



1. Introduction

The objective of this policy brief is to provide an analysis of current European Union policies related to the accessibility of cultural experiences for people with disabilities, with a focus on the integration of multisensory, user-centred interactive technologies. This brief aims to highlight the urgency of addressing gaps in existing policies and to propose strategic areas for further reflection and development.

The inclusion of people with disabilities in cultural life is not only a matter of rights but also an essential element of a diverse and inclusive society. The key questions guiding this brief are: How effectively the current EU policies cover comprehensive access to culture for people with disabilities? What gaps exist in the integration of multisensory experiences in policies, and how can these be addressed through future policy development? Key findings indicate that significant progress has been made, especially through the ratification signed by 164 countries - including all members of the EU and the EU itself - of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the European Accessibility Act, but there is room for improvement. We conclude that there are notable deficiencies for artists with disabilities as well as in multisensory integration, sustainability of inclusive practices, and support for technological innovation in cultural accessibility.

2. Policies Overview

Why Is it important to talk about it?

Access to culture and cultural heritage for people with disabilities is crucial because it promotes inclusion, self-expression, and the recognition of diverse identities. Cultural participation is a fundamental human right enshrined in the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**, which emphasises that people with disabilities should have the same opportunities to enjoy, participate in, and contribute to cultural life as others. **Article 30 of the CRPD** mandates the removal of barriers to cultural participation, stressing that access to cultural venues, materials, and artistic expression is essential for achieving full inclusion in society.

The most important outcome of the CRPD is, nevertheless, the **change in perspective** on people with disabilities: what the signatories of this document have pledged is to shift from a “medical” view of disability to a “social” dimension. **Disability is socially constructed by barriers** (both material and immaterial) **and perpetuated through discrimination and oppression**; it is up to public policies to eliminate them. Physical barriers, obstacles to the accessibility of artistic and heritage products, and limitations related to social, financial, and attitudinal factors are all issues that need to be addressed and solved in the context of cultural life for people with disabilities - especially in regards to people with multiple disabilities. Moreover, talking about cultural rights allows us to broaden the discourse to artists with disabilities: the “*Time to Act*” report of the Europe beyond access project points out that “*the European cultural sector structurally marginalises disabled people as artists and arts professionals [...]*”. Data shows a lack of knowledge about the work of artists with

disabilities, and increasing their visibility would mean truly accomplishing what is set up by Art.30 of CRPD.

EU policies play a vital role in realising these rights by setting standards, guiding member states, and funding projects that foster accessibility and inclusivity in the cultural sector. Effective EU policies can bridge existing gaps, promote the use of multisensory and innovative technologies, and ensure sustainable and systematic changes across member states. Without dedicated EU action, the cultural rights of people with disabilities are up to the Member States and risks being overlooked, preventing the realisation of a more inclusive and diverse cultural landscape.

Existing EU & European-level Policies and Initiatives

We identified the main EU and European-level policies and initiatives concerning the activation of CRPD Art. 30 (and Art. 21 in extension).

1. **European Accessibility Act - Directive (EU) 2019/882**: The directive provides a framework for harmonising accessibility requirements across the EU, particularly in digital and audiovisual media. It aims to reduce barriers and costs while ensuring that people with disabilities can fully participate in the digital single market.
2. **EU Disability Card**: piloted in eight Member States, the card offers people with disabilities equal access and mainly free admission to cultural venues, a visual and audio guide, sign language tours and information geared towards the visually impaired, thus helping to overcome financial and physical barriers.
3. **European Access City award**: Since 2010, the European Commission has organised the Access City Award to recognise EU cities prioritising accessibility for people with disabilities. Criteria scrutinise, among other factors, accessibility to the built environment and public spaces and accessibility to information and communication, including information and communication technologies.
4. **Marrakesh Treaty**: The EU’s ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty is a significant step towards making published works accessible to people who are blind, with visual impairment, or with a print-disability. However, the treaty focuses primarily on visual impairments, with limited consideration for other sensory modalities.
5. **Council of Europe Disability Strategy 2017-2023**: this continuously updated 7-year strategy emphasises the importance of cultural participation for people with disabilities by framing it as a fundamental human right, essential for dignity, inclusion, and active participation in society. The Council of Europe’s commitment involves promoting universal design, reasonable accommodations, and assistive technologies, advocating for policies that not only facilitate access but also promote the cultural contributions of people with disabilities as active members of the community. The Council of Europe’s strategies are not legally binding for its members.

