

CultHeRit Insights

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Mentorship in Cultural Heritage Institutes and Museums (CHIM)



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



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Core Team

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

Senka Gavranov – Team Leader, Facilitator and Editor. Convened and designed the participatory process, facilitated workshops in response to participant needs and feedback, conducted desk-based research and designed the methodological instruments that shaped the inquiry, synthesized the collective input and conceptualized, authored and edited the publication.

Anna Böhm-Vinceffy (MNMKK-IMM) – Editorial Assistant. Collected and administered documents, centralized and edited material and written texts of the contributors (mentors and mentees) as part of preparation for the workshop in Postojna, October 2025 and for this publication.

Carlotta Schiller (MAK) – Co-author and Research Contributor. Conducted a literature review on the historical roots of mentorship and synthesized findings with insights from the Bucharest workshop (June 2025). Drafted the workshop minutes and authored the first version of the chapter on the historical roots of mentorship for this publication.

Serioja Bocskok – Graphic Designer. Designed the visual identity and layout of the publication and prepared print-ready files.

Roxana Cleja – Legal Advisor. Provided legal counsel and review.

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About This Publication

This volume is the second in the four-part series **CultHeRit Insights**. It focuses on mentorship in Cultural Heritage Institutes and Museums (CHIM). The *CultHeRit Insights* series also includes:

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

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

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

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

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

This volume is accompanied by five annexes available on the project website:

Annex I: Methodology and Inquiry Framework – The Evolving Dialogue

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

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

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

Annex V: The Mentorship Rulebook

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

Executive Summary

This volume captures the insights and practical tools derived from the CultHeRit pilot action, which tested mentorship as a strategic intervention within the broader employment model defined for CHIM. Within the project, ten early-career professionals were employed for twelve months in 2025 in ten institutions in eight countries to test the developed employment model. The findings suggest that formalizing mentorship can be a viable, employee-led pathway to improving onboarding and retention, while ensuring intergenerational knowledge transfer and cooperation. Three partner institutions adopted mentorship as a recognized onboarding and workplace integration practice beyond the pilot phase. Designed for CHIM professionals, HR experts and policymakers, this volume examines the benefits

and limitations of workplace mentorship in CHIM. The volume covers historical roots of mentorship, workplace dynamics, tacit knowledge transfer, structural barriers, gendered dimensions of care work, scalability and nomothetic risk, participatory methodology, complementary models (co-mentoring, work buddy, peer mentoring, job shadowing), limitations, institutional ecosystems, and six emerging policy directions. It also introduces the Mentorship Lab as a package of conceptual tools for further discussion and institutional adaptation. Rather than prescribing a single model, it offers an experience-based starting point for institutions to explore mentorship and complementary approaches and for professional peers and colleagues to join the conversations about improving employment situation in CHIM.

CultHeRit Project Overview

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

The CultHeRit initiative united thirteen organizations from eight Southeastern and Central European countries to tackle barriers facing the young professionals when accessing employment in CHIM sector. The CultHeRit project aimed to improve entry into the sectoral labor market and diversify its workforce by enhancing hiring and onboarding practices in order to attract and retain young professionals. In 2024, the partnership developed a transnational aspirational employment model, defining a series of HR practices and processes intended to improve the attractiveness of CHIM careers. Throughout 2025, ten institutions from eight countries tested the model by employing ten young professionals. Workplace mentorship was an integral part of that process.



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

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), Oradea, Romania

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Associated Strategic Partners (ASP):

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

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

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

ASP4: Institute for Cultural Concepts (Austria)

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

Participants

The insights presented in this volume emerged from a dynamic participant-led inquiry involving more than sixty team members from CultHeRit consortium throughout 2025 and in early 2026. More than half of them were in the role of mentors and mentees testing the employment model across ten institutions in eight countries. They contributed through their active participation in the transnational working sessions and also through their written testimonies.

The Mentorship Pilot

The pilot employed TEN young professionals across TEN CHIM institutions in EIGHT countries for TWELVE months in 2025.



Mentors and mentees in Banja Luka, April 2025. Photo credit: CultHeRit



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

Location: Budapest, Hungary

Mentor: Júlia Katona

Mentee: Dalma Pszota

MAK - Museum of Applied Arts (MAK)

Location: Vienna, Austria

Mentor: Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel

Mentee: Jenny Unterkofler

National Institute of Heritage (INP)

Location: Bucharest, Romania

Mentor: Ioana Petrescu

Mentee: Erika Nagy

National Museum for the History of Transylvania (MNIT)

Location: Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Mentors: Monica Bodea, Ștefania Dogărel

Mentee: Andra-Cezara Comiati

Republic Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments (RIPCM)

Location: Belgrade, Serbia

Mentor: Vladimir Džamić

Mentee: Dorotea Aščerić

Intermunicipal Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments - Subotica (IPCMS)

Location: Subotica, Serbia

Mentor: Neda Džamić, Klara Evetović

Mentee: Richárd Morvai Rác

Museum of Arts and Crafts (MUO)

Location: Zagreb, Croatia

Mentor: Marija Jurkić Flis

Mentee: Tessa Bachrach-Krištofić

Institute for Protection of Cultural-Historical and Natural Heritage of Republic of Srpska (IPC)

Location: Banja Luka, Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mentors: Milijana Okilj, Miroslav Malinović, Jelena Savić

Mentee: Sara Đumić

Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague (UPM)

Location: Prague, Czech Republic

Mentor: Lucie Vlčková

Mentee: Tereza Hrdlička

Notranjska Museum Postojna (NMP)

Location: Postojna, Slovenia

Mentors: Tina Poljšak, Ana Čič, Tine Kaluža

Mentee: Vital Jurca

Senka Gavranov anchored this multifaceted endeavor. She convened the community at each stage, maintained communication channels and continuously adapted goals to reflect the participants' evolving needs. Her role extended beyond conventional facilitation. She acted as the project's connective thread, ensuring that no voice was lost between sessions and that collective insight was faithfully translated into this publication.



Senka Gavranov facilitates a project workshop in Cluj-Napoca, June 2024.

Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai

Partners jointly developed the transnational employment model. Thomas Philipp from KUPF OÖ guided and coordinated this process and conducted an ongoing evaluation through regular surveys. He also facilitated an assessment session involving the young mentees in Linz in December 2025. His analysis and reports ensured reliable guidance for the partners, helping them adjust onboarding practices and improve workflows throughout 2025.



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

The Transnational Employment Model with examples of good practice are available on the project website. A brief summary of the mentorship evaluation is available as Annex III to this publication.

This volume is neither a formal evaluation report nor a scientific study. It is a collection of insights derived from transnational working encounters, where participant needs and feedback shaped the agenda. It offers a window into the lived experience of mentorship, capturing its nuances, challenges, doubts and breakthroughs. While grounded in practice, the text is informed by theoretical frameworks that helped participants identify and explain observed patterns and daily phenomena. The working encounters also served as a space for research and calibration, where the partnership evaluated various analytical tools, concepts and approaches to devise practical and feasible solutions. The *CultHeRit Insights* series documents these tools as instrumental for identifying, contextualizing and tackling problems. While many theories and concepts were considered, the most promising frameworks facilitated identification of

realistic and effective methods to address urgent issues and support advocacy and alliance-building necessary for achieving long-term goals. Designed for modular reading, the four volumes of the *CultHeRit Insights* incorporate these theoretical concepts and analytical tools because they have proven instrumental for explaining various aspects of work in CHIM. This recurrence serves as a connecting thread, while ensuring that each volume of the publication remains self-contained and accessible to readers who may not consult the entire series.

Beyond the collective energy and wisdom of the working encounters, this publication draws depth also from the testimonies of mentors and mentees who chose to document their journeys in writing. These personal narratives are collected in Annex II: Voices from the Field. Their reflections complement the broader group insights and offer a valuable resource for researchers and HR experts studying the real-life dynamics of professional development and institutional integration.

Mentors who contributed written testimonies are Ștefania Dogărel (MNIT), Neda Džamić (IPCMS), Vladimir Džamić (RIPCM), Marija Jurkić Flis (MUO), Milijana Okilj, Miroslav Malinović and Jelena Savić (IPC), Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel (MAK), Lucie Vlčková and Michaela Neškerova (UPM).

Mentees who contributed written testimonies are Dorotea Aščerić (RIPCM), Tessa Bachrach-Krištofić (MUO), Andra-Cezara Comiati (MNIT), Sara Đumić (IPC), Erika Nagy (INP), Dalma Pszota (MNMKK-IMM), Richárd Morvai Rác (IPCMS).

Readers are invited to explore this and companion publications in the series and to join the conversations about intergenerational cooperation and knowledge transfer in the workplace and contribute to the efforts for improving employment accessibility and outcomes for young professionals and all new colleagues.

The Imperative of Connection: Why Mentorship Matters Now

Like many employment markets, the cultural heritage sector is navigating a period of transition. Custodians of collective memory, CHIM institutions face significant challenges, including demographic shift and the urgent need to attract and retain new talent. The departure of senior staff and low retention rates of young professionals pose risks to institutional memory, intergenerational transfer of (tacit) knowledge and specialized skills. An important factor in addressing these challenges lies in how relationships between experienced colleagues and emerging professionals are structured.

In this context, mentorship emerges not merely as a ‘nice-to-have’ addition to human resources strategies, but as a strategic imperative for sustainability. This structured professional relationship, referred to interchangeably as workplace mentorship or mentorship at work, is often misunderstood. It is frequently conflated with supervision, reduced to an informal favor or misapplied as a temporary fix for structural, sectoral or even societal issues. This publication argues that for mentorship to be effective, it should be reimagined and implemented as a structured, reciprocal and formally recognized practice that benefits both the mentor and the mentee while strengthening the institution as a whole. If introduced without honest discussion, adequate resourcing or clear boundaries, mentorship risks becoming yet another unpaid burden for overworked staff. The goal here is to explore how to avoid this pitfall and make mentorship scalable and a source of strength.

