



National Cultural  
Data Observatory

# Creating a connected cultural data ecosystem: National Cultural Data Observatory

8 June 2026



# Project partners



Led by



Funded by



In partnership with



Advisory Group members





# Building upon...

- University of Leeds/The Audience Agency partnership in delivering **Centre for Cultural Value** - independently developing a national data observatory concept
- **Making Data Work for Public Sector Policy** (CCV/University of Leeds/The Audience Agency/MyCake funded by ESRC) - including a call to pilot a national data observatory
- **Better data for the Cultural Economy** (MyCake/The Audience Agency for DCMS) - which proposed a roadmap for joining up existing data and filling data gaps
- Feasibility/scoping by The Audience Agency/MyCake for Historic England for **Knowing the Heritage Sector** sector mapping
- **Heritage Places decision-making framework** (TAA for NLHF), **social impact Measures Bank** (MyCake/TAA for NLCF)



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# Why we were funded

Title: **Transforming data collections infrastructure** for social science...

"...to **scope** and **demonstrate** where a significant opportunity or gap lies in the **data infrastructure landscape**."

"Foundational research infrastructure...data collections that are capable of supporting a **range of research questions over time and across different disciplines**..."

"to produce... recommendations for ESRC to **help inform the selection of ideas** it takes forward to the **UKRI Infrastructure Fund**"

<https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/transforming-data-collections-infrastructure-for-social-science/>





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# Project aims

"This ambitious R&D project will transform the **fractured data infrastructure** of the UK's arts, cultural and heritage (ACH) sector and create the **blueprint** for a National Cultural Data Observatory.

"By doing this at unprecedented scale and granularity, the ambition of such an Observatory is to **provide a definitive, defensible and trusted evidence base** both for the ACH sector strategy and for public policy more broadly."

"By the end of the project, we will have built a **national consortium to develop a major UKRI bid** to develop, establish and implement a national observatory for cultural sector data."



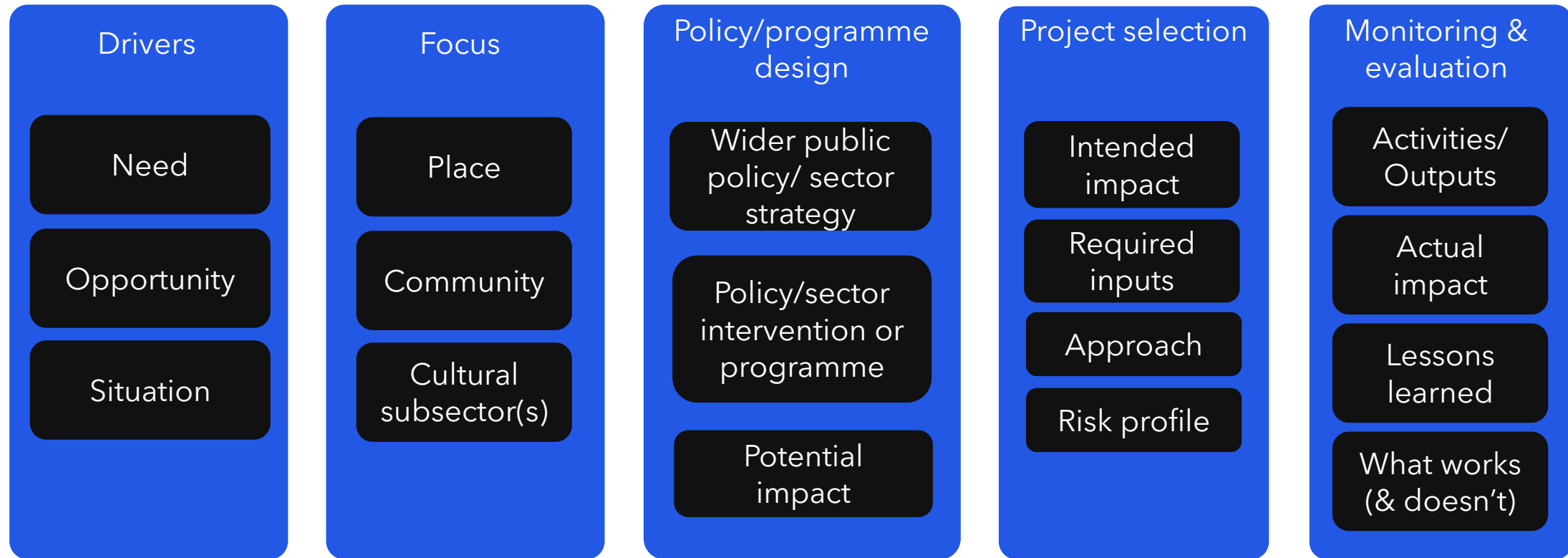
# Use cases for data to inform public policies & sector strategies