Identified Gaps

Looking at the policies presented here in light of Muse-IT’s experience, key elements were



identified as missing or insufficiently present:

1. **Limited Multisensory Integration:** Current policies predominantly focus on singular sensory modalities, such as visual or auditory, neglecting the potential of multisensory technologies that incorporate haptic, kinetic, and other sensory inputs. This gap limits the inclusivity of cultural experiences for those with complex or multiple disabilities.
2. **Focusing on Access and Participation to Culture and Cultural Heritage:** The specific needs of people with disabilities in accessing and creating cultural assets are often overshadowed by broader accessibility initiatives. There is a need for targeted policies that address the unique challenges faced in the context of cultural participation, both from the perspective of the audience and that of creators of culture. These obstacles are not just physical barriers, but include obstacles to the accessibility of artistic and heritage products, limitations related to social, financial, and attitudinal factors, and visibility of the work of artists.
3. **Sustainability and Continuity of Inclusive Practices:** Many inclusive practices are left depending on the commitment of specific individuals within cultural institutions, leading to risks of discontinuation when these individuals leave. There is a need for these practices to be institutionalised within organisational structures to ensure their longevity.
4. **Comprehensive Data Collection and Monitoring:** Existing policies lack robust mechanisms for systematic data collection on the usage and effectiveness of accessible cultural services - the CRPD evaluation system depends on the national reports coming in every four years, and states are not required to report on every article. This deficiency hampers the ability to evaluate and improve these services based on real-world data and user feedback.
5. **Support for Technological Innovation:** While EU policies promote inclusive participation, there is insufficient emphasis on the co-creation of cultural assets with people with disabilities, particularly in the realm of technology. This gap limits the development of innovative tools that could significantly enhance accessibility.
6. **Transversality of Universal Design:** The concept of universal design is not consistently applied across all cultural systems, focusing in the EU on the ICT and digital universe. This limits the effectiveness of accessibility initiatives to cultural assets, both from the audience and creators' perspective.

3. Future reflections

Given the identified gaps, this policy brief proposes the following areas for further reflection and development, paving the way to the final recommendations:

- It is essential to **prioritise cultural accessibility and participation** at the policy level, not by limiting efforts to isolated initiatives, but by **institutionalising these processes through comprehensive EU-level policies**.
- Future policies should include the **integration of multisensory technologies and approaches**, ensuring that cultural experiences cater to a wide range of

sensory needs - with a focus on the transversal application of universal design principles. Standards for multisensory experiences in cultural contexts and the promotion of research and innovation in this area are two possible ways forward. Muse-IT is especially active in this domain.

- There is a need for policies that mandate **comprehensive data collection and monitoring of accessible cultural services**. These frameworks should include both quantitative metrics and qualitative insights from users, with a particular focus on understanding the experiences of people with disabilities.
- A significant knowledge gap persists in **understanding the true potential of technological solutions for cultural accessibility and cultural visibility**. Technology and digital options can both improve access to culture and help in developing one's potential as creator and professional. Research and initiatives in this area must be conducted both **systematically and at a granular level**. Analysing existing solutions, their implementation in cultural institutions, and the availability of public incentives remains a central focus for Muse-IT.

By addressing the identified gaps and exploring these recommended areas, policymakers and policy analysts can contribute to the creation of a more inclusive cultural landscape where everyone has the opportunity to participate and enjoy cultural life to the fullest extent.

Read more about the MuseIT project:

<https://www.muse-it.eu/> Contact: contact@muse-it.eu

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