



HUMANITIES IN THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA (HERA)

Impact Case Studies

September 2026

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Overview:

The Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) network is a collaborative partnership of 26 national research funding agencies from 25 European countries. Since 2004, its mission has been to promote and support European arts and humanities research through research funding, collaboration, and advocacy. AHRC was a founding member and is currently chair of the network. As a result of 6 humanities-led funding opportunities, 67 out of 85 transnational projects involve UK teams funded by AHRC.

In the summer of 2026, through the 10,000 Black Interns Programme, two AHRC interns undertook a project to better understand the long-term impact of the UK's involvement. Focusing on the first 5 funding calls between 2009 and 2022, Princess Kunadu (International Partnerships and Engagement Team) and Sammy Morgan (Strategy, Impact and Engagement Team) worked together to establish contact with the UK leads of 60 projects.

In addition to establishing contact with the UK leads, a Microsoft Forms Survey was developed with a set of questions to gather information on the impact and added value of this European collaboration since the projects have finished.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) defines research impact as the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy. This is central to UKRI's key missions:

- Advancing Knowledge
- Improving Lives
- Driving Economic Growth

Out of 60 initial emails sent out, 6 survey responses were returned. These six were then developed into the following stories highlighting how AHRC-supported research has advanced knowledge, improved lives, driven economic growth and delivered wider social and cultural benefits.

Impact Stories:

Cultural Dynamics: Inheritance and Identity (2009 – 2012)

- 1) Sharing Ancient Wisdoms: Exploring the Tradition of Greek and Arabic Wisdom Literatures

Cultural Encounters (2013 – 2016)

- 2) Marrying Cultures: Queens Consort and European Identities 1500 – 1800

Uses of the Past (2016 – 2019)

- 3) CitiGen: Identity, Citizenship and Nationhood in the Post-Genome Era

Public Spaces: Culture and Integration in Europe (2019 – 2022)

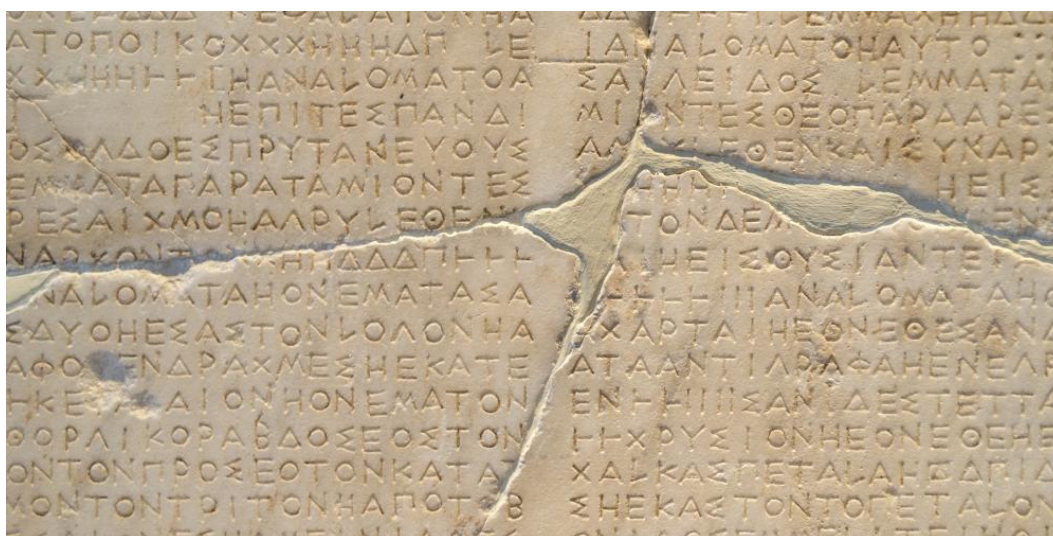
- 4) Beyond Stereotypes: Cultural Exchanges and the Romani Contribution to European Public Spaces
- 5) Public Renaissance: Urban Cultures of Public Space between Early Modern Europe and the Present
- 6) En/counter/points: (re)negotiating belonging through culture and contact in public space and place

Cultural Dynamics: Inheritance and Identity (2009 – 2012)

Sharing Ancient Wisdoms: Exploring the Tradition of Greek and Arabic Wisdom Literatures

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Written by Sammy Morgan



Credit: Leon Rafael, Shutterstock

For centuries, collections of sayings and practical advice collectively understood as Wisdom Literature shaped how people approached their everyday lives. The pathways through which these ideas travelled across languages, cultures and generations, however, remained poorly understood.

