

“Safeguarding the Future of Our Past”

iPhotoCult Policy Roundtable Event, FORTH, May 12, 2026

Rationale: It is recognized that current global geopolitical challenges as well as natural and anthropogenic disasters cause growing threats to protecting, preserving and securing Cultural Heritage (CH). In this context, bold and strategic actions are needed for safeguarding the future of our past.

The Policy Roundtable Event *“Safeguarding the Future of Our Past”* was hosted virtually on May 12, 2026 by the Institute of Electronic Structure and Laser – Foundation for Research and Technology - Hellas (IESL-FORTH), which is leading the iPhotoCult project. It brought together an audience of 45–50 participants, including, CH preservation experts and research scientists, industry representatives, digital science and AI experts, and European Commission policy officers.

During this event several priorities related to CH protection were raised, including:

- The continuity following the end of a CH research project, the so-called **continuity gap**.
- The importance of **preventive conservation** versus post-damage interventions.
- Ways of promoting European soft power and **Science Diplomacy through CH research**.
- Enhancing the impact of AI technologies applied in CH by **improving the quality of data** fed in relevant AI tools.

To this end, for ensuring the physical survival of historical assets, emphasis should be placed towards proactive, data-driven, and continuous technological monitoring. Also, given the rapidly evolving war economy, a more general question arises as to how CH protection actions can maintain their impact and compatibility with the “green” European priorities.

Following the discussion and as an outcome of this event the following **recommendations** were adopted:

1. **Bridge the "continuity gap" following the end of CH research projects** and enhance their long-term impact by creating follow-up mechanisms. In this context,
 - a. **establish specific provisions for increasing the TRL state** of CH preservation innovative (digital or hardware) tools could be considered within the EIC actions.
 - b. **promote the integration of project outputs into long-term infrastructures** which enable a stronger connection between research and public policy, recognition of the non-economic impact, capacity building and knowledge transfer.
 - c. **ensure the active, continuing participation of local stakeholders and end-users** from the initial design phase through to post-project exploitation. This ensures the seamless, long-term transfer of diagnostic tools into everyday community workflows, safeguarding regional identity and societal cohesion.
2. **Promote a risk-based strategy of preventive conservation** over costly, after-damage restorations, ensuring the fundamental conservation requirement of minimal intervention. To this end, **integrating digital infrastructures and data ecosystems** is highly recommended. A major priority should be the development of interoperable European infrastructures capable of integrating heterogeneous datasets (environmental and climatic data, material analytics and structural diagnostics, geospatial and archaeological information, historical documentation, etc.) and monitoring data collected over time.
3. **Shift AI focus from "static digitization" to "emerging tech data streams"**: Ensure that AI conservation tools are powered by high-quality, multidimensional data captured by emerging diagnostic technologies complementing legacy digitized archives.
4. **Establish actions for promoting Heritage Science Diplomacy** by encouraging international partnerships and collaborative projects, such as access to European Technological and Research infrastructures, training, and mobility schemes.
5. **Fund multidimensional, risk-based metrics**: Establish comprehensive evaluation frameworks that measure and address **Heritage loss** through a combination of physical, environmental, socio-economic, and qualitative cultural indicators, directly linking these risk metrics to broader European green mitigation and climate adaptation budgets.
6. **Prioritize the human element via capacity building**: Balance funding between physical/digital infrastructures and human capital, dedicating explicit budgetary allocations to interdisciplinary training, professional mobility schemes, and digital literacy frameworks to bridge the skills gap between advanced technology developers and field heritage managers.
7. **Secure dedicated operational funding for technology transfer and platform sustainability**: Establish explicit, long-term regulatory funding mechanisms aimed at operational heritage management to bridge the gap between research innovation and everyday practice. Dedicated resources must be allocated to systematically maintain unified digital platforms, update cross-project diagnostic toolkits (such as those developed across the Green Cluster), and actively transfer these advanced methodologies into the daily workflows of



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museums, archaeological sites and monuments, local communities, and national and regional heritage authorities. Such funding should also support the training of archaeologists, site managers, conservators, and in general heritage professionals working across diverse contexts — from urban historic centres and rural archaeological landscapes to monumental complexes — ensuring that technological advances reach all tiers of heritage stewardship, not only well-resourced institutions.

- 8. Institutionalize a dual-track operational strategy for heritage data management:** balance legally public value with asset security during active field diagnostic phases. This framework should enforce an open-access public track by sharing non-sensitive diagnostic and structural metadata as well as an immediate, restricted Security Track for protecting fragile, exposed, or newly discovered assets from looting, vandalism, and the risks of over-exposure.
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Roundtable Participants:

- **Ana-Maria Stan** – Representative of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD.4 – Democracy, Equality, Culture).
- **Despoina Tsiafaki** – Director of Research and Head of the Department of Culture and Creative Industries of Institute for Language and Speech Processing (ILSP) at the ATHENA research center, National Representative CL2, Greece.
- **Alexandre Causse** – Executive Director of JPI Cultural Heritage and coordinator of the ARCHE project.
- **Nikolas Bakirtzis** – Director of the Andreas Pittas Art Characterization Laboratories (APAC Labs), Cyprus Institute (CyI), Nicosia and Coordinator of CyI's Science and Technology in Archaeology and Cultural Heritage doctoral program.
- **Katrien Keune** – GoGreen Scientific coordinator, Head of Science, Conservation & Science Department, Rijksmuseum, John van Geuns chair, Van 't Hoff Institute for Molecular Sciences, University of Amsterdam, Chair, Netherlands Institute for Conservation+Art+Science+ (NICAS).
- **Green cluster projects representatives:**
 1. ARGUS: **George Pavlidis**, ATHENA research center
 2. ChemiNova: **Noémie Gabay**, ICCROM
 3. NERITES: **Jörg Hermsdorf**, Laser Zentrum Hannover

Organizing Committee:

Costas Fotakis (*iPhotoCult Scientific Coordinator*), **Anastasia Giakoumaki** (*iPhotoCult Project Manager*), **Alexandros Selimis** (*Rapporteur*).

