural policies. However, the topic of culture is not recognised as a standalone priority. On the other hand the Culture Compass Guidelines contains objective 5.2. Promoting culture-led regional, territorial and local development including in peripheral, rural, island, coastal and remote areas, and the EU outermost areas, which face challenges e.g. depopulation, geographical barriers and fewer and poorer services, which means that the European-level strategies require integration. The EU Island strategy also clearly notes that the development of policies for islands is distributed across different governance levels, requiring dialogue between the EU, member states, regional governments and local authorities and stakeholders.

These developments mean that in the present circumstances of dynamic policy-making, the arts and culture sector from the European island territories must continue to create visibility for themselves and the benefits they bring to the European Union and these activities must span across territories and governance levels, to achieve better integration of arts and culture into the overall island policy agenda.

Several island cities and territories have used the European Capital of Culture framework as a catalyst for cultural development. Examples include Valletta (2018) and Paphos (2017), which developed long-term cultural strategies focused on internationalisation, community participation, and strengthening local cultural ecosystems. These experiences provide valuable models for island-based cultural policy and capacity building. There are several upcoming European Capital of Cultures, including Larnaca – European Capital of Culture 2030 and the competitions for the Maltese and Spanish European Capital of Culture 2031, which offer an excellent opportunity for streamlined and structured dialogue among the actors across the EU governance levels and EU island territory arts and culture ecosystem, to jointly drive the visibility of the European island territories and identify new approaches and tools to facilitate the evolution of the EU island territory cultural sector.