



Kulturaren
Euskal Behatokia
Observatorio Vasco
de la Cultura

Executive Summary

Evaluation of Cultural Policies

Concepts,
dimensions and
indicators



EUSKO JAURLARITZA
GOBIERNO VASCO

KULTURA ETA HIZKUNTZA
POLITIKA SAILA

DEPARTAMENTO DE CULTURA
Y POLÍTICA LINGÜÍSTICA

Executive summary

The Basque Cultural Observatory has dedicated a study to the analysis of cultural policy evaluation, an exercise that is increasingly gaining prominence at all levels of government. We are witnessing a “turn towards evaluation” among key institutions, though this trend is more evident in regulatory guidance than in its practical implementation. This report aims to help clarify key concepts, identify references, guides and frameworks for the evaluation process, and propose relevant methodologies, tools and benchmarks.

It is organised into two main sections: the first explores the fundamental elements to consider when evaluating public policies; the second focuses more specifically on cultural policies, with a more practical approach. It spans from principles and dimensions to be considered in evaluation, through to indicators, aiming to provide useful references and examples. The report concludes with a section on the current challenges and difficulties involved in evaluating cultural programmes and projects.

Across the world, different traditions of public policy evaluation exist, with varying degrees of institutionalisation. However, despite differences in mandatory requirements, even in less institutionalised contexts such as the United States and Canada, the use of guidelines and frameworks is widespread. In countries like Ireland, the United Kingdom or Norway, rules and instructions are also in place. Evaluation is now widely practised and, at least in theory, broadly accepted.

Supranational bodies such as the OECD and the European Union have played a major role in promoting the adoption and mandating of public policy evaluation. In 2022, the OECD approved a [recommendation](#) on the evaluation of public policies, based on an extensive [analysis](#) of practices in 42 countries in 2020.

As for the European Union, it requires recipients of its funds to implement evidence-based evaluation mechanisms, and is expanding its evaluation agenda through the [Better Regulation programme](#). This approach encourages citizen participation and good governance. Through this mechanism, the EU promotes the application of principles and recommendations aimed at improving and simplifying public consultations, supports evidence-based evaluations, initial impact assessments, regulatory simplification and the reduction of bureaucracy, and the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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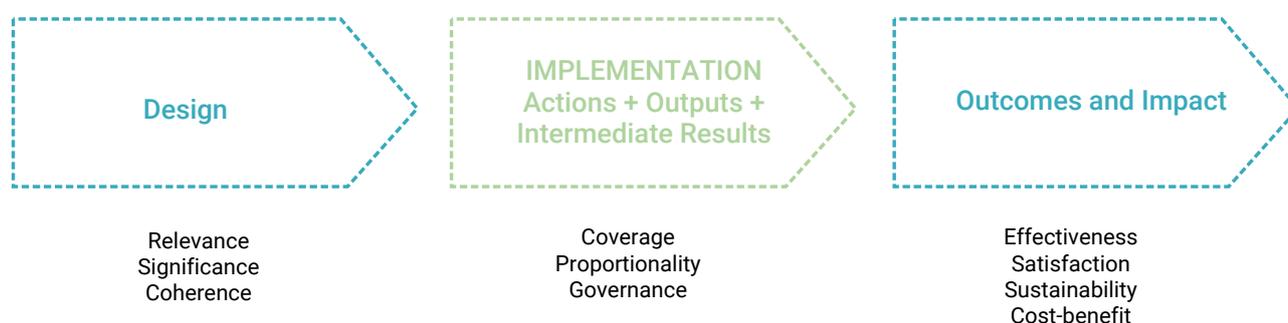
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At the national level, worth noting is [Law 27/2022](#), which institutionalises the evaluation of public policies within the General State Administration.

In the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC), efforts to improve public management began 30 years ago, also incorporating the issue of evaluation. Following a series of strategies and plans linked to different legislative periods, the most recent plan is [ARDATZ 2030](#), a framework document for the evaluation of public policies, with governance, innovation and digital government as its central themes. It is based on a service model grounded in data and accountability. Also worth mentioning is [Law 3/2022 of 12 May, on the Basque Public Sector](#).

Definitions of evaluation highlight key elements such as the need for systematic and structured processes, the importance of evidence, the reference framework based on measurable objectives, and the possibility of applying evaluation at various stages of a policy - from its design to its outcomes. To these general elements of any rigorous evaluation process, one must add the fact that the subject being evaluated is a public policy implemented with public resources. Therefore, the social benefit it delivers is ultimately the main focus of the entire exercise. All of this points to the intrinsic link between evaluation and planning. The former needs a planning process as its reference framework, one that sets out objectives and indicators. What is evaluated, in essence, is the degree to which commitments have been met, or the measurable deviations from the original plan. Today, this process is unthinkable without the participation of citizens and stakeholders. Governance is one of the cornerstones of public policy, adding transparency, oversight and complexity to its management.

Evaluation can be classified according to various criteria: who conducts it, for what purpose, at what stage, or in terms of process and outcomes.



