

**POLICY PAPER
ON DATA-DRIVEN
AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT
IN THE CULTURAL AND
CREATIVE SECTORS
IN EUROPE**

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy paper responds to the Council of the European Union's call to strengthen the cultural and creative sectors (CCS) through data-driven audience development (DDAD). It positions **DDAD as a strategic lever for a resilient, inclusive and future-proof European cultural ecosystem**, fully aligned with the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026 and the Culture Compass for Europe.

DDAD refers to the ethical, systematic collection and use of audience data to improve cultural participation, accessibility and engagement. By moving beyond intuition-driven approaches, cultural organisations gain deeper insight into who participates, who is excluded, how engagement evolves and how cultural experiences can be shaped to be more relevant, inclusive and impactful. At EU level, DDAD underpins evidence-based policymaking, strengthens cultural rights and diversity, and supports democratic resilience in a rapidly digitalising environment.

Achieving this vision requires **shared responsibility between the European Union and its Member States**. The EU are recommended to provide the necessary strategic direction, to foster common standards, to invest in interoperable infrastructure and to facilitate cross-border coordination. Member States, in turn, are recommended to ensure national implementation, to strengthen institutional capacity and to adapt European guidelines to diverse cultural ecosystems. Only through such coordinated, multilevel action can Europe build a coherent, trustworthy and sustainable cultural data infrastructure.

To support this transformation, the paper charts a clear path for this crucial transformation. It does so by outlining **four interconnected pillars** that call for joint action by the EU and its Member States, each accompanied by specific **recommendations** addressed to the European Commission and the Member States.

1. Strengthen data literacy across the CCS

Data literacy is the foundation of DDAD. Cultural professionals require not only technical skills to collect and interpret data, but also regulatory awareness (GDPR, AI Act, Data Act), ethical competence and strategic insight. Enhanced data literacy enables organisations to design user-centred services, make informed decisions, and apply data in ways that support inclusion and public trust.

The EU is recommended to structure learning ecosystems and cross-border knowledge networks, while Member States embed data literacy in national training frameworks and support uptake in diverse cultural environments.

2. Develop and implement standardised audience metrics

Current audience data practices across Europe vary widely, limiting comparability, collaboration and policy evaluation. Standardised metrics—covering key data sources such as ticketing, surveys, socio-demographic and socio-economic information and digital engagement—create a shared language that supports both institutional benchmarking and EU-level policy insight.

The EU is responsible for defining standards and ensuring interoperability, while Member States align national systems accordingly, support implementation and secure that institutions of all sizes can participate effectively.

3. Enable practical tools for data-driven engagement

Data is meaningful only when organisations can convert it into action. Practical, interoperable tools—ranging from dashboards and segmentation models to ethical AI-based recommendation systems—enable cultural institutions to tailor programmes, improve accessibility, identify participation gaps and measure impact.

The EU should invest in open, scalable and interoperable infrastructures; Member States must support adoption by providing technical assistance, training and financial access. This ensures that institutions, regardless of scale, can benefit from emerging technologies.

4. Establish a governance framework for interoperability and strategic alignment

Europe’s cultural data ecosystem is rich but fragmented. A shared governance framework is needed to align bottom up innovation, national strategies and EU-level digital initiatives. Such a framework defines roles, responsibilities and ethical safeguards, ensures interoperability across data spaces and prevents duplication of efforts and investments.

The EU provides longterm governance principles and coordination mechanisms; Member States integrate these into national ecosystems and engage cultural and creative organisations to ensure inclusivity and sustainable implementation.

To operationalise these pillars, the paper outlines a **phased approach**:

- Short term: strengthen capacity and launch voluntary pilots using existing EU tools and programmes.
- Medium term: introduce harmonised cultural engagement metrics¹, scale practical data tools and deepen cross-border cooperation.
- Long term: build a connected European governance model linking grassroots innovation, national initiatives and EU-level digital strategies.

A coordinated European–national effort across these four pillars will equip Europe’s cultural and creative sectors with the skills, tools, infrastructure and governance structures needed to thrive in a digital age—ensuring that culture remains a public good, accessible to all, and a cornerstone of European democracy.

2. CONTEXT

A priority of the Belgian EU-presidency during the first half of 2024 was the support and stimulation of the digital transformation of the cultural and creative sectors (CCS). This led to the Council Conclusions on empowering the cultural and creative sectors through data-driven audience development of May 31st, expressing the need for a shared framework for pooling efforts and strengthening collaboration on a larger scale. European collaboration could offer numerous benefits, such as the ability to exchange data from member states and cultural organisations, fostering shared insights.

¹ Throughout this document, the term “cultural engagement metrics” is preferred over “audience metrics” because the scope of analysis extends well beyond traditional audiences. Cultural institutions engage with a wide spectrum of people—on-site visitors, participants in educational, outreach, and digital programmes, as well as individuals who do not engage at all. Using “cultural engagement metrics” better reflects this full continuum of quantitative and qualitative data and avoids the narrow implication that only audiences are considered.

During the Belgian EU-presidency, the Ghent Manifesto² was launched as a call to action to raise a wider awareness on the topic and support the operationalisation of the council conclusions. With a coalition of the willing, the Flemish Department of Culture launched a 'European Policy Forum on Data-Driven Audience Development' investigating the translation of these Council Conclusions into concrete topics and action domains.³ This policy forum⁴ met three times during the period 2024-2025 and was the main driver in preparing this policy paper.

3. WHY IS DATA-DRIVEN AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT (DDAD) IMPORTANT?

3.1. WHAT IS DATA-DRIVEN AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT IN THE CCS?

Data-driven audience development is the systematic collection, analysis and ethical use of audience data to strengthen engagement, accessibility and inclusion across the Cultural and Creative Sectors. It enables cultural and creative organisations to move beyond intuition-based decision-making by using evidence-based insights to understand who participates, where gaps exist and how cultural experiences can be adapted to become more relevant and impactful.

DDAD applies to both physical and digital forms of cultural engagement and participation, reflecting the growing importance of hybrid and digital cultural experiences.

3.1.1. CORE COMPONENTS OF DDAD

- Systematic data collection

Organisations gather both quantitative and qualitative data on the people they engage with - ranging from on-site audiences to participants in educational programmes, outreach initiatives and digital activities. This includes information on demographics, preferences, behaviours and participation patterns, sourced from ticketing systems, web analytics, digital platforms, surveys, CRM systems and social-media insights. They often complement these internal datasets with publicly accessible statistics from sources such as Eurostat, national statistical offices, and international cultural participation surveys like the Eurobarometer.