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- **Advocacy & Strategic Positioning:** Building compelling narratives and arguments for change
- **Need/Opportunity Analysis:** Where potential interventions will have greatest impact/value
- **Sector Mapping & Health:** Informing situation analysis and issue diagnosis
- **Policy Design & Targeting:** Focussing and tailoring policy interventions to place/situation
- **Impact Modelling & Forecasting:** Projecting future cultural, social, economic or environmental impact for proposed policies & programmes
- **Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning:** Tracking delivery, measuring progress, learning to improve efficiency and effectiveness
- **Participation & Engagement:** Who participates in cultural activities, where, how and why – the base data of most other social impact modelling and measurement
- **Organisational Strategy & Ops:** Supporting strategic planning and decision-making in culture, civic and other related organisations

# Requirement 1 | Supporting programme design, delivery and evaluation



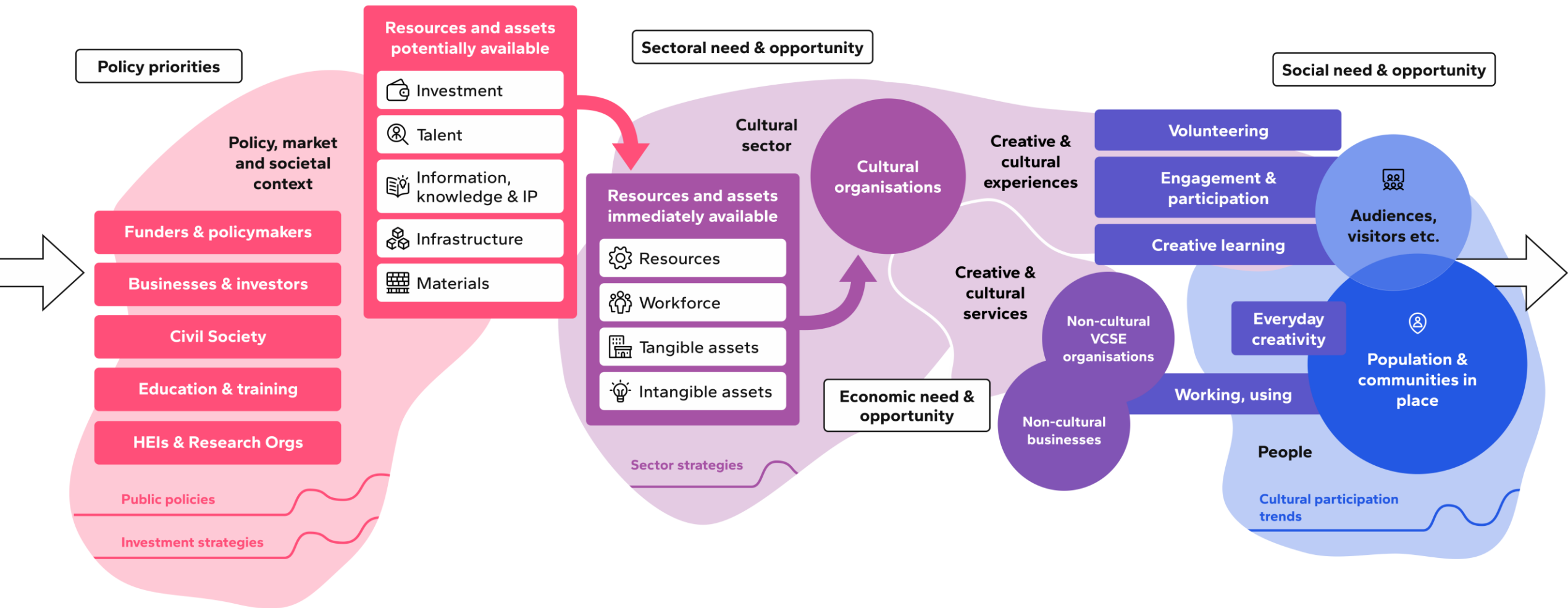


# Requirement 2 | Model theories of change

Pulling together social and economic measures and indicators

Inputs	Outputs	Outcome	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding/ investment</li> <li>Tangible cultural capitals</li> <li>Intangible cultural capitals</li> <li>Human capital</li> </ul>	Social value focus		Economic & social (same indicators as for need/opportunity)
	Cultural provision/activity	Cultural participation	
	Resilience/economic focus		
	Sector resilience	Economic contribution	