With regard to cultural policies, while the shift towards evaluation has already taken firm hold in sectors such as education, health and international cooperation, the cultural field is now also beginning to feel its influence. UNESCO has emphasised that it is “essential to ensure that evaluation forms an integral phase of any cultural policy, and that it is embedded from the very

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design of interventions. Evaluation as Obligation and Commitment. Evaluation not only helps improve the quality of policies and correct potential shortcomings, but it is also crucial in ensuring that such policies respect human rights.”

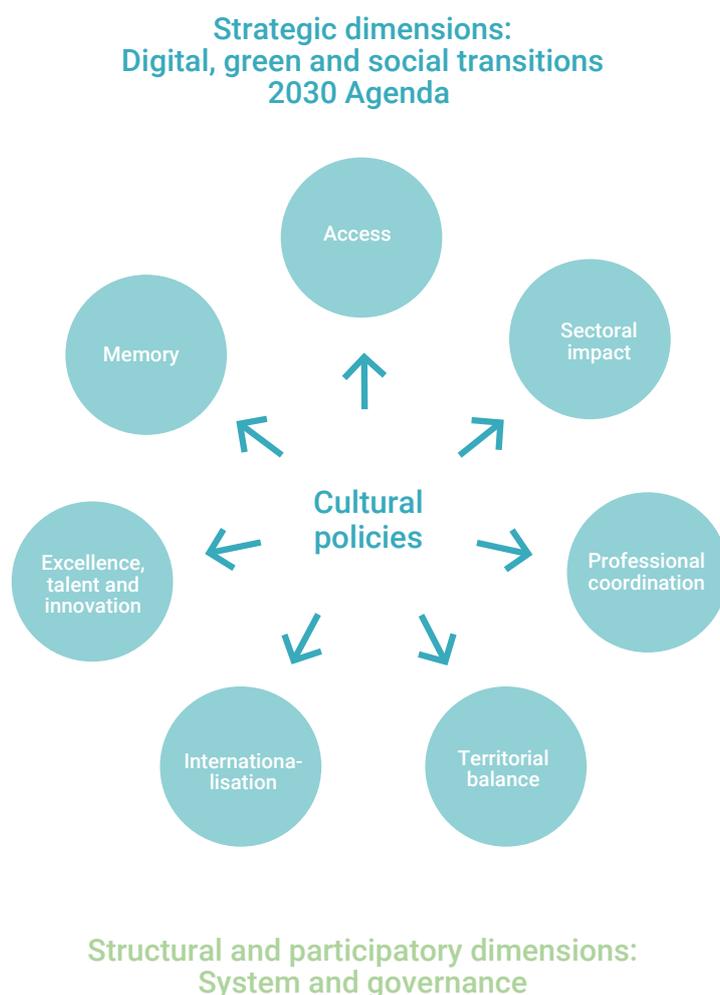
The chapter on cultural policies is clearly geared towards the practical application of evaluation, using the principles, dimensions, indicators and methodologies currently being employed by various cultural organisations. Efforts have been made to select tools and approaches from a range of traditions in order to showcase the best of each.

We begin the section on the evaluation of cultural policies with an exploration of principles. As a key point of reference, we have chosen the British experience developed under the [Cultural Value](#) Project.

Summary of Evaluation Principles from the Cultural Value Project

Beneficial	Robust	People-centred	Connected
↓	↓	↓	↓
Does the evaluation address the needs of the organisation and its stakeholders?	Are the approach and methodology appropriate, rigorous, and geared towards learning?	Does it consider diverse viewpoints and experiences to enable better insight?	Does the evaluation foster shared learning, both within and beyond the organisation?
Commitment to learning Ethics Applicable	Rigour Open-mindedness Proportionality	Empathy Inclusion of many voices Social commitment	Transparency Awareness Shared responsibility

As for the dimensions of cultural policies, the following have been identified. Each is briefly described and accompanied by suggested indicators, with an approach tailored to the specific context of the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC), though references also include examples from other settings.



Among the selected references, the following stand out as general models of evaluation:

- The **FEMP** model as an example of a cultural indicator framework:
- The EU self-assessment guide for **cultural capitals**.
- Audit reports on **European investments in cultural sites**. We include them for their assessment of the social, economic and cultural impacts of ERDF funds:

The chapter concludes with a section on data and information sources, and another identifying current challenges and risks.

In conclusion, it is worth stressing the importance of focusing efforts on the actual implementation of evaluation practices, aiming to create models that facilitate comparability and longitudinal analysis. Now is the time to address the need for rigorous evaluation of cultural programmes and projects, using indicators that are useful, reliable and relevant. Evaluation should be approached from a broad perspective, going beyond simply justifying the use of resources, and embraced as a process from the setting of objectives to the analysis of impacts.

Evaluation, beyond accountability, is a process of improvement and learning. That is, ultimately, its true purpose. So that it may become not just a matter of intention, theory or obligation, but a fully integrated management practice within cultural programmes and services.



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