The core component of the CultHeRit living lab on employment in CHIM was the development and testing of a transnational employment model in

2025, with mentorship as an integral part of the onboarding and orientation processes. During that year, the mentorship pilot was implemented in ten CHIM institutions in eight countries, avoiding to impose a rigid one-size-fits-all structure. The CultHeRit pilot rather embraced flexibility, allowing mentor-mentee pairs to explore various options and arrangements, from traditional one-on-one mentoring to co-mentoring and peer-support models. This openness to diverse configurations of traditional mentorship approaches and to explore complementary models was deliberate and strategic. It aimed to ensure that the resulting practices would be applicable and transferable across diverse institutional contexts, from large national museums to smaller local archives.

Focusing on innovative employment practices, CultHeRit sought to identify what works under different conditions rather than prescribing a single ‘correct’ method. It did so by testing diverse approaches and employment practices, including mentorship models, in real-world settings. Additionally, the project identified good mentorship practices within the field, detailed in the Transnational Employment Model, and mentorship for persons with disabilities, covered in the fourth volume of this series.

The purpose of this volume is to present insights from CultHeRit and show how a structured mentorship program can play a transformative role in improving employment conditions and outcomes in CHIM for young professionals. By pairing newly hired staff with experienced colleagues, mentorship can help improve retention rates and career outcomes, smooth onboarding as well as create a platform for intergenerational dialogue and intra-institutional cohesion. The publication



Senka Gavranov and Anna Böhm-Vinceffy working with mentors and mentees at the workshop in Postojna, October 2025. Photo credit: CultHeRit.

captures the practical experiences and insights emerging from the CultHeRit pilots. It does not claim that mentorship is a panacea. Rather, it presents mentorship as one viable strategy which was trialed and evaluated. By summarizing ongoing conversations and presenting what worked, what fell short and what needs additional resources, the publication aims to stimulate wider conversations about scalability of mentorship as one of the sustainable ways to involve young people in heritage work.

While mentorship is already regulated by law in two partner countries, the CultHeRit pilot demonstrated that formalization can also be driven from within. In three institutions of the partnership, the pilot's impact extended far beyond the initial 12-month timeframe. Driven by the mentors and mentees themselves, who presented formal proposals to their leadership, these institutions officially adopted mentorship in the first half of 2026. This immediate transition from pilot to institutional policy serves as a testament to the model's viability and the capacity of staff to drive institutional policy change. It demonstrates that

employee-led advocacy can successfully convince leadership to institutionalize the practice.

This text is not a rigid toolkit or guideline. It is a collection of insights and findings intended to start conversations about the advantages and disadvantages of mentorship and to present diverse alternative or complementary models, such as co-mentoring or work-buddy arrangements. In other words, this volume is written and published to invite colleagues from museums and, where relevant, libraries, archives and galleries, as well as other organizations, to consider formal mentorship schemes and ways to recognize, resource and remunerate them appropriately and to explore complementary approaches such as job-shadowing, team-mentoring or peer-mentoring. The goal is to move the conversation from theory to practice, offering concrete examples and tools that can be adapted across the cultural heritage landscape. Ultimately, the publication aims to inspire employers, museums and cultural-heritage institutes to sustain and adopt flexible, inclusive and fair employment models that build workplace communities, future-proof the sector and ensure its vitality.

Understanding Mentorship: Historical and Cultural Roots

by Carlotta Schiller, MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna, Austria

Mentorship and menteeship signal a joint journey in which both mentor and mentee actively participate. Knowledge, experience and learning flow in both directions, challenging the traditional 'expert-to-novice' hierarchy. Neither party is merely a passive recipient. Each person commits to a mutually supportive relationship and works toward shared objectives while remaining flexible enough to realign goals as circumstances change. By the end of their working interactions, both individuals emerge transformed, having enriched one another through a truly collaborative exchange. In this structured professional-yet-personal relationship, the collaborative and reciprocal dynamic is not merely an administrative formality but a mechanism for intergenerational solidarity as well as integration into teams. If done well, mentorship contributes to improving employee retention and fostering a profound sense of belonging among young professionals entering a sector often characterized by precarious employment conditions.

While the contexts for mentorship have shifted from mythological epics to organizational charts, the fundamental human need for wisdom, trust and guidance remains unchanged. To fully appreciate the weight of this commitment in the modern-day institutions, it is instructive to situate these practices within their broader historical context.

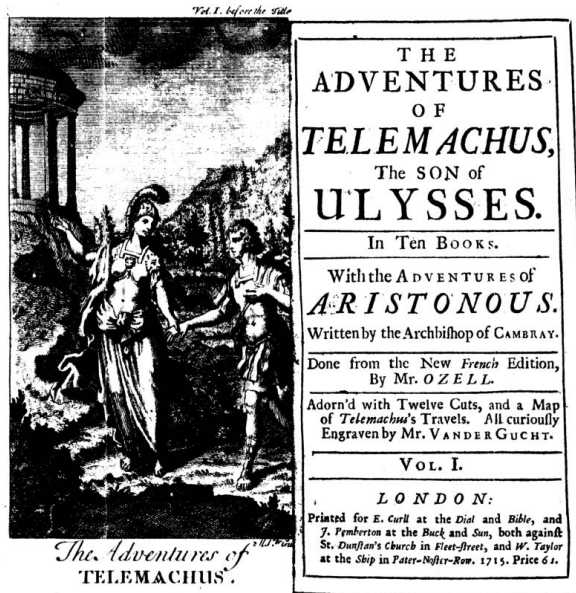
The modern concept of mentorship is deeply rooted in classical Greek literature, particularly in Homer's *Odyssey*. The term mentor originates from the character Mentor, a trusted friend of Odysseus. Before departing for the Trojan War, Odysseus entrusts Mentor with the care and guidance of his household and, more importantly, the



Telemachus and Mentor Photo credit: Wikimedia commons

upbringing of his son, Telemachus. Mentor's role extends beyond guardianship. He is responsible for advising, educating and shaping Telemachus' moral and intellectual development during Odysseus' long absence. Significantly, the goddess Athena frequently intervenes in *The Odyssey*, at times taking the form of Mentor in order to guide Telemachus. While Mentor is a trusted friend of Odysseus and the appointed guardian of his household, Athena's disguise of his identity allows her to deliver wisdom, encouragement and practical guidance directly to Telemachus. This blending of human guardianship and divine intervention reinforces Mentor's symbolic function as a source of wisdom, protection and personal growth rather than merely instruction (Graf & Edelkraut, 2016).

From a linguistic perspective, the word *mentor* derives directly from the ancient Greek *Mentōr* (Μέντωρ). By the 18th century, the term began to be used metaphorically in European languages, particularly in English and French, to describe a wise and trusted advisor. François Fénelon's 1699 novel *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, inspired by Homer's *Odyssey*, played a critical role in popularizing the term in its figurative sense. The novel reinforced Mentor as an idealized guide, further embedding the concept in educational and philosophical discourse (Graf & Edelkraut, 2016). The etymological evolution of 'mentorship' reflects this transition from literature to social practice. While mentor initially referred to a specific individual, the derivative noun 'mentorship' emerged to describe the process or relationship itself. This shift marked an important conceptual development. Mentorship came to be understood not merely as the presence of a wise figure but as an intentional, ongoing relational practice focused on development and guidance.



Francois Fenelon The Adventures of Telemachus Photo credit: Wikimedia commons

The modern concept of mentorship, found across cultures, echoes the classical guru principle in Hinduism, a relationship grounded in care, guidance and long-term personal growth (Yale, 1951). Today, mentorship brings these ideals into workplaces and organizations, fostering individual development, knowledge sharing and stronger communities. In Japan, the *senpai-kōhai* system reflects a similar approach. Informal relationships among employees are shaped by culturally embedded traditions of hierarchy and guidance. Senpai (seniors) support *kōhai* (juniors), while *doki* (peers) provide each other assistance. Sekiguchi & Ikeda explain that "[t]he *senpai-kōhai* dynamic in Japanese organizations is deeply rooted in cultural expectations of mutual support and respect." (Sekiguchi & Ikeda, 2025, point 2). *Senpai* are expected to guide and care for their *kōhai*, while *kōhai* show respect and appreciation in return. This reciprocal relationship extends beyond a single generation, as *kōhai* eventually take on the *senpai* role themselves, passing the cycle of guidance and support to the next generation within the organization.

Over time, the meaning of mentorship expanded beyond its classical roots to encompass diverse contexts, including education, academia and organizational settings. Nevertheless, the foundational attributes associated with Mentor in *The Odyssey*, wisdom, trust, guidance and the nurturing of potential, continue to define the essence of mentorship today. The enduring influence of this ancient narrative underscores the timeless human need for guidance and the transmission of knowledge across generations. This is especially true for early-career professionals entering the field, yet the modern workplace requires a different mechanism to sustain that spirit.



The Intrainstitutional Dynamic: Workplace Mentorship

Workplace mentorship is a structured, purposeful relationship aimed at supporting the personal and professional development of employees. While academic mentorship provides a primary model for such guidance in the modern world, workplace mentoring differs significantly in its focus, goals and modes of relating. Unlike supervision, which centers on performance, task completion and accountability, mentorship is oriented toward long-term development, strategic guidance and integration into the professional field. The chain of supervision also plays a role in integrating new colleagues and steering their professional development. Yet, the supervision is driven primarily by the needs of the organization and the team, prioritizing the institution's goals within the organigram, even when a mentee's future trajectory may lie outside the current institution. Consequently, sensitizing supervisors to these distinct roles can be highly beneficial. Mentors often characterize their role as guiding integration, fostering independence and providing a safe space for honest dialogue, distinct from the evaluative priorities of supervision. This caring, developmental and forward-looking relationship fosters the growth of mentees, strengthens the capabilities of mentors and contributes to the resilience and sustainability of organizations.

