



ENGLISH VERSION — 2025

Accessible Heritage Experiences for Audience Development

CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME

Syllabus Executive Summary



Co-funded by
the European Union

CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME



Purpose

The AHEAD Programme is a capacity-building pathway designed to empower heritage organizations in creating audience-centered experiences that **are accessible, participatory, and sustainable**. The AHEAD program integrates online seminars with on-site **co-creation Labs**, progressing from foundational concepts to tested prototypes within actual heritage settings.

The programme helps organisations align their mission, public value and day-to-day practices, while strengthening their capabilities by working **collaboratively with communities**.

AHEAD addresses a concrete need in the cultural heritage field. Many institutions aspire to engage diverse audiences and to co create relevant offers, yet they **lack a shared framework, common language and ready-to-use tools** to do so consistently. AHEAD fills this gap through a scaffolded pathway with a shared blueprint, simple methods and an explicit focus on psychological safety and peer support.

Expected learning outcomes

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The AHEAD Programme builds participants' abilities in ethical audience engagement and human-centred strategy within heritage settings, and by the end of the programme participants will:

- **Recognise intentional and ethical audience engagement** and how audience strategies connect to cultural democracy and audience-centred objectives.
- **Identify** the key stages of Design Thinking and recognize their application in creating and refining audience-focused offerings.
- **Recognise** how engagement aligns with mission and public value, and identify participatory inputs from staff, visitors and communities.
- **Identify** early impact planning components and their purpose, and recognise appropriate research methods, audience journeys and basic interpretive elements.
- **Identify** the **mutual benefits of engaging local communities** in heritage projects, both for the heritage sector and the local communities.
- **Recognise the importance of co-creation** and **find** possible tools and modes for co-creating with communities.
- **Evaluate** organizational enablers, blockers, and long-term conditions for maintaining audience-centered services.

Pedagogical approach and values

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AHEAD adopts a practice oriented, **human-centred pedagogy**. Learning happens in cycles of doing, reflecting and re-doing. A core principle of the AHEAD training programme was to foster psychological safety, **collaboration and peer support**, so that uncertainty and stress became conditions for learning instead of barriers.

The approach balances rigour and simplicity. Teams use just enough structure to move forward without over engineering the process. Methods are chosen for their usefulness in small to mid sized organisations and can be adapted to various constraints. Ethics are explicit.

Participants **connect audience needs with organisational values, public purpose and cultural democracy**. Transparency and accountability are reinforced through early impact thinking and shared evaluation.

**Key components:
1. AHEAD SEMINARS**

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The programme unfolds in two complementary phases:

1. AHEAD seminars

Nine one-hour sessions in English establish a shared foundation across the consortium and offer future participants practical ideas for use in their own contexts.

The topics covered are: **audience development ethics and strategies, design thinking, audience research and journey mapping, participative branding, heritage interpretation, community engagement, impact assessment and basic facilitation for co-creation.**

Each seminar follows a consistent structure, incorporating activation, expert input, peer learning, and evaluation. To improve accessibility, each session is complemented by readings and recordings. The seminars introduce concepts and tools that are subsequently applied, tested, and refined in the Labs.

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Key components: 2. AHEAD LABS

2. AHEAD LABS: Laboratories

A cycle of in person, on-site co-creation Labs, where training partners and heritage organisations co-design audience-oriented services and experiences.

The Labs follow three iterative steps.

Empathize and Define: develop personas, journeys and clear problem statements framed as how might we questions.

Ideate and Prototype: generate options and minimum viable experiences.

Test validates solutions: first internally and then with users, collects evidence and iterates.

It frames archaeological sites as living cultural spaces and positions artists and communities as co-authors rather than peripheral stakeholders. Their involvement functions as a creative mediation between organisations and communities, strengthening meaning and co-curation.

AHEAD Seminars: Structure



N.	Training partner	Topics
0	All	Overview of the AHEAD Seminars
1	Deusto University, Impact Valley	Introduction to Audience Development: definition, approaches and ethics Introduction to the AHEAD Canva
2	Melting Pro	ACED & Design Thinking: illustrating the process
3	Deusto University	Audience research, analysis, segmentation: simple tools; Customer journey
4	Melting Pro	Participative Branding for Heritage
5	HERITAGE	Foundations of Heritage Interpretation & elements of Interpretive Writing
6	HERITAGE	Community Engagement
7	Impact Valley	Impact Evaluation: framework of indicators for assessing impact
8	Impact Valley, Melting Pro	Facilitation Methods

AHEAD Seminars: Topics

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Seminar 0 - Overview Introduces the overall pathway, roles, resources and outputs, aligning expectations and the language we use throughout the programme.