# Requirement 3 | Represent the complex cultural ecosystem and its policy context



# Requirement 5 | Enable research spanning past, present and future

Past

Now

Future



TIME

## High-level policy/sector stewardship

*Mapping & recording*  
 Need & cause  
 Opportunity  
 Past interventions

*Tracking*  
 Statistics  
 Situation  
 → Trends →

*Predicting*  
 Benefits  
 Future scenarios

## Specific policy interventions/programmes

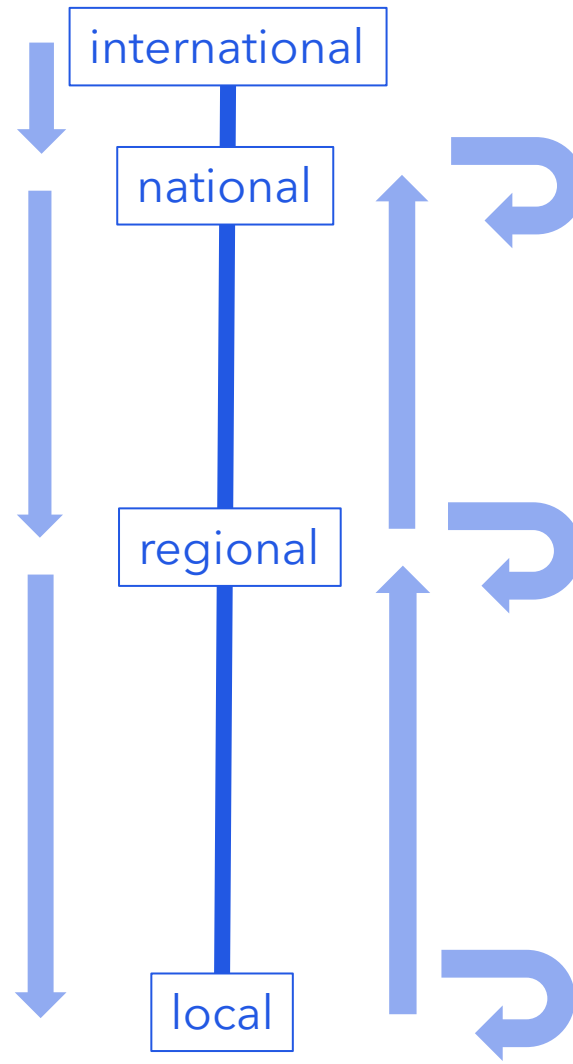
*Before*  
 Focus and design  
 Baselines

*During*  
 Refocus and redesign  
 Monitoring

*After*  
 'What Works' & doesn't  
 Evaluating impact

# Requirement 6 | Joining up local, regional and national

- Attract partnerships & funding
- Identify priority regions
- Agree goals/focus for regions
- Pan-regional co-ordination
- Identify priority localities
- Agree goals/focus for localities



- Benchmark to other countries
- Identify opportunities & threats
- Benchmark regions nationally
- Evidence national contribution of region
- Benchmark region to other regions
- Benchmark locality regionally
- Evidence regional contribution of locality
- Understanding differences between localities



# Requirement 4 | Making data accessible, meaningful and reusable

**Aim higher** instead of 'making do':

- **Quality data** – recent, frequent, relevant, complete, consistent, interoperable, granular
- high **reach and repeatability**
- **least data for greatest use** – more efficient, save money
- **support different 'views'** – demand vs supply, individuals vs. organisations, assets vs. activities, top-down vs bottom up, economic vs social value

Move away from:

- Ad hoc/episodic research
- Small sample groups
- Overlapping but unintegratable datasets

Where there isn't such data, have specific research action lines to fill the big data gaps:

- **Workforce:** Granularity by place, population segment and subsector. Over time.
- **Sector mapping:** Assets & infrastructure (capitals) both tangible & intangible; organisations & their finances; funding.
- **Non-ticketed cultural and creative participation:** Including everyday creativity.
- **Philanthropic income:** Especially from individuals and companies
- **Diversity (all):** Workforce, freelance creatives, boards, volunteers, audiences, participants...