Led by UK based Professor Charlotte Roueché (King's College London), [Sharing Ancient Wisdoms \(SAWS\)](#) brought together researchers from the UK, Sweden, and Austria to explore the transmission of this literature between the medieval Greek, Arabic, and European worlds. The research demonstrated that many ideas often viewed as the product of a single culture were instead often the product of centuries of exchange between European, North African, and Middle Eastern communities. By tracing the movement of sayings and teachings through manuscripts and anthologies, the project highlighted deep historical connections linking Greek and Arabic intellectual traditions and showed how knowledge was continually reshaped as it crossed linguistic and cultural boundaries.

A major contribution of the project was translating these complex cultural relationships into accessible and innovative digital tools. Researchers created the [SAWS Dynamic Library](#), which

offered open access to a digital collection of wisdom literature, their source texts, and later works influenced by them. The platform enables users to explore connections between texts, ancient places, and ideas in ways that would previously have required years of specialist research. The project's publication of previously obscure digitised manuscripts and textual collections drastically increased public usage of cultural heritage materials actively advancing the knowledge of the individuals across Europe.

The project also played an integral role in supporting future research into the relationship between texts and ideas across time and space through the development of a unique methodology and ontology. This academic approach has influenced further explorations of ancient text such as [Elagina's project on Beta masāhəft](#), focusing on the digital analysis of Ethiopic manuscript culture. The continued use of SAWS' discoveries to inform more recent work demonstrates the projects lasting importance and enduring prominence in humanities research.

More than a decade after its completion, Sharing Ancient Wisdoms remains an important example of how humanities research can expose shared intellectual heritage. By demonstrating the way in which ideas travelled between Greek, Arabic, and European traditions the project effectively highlighted the long history of intercultural dialogue that has shaped societies across Europe and beyond. Its legacy continues to support research and public understanding of the powerful exchanges that connect and define cultures across time and place.

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Cultural Encounters (2013-2016)

Marrying Cultures: Queens Consort and European Identities 1500-1800

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Written by Princess Kunadu



Credit: Charles XI's Family with Relatives from the Duchy Holstein-Gottorp, David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl

Between 1500 and 1800, royal marriages were some of the most important connections between European nations. *Marrying Cultures: Queens Consort and National Identities* explored how foreign-born queens influenced the courts they married into and how these international marriages helped shape national identities, cultural traditions, and political relationships across Europe with their impact still being felt in the 21st century.

Led by Professor Helen Watanabe O'Kelly at the University of Oxford, researchers from the UK, Sweden, Poland and Germany came together to reveal the deep cultural interconnectedness of European societies. They demonstrated the vital role of various countries across the European continent in shaping European identities.

At a time when national histories can often be studied in isolation, one of the project's key contributions was working closely with museums, libraries, and royal palaces including Kensington Palace, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, London; the Royal Armoury, Stockholm, and the Duke August Library, Wolfenbüttel) to share stories of these cultural exchanges and international connections. As a result, the significant role royal women played as cultural ambassadors who introduced new ideas, customs, artistic influences, and political connections was highlighted – [advancing public knowledge](#) of Europe's shared heritage and the UK's place within it.

The collaboration established through the project has endured beyond its original lifetime, with research partners across the UK, Sweden, Poland, and Germany continuing to exchange

expertise and develop new research opportunities. The project's research has also had a lasting academic legacy through influential publications, including *Queens Consort, Cultural Transfer and European Politics, c.1500–1800*, which continues to be cited.