- Analysis and interpretation

Statistical tools, segmentation models⁵ and predictive analytics are used to identify trends, map visitor journeys, uncover participation barriers and forecast demand. These insights help institutions understand current and potential audiences.

² The Ghent Manifesto was presented at the 'Empowering the Cultural and Creative Sectors in Data-Driven Audience Development'-Event in Ghent; <https://www.vlaanderen.be/cjm/en/ghent-manifesto>

³ The policy forum unites over 40 policy and practitioner experts from 17 different member states.

⁴ <https://www.publiq.be/en/european-policy-forum>

⁵ Segmentation models developed like Cultureel Doelgroepenmodel by Rotterdam Festivals in The Netherlands segment the total population into 13 cultural segments with specific cultural preferences.

- Strategic application

Audience data informs targeted marketing strategies, personalised communication, inclusive programming, educational formats, resource allocation, pricing strategies, innovation and impact measurement. DDAD supports both operational decision-making and long-term strategic development.

3.1.2. WHO BENEFITS FROM DDAD?

DDAD is relevant across all parts of the CCS, including:

- Public institutions: museums, libraries and archives.
- Performing arts organisations: theatres, dance companies and music ensembles.
- Heritage bodies: managing monuments and sites.
- Media and publishing houses.
- Creative industries: design, fashion, film and video games.

Despite differences in scale, context and digital maturity, all subsectors benefit from DDAD. It supports innovation, helps reach underserved population groups, improves accessibility and strengthens engagement. It also stimulates collaboration with related policy domains such as media, cultural heritage, tourism, urban and community development, as well as health, wellbeing and social cohesion. The example below illustrates how these benefits extend to areas like tourism and city marketing.

3.1.3. HOW DDAD WORKS IN PRACTISE?

To illustrate the potential of data-driven approaches, consider the case of a large, multi-day city festival in a small urban environment.

Challenges without DDAD

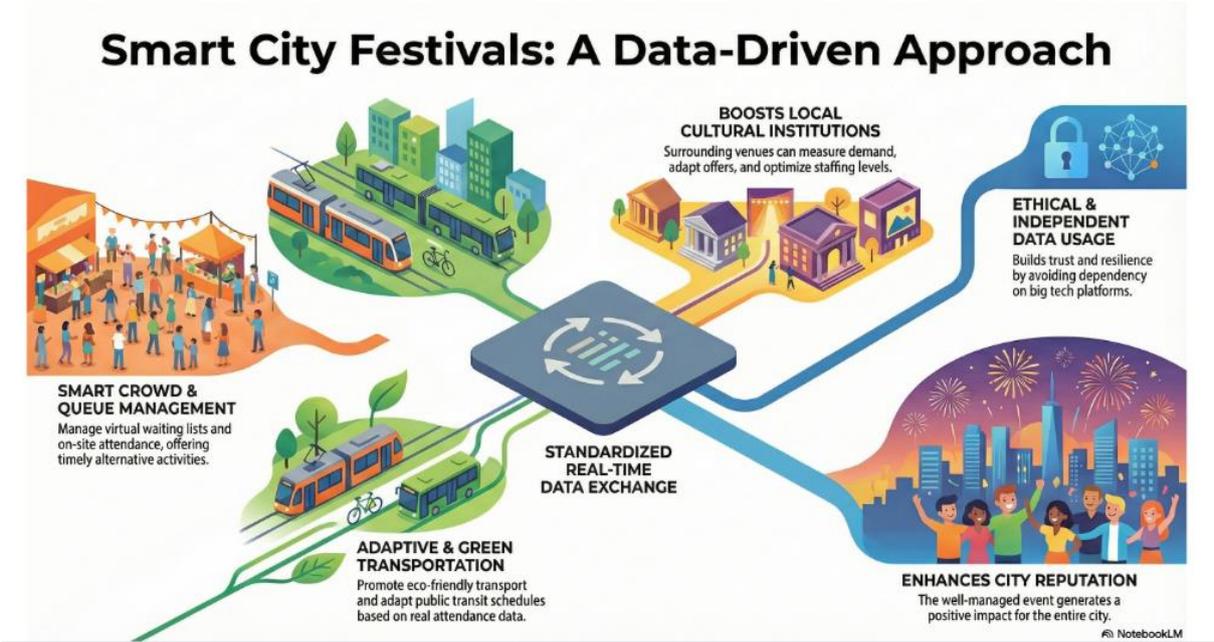
High visitor numbers strain infrastructure: long queues, overcrowding, insufficient staffing, inefficient ticketing and environmental pressure on public space. Without real-time data exchange, institutions cannot adjust their offer or guide visitor flows, resulting in spillover effects and diminished visitor experiences.

A data-driven solution

A suite of interoperable applications—built around standardised, real-time data exchange between cultural institutions, transport providers and accommodation services—transforms the festival experience. This ecosystem enables:

- Dynamic attendance measurement to adjust public transport schedules and target communications toward city-pass holders.
- Virtual queues and waiting-list management, offering alternative cultural activities when venues reach capacity.
- Personalised visitor experiences, informed by audience segmentation models that identify underserved groups and tailor recommendations.
- Sustainable mobility and lodging options, presented at the right moment to reduce congestion and align with environmental goals.
- Operational readiness, ensuring institutions can allocate staff, manage visitor flows and adapt programming based on real-time demand.

This approach creates a data-informed cultural ecosystem in which festivals become safer, more inclusive and more efficient—while prioritising ethical data use, transparency and reduced reliance on large commercial platforms.



3.1.4. BENEFITS OF DDAD

For the Cultural and Creative Sector (CCS)

Leveraging real-time data enables institutions to understand their target groups preferences, adapting offers, optimize staffing and mitigate spillover effects. At the same time, DDAD drives digital transformation, strengthens data literacy and enhances digital autonomy through EU-compliant tools, reducing reliance on global tech giants and safeguarding cultural data sovereignty.

Data-driven engagement across on-site, outreach and digital channels enables all subsectors of the CCS to respond to audience needs in a relevant, effective, and innovative way, while also enhancing accessibility, broadening participation, and strengthening engagement.

Different subsectors may sometimes require a tailored methodological approach, and the most suitable method for each institution depends on its current context and the specific research questions guiding the data analysis. Nevertheless, the following ways of collecting a wide range of data are broadly applicable and beneficial across all sectors.