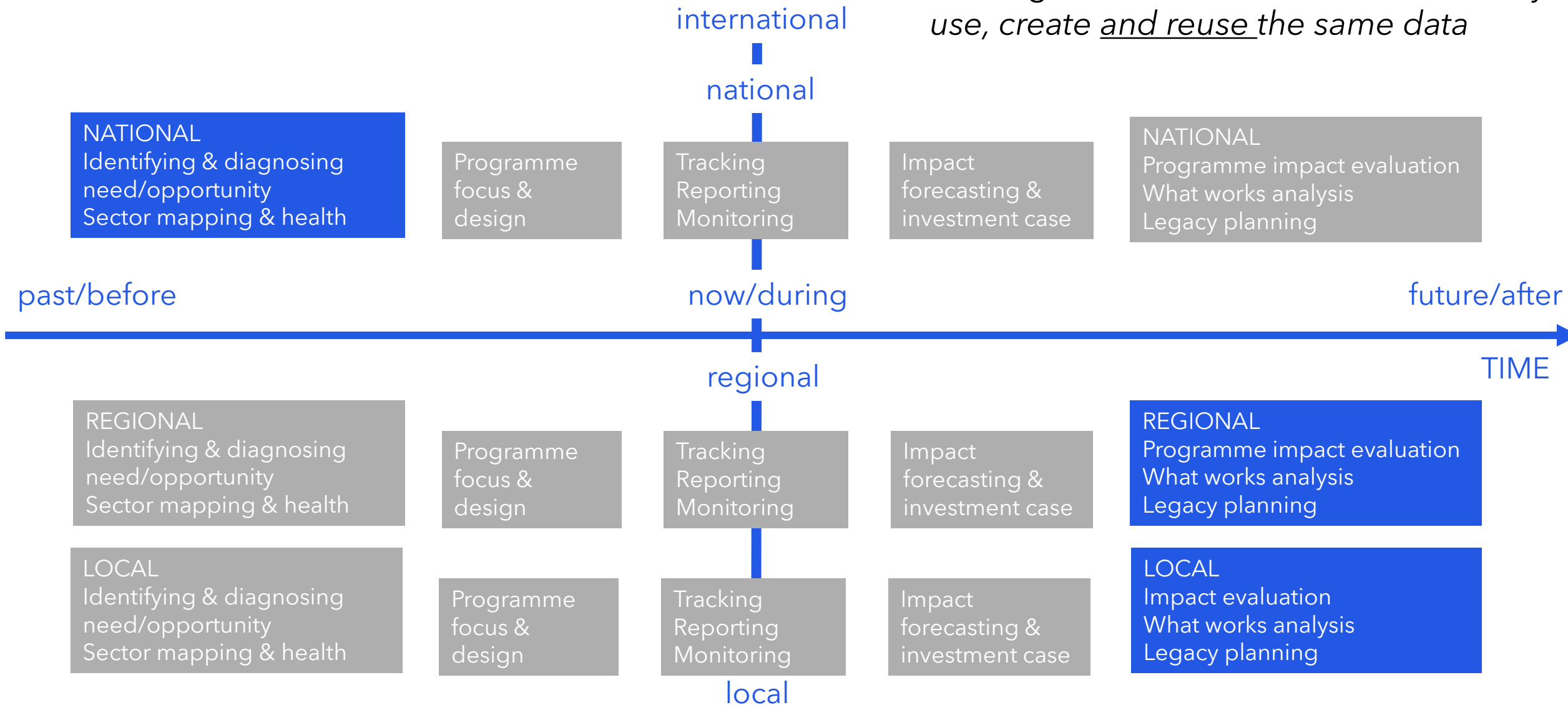
# Building a Shared Cultural Data Catalogue

- Data Catalogue: A structured **inventory of a 100+ qual/quant datasets** (national surveys, local studies, indicators, assets, research reports).
- **Federated Access:** Datasets can remain with their custodians but are searchable through a common catalogue (Data Exchange).
- Provides a **translational layer** so heterogeneous datasets (indicators, outcomes, metrics) can be **mapped together**.
- **Standardises across domains:** organisations, assets & funding, geography & place, outcomes & indicators, people & population, time
- Datasets and derived measures are **defensible, reproducible, comparable, and aggregable**.