Seminar 1 - Introduction to Audience Development: frames audience development ethically and strategically, with attention to cultural democracy, success factors and practical goal setting. Participants connect their context with European level insights and identify one priority to carry into the Labs.

Seminar 2 - ACED & Design Thinking: links design thinking with the ACED blueprint and explores pitfalls and prototyping. Teams learn to design with and for audiences, and to build an iteration habit.

Seminar 3 - Audience research: offers simple tools for audience research, segmentation and journey mapping. The message is clear. Research does not need to be perfect to be useful. Small, well focused exercises already improve decisions.

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AHEAD Seminars: Topics

Seminar 4 – Participative Branding for Heritage: clarifies why participative branding matters for heritage, defines the five ingredients of a strong brand and outlines participatory steps to involve staff, visitors and communities.

Seminar 5 – Foundations of Heritage Interpretation: introduces value based heritage interpretation, criteria for quality and the role of interpretation in the management of a site.

Seminar 6 – Community Engagement: focuses on community engagement. Participants identify stakeholders, motivations and challenges, and sketch one feasible engagement activity for their context.

Seminar 7 – Impact Evaluation: builds an impact strategy. Teams select indicators, plan data collection and align stakeholders for credible evidence.

Seminar 8 – Facilitation Methods: distils essential facilitation postures, collaboration frameworks and decision modes suitable for co creation.