- Broadening participation and expanding access

Core actions

- Collect socio-demographic, socio-economic and behavioral data - such as age, origin, visit frequency, interests - to identify underrepresented groups.
- Analyze ticketing data and social media trends to uncover gaps in audience demographics and preferences and use these insights to track borrowing patterns, event attendance, and digital resource engagement to understand participants perspectives.
- Use insights to design multilingual tours, sensory-friendly exhibitions, and thematic experiences tailored to diverse population groups.

- Offer curated collections, multilingual resources and inclusive programming as well as educational formats for underrepresented groups.
- Collaborate with local organizations - such as community groups, schools, social services and health or youth organisations - to co-create events that resonate with underserved communities.

Impact

- Strengthens equitable participation and engagement, accessibility and cultural inclusion by aligning offerings with the factors shaping and fostering engagement.
- Deepening engagement and building loyalty

Core actions

- Implement dynamic ticketing and membership models based on visitor patterns to encourage repeat visits.
- Develop segmented marketing campaigns for different cultural and linguistic groups using personalized content.
- Optimize the visitor journey across digital and physical touchpoints to foster long-term relationships.

Impact

- Increases loyalty and repeat engagement through tailored, data-informed experiences.
- Strengthening cultural relevance and innovation

Core actions

- Use insights on different population groups to adapt editorial strategies, design trends, and media formats for different segments.
- Develop interactive and immersive experiences (AR/VR exhibitions, gamified learning) informed by audience data.
- Prototype new formats and experiment with emerging technologies to stay ahead of cultural shifts.

Impact

- Ensures cultural products remain relevant, competitive, and creatively innovative.

For CultureTech

Creative start-ups leverage analytics on international trends and consumer behaviour to shape products⁶ for global markets, optimize pricing and deploy targeted campaigns. This accelerates market expansion, creates new jobs and opens sustainable revenue streams - reinforcing Europe's tech resilience and competitiveness.

For Member States

Transparent governance relies on actionable insights to measure cultural participation and policy impact. Benchmarking supports evaluation of cultural strategies over time and links engagement to broader societal goals like economic resilience and social cohesion and inclusion. Shared, sovereign digital infrastructure ensures cost-efficiency and equal access for all institutions.

⁶Building bridges between culturetech and cultural institutions;
<https://www.culturesuite.co/resources/articles/building-bridges-culturetech-and-cultural-institutions-unite-at-eada-summit>

For European citizens

Inclusive, diverse cultural experiences foster shared belonging, data-driven solutions improve accessibility through adapted offerings, reduced queues, better transport options and eco-conscious choices accelerate more serendipitous cultural encounters, creating more spontaneous cultural encounters and broadening cultural horizons.

3.2. WHY DOES IT MATTER FOR EUROPE?

Having outlined how a diverse set of stakeholders benefits from DDAD, the next step is to understand why this ecosystem matters at EU level. For the Union, the CCS are not only cultural actors but essential pillars for safeguarding core values and advancing key policy objectives. Culture is a fundamental right,⁷ explicitly recognized by the EU⁸ and respect for cultural diversity is a cornerstone of the EU.⁹ Ensuring resilient and inclusive CCS is essential to safeguarding these core values.

Evidence consistently shows that cultural participation not only generates economic value¹⁰ but also enhances mental health, well-being and strengthens democratic values.¹¹ As a result, the CCS function as a strategic asset for the Union,¹² contributing directly to its core policy objectives:

- Economic policy: the CCS constitute an economic force, generating jobs and value.¹³
- Socio-cultural policy: the CCS foster inclusive participation and cultural diversity, ensuring all citizens can access cultural life. Cultural spaces also enable dialogue on shared European values while celebrating diversity,¹⁴ which is crucial in sustaining a European democracy.¹⁵
- External policy: through international cultural relations the CCS can leverage the EU's rich cultural diversity as a strategic asset to strengthen external action.¹⁶

However, the CCS operate in a rapidly changing technological environment that is reshaping how culture is created, accessed and governed. Developments in artificial intelligence and digital

⁷ Right to participate in cultural life (Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>; Article 15 International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [ch_iv_03.pdf](#)).

⁸ The EU charter of Fundamental Rights recognizes the Freedom of the arts and sciences (article 13) and respect for cultural diversity (article 21); also see article 2 TEU.

⁹ See article 2 and 3 TEU.

¹⁰ CCIs represents 3.95% of EU value added and employs around 8 million people: https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/cultural-and-creative-industries_en

¹¹ Culture and democracy, the evidence <https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-06/culture%20and%20democracy%20the%20evidence-NC0822225ENN.pdf>

¹² The strategic importance of CCS is firmly anchored in EU primary law. Article 167 TFEU tasks the EU with supporting the cultural development of the Member States, promoting their cultural diversity, and highlighting Europe's shared cultural heritage.

¹³ In addition to Article 167 TFEU, which provides the Union with a mandate to support the CCS, these sectors are also treated as part of the EU's broader industrial ecosystems, as for example reflected in the EU Industrial Strategy developed under Article 173 TFEU (see EUR-Lex - 52021DC0350 - EN - EUR-Lex).

¹⁴ Beyond Article 167(1)-(2) TFEU, which commits the Union to promoting cultural diversity, safeguarding cultural heritage and supporting access to culture, the EU's status as a Party to the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions further reinforces the recognition of the Cultural and Creative Sectors as contributors to social cohesion, inclusive participation and societal resilience ([2005 Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expressions | Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#)).

¹⁵ See "Culture and democracy, the evidence" (Culture and democracy, the evidence - Publications Office of the EU).

¹⁶ Article 167(3) TFEU determines that the EU shall foster external cooperation in the sphere of culture.

technologies introduce both opportunities and vulnerabilities for the sector.¹⁷ In response, the EU has emphasized the importance of digital sovereignty by investing in independent infrastructures and technologies that safeguard public and cultural interests and ensure that technological change reinforces, rather than undermines, CCS contributions to the Union's broader objectives.

Against this backdrop, a coordinated approach to DDAD across Member States emerges as a prime example of how to align technological innovation with EU values and priorities.