Notably, in the CultHeRit pilot, the mentor was typically an internal colleague. The sole exception was IPC in Banja Luka, where co-mentors were external professionals who work in the same field and also bring extensive experience in academic mentoring. Intra-institutional mentoring arrangements often produce dynamics distinct from external or academic mentorship. Since the mentor operates within the same organizational hierarchy, a potential conflict arises between the

mentor's supportive role and the supervisor's evaluative role. This tension requires careful navigation so the mentor remains a trusted confidant rather than an extension of management. While various mentorship models exist for professional growth, this publication focuses on the specificities of the in-situ model, where the mentor must balance institutional loyalty with the mentee's independent development.

Beyond Skills: The Transfer of Tacit Knowledge

The transfer of knowledge in mentorship extends well beyond the transmission of technical or professional content. Tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966) in this sector encompasses ethical frameworks, the 'unwritten rules' of institutional navigation, the preservation of institutional memory and access to professional networks and contacts. This implied knowledge and these resources are rarely codified in manuals or procedures, yet they are essential for effective professional practice. A mentor who shares the informal norms of institutional communication, introduces the mentee to key contacts across departments or conveys the ethical standards that govern decision-making in heritage preservation is transferring a form of capital that no handbook can replicate. The loss of tacit knowledge when senior staff retire represents a significant risk to institutional continuity, making mentorship a vital mechanism for its preservation.

Safeguarding this knowledge through mentorship, however, serves purposes larger than preservation alone. The objectives of this relationship are multifaceted. Mentorship at work primarily aims to support the personal and professional development

of employees while facilitating their onboarding and integration into institutions. It serves to transmit professional standards, ethics and sector-specific norms, thus strengthening institutional capacity and ensuring knowledge continuity. Ultimately, these efforts seek to improve retention of new hires, their job satisfaction and long-term career sustainability. Even when formal mentorship relationships conclude, their impact often extends far beyond the official timeframe, creating durable professional bonds and contributing to a stronger, more resilient cultural heritage sector.

Main Principles of Mentorship at Work

During CultHeRit working sessions, participants identified core principles to define the role, goals and nature of mentorship in CHIM. These principles guide workplace implementation and distinguish mentorship from other professional interactions. A fundamental principle is that mentorship requires dedicated professional commitment. It cannot be relegated to informal status or absorbed into standard workloads without affecting its effectiveness. The practice demands time, emotional investment and strategic thinking. Without formal recognition, mentorship risks becoming a burden for mentors and an inconsistent experience for mentees. It therefore warrants explicit recognition as part of institutional work.

Another key principle is that mentorship is distinct from supervision, as outlined earlier. Supervisors are responsible for daily tasks, performance evaluation and institutional hierarchy. Mentors, however, focus on long-term developmental trajectories. They guide mentees through onboarding, institutional processes and professional norms,

while also helping them envision future career paths that may extend beyond the current institution. This distinction allows mentorship to remain a safe space for honest dialogue, critical (self-)reflection and growth. Yet, the practical application of this distinction sparked considerable discussion during the CultHeRit workshops. Participants did not reach a consensus on whether the same person should fulfill both roles. Some argued that the roles should be clearly delineated to prevent conflicts of interest and preserve the mentor as a trusted confidant outside the chain of command. Others suggested that combining the roles could be effective if clear boundaries were established and the mentor-supervisor possessed the interpersonal skills to navigate both functions. Rather than prescribing a single model, participants prioritized clarity as the main requirement. Institutions should explicitly define the roles, clarify responsibilities and potential risks associated with each. They must assess on a case-by-case basis which approach best suits their organizational context and the individuals involved.

Mentorship is also a fundamentally bi-directional learning process. While mentors provide experience, institutional knowledge and professional standards, mentees contribute new perspectives, digital skills and contemporary practices. The relationship thrives on mutually beneficial exchange rather than a rigid expert-to-novice hierarchy. Sustaining this reciprocity, however, requires deliberate effort. The terms of the relationship must be mutually agreed upon with clear expectations from the outset. This alignment is best achieved when mentorship is formally recognized and institutionalized, ensuring the exchange remains protected and valued amid the daily demands of the workplace.

The Persistent Challenge: Barriers in CHIM Employment

The CultHeRit project is a response to the observed crisis that threatens to disrupt generational ties and knowledge transfer in the cultural heritage sector. The attrition of young professionals to other sectors or to Western labor markets presents a persistent challenge for cultural heritage institutions in Southeastern and parts of Central Europe. This trend is particularly acute for non-sectoral functions, including administrative roles such as accounting, marketing, legal or administrative support roles. In general, there is a pronounced risk of CHIM institutions becoming mere launchpads. This accelerates the depletion of institutional resources. High turnover often means that remaining staff absorb the tasks of departed colleagues, resulting in overload and risking burnout. A slow pace of rejuvenation, low retention rates and high turnover contribute to the emergence of generational silos within many institutions. These silos, in turn, lead to widening intergenerational gaps, miscommunication, further fragmentation of practices and the loss of knowledge, expertise and international professional networks when senior staff retire.

There is a clear need for a systematic, resource-conscious and affordable solution to integrate newcomers while preserving and transmitting the knowledge of senior colleagues. If the onboarding of new colleagues remains ad-hoc and guidance is inconsistent or lacking altogether, it can leave them confused, isolated and uncertain about career pathways or even daily tasks. Combined with low remuneration, many feel compelled to seek employment elsewhere. A repeated cycle of attrition leaves leadership and teams in many institutions facing a dilemma: invest in the professional development of a young colleague and risk their departure, or refrain from

investing and risk their stagnation if they stay. Ultimately, the solution lies in finding a way to retain new hires through a sustainable balance of interventions on individual, institutional, sectoral and societal levels.

Resolving this dilemma also requires confronting the root causes of instability that drive it. Employment in the cultural sector is characterized by job instability. As noted in the *EU Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026*, “artists and cultural and creative professionals tend to have project-based careers and experience a high degree of mobility. They often have an irregular and unpredictable income and combine several jobs to earn a living” (Council of the European Union, 2022). Mafalda Dâmaso (2021) explains that “the atypical nature of artistic and cultural work and its precarious characteristics cannot be fully addressed without taking into account broader structural vulnerabilities” (p. 2).

Even within its limited scope and a short-term project-based framework, CultHeRit sought to address reported job instability by prioritizing employment interventions. It focused on providing structured support to strengthen institutional HR processes, capacity and practices for the employment of early-career professionals, rather than relying on alternative work arrangements. The project was designed to improve job accessibility in the CHIM sector by moving beyond dependence on recurrent, often precarious arrangements such as repeated volunteering, unpaid internships and short-term freelance contracts. While often a necessary life-line for underfunded institutions, the perpetuation of such arrangements ultimately risks reinforcing a cycle of job insecurity for young professionals. The CultHeRit initiative encouraged institutions

to prioritize permanent hiring over reliance on short-term options. Because interventions and tools were designed to be used beyond the project's conclusion, they establish a solid foundation for future recruitment and integration. Crucially, continued employment of well-integrated new colleagues means that the knowledge and skills acquired from senior colleagues remain in-house, strengthening the institution. Improving hiring and integration processes, ultimately, builds institutional and sectoral capacity to provide quality employment for young talent.

Nevertheless, interventions at the level of teams and institutions are limited in scope and outreach. Structural barriers call for interventions at the policy and societal level, including financial measures such as fair remuneration and stable funding for culture. For that reason, the CultHeRit partnership worked on many levels. In parallel with exploring mentorship as a viable institutional response which could improve the employment situation and outcomes for young professionals, it advocated for structural and financial interventions.

A Multi-level Approach to Effecting Change

Responding to the need for balanced holistic solutions, a core mission of CultHeRit was to identify fields of intervention where CHIM institutions, their leadership and employees could drive and effect change. The project aimed to empower professionals to (re)claim their agency by identifying problems and solving those within their reach, given their available resources and skills. This approach navigates a delicate balance. It seeks to empower staff without overburdening them or replacing the specialized knowledge of HR or other professionals. The CultHeRit self-reliant, bottom-up approach enabled CHIM professionals to regain agency and directly tackle challenges within their immediate scope. This empowerment extended beyond individual institutions, encouraging professionals to engage with colleagues and peers across the sector to discuss shared challenges, co-create solutions and build strategic alliances that amplify their collective voice. The project, therefore, recognized that many challenges require structural changes beyond the reach of individual employees, spanning institutional, sector-wide, policy and societal levels. At the institutional level, the initiative actively supported partners to improve hiring procedures and enhance onboarding and integration practices for new entrants. In parallel, CultHeRit worked 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, conferences and fora for policy-makers. The CultHeRit multi-level approach ensures that internal institutional changes align with broader sectoral and policy goals. That way, the staff is empowered to act

locally and effect change within their sphere of influence, while broader systemic issues are addressed through collective advocacy and targeted policy intervention.

Central to this multi-level approach, mentorship emerged as a pivotal institutional intervention capable of bridging individual agency with broader policy goals. It can be supported by individuals and their actions (such as the way individuals and teams relate to novice colleagues) and catalyze policy-level changes (regarding how policy and legal frameworks can support mentorship). In the specific context of CHIM, mentorship often forms ad-hoc and remains informal and resource-constrained, although exceptions exist where it is regulated by law. Without institutional or regulatory support, high workloads frequently render these organic pairings unreliable, risking the transformation of guidance into a burden for mentors and inconsistent support for mentees. Moreover, the reliance on informal goodwill, while often driven by dedication, is not without its complexities. The very characteristics that make mentorship a powerful tool, its dependence on emotional labor and relational care-work, are frequently overlooked in traditional organizational structures. Recognizing that these relational dynamics can impact staff differently depending on their position and background, it is important to consider how gendered expectations shape the experience of care and transmission in the sector. Examining these dimensions allows for a deeper understanding of how to support mentorship in a way that is both sustainable and equitable for all, especially in feminized sectors.

