A journey through the wormhole:

a framework to streamline the integration of artistic practices in policy and innovation

We present a framework of which we are convinced that it can increase the innovation power that is needed to tackle the fundamental challenges companies, policy makers and our society in general are faced with. It is inspired by the Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) of NASA and, in the same way that the TRL framework has widely influenced the sector of technology R&D and startups, this framework can impact the level at which we engage with cultural and creative industries in policy and innovation. We developed the framework in the context of the Interreg RegionArts project (2018-2021),through interaction with a variety of local stakeholders from Eindhoven (NL). In a partnership, Baltan Laboratories and Arteconomy now further disseminate, promote and develop it; through this open-source manual and with supporting lectures, workshops and tailor-made services.

Who can benefit from this tool?

- **Artists:** To map their portfolio and to guide their dialogue with external people and organizations, enabling them to articulate which part of their artistic practice can be of value for policy makers and/or in innovation contexts. The framework helps to describe in which stage of development their project currently is, and which steps are needed to further develop it.
- **Innovators (public and private):** To open their horizon to more radical and impactful insights and approaches for sustainable policies and innovation. Be it a company on the lookout for purposeful product or service innovation or a public body faced with a complex policy challenge.
- **Policy makers and ecosystem builders:** To map the support structure that is present in their cultural, creative and innovation ecosystems (incubators, accelerators, grants, funds, investment opportunities…). With the aim to identify the potential gaps and strengthen the transversal synergies and cohesion.
- **Support and intermediary actors in the ecosystem:** To position themselves in the landscape and define a clear strategy on who they want to support and in which stages of development.

The problem: we fail to innovate at the fundamental level that is needed

In our attempts to find solutions for complex problems, we find ourselves stuck in the systems and mindset that have brought us prosperity during the past centuries, but now have reached their limits. We keep falling back on existing methods, hoping that at some point they will give us radically new insights. Yet, as we all know from the famous quote: "If you always do what you've always done, you will always get what you've always gotten."

As a result, while there is a lot of ambition and willingness to change, we fail to obtain effective results. There is an increasing awareness that crossovers with cultural and creative industries are an essential way out of this impasse we find ourselves in. However, we lack the instruments to systematically and effectively make this happen.

The opportunity: by streamlining synergies with artists and conceptual design, we can boost fundamental innovation and change

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The inspiration: NASA and the technology sector have proven the value of having a common framework

In the 1970s, NASA introduced the framework of Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) to have a more objective discussion with their suppliers and subcontractors about the development stage of the technologies and devices that were needed for space missions. Since they have no room for error, it is vital to have a common understanding of the readiness level at which these technologies are.

Since its inception, the TRL framework has been widely adopted by the world of technology R&D and (tech) startups. And this to facilitate the discussions between development partners or with investors or support and intermediary actors.

For those not familiar with these concepts, please check out the following references:

