



EU elections 2019

The European Historic Houses (EHH) is the European “umbrella organisation” of 24 national associations of managers of private historic houses in 22 European countries.

According to the European Commission, private historic houses represent 40% of the EU built heritage in the EU. It contributes to economic growth through tourism which is estimated to bring €415 billion to the EU GDP; and with 3.4 million tourism enterprises accounting for 15.2 million jobs – many linked to heritage, directly or indirectly¹. We especially maintain economic activities and jobs in rural areas, our houses being visited by millions of tourists every year.

Managers of these houses are the guardians of vulnerable historic buildings which they preserve for the future generation with their own know-how, commitment, financial, and human means. They invest a lot of their energy to manage their historic houses as SMEs. However, they have low profitability after taxes. Greater accessibility of historic houses and their gardens must meet public expectations for higher standards of conservation and diversified cultural activities. It increases the burden and financial pressure of the owners to preserve the heritage for the benefit of all.

Europe needs to maintain its cultural heritage and support historic houses entrepreneurs to continue their efforts. European decision-makers must contribute in their legal and financial policies to unlock the potentialities of the sector for our European cultural heritage.

In the wake of EU elections in May 2019, the European Historic Houses should be prepared to explain and raise awareness on the most pressing issues for its national associations. To that end, we summarized the most important measures which should be adopted by the incoming generation of EU policy makers:

1. Put historic houses on an equal footing with other SMEs

Historic houses are SMEs. Their managers should be encouraged to develop innovative management and funding mechanisms. Tax policies including national fiscal incentives on inheritance, property taxes are major incentives to carry out restoration projects.

Fiscal policy (taxes especially lower VAT for renovation work, inheritance tax, special tax rates for using specific craftsmanship should be considered in the future

¹ European Commission Communication of 22 July 2014 towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe (COM(2014) 477 final)

2. Better access to EU financing

The proposed increase of 27% funds allocated for the next Creative Europe Programme 2021- 2027 should also support family-owned houses to create new business opportunities. It should take stock of the study ‘Heritage Houses for Europe- Exchange & Innovate’ founded by the European Commission EAC/2018/0313. The “Invest EU Fund”, the new proposed financial instruments in the cultural and creative sectors should be streamline to entrepreneurs of cultural heritage.

Historic houses and their surrounding environment contribute to the preservation of Europe’s green heritage and its culturally-significant landscapes. Owners and managers of historic houses, and their parks are improving the well-being of society in protecting the environment with sustainable management practices.

The mainstream of cultural heritage in the new Structural Fund with dedicated financial allocation is decisive. The EU’s regional, urban and rural development policies are instrumental for the maintenance of cultural heritage. A specific budgetary line for Heritage sites and houses located in rural areas should be included as an objective.

3. Ease employment rules and cost

Historic houses play a major role for local employment as well as for the preservation of various types of craftsmanship. More than 90% of owners employ skilled workers in their historic houses. It is significant for local growth and employment. Furthermore, they are faced with excessive labour costs. They are vital parts of the maintenance and safeguard of historic houses across Europe, and have a positive social and economic impact for Europe².

4. Pay attention to the specificities of private historic houses

Private historic houses have specific esthetical, social, legal and economic constraints different from other buildings. The Energy Efficiency Directives promoting energy performance requirements can impact directly the maintenance of historic buildings.

All Members States should make use of the existing article 4.2 of Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (2010/31/EU) which leaves the possibility to exclude protected historic buildings from energy efficiency requirements. The EU Structural Fund should unlock funding mechanisms for heritage houses owners to energy efficiently refurbish their buildings while taking into account their constraints and need for cost effectiveness.

5. Sponsor tourism marketing for private heritage houses

² There were an estimated 24 million visits to houses, gardens and parks in 2014 in the UK, leading to a gross visitor spend of £1billion. This financial windfall should contribute to repair and maintain historic houses if this success is to be sustained.

A large part of the revenue of private historic houses is generated by the tourism sector. Cultural tourism, which is 40% of European tourism as a whole, is a key sector with potential for growth.

More synergies with the tourism sector should be developed. Historic houses owners should be included in the decision-making process linked to the development of touristic projects and infrastructures (e.g. cultural routes, tour operators, territorial development) in order to capitalize on these opportunities and create a mutually beneficial cooperation framework.

6. Finance training programs for next Generation managers of historic houses

The European Historic Houses created “the Next Generation Group” to work on knowledge transfer and education of future owners of historic houses and gardens. At the time where part of the young generation is disconnected from its roots and values, we have a duty to raise awareness on our cultural heritage. This includes digital revolution. We will have to learn from our young generation and built a relation of trust and knowledge sharing.

The next Creative Europe Programme 2021- 2027 should develop training programmes in order on the one hand to provide historic houses managers with adequate skills and knowledge to sustain their historic buildings and on the other hand to be entrusted with educative projects to raise awareness on their cultural and social values.