The Gendered Dimensions of Care and Transmission

Structuring and formalizing mentorship offers a path to address the sector's persistent challenges at the institutional level: maintaining intergenerational knowledge transfer, recognizing invisible, often gendered, relational work and reducing high attrition rates among early-career professionals. In CultHeRit, mentorship was an integral part of the employment model as a concrete mechanism explored within the project's scope and resources. Its relevance is particularly acute when considering the gendered dimensions of heritage work. According to Jiménez-Esquinas (2025, p. 1474), women constitute the majority of technical staff in the heritage sector yet hold fewer than one-third of executive positions in heritage management institutions. She further contends that this underrepresentation manifests through an imbalance in labor division and areas of influence regarding cultural authority. She characterizes the labor sustaining this sector as "often-invisible, trivialized and unpaid forms of care work," (p. 1472) which is defined as "the ensemble of often invisible, feminized and undervalued activities that ensure the continuity, maintenance, transmission, and affective engagement with cultural practices, places and heritage objects" (p. 1478).

Mentorship, as a practice of care and knowledge transmission, can be seen as directly engaging with these undervalued domains. By formalizing and recognizing the relational work inherent in mentorship, the CultHeRit model sought to counteract the tendency to treat such activities as invisible labor and to acknowledge and validate the contributions of those who sustain the sector's

vitality. The gendered dynamics are not confined to individual institutions but permeate the sector across the region, underscoring the need for interventions that explicitly value and formalize relational work rather than leaving it unrecognized.

Scalability and Avoiding Nomothetic Risk

To ensure such interventions are effective across varied institutional settings, the project had to navigate the risk of applying the same model universally. Expecting a practice successful in one context to work in another often leads to failure. Nomothetic risk, as Vitiello et al. (2025) explain, is "assuming that any idea, or practice, may work in any context, geographic area, at any time" (p. 8). In the cultural heritage sector, this risk manifests when institutions adopt rigid models from other contexts without accounting for local specificities or structural characteristics or barriers. To avoid this, the CultHeRit pilot embraced flexibility, allowing mentor-mentee pairs to explore various options and arrangements, rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all structure.

While Vitiello et al. (2025) differentiate between best practices, good practices and *what works* in the library sector, the distinction appears equally critical in CHIM. Both sectors face chronic resource constraints. CultHeRit partnership considered that scalability in CHIM requires adapting practices to fit local realities rather than assuming universal applicability. The openness to diverse configurations of traditional mentorship practices and to complementary models was deliberate and strategic. It aimed to ensure that the resulting practices would be applicable and



transferable across varied institutional settings, in other words – scalable.

Because nearly the entire sector faces similar problems of demographic shift, disruption of intergenerational knowledge transfer and chronic scarcity of resources, the ambition of CultHeRit was to devise and test scalable solutions and among them – mentorship. According to Vitiello et al. (2025), “scalability involves the capacity to adapt successful practices to different sizes, budgets and contexts without compromising quality or impact. The key question is not whether a practice can be transferred, but how it can be scaled effectively” (p. 12). Pioneering endeavors promoted as best practices are inspiring. They, however, risk remaining isolated or unachievable ideals unless they account for and avoid nomothetic risk. Discussing the diffusion of good practice models and solutions in the library sector, Vitiello et al. (2025) differentiate between best practices, good practices and *what works* as sources of inspiration. They further clarify that *what works* can be a good or best practice that “additionally incorporates aspects of frugality and scarce resources” (p.7).

They explain that “[m]any libraries operate under conditions of very scarce resources and have to find ways to accommodate innovation efforts accordingly. These efforts rest very often on employee motivation and initiatives, as well as on specific resource combinations available locally” (p. 7). Care must be taken not to equate libraries and CHIM institutions so readily, as their specific contexts differ. However, it is worth noting that many organizations in both sectors operate under the conditions of chronic scarcity of resources. This suggests that the risks associated with library models apply similarly to CHIM.

Recognizing that scalable solutions must work within the resource constraints, CultHeRit relied on the best accessible strength available: the in-house knowledge of experienced professionals. Mentorship, therefore, was embedded in the employment pilot intentionally in order to activate and strengthen precisely this strength by providing a supportive environment for intergenerational cooperation and capacity building for mentors, mentees and their teams.

CultHeRit Mentorship in Practice

The pilot was designed with flexibility at its core, testing whether a structured in-house mentorship model could serve as a viable intervention to build capacity, strengthen workplace cohesion and replenish institutions rather than deplete them. Partners, therefore, jointly developed a transnational employment model emphasizing transparent recruitment procedures, efficient onboarding practices and measures for improving job satisfaction. Ten partner institutions from eight countries piloted this model, each employing an early-career professional for a year. As mentorship was an integral part of the model, this ensured that the framework was tested and refined through multiple lenses, increasing its potential applicability across different geographical and sociocultural contexts.

CultHeRit Team: Towards a Community of Practice

The team's makeup itself helped validate the model for replication and scaling.



CultHeRit team at the project meeting in Banja Luka, April 2025.

Photo credit: CultHeRit.



The transnational CultHeRit team brought together professionals with diverse educational backgrounds, varied job profiles and different perspectives on work in CHIM. The project team comprised a deliberately mixed-age group of more than sixty professionals, with team members ranging in age from 23 to nearly 70. In this multigenerational, multinational, multilingual and multidisciplinary setting, dialogue, mutual respect and collaborative problem-solving characterized working interactions. Feedback suggests that age diversity stimulated creativity, allowing participants to collaborate on innovative solutions. Solid communal bonds emerged, contributing to intergenerational understanding and fostering empathy. This sense of belonging to a community of practice was reinforced by traveling together to project meetings, working closely on tasks and sharing a sense of purpose and mission. The shared commitment helped the team overcome obstacles and clarify misunderstandings. It also laid the groundwork for a broader change, strengthening internal ties and amplifying external impact.

However, the manifold employment challenges facing the sector cannot be fully solved within the framework of a single project. Recognizing this, the diversity of the CultHeRit partnership and the team was not merely symbolic. It provided the multi-perspective lens necessary to identify and categorize the complex issues, realistically assess their extent and complexity, evaluate available capacities and develop targeted approaches to resolution. The collective analysis confirmed that systemic barriers require broad policy intervention and revealed which specific institutional hurdles could be addressed through focused, in-house actions. Such participatory problem-solving process

was built into CultHeRit by design: instead of imposing top-down solutions, the partners collaboratively defined a pool of solutions, selecting and adapting strategies based on their specific contexts, needs and agreed-upon goals. Over the project, this dynamic process, driven by participants themselves, shaped the insights presented here.

Building Strength from Within

The shift toward in-house action was also driven by the sector's chronic resource constraints. Mentoring was tested as an internal practice designed to develop institutional human resources. It is an accessible tool for smooth onboarding and helps foster a sense of belonging to a profession and a vibrant community of practice. In CultHeRit, the 12-month mentoring pairings were understood as a shared journey of mutual learning, where goals evolve and relationships accordingly realign. As mentorship functioned as a solution that draws on existing institutional knowledge and skills rather than requiring extensive external support, it reduced reliance on outside help. In effect, if done well and properly supported, mentorship strengthens the organization. It turns in-house resources and institutional memory into an active asset, simultaneously building the capacity of both the mentor and the mentee. For the mentee, it provides orientation in the field, accelerates professional integration and builds the confidence essential for early-career professionals. For the mentor, the process develops professional technical skills alongside soft-skill fluency in communication and leadership.



Senka Gavranov facilitates mentors-mentees building a community of practice in Banja Luka, April 2025. Photo credit: CultHeRit.

To support mentoring efforts in CultHeRit, the mentorship pairs used simple, affordable tools, including mentoring journals, regular meetings and ongoing evaluation. These tools are accessible to every organization working on every budget. The approach used in CultHeRit resonates with the concept of frugal innovation, defined by Hossain et al. (2016) as “a resource scarce solution[...] that is designed and implemented despite financial, technological, material or other resource constraints, whereby the final outcome is significantly cheaper than competitive offerings [...] and is good enough to meet the basic needs of customers who would otherwise remain un(der)served” (p. 133). By leveraging in-house assets and building their capacity through

the mentorship program, the CultHeRit pilot operationalized this concept, transforming the collective experience of CHIM professionals into a sustainable foundation for professional growth. Institutions often rely on pragmatic approaches that leverage existing assets to address immediate challenges while securing optimal quality. In CHIM, frugal resourcefulness is often born of necessity rather than strategic choice. CultHeRit, however, embraced it not as a fallback but as a formalized self-reliant way for institutions and their employees to (re)claim agency and improve the employment situation. Nevertheless, mentorship can complement, but cannot substitute, the structural support and adequate public investment on which long-term sustainability depends.



Generating Insights: A Participatory Approach

To maintain reliance on internal resourcefulness, the process of generating insights had to be equally embedded in the participants' daily reality. The findings presented in this volume were not simply extracted from a dataset but emerged organically from the ongoing conversations and workshops that acted as the scaffolding for the mentorship pilot.

Transnational Learning Exchanges

The development of these insights was a dynamic process driven by the participants. It unfolded throughout 2025, starting with mentorship pairings in January.

January 2025

Mentorship pairings started in ten CHIM institutions across eight countries.

April 6, 2025

The Launch: Building a Community of Practice | Location: Banja Luka, Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Focus: Establishing group dynamics and initial connections. Facilitator: Senka Gavranov.

June 3, 2025

Mentor and Mentee Presentations | Location: Bucharest, Romania. Focus: Background, challenges and initial findings from the first semester of mentorship in CultHeRit. The survey was conducted by Senka Gavranov and Sebastian Boniș, completed and presented by mentors and mentees. Moderator: Sebastian Boniș and Anna Böhm-Vinceffy.

June 4, 2025

The Mentor's Forum: Focus Group on the Role and Tools | Location: Bucharest, Romania. Focus: Dedicated session for mentors to discuss challenges, refine skills and define roles. Facilitator: Senka Gavranov. Conclusions drawn by: Carlotta Schiller and Senka Gavranov.

June 4, 2025

The Mentee's Forum: Focus Group on the Ten Parameters for Good Employment | Location: Bucharest, Romania. Focus: Session dedicated to mentees to define parameters for good employment. Facilitator: Thomas Philipp.

July – September 2025

Preparatory survey designed by Senka Gavranov, completed by CultHeRit mentors and mentees. Results centralized by Anna Böhm-Vinceffy and analyzed by Senka Gavranov.