— 2025

THE LABS: AHEAD BLUEPRINT

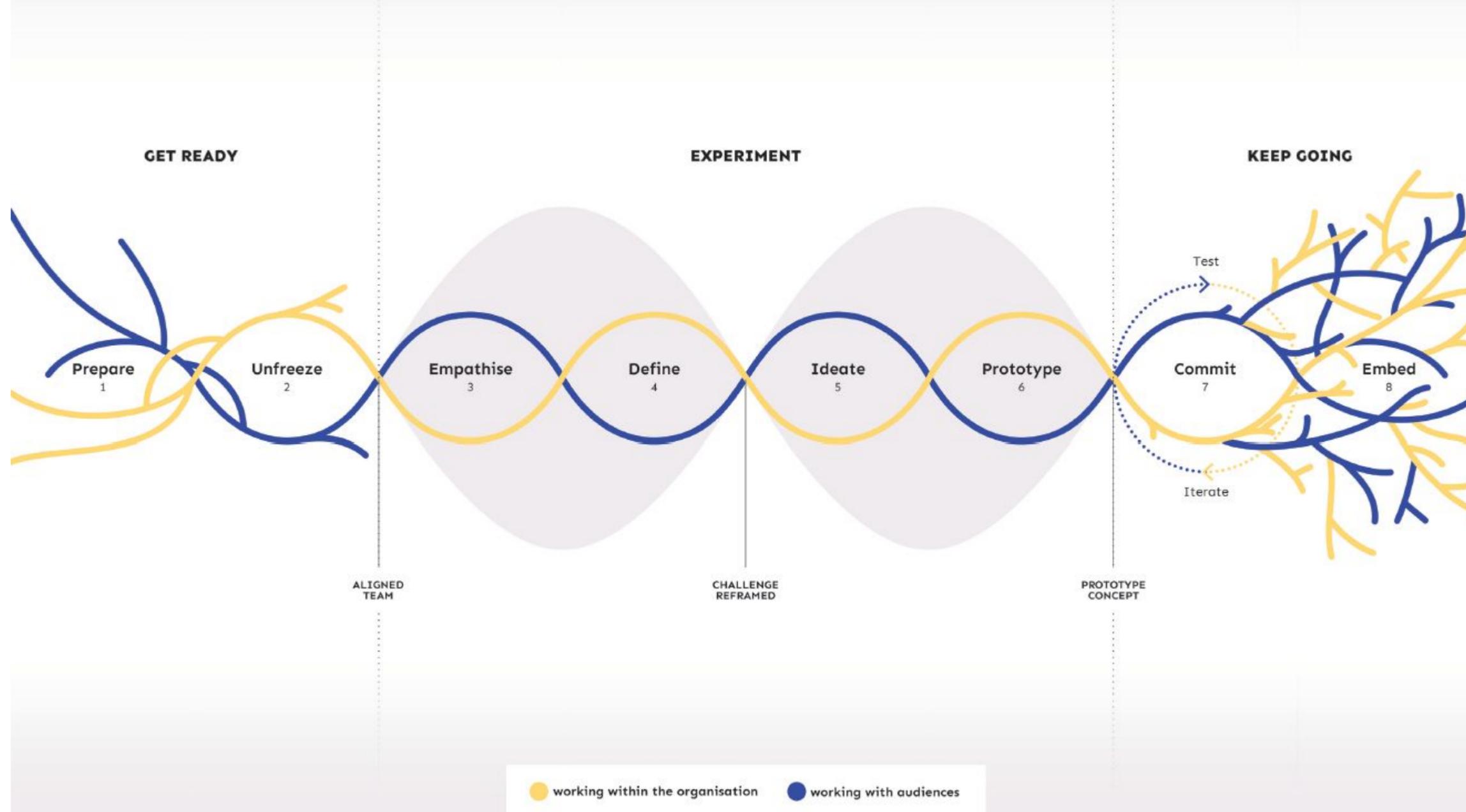


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Starting point (1/2)