DDAD enhances the economic, socio-cultural and external policy value of the CCS in three key ways:

- Economic policy: by providing insights into cultural market dynamics, DDAD can be used to boost competitiveness, drive innovation and support fair employment and mobility in the CCS.
- Socio-cultural policy: by identifying demographic participation patterns and barriers, DDAD enables an evidence-based approach to cultural policies aimed at fostering social inclusion, diversity and democratic dialogue, as well as policies aimed at facilitating cross-border cultural events.
- External policy: by providing comparable cross country audience insights, DDAD informs more targeted cultural diplomacy, which helps strengthen the EU's international cultural relations and reinforces its global role as a promoter of cultural rights, diversity and democratic values.

The bottom line is: without robust audience data, CCS policy goals with regard to prosperity, social resilience and external relations remain aspirational. European cooperation in the field of DDAD makes these ambitions concrete, enabling better decisions, efficient services and richer cultural experiences for citizens. Crucially, it also reaffirms the public and cultural value of data, ensuring that culture remains a shared public good rather than a commercial commodity.

This policy paper is fully aligned with the EU's current cultural policy framework. First, the coordinated approach to DDAD responds directly to the European Council's call to strengthen the Cultural and Creative Sectors through data-driven audience development, as outlined in the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026 and the Council Conclusions of May 2024. These instruments emphasize the need for resilience, inclusivity and innovation in cultural ecosystems, objectives that depend on understanding and engaging diverse audiences effectively.

Second, EU coordination with regard to DDAD is fully aligned with the recently published Culture Compass for Europe.¹⁸ Through this framework, the European Commission offers a structured approach to strengthening the cultural ecosystem, including its digital transformation. The Culture Compass identifies a set of interconnected challenges facing the CCS and foresees periodic *State of Culture in the EU* reports, supported by the establishment of a EU cultural data hub for collecting and analysing cultural data. DDAD offers exactly the type of high-quality, interoperable data required for the purpose. By mapping participation patterns, barriers to access, consumption behaviours, and sector-specific inequalities across the CCS, DDAD provides actionable insights that feed targeted regulation, funding priorities and long-term strategic planning.

The knowledge generated through DDAD gives the CCS the insights and tools they need to broaden participation, strengthen cultural diversity and support sustainable growth, which directly contributes to the four strategic objectives of the Culture Compass: fostering diverse programming and inclusive participation; empowering cultural professionals through better data and digital skills;

¹⁷ See e.g. [Creatives unite | Ethical Shift: European Culture Demands Digital Independence](#); Topic 4: Europe's Strategic Cultural Autonomy as a global signature: Creative Autonomy as Smart Power ([DOC_White-Paper_SCECE2025_20250903.pdf](#)).

¹⁸ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-compass>

using digital technologies and AI to enhance competitiveness and regional development; and improving international cultural relations through stronger, evidence-based cultural diplomacy.

In doing so, coordinated DDAD would enable the EU to leverage technological opportunities in support of its cultural priorities, fully in line with the Union's broader policy frameworks.

4. WHAT ARE THE CURRENT INITIATIVES?

4.1. BOTTOM-UP APPROACHES

Across Europe, a growing number of grassroots initiatives are using audience data to strengthen cultural engagement. These efforts often originate from cultural institutions, regional and national networks and public agencies aiming to understand and broaden participation. These initiatives emphasize practical tools such as audience segmentation, behavioral analysis and accessibility improvements.

However, these initiatives tend to be fragmented, with diverse methodologies and limited interoperability.

One notable attempt to organize these efforts is the European Arts & Culture Data Alliance (EADA)¹⁹. Its mission is to connect stakeholders and share best practices, creating a collaborative framework for audience development. Despite its potential, EADA currently faces significant challenges: coverage across member states is uneven and representation of cultural disciplines remains incomplete. This limits its ability to serve as a truly pan-European platform for coordinated action.

For detailed descriptions of these initiatives, please refer to the annex.

4.2. TOP-DOWN APPROACHES

At the European level, the data ecosystem is increasingly shaped by data spaces - large-scale infrastructures designed to enable secure and interoperable data²⁰ exchange across sectors. During the policy forum, three key data spaces were highlighted:

- Cultural Heritage Data Space: Facilitates sharing and reuse of digitized cultural content among institutions and platforms.
- Tourism Data Space: Supports data-driven strategies for sustainable tourism and visitor engagement.
- Media Data Space: Focuses on enabling innovation and collaboration within the media ecosystem.

While these initiatives mark a significant step toward a unified digital infrastructure, they are still in early stages. Many cultural domains and smaller organizations remain outside these frameworks, creating a disconnect between ambitious European strategies and local realities.

¹⁹ European Arts & Culture Data Alliance; <http://www.audience-data.org>

²⁰ Interoperable Europe: Core Vocabularies: e.a. Core Public Event Vocabulary <https://semiceu.github.io/Core-Public-Event-Vocabulary/releases/1.1.0/>

4.3. THE NEED FOR SYNERGY

There is a clear gap between bottom-up and top-down approaches. Local and national initiatives are practical and context-sensitive but lack scale and interoperability, while European-level data spaces offer structural solutions but remain abstract and incomplete for many stakeholders. Bridging this gap requires synergy –a coordinated effort to align grassroots practices with European frameworks, ensuring inclusivity, coverage and shared.

To achieve meaningful synergy, clear roles and responsibilities must be defined. European institutions should provide overarching guidelines and technical standards for interoperability, while national and regional agencies should adapt these frameworks to local contexts and ensure alignment with cultural policies. Cultural institutions are expected to implement these standards in practice, share data responsibly and contribute feedback for continuous improvement. Additionally, a central coordination mechanism—such as a joint governance body or platform—should be established to monitor progress, prevent duplication of efforts and maintain transparency. This structured approach will ensure clarity, inclusivity and efficient collaboration across all levels.

5. WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

5.1. IDENTIFICATION AND IMPACT OF CHALLENGES

To effectively address the real-world challenges faced by institutions driving cultural, social and digital innovation across Europe, it is essential to build on the momentum of grassroots collaboration. The founding of the EADA (European Arts & Culture Data Alliance)²¹ in 2022 marked a pivotal step toward unifying efforts across European cultural institutions. Moving forward, a coordinated strategy should focus on strengthening three foundational pillars - data literacy, data collection & interoperability and data applications- in order to enable shared knowledge, scalable best practices and aligned opportunities.

5.1.1. DATA LITERACY

To unlock the full potential of audience data in the cultural and creative sectors, the EU must address the critical gap in skills and regulatory awareness through targeted education and training.

Many cultural institutions and policymakers lack the foundational knowledge needed to collect, analyse and apply audience data effectively. Educational programmes should be designed to reflect the diversity of institutions across subsectors, building data literacy while aligning with evolving European regulations, particularly the AI Act and the Data Act. These frameworks emphasise ethical, transparent and rights-based data practices, which are essential for maintaining public trust and accountability.