October 2, 2025

The Dialogues: Shaping the Framework Together | Location: Postojna, Slovenia. Focus: Focus: Joint workshop for mentors and mentees to discuss findings, refine definitions and share insights. Facilitator: Senka Gavranov.

November 27, 2025

The Horizon: Early Policy Insights and Future Pathways | Location: Bucharest, Romania and hybrid. Focus: Key Stakeholder Group (KSG) workshop to guide strategy and advocate for policy changes. Hosted by Lucia Leca and Irina Iamandescu (INP). Workshop facilitated by Senka Gavranov.

December 2025 – April 2026

Final input collection for this volume, administered and centralized by Anna Böhm-Vinceffy and analyzed by Senka Gavranov.

June 18, 2026

Intergenerational Cooperation and Future -proofing the CHIM sector | Location: Budapest, Hungary. Joint workshop for members of CultHeRit project team and Key Stakeholder Groups (KSGs) to strengthen intergenerational understanding and enhance transfer of skills and knowledge through experiential learning and empathy-building. Facilitator: Senka Gavranov.

Throughout 2025, transnational encounters and working sessions allowed findings to mature through continuous dialogue, ensuring that insights could be tested, challenged and refined over time rather than captured at a single point and ossified as static knowledge. These sessions functioned as both spaces of inquiry and support, allowing mentors and mentees to share challenges and brainstorm solutions together. Several workshops also included colleagues from the participating institutions, expanding the circle of engagement beyond the primary mentor-mentee pairs.

Notably, the request for these interactions came directly from the mentors and mentees themselves, who viewed them as vital for professional development. To accommodate this, the content,

frequency and format of transnational interactions were designed based on consultations to identify and address the ongoing needs of the community. By encouraging participants to contribute to the agenda, select the tools and define the metrics of success, the project sought to foster a deep sense of agency. It also ensured that the insights and conclusions were grounded in the participant's lived reality.

From Employee Empowerment to Institutional Adoption

The CultHeRit pilot's most significant achievements include a robust Transnational Employment Model and compelling evidence that employee-led

initiatives can drive structural change. While mentorship is already regulated by law in two countries, this pilot demonstrated that formalization can be driven from within. By supporting and encouraging employees to define their needs and design solutions, the project supported participatory initiatives where professionals successfully

navigated complex hierarchies and administrative barriers to implement lasting change. This empowerment delivered immediate, tangible results. In early 2026, three partner institutions officially integrated mentorship into their operational frameworks.

Employee-Led Success Stories of Institutional Adoption of Mentorship

Republic Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments (RIPCM), Serbia: In late 2025 and early 2026, a rulebook was drafted to support the adoption of mentorship as a standard onboarding procedure. The rulebook was adopted by the Acting Director of the Republic Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments on June 5, 2026, setting a precedent for the entire network of heritage protection institutes in Serbia, including **Intermunicipal Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments - Subotica (IPCMS)**. For future employees, mentors and institutions, this means ensuring the effective transfer of knowledge and skills, as well as smoother professional and social integration into the Institute's working environment.

Museum of Arts and Crafts (MUO), Zagreb, Croatia: On April 13, 2026, the MUO Council of Administration decided to adopt the *RULES on mentoring for newly employed employees trainee curator in the Museum of Arts and Crafts*. The mentoring process at the MUO lasts one year, unless otherwise stipulated by law. The mentor is appointed by the managing director upon the proposal of the President of the Expert Council, with the consent of the proposed mentor.

National Museum for the History of Transylvania (MNIT), Romania: On April 24, 2026, the MNIT Council of Administration decided to adapt the Internal Order Regulation, embedding mentorship into the institution's standard practice. Under this framework, the manager assigns a mentor or co-mentors to newly employed colleagues upon entry for the duration of the three-month standard trial period. Although initially designed as a central aspect of onboarding and orientation to be tested and evaluated during the pilot, the formal adoption of mentorship was not a requirement of CultHeRit project. Recognizing its value and responding to their HR needs, the three partner institutions moved beyond the pilot phase to pursue formal integration. Empowered by the project's participatory approach, professionals drafted proposals, presented them to leadership and secured adoption.

These three cases demonstrate that employee-led initiatives are not just theoretical ideals but practical pathways to sustainability. This success was cultivated through structured support of CultHeRit working encounters, which provided expert guidance, peer support and problem-solving space necessary to navigate institutional and regulatory realities. Employees reclaimed the

agency to identify needs and design solutions. CultHeRit confirmed that projects and experts are most effective when they respect participants' knowledge and help them turn it into action, supporting proactive problem-solving rather than prescribing rigid models or imposing universal solutions.

Critical Realities: Formalization, Limitations and Policy

The institutional adoption of mentorship in three partnership institutions succeeded also because the pilot, evaluations and transnational working sessions proactively tested, troubleshot and anticipated limitations in real time across multiple countries simultaneously. Throughout 2025, transnational working sessions and ongoing evaluation served as more than just reflective exercises. They were intentional mechanisms to stress-test the model and future-proof it for sustained impact. To ensure scalability, the partnership identified formalization pathways that respect the capacities of diverse institutions.

Mentorship does not exist in isolation but interacts with the wider structural landscape of the cultural heritage sector often characterized by resource-scarcity. It is touted as a resource-efficient intervention that leverages in-house assets and builds on existing informal practices. Yet, the reliance on goodwill and voluntary effort often masks hidden costs. This demanding work frequently depends on free time and personal dedication. Without dedicated support, chronic work overload risks turning informal arrangements

into a burden, resulting in unstable and unreliable guidance.

The Case for Formal Recognition

Formalizing mentorship means acknowledging it institutionally and societally, regulated through job descriptions and certificates and rewarded financially through salary supplements or other means. Clear definition of responsibilities sets expectations, ensures accountability and legitimizes the time dedicated to mentoring activities. Without such formalization, the practice relies on personal goodwill, leading to uneven quality and limited sustainability. As Milijana Okilj, Miroslav Malinović and Jelena Savić from the IPC observe, true institutional support requires that “mentorship is recognized as part of the job, time is allocated for it and roles are well defined.” Similarly, Erika Nagy of the INP highlights the necessity of formal integration, noting that when mentorship is recognized, it “does not feel like a second thought” but is instead “incorporated within the institution’s processes.” Closely linked to official recognition is financial compensation.



Senka Gavranov and Carlotta Schiller at the workshop with mentors in Bucharest, June 2025. Photo credit: INP. Paul Soare.

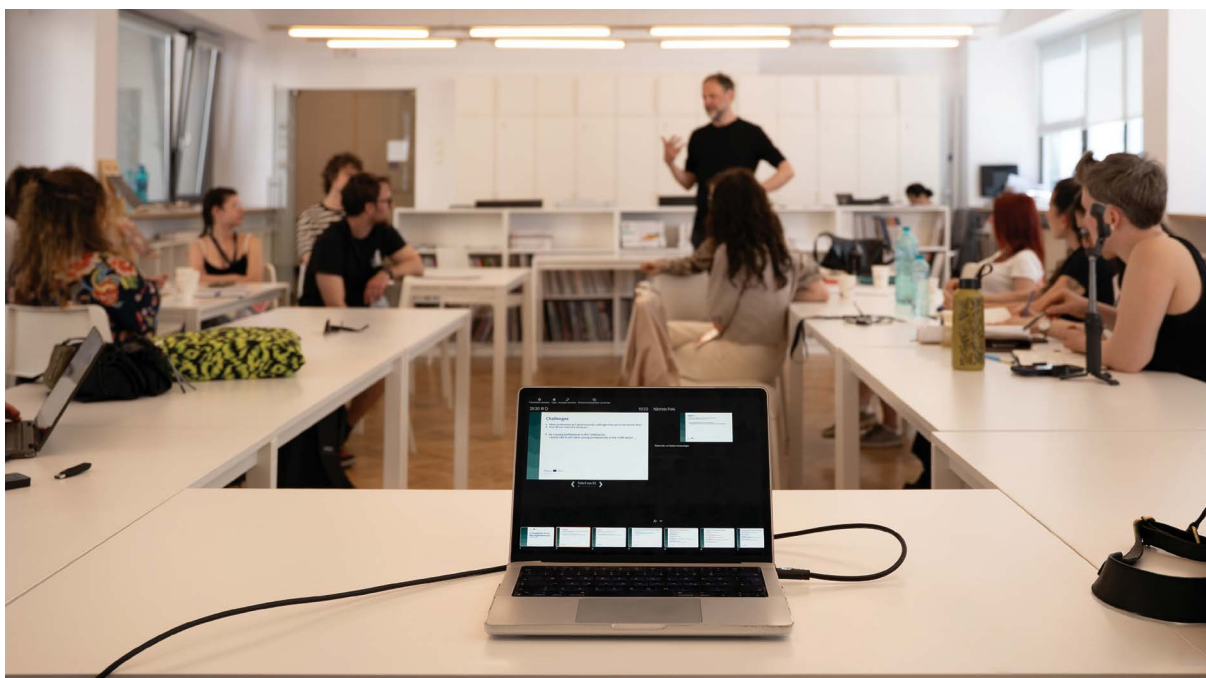
Mentorship should be financially compensated by employers through salary supplements, reduced workloads or other adequate means, ensuring mentors receive increased salaries or designated working hours. Financial recognition not only values the mentor's contribution but also increases the willingness of qualified professionals to take on these roles. Interactions and discussions within the CultHeRit suggest that a modest investment of time and resources yields tangible gains in onboarding confidence, intergenerational knowledge exchange and institutional cohesion. By institutionalizing mentorship, allocating a modest but sufficient budget and developing capacity-building measures, the sector could turn mentorship into a catalyst for retaining young talent and safeguarding collective heritage expertise.