ACED

Audience Centred Experience Design



adeste+

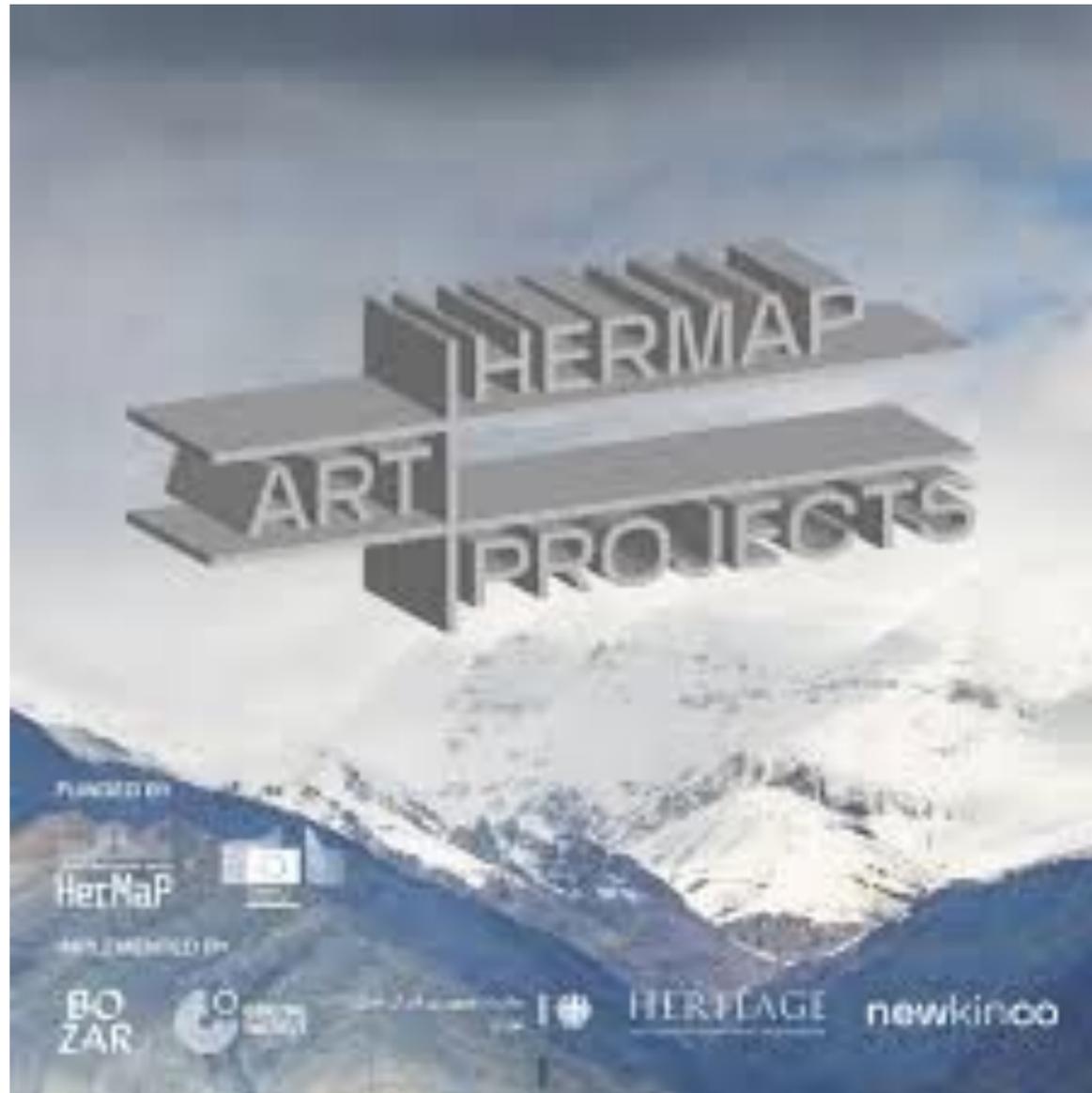


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<https://aced.adestepius.eu/>

One of the key pillars of AHEAD originates from the ADESTE+ Project, where the ACED methodology was first developed.

Starting point (2/2)



HerMaP stands for “*Heritage Management Project*” (Iran) and the “*Art Projects*” refers to the artistic-residency / exhibition component. It is a cultural initiative that brings together Iran and Europe in a collaborative research-and-creation format: artists, researchers, heritage professionals working on tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

The other key pillar of AHEAD originates from the HerMaP Art Projects, also funded by the European Union. These initiatives offer valuable insights into working within the heritage sector and fostering collaboration between artists and communities.

<https://hermapartprojects.org/>

From ACED to AHEAD: evolving the approach

AHEAD blueprint



Audience & Organisation Together

Work with audiences and internal teams together, using co-creation and empathy as shared practice.

Structured but Flexible Framework

A structured yet flexible framework with 3 phases and 8 steps, based on a simple logic: first understand the problem deeply, then generate options, and finally refine and test solutions.

Change Management & Leadership

Focus on preparing the organisation to work in this way, involving leadership actively, and assigning a dedicated team to drive the change.

Action Learning & Reflection

Learn by doing: test ideas, learn from results, and build the new practices into everyday work.

From Audience to People

Move from trying to “attract visitors” to enabling people to participate in culture in ways that matter to them.

**From ACED to
AHEAD: evolving the
approach**

AHEAD blueprint



Context-Specific:

applied to *archaeological sites* as living cultural spaces.

Artistic Involvement:

artist integrated into the co-design process.

Community & Territory:

strong connection with local communities and places.

Co-creation:

Professionals, artists and citizens work together at every step of the design process, not only at the end.

From Access to Agency:

people empowered to reinterpret heritage.

Interdisciplinary Approach:

linking art, heritage, and social innovation.