Training must go beyond technical instruction to empower institutions and policymakers to make evidence-based decisions, develop user-oriented services and improve cultural experiences. Without this investment, the sector risks continued fragmentation, regulatory non-compliance and missed opportunities to measure impact, enhance inclusion and strengthen cultural participation across Europe.

²¹ <http://www.audience-data.org>

5.1.2. STANDARDISED CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT METRICS

To work with audience data requires the collection, processing (filter, aggregate, ...) and standardisation of data to analyse, benchmark and use data. This process must be carried out in alignment with key European regulatory frameworks. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) ensures that personal data is handled lawfully, transparently and with respect for individual rights, particularly when audience data includes identifiable information. The Data Governance Act and Data Act further promote secure and fair data sharing, encouraging interoperability and access while safeguarding sensitive information.

At present, surveys remain the predominant method for collecting insights and participation metrics across the cultural and creative sectors. While valuable, these methods are often resource-intensive—both financially and scientifically—and offer limited scalability or real-time responsiveness.

To move beyond these constraints, there is a growing need to develop robust, interoperable data infrastructures embedded within digital platforms and tools. These systems must be designed in alignment with European public values and regulatory frameworks.

To improve analytical value, there is a growing emphasis on developing coherent, standardised cultural engagement metrics that can be applied consistently across institutions and Member States. Such metrics should support comparability, benchmarking, long-term trend analysis and policy evaluation, while maintaining alignment with European public values and regulatory requirements.

In the absence of a shared metric framework, existing efforts remain fragmented. This leads to inconsistent data collection practices, reduced comparability, and limited opportunities for coordinated research or cross-border analysis. Establishing a common set of audience metrics would strengthen collaboration, support evidence-based decision-making, and enable a more integrated understanding of cultural participation across Europe.

5.1.3. TOOLS AND APPLICATIONS

Audience data holds significant potential for the cultural and creative sectors, enabling institutions to better understand their existing audiences and identify pathways to engage new ones. To translate this potential into practice, cultural actors require hands-on tools that provide actionable insights for audience engagement, direct marketing and programming. These tools must be supported by underlying interoperable data infrastructures.

Currently, a wide range of initiatives explore segmentation models, data visualisation techniques and technical infrastructures. However, these efforts remain largely disconnected, lacking a unified strategy to embed them within a sustainable digital ecosystem for the CCS. Without a collective approach, these practices struggle to generate measurable impact, inhibit benchmarking across regions and limit the ability to enhance cultural participation at a European scale.

The challenge becomes even more pressing with the increasing use of artificial intelligence to interpret and act on audience data. The forthcoming AI Act introduces critical obligations around transparency, risk classification and human oversight—particularly relevant for AI-driven recommendation systems and audience profiling tools. Failure to address this challenge risks non-compliance with EU regulations and undermines public trust in cultural data practices.

If not properly taken up, this fragmented landscape will continue to dilute the effectiveness of cultural engagement data strategies. Without shared, sustainable and interoperable data infrastructures, institutions lack the foundations needed to make evidence-based decisions, measure impact, or align with European values on ethics, inclusion and digital sovereignty.

5.2. INTERDEPENDENCIES ACROSS KEY CHALLENGES UNDERSCORE THE NEED FOR A COHERENT AND COORDINATED APPROACH

The three challenges outlined above are deeply interconnected, underscoring the need for a strategic framework that ensures coherence and coordination. Their interdependencies demand more than isolated solutions—they require an integrated approach that aligns efforts across domains:

- Data literacy equips institutions with the skills and awareness required to use audience data responsibly, forming the foundation for ethical and effective data use.
- Standardised cultural engagement metrics establish the shared structures needed to collect, organise and share data securely and consistently, ensuring usability across institutions and borders.
- Data tools and applications transform data into actionable insights that support audience engagement and policy development. Yet their effectiveness depends on being embedded within interoperable infrastructure.

Moreover, the fragmentation between national and European-level initiatives (see '4. What are the current Initiatives') reinforces the urgency of establishing a common framework and shared governance model. Such governance must ensure ethical oversight, regulatory alignment and inclusive participation –especially for smaller institutions– while fostering trust among stakeholders. Without this alignment, efforts risk remaining siloed, limiting their impact, scalability and ability to uphold European values on ethics, inclusion and digital sovereignty.

6. WHAT ARE THE RECOMMENDATIONS?

6.1. PILLAR 1: STRENGTHEN DATA LITERACY ACROSS THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTORS

6.1.1. CONTEXT

Audience data is central to designing user-oriented cultural services and making evidence-based decisions. However, most cultural institutions lack the capacity to navigate complex data governance requirements. Research indicates that 89% of cultural leaders do not feel capable of managing or formulating a digital audience data strategy.²² Without targeted interventions, this gap risks undermining compliance, innovation and democratic values in the cultural sphere.

²² <https://www.culturesuite.co/resources/articles/building-bridges-culturetech-and-cultural-institutions-unite-at-eada-summit>

6.1.2. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Increased capacity within CCS to interpret and apply audience data ethically.
- Enhanced compliance with EU data governance frameworks.
- Strengthened public trust in digital cultural infrastructures.
- Percentage increase in trained cultural professionals.
- Improved leadership confidence in digital strategy formulation.

6.1.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Develop a comprehensive data literacy framework

- Create a blueprint for training programmes tailored to cultural institutions (management and practitioners) and policy makers.
- Connect training to the relevant data sources and clearly define the competencies required for cultural institutions and leadership roles.
- Include modules on EU regulatory requirements and ethical data practices.

Recommendation 2: Embed data literacy at all organizational levels

- Position data literacy as a strategic skill, extending beyond technical staff to senior management.
- Provide guidance on key questions leaders should ask audiences and frameworks for defining engagement strategies.
- Improved strategic decision-making and inclusive audience engagement.

6.2. PILLAR 2: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT STANDARDISED CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT METRICS

6.2.1. CONTEXT

Data on everyone an organisation engages with -including on-site audiences as well as participants in educational, outreach and digital activities- is becoming increasingly central to cultural policy and programming. Yet current practices remain fragmented: cultural institutions and member states use different metrics and incompatible systems, hindering cross-border collaboration and limiting the ability to generate meaningful insights at scale.