By uncovering the role of royal women in shaping cultural and political identities, *Marrying Cultures* has strengthened understanding of Europe's interconnected past and encouraged more informed conversations about shared histories and international cooperation today.

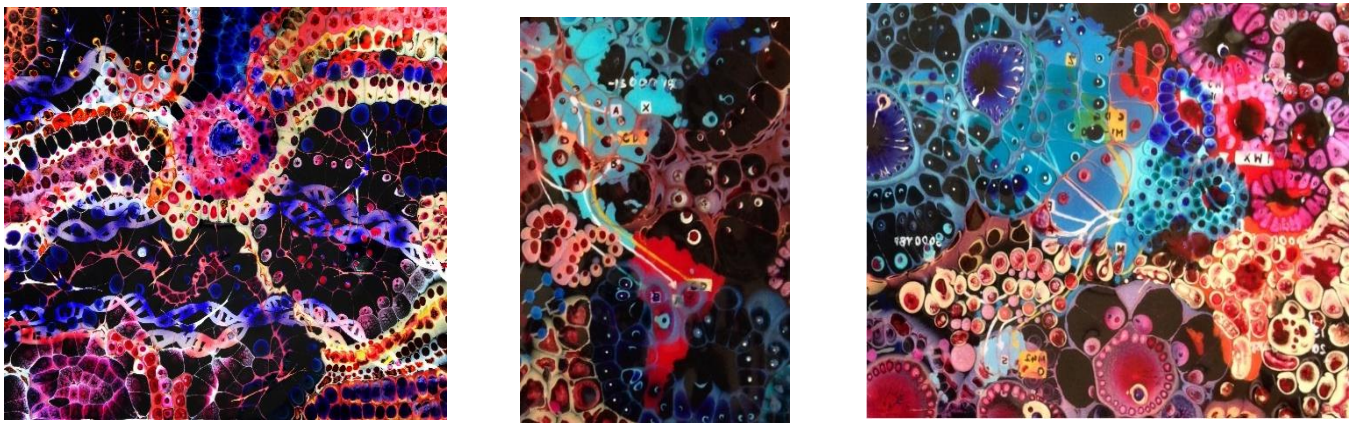
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Uses of the Past (2016 – 2019)

CitiGen: Identity, Citizenship and Nationhood in the Post-Genome Era

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Written by Princess Kunadu



Credit: Micro Chroma series, Kate Grant. Artwork commissioned by the CitiGen project

As public interest in DNA testing continues to grow, questions about ancestry, identity, citizenship, and belonging have moved from academic debate into everyday life. However, genetic information is often oversimplified, creating the risk of complex histories being deliberately misinterpreted to support exclusionary or racist narratives.

Led by Dr Hannes Schroeder at the University of Copenhagen, *CitiGen: Identity, Citizenship and Nationhood in the Post-Genome Era* brought together geneticists, historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists from across Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, and the UK (Professor Matthew Collins, University of York) to address this challenge. By combining scientific evidence with historical and cultural context, the project developed new and innovative ways to bridge the gap between genetics and the humanities.

CitiGen demonstrated that genetics cannot "prove" cultural identity and that genetic data must be understood alongside historical, linguistic, and archaeological evidence. This "biocultural perspective" challenges simplistic narratives about race and provides a more nuanced understanding of diversity and social change.

Beyond academia, CitiGen worked directly with museums, educators, and ancestry-testing companies such as AncestryDNA and LivingDNA to improve public understanding of human diversity and migration. Researchers helped strengthen the scientific process of finding one's ancestry whilst also developing more accurate and inclusive ways to describe ancestral populations. The project created educational resources for primary and secondary schools, helping young people across the country engage critically with questions of ancestry and identity.

To make research accessible to wider audiences, CitiGen developed the [Ancient Genome Atlas](#), a free online platform that continues to allow users to explore more than 5,000 ancient human genomes across time and space. The resource has supported researchers and educators as well as members of the public seeking to understand genetic evidence within its broader historical context.