However, a critical tension remains. Mentorship is often praised as a cost-effective solution because it leverages existing human capital rather than requiring costly external hires. Yet, this efficiency is conditional. While the method utilizes internal knowledge, implementation demands dedicated time, formal recognition and adequate financial remuneration. Planning, set-up and implementation of a mentorship program are labor-intensive and resource-consuming. Labelling mentorship cost-effective or even frugal without acknowledging these costs risks perpetuating the very burnout it aims to solve. True sustainability requires viewing mentorship as both a human and economic investment, not as a free add-on but as a strategic commitment that initially consumes resources to generate long-term returns.

The Human Factor: Selection and Fit

Translating this commitment into practice requires careful attention to the people involved: specifically, selecting mentors. While the role and perspectives of mentees warrant further exploration, this chapter focuses on the mentors, given their ability to influence outcomes and power dynamics within the relationship. Participants agreed that professional competence and expertise alone do not guarantee effective mentorship. The part of success of any program hinges on the personal traits and motivation of the mentors themselves. Participants highlighted that successful mentors possess specific interpersonal qualities: empathy, patience and a genuine desire to support another's growth. While domain knowledge and technical skills serve as the baseline, the most valued traits are interpersonal: active listening and the ability to provide constructive, non-judgmental feedback. Dorotea Aščerić from the RIPCM emphasizes that a mentor "should have social intelligence to recognize which communication style suits the new employee best," suggesting that adaptability is more important than expertise. An ideal mentor is approachable, respectful and willing to invest time, embodying a balance of professional achievement and accessibility. Vladimir Džamić adds that at the ideal level, a mentor "embodies all the qualities listed above and demonstrates a high degree of empathy and personal charisma."

However, there is a tangible risk that individuals lacking desirable qualities may assume mentorship roles. Certain characteristics are also identified as disqualifying, including rigidity, arrogance, a chronic lack of time and an authoritarian



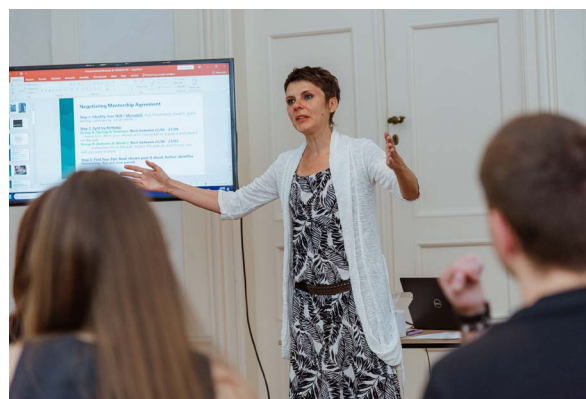
Thomas Philipp facilitates a workshop with mentees discussing ten parameters for quality employment in Bucharest, June 2025. Photo credit: INP. Paul Soare.

mindset. Additionally, Ștefania Dogărel from the MNIT warns that “a person with intense micro-manager behaviour would not make a good mentor, as they could never build trust with a mentee and offer constructive criticism.” Furthermore, a mentor who views the relationship as a burden or refuses to share knowledge will likely fail. Neda Džamić (IPCMS) provides a stark warning against the abuse of power: “The mentor must not overload the mentee, nor use

them for professional or personal purposes, nor manipulate, deceive, or claim their ideas.” Marija Jurkić Flis from the MUO cautions against “arrogant behaviour, a sense of superiority, excessive control, or the imposition of the mentee’s career path,” noting that such traits undermine the relationship. Nearly all agree that an unsupportive or overly critical mentor can cause significant harm, undermining the mentee’s confidence and defeating the purpose of the program.



Senka Gavranov facilitates mentors-mentees workshop in Postojna, October 2025. Photo credit: CultHeRit.



Senka Gavranov facilitates workshop on intergenerational cooperation and future-proofing the CHIM sector, with members of CultHeRit project team and Key Stakeholder Groups (KSGs), in Budapest, June 2026. Photo credit: Zoltán Szalontai.

To mitigate this risk, institutions face the difficult task of establishing criteria for selecting and evaluating mentors. This implies a need for regulation, but it also introduces new complexities. Determining who is fit to mentor requires assessment methods that can be subjective or resource-intensive. Furthermore, the workshops underscored that a mentor who is ideal for one person may be ineffective for another. The consensus suggests that social intelligence is perhaps more critical than specific technical expertise, emphasizing interpersonal chemistry, communication style and shared interests as crucial. Participants consistently emphasized that successful mentorship relies on the alignment of expectations.

Consequently, a robust program cannot simply assign pairs at random. Rather, it should facilitate a matching process structured with an upfront yet flexible agreement on mentorship objectives and expectations to ensure both parties work toward shared goals. Communication styles, frequency of contact and channels as well as evaluation and troubleshooting mechanisms should also be clarified from the outset.

Whether through personality tests, trial periods or structured matching sessions, finding the right fit demands time and foresight. The approach must be guided by the actual progress of collaboration, its ongoing evaluation and adjustment rather than rigid timeframes. In practice, these necessary steps translate into additional workload and administrative labor.

Navigating Administrative Burden

It is important to acknowledge that instituting and implementing mentorship may entail significant administrative work and deplete resources. Paperwork related to embedding mentorship within an institution, setting it up, regulating it, establishing procedures, drafting forms, providing infrastructure and organizing training can overwhelm a single institution. Adding selection and matching requirements makes the burden heavier. Excessive bureaucracy can stifle the spontaneity essential to mentorship, while lacking clear tools can leave willing mentors uncertain about their duties. Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel

(MAK) shares her perspective that: “The CultHeRit program was very comprehensive... but it was difficult to implement in the day-to-day work of a large institution.” To remedy this in a resource-efficient way by leveraging diverse experiences, models and knowledge, one proposal suggests creating methodologies and tools in partnerships, internationally or nationally, with help from relevant associations and institutions. This way, tasks and workload are distributed and, if coordinated well, the initiative and outcomes benefit from the knowledge and skills of all involved. The process must be participatory, not merely a matter of top-down mandates imposed by authorities or assigned by experts.

Complementary Models: Co-Mentoring and Alternatives

To ease the administrative burden and address the limitations of traditional one-on-one mentoring, especially in resource-constrained environments, a range of alternative and complementary models were identified. These include **co-mentoring, team mentoring, peer mentoring, work buddy systems, job shadowing, overlap periods with retiring colleagues** and similar arrangements. These complementary models distribute tasks and responsibilities and leverage different skill sets. Collaborative approaches shift the focus from individual reliance to collective support, ensuring that the mentorship process remains sustainable even when resources are limited. Andra-Cezara Comiati of the MNIT summarizes the possible solutions and proposals tested in CultHeRit and discussed at workshops: “To support overworked mentors and broaden learning opportunities, CHIM institutions can

establish co-mentorship teams, peer mentoring circles, or structured ‘buddy’ systems,” distributing the administrative load.

In CultHeRit, **co-mentorship** emerged as a strong alternative. Well-organized, structured co-mentorship is a resource-friendly model that covers the range of practices from administrative support to professional development and guidance.

For instance, in Prague, the Museum of Decorative Arts (UPM) implemented a model with one main mentor and two co-mentors. One co-mentor handled organizational and labor law issues, while the other focused on specific educational activities. This division reduced the time demands on the main mentor and allowed for specialized guidance. Lucie Vlčková, the main mentor from the UPM, clarifies that the co-mentor’s role “consists primarily in systematically guiding the mentee through administrative and organizational processes... This role significantly contributes to reducing the time and organizational burden on the main mentor.” Similarly, in Banja Luka, the IPC utilized a team of three mentors. A principal mentor coordinated strategic guidance, while co-mentors provided academic writing support and institutional navigation. Sara Đumić, their mentee from IPC, affirms that “a viable alternative or complement to traditional mentorship is a model that includes working with co-mentors alongside a main mentor.” According to her team of mentors Milijana Okilj, Miroslav Malinović and Jelena Savić, such an approach is a viable and efficient way to maximize human resources without requiring additional funding. They noted that while defining roles initially takes dedication and significant effort, the complementary skill set offers comprehensive

and stable support that a single mentor might struggle to provide alone. Cooperative attitudes and teamwork are essential for the success of this mentorship arrangement. Equally critical is frequent communication and consultation to monitor the mentee's development and integration and to prevent conflicting instructions.

The **work buddy** system was proposed as a less formal alternative, particularly for lower-responsibility positions or initial onboarding. Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel from the MAK advocates for this, noting that "a model based more on trust and personal responsibility, such as a buddy system, would be more efficient and sustainable." In Romania, colleagues from the INP and the MNIT also identified a paid work buddy as a viable alternative to traditional mentorship. Ștefania Dogărel from the MNIT points out that "a viable alternative to mentorship is a paid work-buddy... for lower responsibility positions," while Erika Nagy from the INP proposes that "a paid work-buddy seems the best option" for alleviating initial confusion. These peer-support arrangements allow new employees to receive guidance without the full weight of a formal mentoring relationship, relying on spontaneous interaction and mutual interest rather than bureaucracy or formal evaluations.

Peer mentoring circles were also identified as a mechanism to foster collective learning. However, while peer support is indispensable for immediate orientation, junior colleagues may not yet possess the comprehensive field overview, networks or connections that seasoned professionals offer. Therefore, combining these flexible arrangements with formal mentorship can create the most robust support system.

Job shadowing was identified as a practical tool for observational learning. Participants suggested that job shadowing allows mentees to understand workflows without immediate pressure. Another effective arrangement involves an overlap period or semester with a colleague approaching retirement. Dalma Pszota from the MNMKK-IMM notes that "a transitional year with a colleague who is about to retire... brings a wealth of experience and valuable insight," though she cautions that they may come from a different working culture and require adaptation to the latest tools. This helps transfer institutional memory directly before the senior staff member leaves. In Serbia, Richárd Morvai Rácz, the mentee from IPCMS, highlighted the value of involving retired professionals in an official mentoring capacity. Their extensive experience, tacit knowledge and available time can have beneficial effects and even offer deeper insight than current staff who may be overworked. Reinforcing these findings, he states that "I am convinced that, in an official mentoring capacity, they could contribute even more meaningfully to the professional development of younger generations."