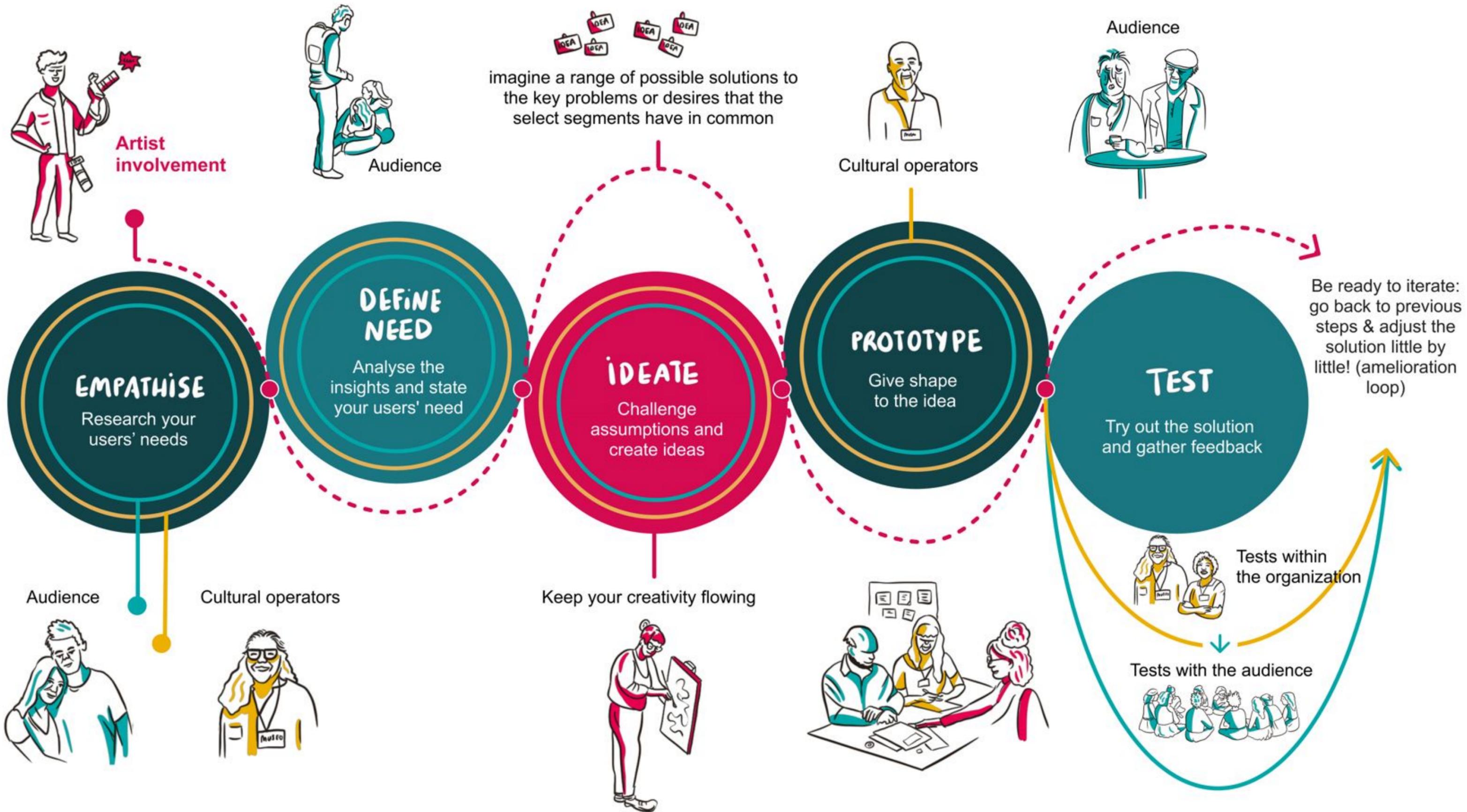


AHEAD blueprint



**From ACED to
AHEAD: evolving the
methodology**

ACED (ADESTE+)	AHEAD Methodology
Audience-Centred Experience Design	Heritage-Centred and Community-Driven Design
Focus on cultural organisations and audiences	Focus on archaeological sites and local communities
Human-centred design + organisational change	Context-based design integrating art, territory, and community
Structured 3-phase / 8-step process	Adapted and simplified process aligned with site-specific realities
Empathy and participation through workshops	Deep co-creation with artists and residents on-site
Leadership and change management	Collective ownership and shared agency
Aim: develop more inclusive audience experiences	Aim: transform heritage into a living, participatory experience



The AHEAD Labs



PHASE	FOCUS	KEY ACTIONS & OUTCOMES
1st EMPATHISE AND DEFINE	Understand people and their needs	Get to know your target community as <i>real people</i> . Identify what matters to and with them and define the key challenges and opportunities. Create personas, evidence-based portraits of real people that help teams challenge their assumptions, and “How Might We” questions that translate those insights into open prompts that guide the design process.
2nd IDEATE AND PROTOTYPE	Generate and shape ideas	Use creativity and collaboration to co-design solutions: generate many ideas, choose the most promising, and build quick low-cost prototypes with artists, professionals and community members involved in the ideation.
3rd TEST THE SOLUTIONS	Learn and refine through feedback	Test prototypes – simple early versions of an idea built to learn before investing – first internally, then with real audiences. Gather feedback through dialogue and data, and refine solutions to make them meaningful, effective and sustainable



AHEAD blueprint

1st phase
**EMPATHISE
AND DEFINE**

Goal:

Listen carefully to understand what really matters to the people you want to work with — rather than assuming what you already know.