By promoting evidence-based and inclusive narratives, CitiGen has helped counter the misuse of genetic science in racist, xenophobic, or exclusionary practices. Its influence continues through ongoing partnerships with DNA companies, research collaborations, museum engagement, and the introduction of [the international Archaeomics PhD Summer School](#) in Copenhagen, which continues to train the next generation of researchers, hosting 20 students every year from all over the world.

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Public Spaces: Culture and Integration in Europe (2019-2022)

BESTROM: Beyond Stereotypes: Cultural Exchanges and the Romani Contribution to European Public Spaces

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Written by Princess Kunadu



Credit: German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv), categorized under image ID Bild 183-1992-0918-508.

Led by the Universidad de Sevilla, *BESTROM (Beyond Stereotypes: Cultural Exchanges and the Romani Contribution to European Public Spaces)* brought together academics and non-academics from Spain, Poland, Finland, and the UK to investigate how Romani communities have shaped Europe's public, cultural, political, and economic spaces since the nineteenth century.

A key aim of the project was to improve public understanding of the discrimination and persecution experienced by Sinti and Roma communities whilst highlighting their agency, resilience, and contributions to wider society. BESTROM created publications aimed at both academic and non-academic audiences to bring previously overlooked stories into public view. This included a volume of case studies that can support the inclusion of Romani history and can be used in schools. BESTROM also used theatre to share their findings, collaborating with the University of Bremen to produce a stage production on the policing and harassment of German Sinti and Roma around the turn of the 20th century. This production led to much

conversation, attracting considerable public attention and provoking debate, whilst creating opportunities for regional Sinti organisations to engage directly with wider audiences.

The UK portion of the project, led by Professor Eve Rosenhaft at the University of Liverpool, focused on economic spaces. Advancing knowledge around Romani horse traders and their role in fairs and markets across Britain and Germany, they explored how everyday interactions between Romani and non-Romani communities contributed to the development of local economies and public life. Their study revealed how Romani participation in horse trading influenced urban development in Germany and how Romani families contributed to the growth of tourist economies in places such as Blackpool, where Romani fortune tellers became a recognised part of the tourist experience.

The project challenged long-standing stereotypes by showing that Romani history is not a marginal or separate history, but a key part of European, national, and local histories. BESTROM used a biographical approach, focusing on the life stories, experiences and personal timelines of individuals, to create detailed case studies of trading families and demonstrate how horse markets served as vital spaces where Romani and non-Romani people had mutual respect and engaged on relatively equal terms regarding both economic exchanges and social interactions.

BESTROM's legacy continues through sustained European partnerships and new research investment, including a €600,000 collaborative project funded by AHRC and DFG (The German Research Foundation) on Romani migration between Germany and Britain. The project has been able to make significant changes and political breakthroughs such as the formal launch of the [new standing forum](#) for discussion and policy making on issues affecting the Sinti and Roma communities in Lower Saxony, Germany.

By placing Romani experiences at the centre of European history, this project has helped to improve lives of the underrepresented by creating more inclusive historical narratives and a greater public understanding of Europe's diverse past.

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Public Spaces: Culture and Integration in Europe (2019 – 2022)

Public RENaissance (PURE): Urban Cultures of Public Space between Early Modern Europe and the Present 2019-2022)

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Written by Sammy Morgan



Credit: Public Renaissance: Urban Cultures of Public Space between Early Modern Europe and the Present (Pure) - FBK ISIG, painted by Antonio Lazzarini

Through *[Public RENaissance: Urban Cultures of Public Space between Early Modern Europe and the Present](#)* a team of researchers in Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK examined how modern European cities have been shaped by the habits of ‘city-dwellers’ between 1450 and 1700. The project, led by Professor Fabrizio Nevola at the University of Exeter, used comparative research across Exeter, Deventer, Hamburg, Valencia and Trento to develop the concept of the ‘Public Renaissance’, which aims to shift dominant historical narratives away from an elite and instead demonstrate the importance of ordinary people in shaping the public spaces we continue to enjoy today.