Responses and discussions during transnational working sessions in CultHeRit also explored the potential utility of **AI tools and digital administrative assistants** for handling routine tasks. Respondents noted that AI tools could assist with scheduling meetings, tracking progress and answering basic procedural questions. Milijana Okilj, Miroslav Malinović and Jelena Savić from the IPC observe that "AI tools could help with routine tasks... This support means mentors can save time for conversations and guidance," enhancing the mentorship experience without adding extra costs or work. Digital tools also facilitate



Mentors and mentees work jointly in Postojna, October 2025. Photo credit: CultHeRit.

communication when co-mentors are based in different locations by enabling hybrid meetings and shared documentation. Proceeding with caution is also advised. Technology aids efficiency only if the risk of over-reliance is carefully assessed. Mentorship must remain a human-centered practice, not dominated by screen time.

Proposed models are not mutually exclusive; they can be combined to suit specific sociocultural, institutional and regulatory contexts. Flexibility is paramount. Tessa Bachrach-Krištofić from the MUO concludes that “mentorship should be flexible and adapt to the mentee’s needs,” suggesting that institutions could also explore combining in-house support with external models like “co-mentorship and external workshops.” As a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach is likely to fail to meet the diverse needs of the sector even within the same country, policy frameworks should encourage flexible arrangements that acknowledge and adapt to contextual differences by, for example, recognizing that what works in a large national museum may differ significantly from a smaller rural institution.

Limitations and Realistic Expectations

Mentorship is a powerful tool, but not a panacea. It is unrealistic to task it with solving structural challenges in the cultural heritage sector. Doing so sets it up for failure. Achieving meaningful impact remains contingent upon institutional

backing and complementary structural support. The inquiry and critical dialogues in the CultHeRit workshops identified eight specific areas where mentorship faces inherent limitations. Several were detailed earlier, while this section consolidates the full picture of identified constraints.

FIRST, mentorship cannot compensate for systemic deficits. Structural problems remain beyond its reach. While a mentor can guide a new employee, they cannot substitute for fair wages or stable contracts. In the words of Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel (MAK), “[m]entoring cannot compensate for systemic deficits, such as unclear role profiles, lack of recognition or unequal pay.” If a sector or an institution suffers from these deep-seated problems, mentorship may only delay attrition rather than prevent it.

SECOND, when mentorship develops haphazardly, it becomes an informal arrangement dependent on voluntary goodwill and fluctuating availability. In many institutions, mentorship remains an informal activity absorbed into standard workloads without dedicated time or resources. This reliance on the goodwill of senior staff renders the practice vulnerable to burnout and inconsistency, particularly during periods of high workload. As Marija Jurkić-Flis from the MUO warns: “if mentorship is not supported institutionally, it risks burnout.” Without formal recognition and time allocation, mentorship risks becoming counterproductive, a burden rather than a supportive tool.



Mentors and mentees work jointly in Postojna, October 2025. Photo credit: CultHeRit.

THIRD, ambiguity of roles and potential conflicts of interest pose a significant limitation. As discussed in the section on internal institutional dynamics, when the roles of mentor and supervisor are not clearly distinguished, it can result in conflicting priorities, inhibit honest dialogue and lead to perceptions of favoritism. Without clear boundaries, the safe space required for mentorship may be compromised by the power dynamics of performance evaluation. Lucie Vlčková from the UPM notes that while a mentor can be a supervisor, “it is better if they have some distance” to maintain objectivity. This conclusion best illustrates the consensus on this topic reached during the CultHeRit workshops.

FOURTH, a lack of training and standardization is a common hurdle. Being an expert in a field does not automatically make one an effective mentor. Institutions often fail to provide training in communication skills, feedback mechanisms or boundary management to mentors. This lack of preparation can leave well-intentioned mentors ill-equipped to handle complex interpersonal dynamics, potentially causing unintended distress. To prevent this, Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel from the MAK advises dedicating time and resources for solid preparation, and identifies the need for “concrete methodological tools that would address the initial uncertainty and provide guidance and a clear idea of what duties and expectations [mentorship] would entail.”

FIFTH, there is a risk of overdependence and stifled autonomy. If not managed correctly, mentorship can lead to a dynamic where the mentee relies too heavily on the mentor for decision-making. If the mentor is too controlling, it may stifle the mentee’s creativity and confidence, ultimately defeating the purpose of the relationship. Tessa Bachrach-Krištofić from the MUO cautions that “if the mentor is too involved, the mentee may become overly dependent and struggle to develop independence.” Thus, the ultimate goal must be to foster a relationship that empowers, supports and cultivates autonomy of the mentee.

SIXTH, resource constraints and administrative burden remain a challenge. As noted in the section on administrative burden, implementing a structured mentorship program requires significant administrative effort. For single institutions with limited resources, this setup can be overwhelming, potentially discouraging formalization and leaving them with ad-hoc arrangements that lack sustainability. For co-mentoring and other complementary or alternative arrangements, this is especially true. Milijana Okilj, Miroslav Malinović and Jelena Savić from the IPC note that “initially, it takes additional effort to define roles and coordinate the teamwork,” which can be a hurdle if not anticipated and planned properly.



Mentors and mentees work jointly in Postojna, October 2025. Photo credit: CultHeRit.

SEVENTH, mentorship alone cannot fully address demographic shifts. While mentorship remains vital for intergenerational knowledge transfer, it cannot single-handedly reverse the brain drain or the demographic shift. Nor can it fill the vacuum created by the rapid pace of senior staff retirement. Mentorship may serve as a temporary buffer, but it is unlikely to reverse the demographic shift. For that, broader policy interventions, such as improved salaries or societal shifts that restore the value of CHIM work, are needed. The question of the sector's long-term viability for the next generation also merits careful consideration. Dalma Pszota (MNMKK-IMM) captures this uncertainty when reflecting on the interest of young professionals for work in the CHIM sector. She raises a broader question: "Is it still meaningful for young people to plan a long-term career in this field?" Such inquiries are ideal for initiating conversations about wider interventions in the sectoral employment market.

FINALLY, variability in quality and experience should be accounted for. Vladimir Džamić from the RIPCM notes that "the quality of mentorship can therefore have a lasting impact." Because mentorship often depends on the individual

characteristics of the mentor and the support from the institution, the quality of the experience can vary significantly. Without a standardized framework, some mentees may receive exceptional support while others receive little to no guidance, leading to inequitable outcomes.

Collectively, these limitations delineate the realistic scope and expectations for mentorship, as discussed throughout CultHeRit. Mentorship, therefore, has substantial potential, but it alone cannot make the sector attractive for early-career professionals. The identified limitations suggest that while mentorship serves as a powerful tool for professional development and workplace integration, it must be viewed as part of a broader ecosystem of support. It proves most effective when combined with structural reforms, adequate funding, clear policies and a culture that prioritizes professional development. Ultimately, its success also depends on a society that values cultural heritage, the work within it and the arts themselves. Nevertheless, even within a supportive societal framework, the immediate reality for mentors and mentees is shaped by the specific institutional environment.

The Institutional Ecosystem: Between Ideal and Challenging Contexts

The success of a mentoring relationship is contingent upon the institutional context in which it operates. While the personal commitment of mentors and mentees is vital, the structural environment determines if these efforts can be sustained or falter under the weight of systemic constraints. The responses indicate that an ideal institution treats mentorship not as an extra task but as a core professional competency embedded within the organizational framework. Such an environment is characterized by the formal recognition of mentoring roles in job descriptions, ensuring that the time and emotional labor required are accounted for in workload calculations. When institutions allocate dedicated hours for mentorship activities, they signal a commitment to the process that transcends reliance on voluntary goodwill. Capturing this vision, Andra-Cezara Comiati from the MNIT describes an institution that “proactively supports mentorship by allocating time, recognition, and possibly financial incentives for mentors.”

Conversely, environments lacking this structural scaffolding may inadvertently undermine the very relationships they hope to foster. As described previously, a less favorable context is often marked by ambiguity regarding roles. In such settings, mentorship frequently devolves into an informal, ad hoc arrangement dependent on the personal capacity of individual staff. This lack of formalization can result in inconsistent experiences for mentees, where guidance quality fluctuates based on the mentor’s workload and available energy rather than a well-planned commitment.

Furthermore, the absence of training for mentors may leave even well-intentioned senior staff ill-equipped to navigate the intricacies of

intergenerational communication. Insights from the transnational learning interactions within CultHeRit suggest that the ideal institution strives to cultivate a culture of exchange, actively bridging the gap between senior staff and early-career professionals. This is critical in the CHIM sector, where the demographic shift and loss of tacit knowledge pose a significant risk to institutional memory. In supportive environments, mentorship is viewed not merely as an act of goodwill, but as a strategic mechanism for knowledge transfer.

Moreover, what distinguishes a robust system from a fragile one is the presence of mechanisms for regular evaluation and ongoing feedback loops. Erika Nagy from the INP recommends a systematic approach where “there is a systematic order or guide of teaching and introducing the new employee,” accompanied by checklists and periodic meetings. When institutions implement structured, yet flexible check-ins and allow for the adjustment of goals, they create a dynamic space. Within this space, mentors and mentees can adapt to changing circumstances without feeling constrained by rigid protocols.

Yet, even within resource-constrained contexts, certain organizational practices can successfully integrate mentorship and offset limited funding. In the words of Dalma Pszota from the MNMKK-IMM, such an environment is “transparent, democratic, and well-organized,” where colleagues “support one another.” Workshops insights indicate that a culture of transparency and mutual respect can partially compensate for the absence of financial incentives, provided that leadership demonstrates a genuine appreciation for the mentoring role. However, supportive

organizational culture alone is insufficient without structural backing. At a minimum, an institution conducive to mentorship “formally recognizes it in job descriptions and allocates dedicated time for mentors to guide mentees without being overworked,” as Tessa Bachrach-Krištofić from the MUO succinctly summarized. The most promising models appear to be those that combine a supportive ethos with tangible resources, such as access to training, clear policy frameworks and, where possible, financial recognition. Richárd Morvai Rácz from the IPCMS summarizes

this vision: “An institution genuinely committed to mentorship creates conditions that actively support learning, integration, and professional independence.” Ultimately, the distinction between conducive and hindering environments may lie in whether the institution views mentorship as an investment in its future vitality or allows it to devolve into an optional add-on to an already heavy workload.