# Selected use cases in demonstrator



*Although the use cases are different, they use, create and reuse the same data*



# Federated operating model



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Organisations can take up different roles in the NCDO

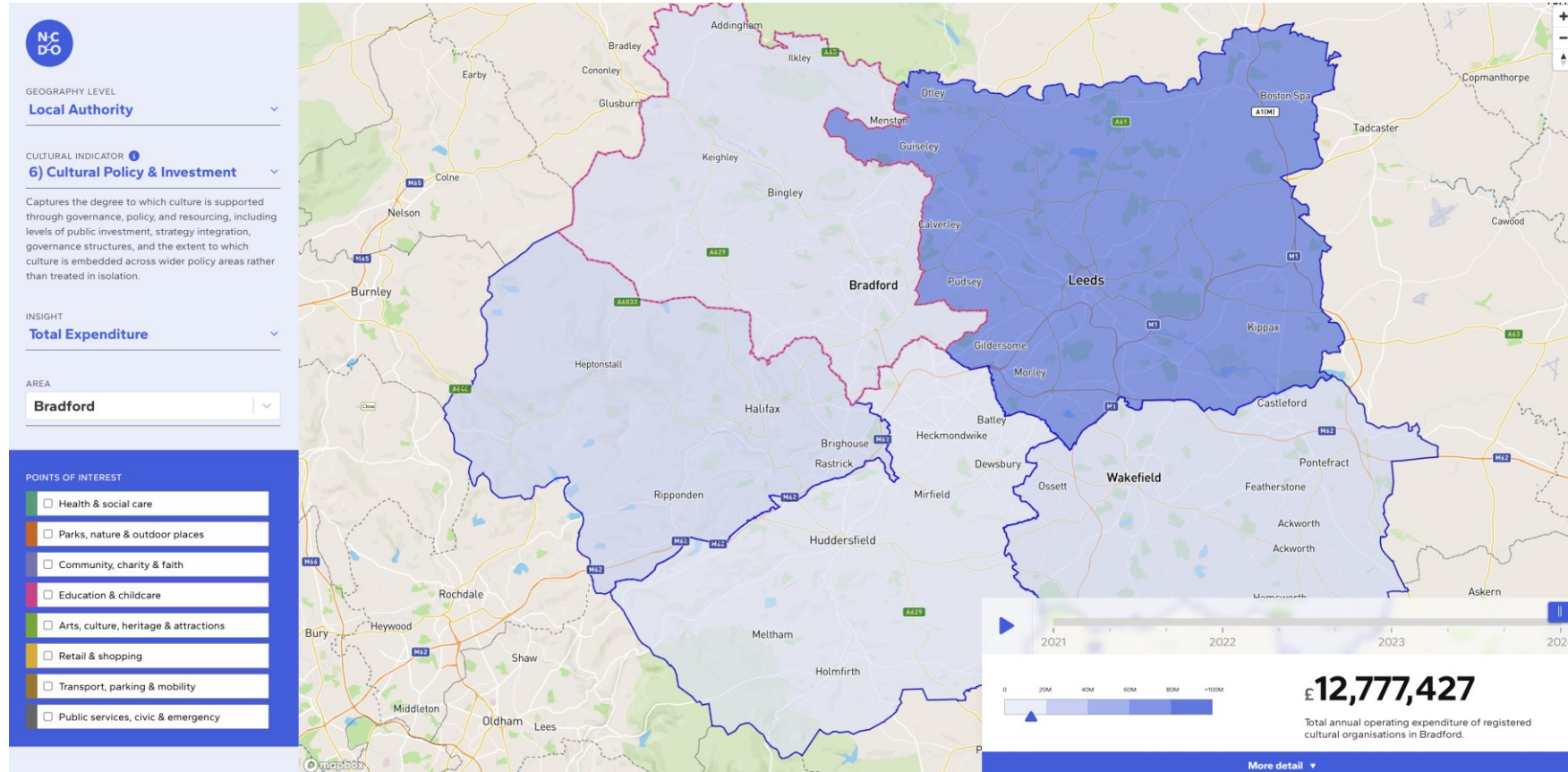
- End user (Government, ALB access, CA/LA)
- End user (sector access)
- Data contributor (Govt, ALBs, CA/LAs, sector bodies, HEIs)
- Data reuser (for portals run by other bodies or their digital suppliers taking a NCDO data feed)
- Academic research partner
- Commercial/freelancer researcher user
- Data infrastructure provider
- Dissemination/engagement partner

# The NCDO Demonstrator:

www.ncdo.org.uk



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\*Total Expenditure data provided by MyCake





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# Making NCDO a reality *together*

- Grow the national consortium and advisory network
- Secure investment for implementation and scaling
- Develop regional and thematic demonstrator projects
- Expand data partnerships and contributions
- Test and refine the Observatory Blueprint
- Build sector-wide data literacy and capability
- Develop international collaborations and learning
- Create a trusted, independent evidence infrastructure for culture