What happens in this phase:

- You get to know your audience or community as real people.
- You look at their everyday life, challenges, motivations and their relationship with heritage.
- You listen through simple tools such as conversations, observation, empathy maps and journey maps — and, where possible, you create these with community members, not only about them.
- From what you learn, you identify needs, barriers and opportunities.
- You then turn your insights into open questions that can spark new ideas.

Outcome:

A strong starting point: a clear, shared understanding of people's needs and a focused problem statement that can guide design and co-creation.

Remember:

Involving your community early — even in tools like empathy maps — builds trust, surfaces real insights and empowers people to shape the process from the beginning.



AHEAD blueprint



2nd phase
**IDEATE AND
PROTOTYPE**

Goal

Open up space for creative thinking and start shaping possible solutions together.

What happens in this phase

- Bring professionals, artists and community members into the same room to generate ideas together.
- Brainstorm freely and playfully to produce many options.
- As a group, you choose the ideas that seem both meaningful and doable.
- You then make very quick, simple versions of those ideas – called prototypes – so they can be shown and tested before investing more time or money.
- You shape these early versions together, so they make sense in the real local context.

Outcome

A set of small, low-risk prototypes that turn ideas into something concrete and start useful conversations and learning inside the organisation and with the community.

Remember: give people time to generate many ideas without judging them, and only afterwards take time to narrow down and choose which ideas to move forward.



3rd phase
**TEST THE
SOLUTIONS**

AHEAD blueprint



Goal:

Learn from real interaction and refine solutions based on feedback.

What happens in this phase:

- Conduct **internal testing** first, involving different departments to gather diverse perspectives.
- Then move to **external testing** with real audiences or community groups on-site.
- Collect feedback through conversations, surveys, observation, and analytics.
- Adjust and refine prototypes collaboratively based on what you learn.
- Share insights across organisations to strengthen collective learning.

Outcome:

Validated and improved solutions that respond authentically to community needs – ensuring that innovation in heritage is both inclusive and sustainable.

Remember: iterate – adjust and test again. Don't defend ideas; listen to learn.

ARTISTS' INVOLVEMENT

AHEAD blueprint



Creative Catalysts: Artists were involved from the early stages, contributing their unique ways of **thinking, seeing, and doing** to the co-creation process, driving more imaginative and non-conventional solutions.

Shared Ownership: They actively participated in the shared process alongside **archaeological site staff** and **local communities**, ensuring a truly interdisciplinary and inclusive dialogue.

Artistic Synthesis: Artists helped to **synthesize and distill** key insights, emotional aspects, and complex ideas emerging from the co-creative process through their specific artistic language.

From Concept to Experience: Their involvement ensured that the resulting heritage experiences were not only accessible but also **highly creative, evocative, and deeply relevant** to the target audiences.

Bridging Worlds: This role established a powerful link between the heritage sector, artistic practice, and social innovation, enhancing the project's **impact and reach**.

**MEANINGFUL
RELATIONSHIP WITH
LOCAL COMMUNITIES
AND TERRITORY**

AHEAD blueprint



Heritage as a Living Space: We view archaeological sites as **living cultural spaces**, embedding them firmly within the social fabric and history of the local territory, not just as isolated monuments.

Wider Local Relevance: By applying a human-centered approach, we make the sites and their narratives **more relevant and accessible** to local communities and new audiences, moving beyond limited visitor profiles.

Empowering Local Voices: Our co-creation processes ensure that local communities and stakeholders are not just passive recipients, but are **actively involved** in shaping the experiences, leading to shared ownership.

Meaningful Experiences: The methodology is designed to create **significant, human-centered experiences** that allow residents to forge a deeper, personal relationship with their heritage and place.

Social & Cultural Growth: AHEAD's vision is to leverage this stronger local relationship to create opportunities for **social and cultural growth** within the surrounding territory, enhancing local pride and identity.



To learn more and find resources
about this capacity building
programme:

<https://aheadeurope.eu/learning/>



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