Significantly, this research led to the development of five urban history apps that have proven both commercially successful and incredibly effective in enhancing public understanding of urban history. Now collectively referred to as *[HistoryCity](#)*, the collection of apps combines academic research with digital GPS technology enabling people to embark on immersive ‘time travel’ trails and experience their local areas through the lens of an ordinary 16th century citizen.

The approach has proved highly successful as a form of digital public history leading to partnerships and contracts to develop and adapt the model in various other locations. HistoryCity currently offers 25 free trails in 11 cities and towns across Europe - each built on new partnerships with organisations generated separately to the initial funding grant. In 2025, the National Trust launched its HistoryScapes in collaboration with HistoryCity to provide immersive, virtual historical experiences for visitors. Similar examples across Europe demonstrate HistoryCity's success in establishing commercial partnerships and contracts.

The groundbreaking nature of HistoryCity's ability to combine deep cultural research with cutting edge technology is reflected by the app being awarded both the Heritage in Motion international prize for virtual and augmented reality and the Best in Heritage award. These prominent European initiatives celebrate excellence and innovation in museums, cultural heritage, and digital storytelling.

Through its European collaboration, historical scholarship and innovative digital public engagement, PURE has enabled contemporary individuals to appreciate the histories of place. PURE's legacy continues through the expansion of the HistoryCity model into new cities and heritage settings.

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Public Spaces: Culture and Integration in Europe (2019 – 2022)

En/counter/points: (re)negotiating belonging through culture and contact in public space and place (2019-2022)

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Written by Sammy Morgan



Credit: en/counter/points: (re)negotiating belonging through culture and contact in public space and place

Across Europe, rising political and social polarisation has intensified debates about where people feel they belong, and how diverse communities can coexist within shared spaces. Belonging, however, is not simply a matter of identity but largely shaped through people's connections to communities, places and histories. Understanding how these connections are formed and challenged is increasingly important for cultural organisations, communities and policy makers seeking to build more inclusive societies during a time of European migration.

In 2019, UK based researchers led by Professor Susannah Eckersley at Newcastle University, in collaboration with Poland, Germany and the Netherlands, investigated how belonging is understood and shaped. *En/counter/points: (re)negotiating belonging through culture and contact in public space and place* used comprehensive analysis of case studies, including museums, religious centres and community spaces to establish that more inclusive forms of belonging critically depend on constructive collaboration between communities, cultural organisations and public institutions. This knowledge underpinned two policy briefs and a range of practical resources produced by the team and currently used to support inclusive community practices across Europe.

Most notably, the project produced a [Toolkit on Belonging for Museum Professionals](#), which has been adopted by major institutions including Manchester Museum, Sunderland Museum and Vienna's Volkskundemuseum, helping embed inclusive approaches into exhibition development and public engagement. The toolkit translated the research findings into practical guidance that museum professionals could apply to their own institutional contexts, supporting them to reflect on whose histories and identities are represented, how communities are involved in decision-making, and how exhibitions and engagement activities can create more inclusive spaces of belonging. Its adoption by these institutions demonstrates a direct pathway from the research to changes in professional practice, enabling museums to strengthen relationships with diverse communities and incorporate more participatory approaches into their work.

The research also informed guidance for urban planners, policy makers and designers, providing evidence-based approaches to the regeneration of neglected public spaces that support community participation and social inclusion. The guidance highlighted the importance of involving local communities in shaping the spaces in which they live, recognising that successful regeneration is not only a physical process but also one through which people develop connections to place and a sense of ownership. By translating the research evidence into practical recommendations for planners and designers, the project provided a framework for developing public spaces that are more responsive to diverse communities and that can strengthen social connections, participation and belonging. This has extended the impact of the research beyond cultural institutions into wider debates about inclusive urban development and the role of public space in socially cohesive communities.

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