- [Technology readiness level - Wikipedia](#)
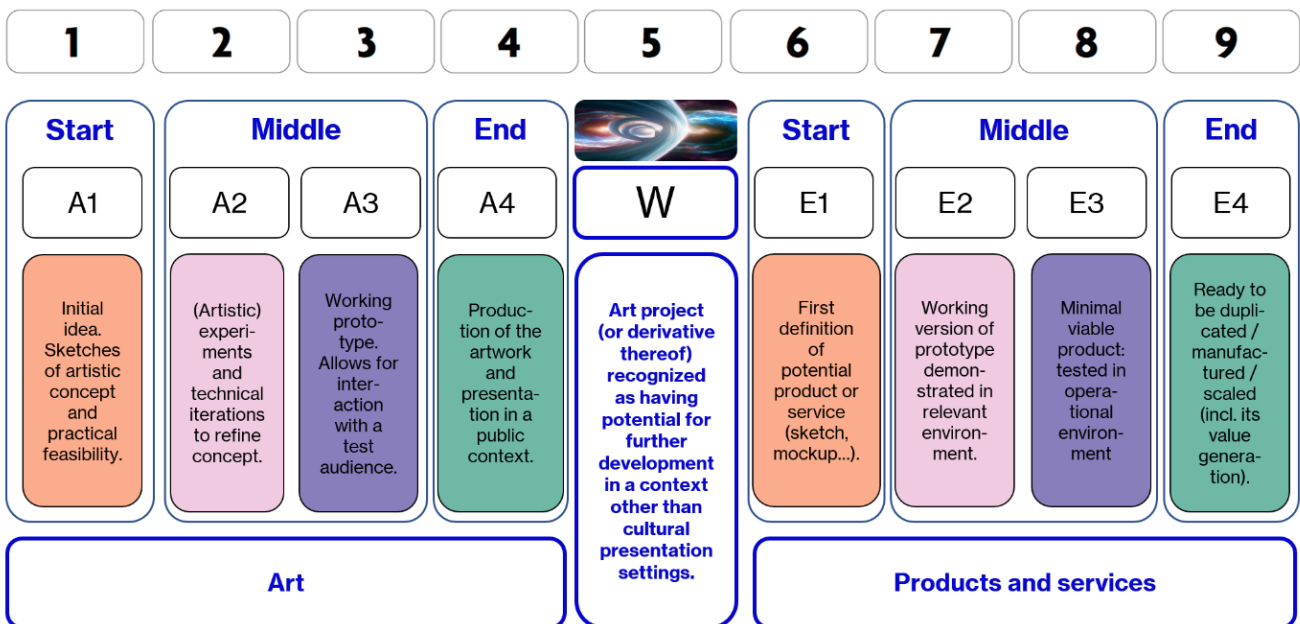- [Usage Areas of Technology Readiness Levels (TRL)](#)

The tool: a framework to streamline the integration of artistic practices in policy and innovation

In the framework, we integrate the development of artworks on the left and the development of products and services on the right side of 'the wormhole'. The wormhole is the moment (or event) at which someone recognizes that an artwork (under development) or derivative thereof can have value outside of the context of cultural presentation and could be turned into a reproducible product or service.

Note that:

- We stick to the 9-step division that is also present in the original TRL framework.
- The 'mechanics' behind the development of art and that of products or services is very similar (4 main stages), even if their goals, drivers, ideologies and intentions are often very different.
- The four stages of development that we define are a compressed form of the more granular 9 stages of development in the original TRL framework. In our context, we felt that his 'rougher' division was sufficient.
- While the framework is horizontal and seems 'linear', the actual developments and journey from idea to outcome are typically iterative and move up and down (or multiple times) through the various stages of development.
- In the spirit of wormholes and parallel universes, a project can exist simultaneously on both sides of the wormhole.

Common framework for artistic & product development

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Start	**Middle**		**End**		**Start**	**Middle**		**End**
A1	A2	A3	A4	W	E1	E2	E3	E4
Initial idea. Sketches of artistic concept and practical feasibility.	(Artistic) experiments and technical iterations to refine concept.	Working prototype. Allows for interaction with a test audience.	Production of the artwork and presentation in a public context.	**Art project (or derivative thereof) recognized as having potential for further development in a context other than cultural presentation settings.**	First definition of potential product or service (sketch, mockup...).	Working version of prototype demonstrated in relevant environment.	Minimal viable product: tested in operational environment	Ready to be duplicated / manufactured / scaled (incl. its value generation).
Art					**Products and services**			

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OK. And now?

For more explanation and examples, we kindly refer to a recorded online presentation that we have given about this framework:

- Oct 2022 - European Week of Regions and Cities

If you see value in this framework, we encourage you to start using it. Whereby we would be very grateful if you would share your experiences with us so we can track the impact that this tool creates and improve it based on our and your findings.

Also, if you have questions, suggestions or need support in the implementation of this tool, do not hesitate to reach out. We for example have a workshop (a role-playing board game) that creates additional insights, can be invited to give a lecture and are open to discuss any tailored services related to this tool in your specific context.

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