European legislation such as the Data Act, Digital Services Act and AI Act sets expectations for transparency, accountability and ethical data use. Aligning cultural engagement metrics with these frameworks ensures compliance while reinforcing public trust.

To support such interoperability, there is an increasing need for robust, interoperable data ecosystems and backend infrastructure focused on technical standards and seamless, standardized data exchange.

6.2.2. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Harmonised cultural engagement metrics across member states and the different cultural subsectors.

- Improved cross-border collaboration and policy alignment.
- Enhanced ability to identify and address gaps in cultural participation.
- Increased trust through transparent and ethical data practices.
- Scalable insights to guide funding and programming decisions.

6.2.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 3: Define relevant data sources

- Publish a reference list of key data types: leisure activity data, ticketing data, survey data, socio-demographic data and digital consumption profiles.
- Include non-transactional cultural activities to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Recommendation 4: Develop standardised surveys

- Create a common set of survey questions for use across countries and sectors.
- Ensure comparability and interoperability of data collected.

Recommendation 5: Promote Interoperability

- Develop frameworks for data-sharing protocols and system compatibility.
- Define cross-European data standards and segmentation models.

Recommendation 6: Establish KPIs and impact metrics

- Create indicators for cultural policy evaluation and audience engagement.
- Ensure these metrics reflect European public values and inclusivity goals.

6.3. PILLAR 3: ENABLE PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR DATA-DRIVEN AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

6.3.1. CONTEXT

Cultural engagement strategies are shifting from passive data collection to strategic, AI-informed applications. This evolution strengthens cultural organizations as responsive, equitable and participatory public institutions. Yet, without interoperable systems and ethical AI frameworks, data remains fragmented and risks undermining trust. EU leadership is essential to support collaboration, compliance and innovation across Member States. To make this possible, the EU must invest in interoperable infrastructure, support open and scalable digital tools, ensure responsible AI deployment, and promote cross-border knowledge sharing so that all cultural institutions can benefit from a resilient, future-proof cultural data ecosystem.

6.3.2. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Evidence-based decision making: Adequate tooling allows cultural institutions to allocate resources fairly and design impactful outreach strategies.
- Ethical AI integration: AI-driven tools deployed with transparency, safeguards and compliance with EU regulations.

- Pan-European collaboration: Interoperable systems enabling data exchange and shared insights across member states.
- Scalable digital infrastructure: A unified European cultural data ecosystem supporting innovation and public value delivery.

6.3.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 7: Invest in interoperable infrastructure

- Fund platforms and APIs that enable seamless data exchange across CCS.
- Connect national initiatives to create a pan-European cultural data ecosystem.

Recommendation 8: Support open-source and scalable solutions

- Provide resources for smaller projects with proven potential to scale.
- Encourage collaborative development of digital tools for audience engagement such as recommendation engines, segmentation dashboards, real-time visitor flow applications, and accessibility-enhancing interfaces

Recommendation 9: Ensure responsible AI deployment

- Embed transparency, ethical safeguards and human oversight in AI-driven tools.
- Align all applications with EU regulatory frameworks, including the AI Act.

Recommendation 10: Facilitate knowledge sharing

- Create EU-level hubs for best practices, pilot results and technical standards.
- Promote cross-border collaboration among cultural institutions and tech providers.

6.4. PILLAR 4: ESTABLISH A GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK FOR INTEROPERABILITY AND STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

6.4.1. CONTEXT

Currently, cultural data initiatives across Europe remain fragmented. Local and national projects are practical and context-sensitive but lack the scale and interoperability needed to operate beyond borders. At the same time, European-level data spaces provide structural solutions but often feel abstract and incomplete for many stakeholders. The disconnect between bottom-up and top-down approaches creates a critical gap that limits efficiency, inclusivity and impact.

Bridging this gap requires synergy - a coordinated effort to connect existing expertise and initiatives at all levels. Establishing a common governance framework offers a strategic opportunity to align grassroots practices with European priorities, ensuring interoperability without duplicating infrastructure or effort. Governance is not just an administrative layer; it is the foundation for a cross-pillar approach that enables sustainable cultural data innovation::

- Pillar 1 (data literacy) provides the skills and ethical foundations needed for cultural professionals to collect, interpret and apply audience data in line with EU standards.
- Pillar 2 (standardised metrics) creates harmonized data structures and KPIs, enabling interoperability and forming the basis for advanced tools and AI-driven applications.

- Pillar 3 (practical applications) operationalizes insights from pillar 2 and relies on the competencies built in pillar 1 to ensure responsible and effective use of technologies such as AI.

Together, these pillars create a continuous feedback loop in which each stage strengthens the next. Building data skills and literacy (pillar 1) provides the foundation needed to develop shared standards and harmonised cultural engagement metrics (pillar 2). These standards, in turn, enable the development and effective use of practical tools and applications across the cultural and creative sectors (pillar 3). The insights generated through these tools—via shared data, evaluations and exchanges of best practices—feed back into the system, continuously improving skills, refining standards and enhancing applications.

Without a clear governance model and defined roles across European institutions, Member States and cultural networks, these initiatives risk fragmentation, duplication and uneven implementation. A structured governance approach -supported by funding priorities and interoperability standards - will ensure clarity, inclusivity and efficient collaboration across all levels.

6.4.2. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Synergy: Alignment of grassroots practices with European frameworks.
- Interoperability: Connected data ecosystems enabling cross-border collaboration.
- Efficiency: Reduced duplication of infrastructure and effort and improved scalability.
- Inclusivity: Clear roles and responsibilities across all stakeholders.

6.4.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 11: Create a European governance framework

- Define roles and responsibilities between EU institutions, Member States and cultural institutions.
- Ensure alignment with broader EU strategies on data spaces and digital innovation.

Recommendation 12: Promote interoperability across data ecosystems

- Develop governance principles that prioritize compatibility and avoid duplication.
- Support integration of existing local/national and sectoral initiatives into EU-level frameworks.

Recommendation 13: Embed governance into funding priorities

- Allocate resources for connecting and sustaining initiatives that advance data-driven audience development.
- Incentivize collaboration between cultural institutions, technology providers and policymakers.

7. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ADVANCING DDAD IN EUROPE?

Achieving a coherent and sustainable European approach to DDAD requires clearly defined and complementary responsibilities across governance levels. The European Union and its Member States each play essential, mutually reinforcing roles.

