

25. Juni 2025

Statement: Heritage of Human Creativity

Design is an integral part of all industrial sectors within the EU's industrial ecosystem, serving as a driver of innovation and as an enabler. As such, the design industry has a significant impact on both the cultural understanding and identity of Europe, as well as a factor in the European Union's competitiveness, innovation, the implementation of the Green Deal and the topic of resilient democracies.

The story of skills: Why

About 1600 years ago, the Romans were able to create dichroic glass – the best-known example is the Lycurgus Cup, where nanoparticles create a stunning colour impression. It took scientists up to the mid-20th century to understand and reproduce the effect (Freestone et al., 2007).

We are currently at a crossroads in creative skills and technology, which might lead to a similar loss of competencies. Hence, a risk to Europe's innovation capacity, distinctiveness and competitiveness. While AI increases the output of the Creative Cultural Industry, where AI is frequently used as a co-partner in ideation and production (with setbacks in IP Rights), the downside is described by Zhou et. al (Zhou, 2025) as follows:

'Our results hint that the widespread adoption of generative AI technologies in creative fields could lead to a long-run equilibrium where, in aggregate, many artefacts converge to the same types of content or visual features. Creative domains may be inundated with generic content as exploration of the creative space diminishes. Without establishing new frontiers for creative exploration, AI systems trained on outdated knowledge banks run the risk of perpetuating the generation of generic content at a mass scale in a self-reinforcing cycle.'

This point is also stressed by the JRC 'Generative AI Outlook Report'(Abendroth et al., 2025, p48) which points not only to the needed upskilling but also to the potential loss of skills in critical thinking and problem solving (Abendroth et al., 2025, p12) – both central aspects of Design and Human Creativity. To sustain a desirable and prosperous future, we must nurture human creative skills – no innovation without heritage and knowledge.

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BEDA and its members are already witnessing a decline in both industrial and creativity-relevant skills. **This includes technical expertise, such as knowledge about materials and manufacturing processes, as well as essential human and planetary centred capabilities in the cultural and creative industries, where curation is increasingly replacing creation, leading to a concerning normalisation of mediocrity** — this erosion of creative skills and knowledge risks causing significant long-term economic harm.

What to do:

To address this, BEDA calls for the establishment of a Heritage of Human Creativity Program—an urgent and strategic initiative to safeguard, revitalise, and future-proof Europe’s creative and industrial capabilities. We urge policymakers and stakeholders to support and help implement this program together with BEDA. The Heritage of Human Creativity could be a dedicated instrument within the framework of the Cultural Compass, serving as a vital guide in enhancing competitiveness and fostering synergies across other Directorates-General.

Potential ‘How’:

BEDA urges the DG EAC, together with DG CNECT and DG GROW, to initiate a stakeholder dialogue on discussing how the Heritage of Human Creativity could be included in different EU Commission Programs.

We see potential integration into:

- Launching a Large-Scale Partnership for Design under the Up-Skilling Program to lay the ground for a ‘Heritage of Human Creativity’ – to ensure a competitive and resilient Europe, against the loss of technological and creative skills.
- Integration of a design-specific pillar within Horizon Europe
- Becoming a pillar or policy initiative of the Creative Cultural Compass

This should be an European program celebrating the Heritage of Human Creativity, a collaborative effort with stakeholders from the European Industrial Ecosystem and led by Design—the creative discipline embedded across all industrial sectors and rooted in innovation and cultural value.

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Case: Why are creative skills crucial for the competitive edge in Europe?

In the late 1950s, the Irish government made a strategic decision to place industrial design under the Department of Enterprise rather than the Arts, signalling a clear intent to develop design and craft as economic drivers. Central to this was the creation of the Kilkenny Design Workshops—an interdisciplinary prototyping hub where Irish companies collaborated with top international designers to revitalise products and services.

The Workshops proved highly successful, fostering national innovation through design and craft. Kilkenny has become a vibrant cultural centre, attracting global talent and giving rise to enduring institutions like the Kilkenny Arts Festival, which continues to contribute to the local economy.

This initiative laid the foundation for a design sector that now generates €11.3 billion annually and employs 63,000 people. Its influence extends into high-tech industries, including medical technology, gaming, computing, and AI.

For example, Stryker — a global medtech leader—chose Cork for a central additive manufacturing facility, citing access to a skilled workforce educated at institutions shaped by Kilkenny Design’s legacy.

This case shows how visionary policy and investment in design can yield long-term economic and technological dividends. It’s not just a historical lesson, but a living example of creative foresight shaping Ireland’s innovation landscape.

Sources

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This is BEDA

Founded in 1969 and based in Brussels, BEDA is a not-for-profit association comprising more than 50 members from 28 European countries. Members include publicly funded design organisations, as well as professional and trade associations, all of which promote pioneering design nationally or regionally.

BEDA sees design as a key driver for sustainable innovation, societal transformation, and planetary well-being. We represent and advocate for design as a method in everything from products and services to policy making and systemic change.

In case of further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us:

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Together we create #impactbydesign

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