The path forward, therefore, requires a shared commitment to building healthy ecosystems.



Emerging Directions for Policy

Honest discussions and exchanges throughout the CultHeRit workshops and learning interactions confirm that a modest investment of time and resources yields tangible gains in onboarding confidence, intergenerational knowledge exchange and institutional cohesion. Yet, assessing limitations remains essential. As explored in previous chapters, mentorship cannot rectify deep-seated structural issues, such as precarious employment contracts, inadequate salaries or the chronic underfunding. Moreover, without formal recognition and dedicated time, mentorship risks becoming a burden that exacerbates burnout rather than alleviating it. Furthermore, success depends on careful selection and matching of participants, as a poor fit can undermine trust and hinder professional growth. Despite these constraints, the pilot suggests that by recognizing mentorship formally, allocating a modest but sufficient budget and devising robust capacity-building measures, the approach can be refined into a sector-wide catalyst for retaining young talent and safeguarding collective heritage expertise.

Synthesizing insights from the CultHeRit participatory process yielded six emerging directions for policy, designed to navigate the identified limitations of mentorship and unlock its potential for broader impact.

ONE. Institutional Recognition and Formal Integration.

The workshops and findings suggest that the most critical direction is to move mentorship from the realm of voluntary goodwill acts to a formal professional competency. In this scenario, institutions would explicitly recognize mentorship in HR policies and workflows, ensuring that

the time and effort are accounted for in workload calculations. This includes integrating mentorship responsibilities into job descriptions and establishing clear career-path integration for mentors. Without this structural scaffolding, mentorship remains vulnerable to daily pressures, leading to inconsistent experiences for mentees and potential burnout for mentors. Formalization legitimizes the activity, signaling that the institution views it as a core duty, not an optional add-on.

TWO. Securing Sustainable Funding and Fair Remuneration.

Financial recognition is a powerful driver of sustainability for mentoring programs. Policymakers and institution leaders can allocate modest funding streams to support mentor training, the production of tools and direct remuneration for mentors. This could take the form of salary supplements, stipends or reduced workloads. Small grant lines could serve as incentives for institutions to introduce mentoring programs, while cross-sectoral financial support for learning initiatives would act as a resource-saving measure. Compensation not only values the mentor's contribution but also increases the willingness of qualified professionals to take on these roles, ensuring a steady supply and broad pool of experienced guides.

THREE. Capacity Building, Digital Tools and Shared Resources.

As noted in the section on the human factor, being an expert in a field does not automatically equate to being an effective mentor. Therefore, developing specialized training programs for mentors is critical. These programs should, at minimum, cover communication skills, giving and receiving feedback, managing boundaries and navigating intergenerational dynamics.

Embedding these modules into existing staff-development programs would amplify their impact. Additionally, the sector would benefit from a shared repository of mentorship tools, such as templates for agreements, journals and evaluation forms, accessible to all cultural heritage institutions. Emerging patterns also suggest the potential utility of AI tools and digital administrative assistants for handling procedures, forms and paperwork, which can help mentors save time for conversations and guidance. The risk of over-reliance on digital tools and automated systems must be carefully assessed. Mentorship should remain a human-centered practice and not be dominated by screen time. Encouraging cooperation across sectors with established mentorship and apprenticeship schemes, such as higher education, medicine and vocational training, could further enrich these resources and provide diverse perspectives on mentorship practices.

FOUR. Structural Clarity and Role Differentiation.

To prevent conflicts of interest and to ensure a safe space for honest dialogue, institutions are advised to define the boundaries between mentorship and supervision. While combining these roles is possible in some contexts, it requires explicit protocols and strong interpersonal skills. Where feasible, separating the mentor from the direct supervisor allows for objective guidance and protects the mentee from the pressures of performance evaluation. Furthermore, collaboration and feedback exchange between the mentor and supervisor is beneficial and should be encouraged. Rather than applying one-size-fits-all generalizations, policies should mandate that institutions assess their specific context to determine the best approach. This ensures that

the mentor-mentee relationship remains distinct from the chain of command. While the CultHeRit workshops did not arrive at the consensus on whether the mentor and supervisor roles should be strictly separated or can be combined, a cautious approach was recommended. Institutions must explicitly define the boundaries and potential conflicts of interest for each case, rather than assuming a single rigid model. The priority is to ensure the mentee has a safe space for honest dialogue, regardless of the administrative structure.

FIVE. Promoting Flexible and Alternative Models.

Policy frameworks should encourage flexible arrangements, including co-mentorship models where responsibilities are shared among a team, as detailed in the section on complementary models. This distributes the workload, brings diverse expertise to the table and mitigates the risk of over-reliance on a single individual. Alternative models such as peer mentoring, job shadowing and work buddy systems should also be supported as complementary strategies. This flexibility allows institutions to adapt mentorship to their specific resources and the unique needs of their staff, acknowledging that what works in a large national museum in a capital may differ from a smaller local museum. Formalization provides the legitimacy and resource allocation required for mentorship to thrive, while flexibility ensures that the model adapts to the unique needs of different institutions.

SIX. Monitoring, Evaluation and Research.

To ensure quality and inform future policy, institutions should implement regular evaluation mechanisms that are developmental rather than punitive.



Mentors and mentees work jointly in Postojna, October 2025. Photo credit: CultHeRit.

This includes the use of reflective journals, monthly check-ins and quarterly reviews where mentors and mentees track progress, identify challenges and adjust goals. These mechanisms provide the data necessary to assess the program's effectiveness. Concurrently, funding research on mentorship programs and outcomes is vital. Studies should focus on retention rates, professional development trajectories, organizational cohesion, institutional memory and intergenerational solidarity. Understanding the long-term impact of these practices will provide the evidence base needed to advocate for sustained investment and refine the approach over time.

While these directions outline a strategic framework, real transformation occurs at the ground level, where mentorship is practiced daily.

From Policy to Practice: The Mentorship Lab

Bridging the gap between policy and practice demands more than good intentions. It requires

accessible resources. To meet this need, Senka Gavranov formulated the *Mentorship Lab*, a package of conceptual tools designed as a response to the challenges discussed during the CultHeRit workshops. Prioritizing transparency, efficiency and human connection, the proposed tools draw on research and collective insights. The collection is not a prescriptive toolkit, but a modular menu of possibilities designed to spark local innovation. The tools address every phase of the mentorship lifecycle, from initial matching to ongoing evaluation and troubleshooting. Each proposal incorporates an interactive element, ensuring the process feels like collaborative discovery rather than a bureaucratic obligation.

Institutions can adapt these ideas or use them as inspiration for entirely new solutions. By pooling resources with umbrella organizations, they can also co-design ready-made templates and tailor them to their contexts.

Instead of a Conclusion: An Invitation

The optimal way to approach and operationalize mentorship is not as a standalone onboarding tool, but as a vital mechanism for institutional cohesion and continuity of expertise during this critical demographic transition. However, the call to expand and upscale it is not without reservations. The path forward necessitates further analysis, research and coordinated cooperation across institutions, alongside a sustained commitment from the sector to assess mentorship as a strategic investment in institutional memory and long-term sustainability. By addressing limitations honestly and anticipating challenges through well-targeted, supportive policies and accessible tools, the sector can build resilient workplace communities and forge a more inclusive, sustainable future.

Identified limitations of mentorship are not reasons to abandon the concept, but imperatives to approach it with honesty, realism and strategic foresight. Moving forward demands that mentorship be viewed not as a standalone solution, but as a vital component of a broader ecosystem of support. It must be integrated with structural reforms, adequate funding and complementary practices like job shadowing, peer coaching or co-mentoring. Success requires acknowledging the work involved: the time, effort and administrative labor it demands.

Nevertheless, the shift from acknowledgment to implementation is already underway. In three partner institutions, employees successfully convinced leadership to adopt mentorship. These examples demonstrate that employee-led

initiatives can effectively navigate structural constraints to drive change.

This work was forged in collaboration. The insights presented in this volume emerged directly from the shared experiences, challenges and aspirations of mentors, mentees and practitioners across eight countries. The exchanges throughout CultHeRit underscore that while systemic challenges are significant, the human capacity for connection and professional growth remains resilient. As progress was not achieved in isolation, sustaining it also requires moving beyond fragmented efforts. It demands cooperation, discussion, honest feedback and alliance building to pool resources, fine-tune tools and advance knowledge.

This invitation extends to all colleagues, institutional leaders and policymakers. The conversation must move from theory to action: committing to the rigorous assessment of whether mentorship is the appropriate intervention for a specific context or how it can be optimally combined with other structural changes. This includes creating accessible and adaptable toolkits, developing practical forms, templates and procedures that alleviate the administrative burden on institutions and employees.

Achieving this requires patience, humility and a willingness to listen to voices from the field, especially young colleagues. By investing in the continuity of expertise, intergenerational solidarity and the ethical transfer of knowledge, the sector ensures the enduring vitality of the cultural heritage it stewards.

Further Resources and Annexes

The methodological framework, testimonies, evaluation summaries, practical tools and the mentorship rulebook are available in the annexes via the project website.

Annex I outlines the themes and tools that shaped the inquiry for the transnational working encounters. **Annex II** offers a granular view of the lived experience behind the analysis through the written testimonies of participating mentors and mentees. **Annex III** presents the summary evaluation of the mentorship component within the employment model. **Annex IV** introduces the Mentorship Lab, a modular menu with conceptual tools designed to inspire conversations and help planning mentorship programs. **Annex V** documents the formal mentorship rulebook drafted and adopted by the Republic Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Serbia (RIPCM).

Readers are invited to engage with these materials as both a resource and an invitation to build on CultHeRit's efforts and explore pathways for future-proofing the employment in the sector.

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