7.1. EUROPEAN COMMISSION

- Set the strategic direction:
Define the overarching vision for DDAD within the broader EU frameworks on culture, digital transformation and data governance.
- Develop common standards and frameworks:
Establish shared definitions, interoperable cultural engagement metrics, data-exchange protocols, governance principles and technical standards to enable comparability and cross-border collaboration.
- Ensure regulatory alignment and ethical safeguards:
Embed DDAD within EU legislation (GDPR, Data Act, AI Act, DSA) and provide guidance to ensure transparency, accountability and rights-based data practices.
- Fund and support infrastructure & innovation:
Invest in scalable digital tools, open-source solutions, interoperability infrastructure and cross-border pilot projects through programmes such as Creative Europe, AgoraEU and relevant data-space initiatives.
- Facilitate knowledge exchange and coordination:
Support peer learning, EU-wide capacity building, dissemination of best practices and alignment between national initiatives and European priorities.

7.2. MEMBER STATES

- Adapt and implement EU-level frameworks nationally:
Align national cultural strategies, funding mechanisms and digital policies with European standards for DDAD.
- Strengthen capacity and professional development:
Embed data literacy in national training infrastructures, support cultural institutions in developing skills and ensure that organisations of all sizes can participate meaningfully.
- Support adoption of tools and interoperable systems:
Provide technical assistance, promote integration of tools and systems, and create enabling conditions for responsible AI and data-driven practices within the CCS.
- Foster collaboration across institutions and sectors:
Connect cultural actors, technology providers, researchers and regional networks to stimulate innovation and ensure shared learning at the local and national level.

- Contribute evidence and feedback to the EU:
Report on national experiences, pilot outcomes and emerging needs to help refine EU-level frameworks and maintain a Europe-wide learning cycle.

7.3. CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INSTITUTIONS

- Apply DDAD principles in practice:
Collect, manage and use audience data ethically and effectively to strengthen participation, accessibility and engagement.
- Participate in data-sharing ecosystems:
Contribute insights, adopt interoperable tools and align with European and national standards to support shared learning across the CCS.
- Provide bottom-up expertise and innovation:
Deliver practical feedback to Member States and the EU, validate tools and frameworks, and contribute to the evolution of DDAD methodologies.

8. HOW TO IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS IN A PHASED APPROACH?

To ensure that the four pillars of data-driven audience development can be implemented effectively and in full alignment with existing EU structures and competences, this paper proposes a phased approach. This strategy supports immediate progress while enabling gradual movement toward the long-term, holistic vision outlined above. It respects the limits of EU competences, avoids imposing obligations on Member States and ensures that each step adds value within the current European framework.

8.1. PHASE 1: ACTIVATE - IMMEDIATE ACTIONS WITHIN EXISTING FRAMEWORKS

In the short term, progress can be made rapidly by activating existing EU instruments and supporting voluntary cooperation. No legislative changes or new reporting obligations are required at this stage.

Key actions:

- Leverage existing EU programmes and platforms (e.g., Creative Europe, AgoraEU, Data Spaces for Tourism/Media/Cultural Heritage) to pilot DDAD initiatives, especially in:
 - capacity-building (data literacy training),
 - testing practical data tools (segmentation dashboards, AI-assisted insights),
 - voluntary data collection pilots.
- Use the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and other peer-learning mechanisms to promote knowledge-sharing among Member States.
- Encourage voluntary collaboration among cultural institutions, technology providers and national agencies to begin aligning practices with the long-term European vision of interoperable and responsible audience data ecosystems.

This phase accelerates bottom-up innovation, strengthens data literacy and begins the practical use of data-driven tools without requiring structural or legislative reforms – fully in line with the short-term implementation pathway, but offering starting points and input for phase 2.

8.2. PHASE 2: ALIGN - STRENGTHENING COORDINATION AND CAPACITY

As momentum builds, the EU and Member States can move toward improving strategic alignment while still respecting subsidiarity and the diversity of cultural systems across Europe.

Key actions:

- Develop EU-level guidance and best practices on:
 - standardised cultural engagement metrics,
 - ethical data use,
 - interoperability requirements,
 - governance principles.
- Support Member States in integrating these indicators and practices into national cultural strategies, while avoiding mandatory approaches.
- Expand EU-funded capacity-building networks and peer-learning infrastructures to ensure:
 - realistic implementation in varied national contexts,
 - knowledge transfer between more digitally advanced and less resourced parts of the CCS.

This phase corresponds to the medium-term objective of rolling out standardised metrics, supporting tool adoption and scaling cooperation between existing bottom-up initiatives. It creates coherence without imposing obligations – consistent with the Executive Summary’s multi-level coordination emphasis.

8.3. PHASE 3: EMBED - MOVING TOWARD A HOLISTIC VISION

The long-term ambition is to connect grassroots innovation, national efforts and EU strategies within a coherent governance ecosystem that sustains DDAD across borders. This remains voluntary and competence-aligned but enables a decisive shift toward a European-wide framework.

Key actions:

- Align DDAD initiatives with broader EU priorities, including social inclusion, the European Education Area, the Digital Decade and the European Democracy Action Plan.
- Strengthen structured dialogue across governance levels to explore:
 - progressively harmonised approaches to cultural data,
 - shared infrastructures,
 - common principles and standards for interoperability.
- Maintain a voluntary and aspirational approach:
 - no mandatory reporting,
 - no new legislative obligations,
 - an emphasis on shared goals, demonstrable value and incremental, evidence-based progress.
- Encourage Member States and EU bodies to prepare for a future governance framework that connects and coordinates existing and emerging data spaces, national platforms, cultural organisations and EU policy tools.

This phase reflects the long-term vision: a connected, multi-level governance model enabling inclusive, data-driven cultural participation across Europe. It embraces ambition while remaining fully compatible with EU competences.

9. CONCLUSION

Data-driven audience development offers a major opportunity to strengthen Europe's cultural and creative sectors in an era defined by digital transformation. By investing in data literacy, standardised metrics, practical tools and a coherent governance framework, the European Union and its Member States can jointly build a cultural ecosystem that is more resilient, inclusive and future-oriented.

Progress, however, requires acknowledging that this transformation cannot be achieved overnight. A phased and collaborative approach is essential – starting with actions that build on existing EU instruments, moving toward coordinated guidance and capacity building, and gradually evolving into a connected governance model that aligns local innovation with European strategy. This step-by-step trajectory ensures feasibility, respects national contexts and supports long-term commitment across the CCS.

By implementing the recommendations outlined in this paper, Europe can unlock the full potential of audience data: strengthening cultural participation, supporting democratic values, and enabling evidence-based policymaking that reflects the diversity and richness of European cultural life. In doing so, the CCS can continue to serve as a public good, accessible to all, and as a vital pillar of Europe's democratic and cultural future.

10. EDITING TEAM

The development of this policy paper was made possible thanks to the active contributions of the experts who participated in its drafting and editorial review.

The Ghent Manifesto was signed by the following countries: Belgium (Flemish Community), Belgium (German-speaking Community), Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Spain.

The Flemish Department of Culture, Youth and Media, assumed the secretariat and presidency of the process, with the support of publiq vzw.

11. ANNEX: OVERVIEW OF EXISTING INITIATIVES

This annex presents a snapshot of existing initiatives at the time of publication of the policy paper. It is not an exhaustive or permanent inventory, but a moment-in-time overview that may evolve as new initiatives emerge or current ones develop further.

Country	Organisation	Initiative	Website	Governance structure	Focus	
					Tools & applications	
					Standardised metrics	
EU-wide	EADA	EADA is an international forum that brings together organisations to strengthen cultural participation through improved collection, analysis and use of audience data.	audiencedata.org	X		
EU-wide	European Policy Forum	The European Policy Forum on Data-Driven Audience Development is an informal platform that promotes European cooperation on data-driven practices in the cultural and creative sectors. It originated from the Ghent Manifesto and the EU Council Conclusions adopted under the Belgian EU Presidency in early 2024. After completing the DDAD policy paper, the Flemish Community ended its role as president and secretariat; the forum's continuation now depends on future presidencies or other stakeholders willing to take it forward.	www.publiq.be/european-policy-forum	X		

Country	Organisation	Initiative	Website	Governance structure	Focus	
					Standardised metrics	Tools & applications
					Data literacy activities	
Belgium (Flanders)	Cultuurconnect	Hub C is a knowledge and training centre that supports the digital transformation of the cultural and creative sector by strengthening sector-wide digital skills.	www.hub-c.org		X	
Belgium (Flanders)	publiq	publiq is funded by the Government of Flanders to strengthen cultural participation and operates the UItwisselingsplatform (www.UItwisselingsplatform.be), a data-mesh exchange service built on the FAIR principles. This platform enables the generation of audience insights and supports innovative applications across the entire cultural sector. In the context of the 2024 EU Presidency, the Government of Flanders mandated publiq to establish the EU Policy Forum for Data-Driven Audience Development	www.publiq.be		X	

Country	Organisation	Initiative	Website	Focus		
				Tools & applications	Standardised metrics	Data literacy activities
				Governance structure		
Czech Republic	Creative Prague	Creative Prague develops Evaluart, a tool that helps the city assess how cultural organisations perform and how well they meet citizens' cultural needs. These insights enable Prague to make data-informed strategic decisions, allocate resources more efficiently and improve services for its residents.	www.kreativnipraha.eu/en/projekt/data-v-kulture/evaluart	X		
Czech Republic	NIPOS	NIPOS is a state-funded body under the Czech Ministry of Culture that supports, analyses and develops local, regional and non-professional cultural activities. It created a benchmarking tool that enables libraries to share and compare their data collectively.	www.benchmarkingknihoven.cz	X		
Denmark	Applaus	APPLAUS has been funded as a national programme under the Ministry of Culture since 2022, with a remit across all artforms to strengthen audience-development skills. It delivers this through research, manuals, seminars and workshops.	www.applaus.nu		X	

Country	Organisation	Initiative	Website	Governance structure	Focus		
					Tools & applications	Standardised metrics	Data literacy activities
Finland	The National Library of Finland	The National Library of Finland is researching how adopting the ISNI identifier can improve data interoperability across countries.	www.kansalliskirjasto.fi/en/news/when-name-not-enough-just-identifier-cmos		X		
France	TMNlab	The leading data-literacy organisation in France, TMNlab is a member-based network supported by the French Ministry of Culture. It advises the sector on data practices and develops programmes to strengthen data-literacy capabilities.	audience.data.tmnlab.com		X		
Germany	IKfF	The Institute for Research on Cultural Participation (Institut für Kulturelle Teilhabeforschung) examines the factors that enable or hinder cultural participation. It holds the world's most robust and comprehensive database of audience-survey data—a key resource for audience-development strategies. As an independent research institute, it provides cultural institutions and policymakers with essential evidence to support data-driven participation strategies.	www.iktf.berlin			X	X

Country	Organisation	Initiative	Website	Governance structure	Focus		
					Data literacy activities	Standardised metrics	Tools & applications
Italy	Fondazione Fitzcarraldo	Fondazione Fitzcarraldo works in the public interest to promote sustainability and innovation in cultural and creative policies and practices. In addition to research, local development and advocacy, it designs and delivers training and capacity-building programmes for cultural professionals, including on data literacy.	www.fitzcarraldo.it		X		
The Netherlands	DEN	DEN is a government-funded agency that drives the digital transformation of the Dutch cultural sector. It offers widely used data-literacy training and action-based research programmes, and conducts and funds studies demonstrating the value of data and digital tools. DEN has also led the development and adoption of digital standards.	www.den.nl		X	X	
The Netherlands	DIP	DIP has developed a digital infrastructure for the Dutch performing arts sector that connects a wide range of ticketing systems and booking tools, enabling seamless exchange of audience and sales data. Through regular, GDPR-compliant ETL processes, it imports large datasets that provide aggregated, sector-wide insights into day-to-day performance, offering valuable audience intelligence at both organisational and sector levels.	www.dip.nl				X

Country	Organisation	Initiative	Website	Governance structure	Focus						
					Tools & applications	Standardised metrics	Data literacy activities				
					The Netherlands	Rotterdam Festivals	Rotterdam Festivals developed the Cultural Target Group Model, a nation-wide segmentation tool that maps cultural preferences and behaviour.	www.cultureleledoelgroepmodel.nl		X	
					Norway	NPU	NPU collects and shares audience data to help cultural institutions understand their visitors and benchmark against others. Through surveys, and now also ticketing data, the tool provides insights that strengthen audience knowledge and support for its members' work.	norskpublikumsutvikling.no/prosjekt/npumonitor		X	
United Kingdom	The Audience Agency	Audience Answers is a platform offering cultural institutions a range of tools, including surveys, ticketing insights and population profiles. All services are built on the Audience Spectrum segmentation model.	www.audienceanswers.org		X						