ekip

Prototyping Innovation Policies with(in) cities

Innovation Area:
Performing Arts & AI

Saint-Étienne, France

How does "prototyping…" work?

This City Case Description is the outcome of a policy prototyping exercise within a city ecosystem. Once the ekip research team has explored a policy area and its connection to cultural and creative industries (CCIs) and innovation, we ask: what would this mean in a local city context?

Together with local stakeholders, we test how a draft policy recommendation might stimulate innovation. Using Portfolio Sensemaking, stakeholders simulate an innovation portfolio, analyse the strengths and gaps of the local support system, and identify what resources are needed to realise the portfolio.

Saint-Étienne Context
& AREA OF FOCUS

Rooted in a strong industrial heritage, Saint-Étienne has gradually reinvented itself and, since 2010, has been recognised as a UNESCO Creative City. This distinction has stimulated the growth of the cultural and creative industries in the region, supported by a network of performance venues historically linked to the working class and its popular entertainment culture.

At the same time, the city seeks to highlight its strengths in emerging technologies — particularly in the field of artificial intelligence — thanks to the presence of higher-education institutions and an ecosystem of innovative companies. Today, Saint-Étienne aims to build bridges between these two forces: artistic creativity and technological innovation. The ambition is to evolve cultural practices, enhance the city's attractiveness, remain competitive in an international context, and explore new forms of artistic expression and mediation.

AI AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INNOVATION AND SUPPORT OF PERFORMING ARTS

While artificial intelligence is not a new topic in the performing arts, its potential as a tool for artistic creation, production, and mediation remains largely to be explored. Our approach seeks to understand what unfolds when the performing arts intersect with AI technologies, and how this hybridisation can transform the ways performance is conceived, disseminated, and experienced.

Far from replacing artists, AI should be viewed as an opportunity: a driver of innovation, a catalyst for imagination, and a tool that enriches artistic processes while opening new aesthetic and organisational perspectives. Its integration concerns a wide range of professions — artists, engineers, producers, educators, technicians, as well as administrative and communications teams — and affects areas from stage production and resource management to the development of immersive experiences and ethical reflection.

The objective: to promote informed and responsible adoption of AI at all levels, ensure inclusivity in the face of technological change, and anchor these developments within a thoughtful legal, social, and cultural framework that supports creativity, strengthens skills, and accompanies the transformation of the sector.

Portfolio sensemaking

RETHINKING PERFORMANCE: EMBRACING AI IN THE ARTS

After analyzing the context of Saint-Étienne and sharing their respective needs, participants worked in four teams. The goal was to explore various aspects of the performing arts sector and identify potential intersections between AI and the performing arts that could drive innovation.
The diversity of participant profiles allowed for a mutual and enrichment of perspectives and highlighted that these intersections remain largely exploratory.
Although AI has been present for some time, current advances are moving rapidly, raising important questions and creating a strong desire to stay ahead of the curve.

> *AI appears to be one of the central themes in current creative discussions across all artistic fields: a tool for artists, not a substitute for human creation.*
>
> Morgiane Laib, City of Saint-Etienne

The four portfolios

Portfolio 1

BUILDING AI SKILLS IN A CONSTANTLY EVOLVING WORLD

Main idea/ Scope:

Training should be accessible to all audiences, tailored, and regularly updated, managed by entities specialized in AI education and supported by national, regional, and local networks. Objective: ensure inclusivity in AI knowledge, adapted to relevant sectors and audiences, ultimately enabling independent use of AI tools in creative practices.

- Coordination: establishment of a dedicated training observatory.
- Multi-stakeholder networks
- Certification: implementation of quality standards and official recognition.
- Support required: funding, qualified human resources, and appropriate infrastructure.
- Timeline: establishment of the first network and launch of the initial training plan by 2030.

Portfolio 2

SUPPORT AUDIENCES IN UNDERSTANDING THE CONTRIBUTION OF AI TO THE CREATIVE PROCESS, MEDIATION, AND DISSEMINATION

Main idea and Scope:

Before generalising the use of AI in the creative field, it is essential to raise awareness among audiences, whose perceptions of this technology can often be highly polarised. The question then becomes how to support these different audiences towards a gradual understanding — and informed acceptance — of the integration of AI into the performing arts, whether in creation, mediation, or dissemination.

- Encourage experimentation
- Provide the necessary resources through a dedicated creative hub
- Strengthen the role of cultural actors in fostering connections and collaboration among peers
- Ensure recognition, prioritisation, and public funding from institutions and policymakers

Portfolio 3

TIME AND SPACE FOR RESEARCH-CREATION

Main idea and Scope:

The rapid pace of technological innovation creates an urgent need for dedicated resources and infrastructures to ensure that research-creation can evolve accordingly. Experimental spaces and targeted funding are essential. They will enable the development of robust institutional frameworks and clear, ethical regulatory standards.

- The scientific outcomes generated through these initiatives will serve as concrete use cases for legal and regulatory models, while expanding the creative possibilities of research-creation.
- Support required: research-creation residencies, dedicated R&D funding, and a creator-driven think tank to guide and structure the field.
- The long-term ambition is to move beyond the distinction between creation with AI and creation without AI — positioning AI as one creative tool among others, fully embedded in artistic practice.

Portfolio 4

PATHWAYS TOWARD LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Main idea and Scope:

Establishing a local governance framework makes it possible to build critical mass in response to dominant global players. The emphasis on local reflects a desire for semi-autonomy, allowing stakeholders within a territory to shape regulations that are tailored to their specific context. This approach helps prevent uniformity that can be detrimental, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises and cultural and creative industries, who are often the first to be affected.

AI in the performing arts — and more broadly across creative fields — raises essential questions, particularly regarding intellectual property and artistic authorship.

- Creating a legal network or hub that brings together a diverse range of territorial actors would ensure inclusiveness and shared governance.
- The objective is to promote intelligent uses of AI: ethical, responsible, and creative.
- A dedicated AI consortium, composed of experts and cultural dissemination professionals, would support the development and coordination of initiatives — including recurring AI-focused events.
- Required support: combined public and private funding, dedicated facilities with appropriate equipment, and qualified human resources.
- Timeline: presentation of outcomes and recommendations within the CCAC-VILLE framework in November 2026.

Who was there?

A BROAD MIX OF STAKEHOLDERS CO-CREATED THIS CASE

CCI ORGANISATIONS

Le Fil, La Comète, Compagnie Corps au Bord, Opéra, Compagnie Vladimir Steyaert, neR
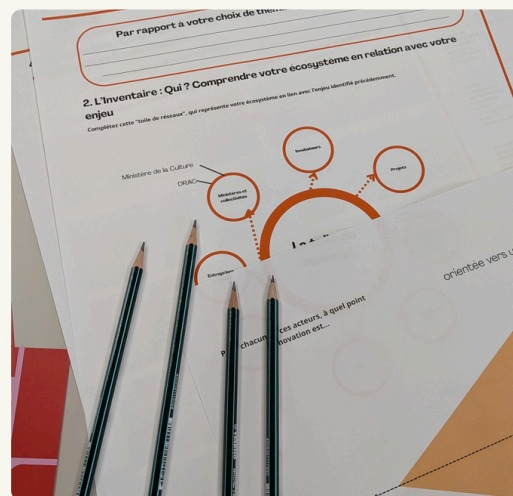
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BUSINESSES

Minalogic

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ACADEMIA

Université Jean Monnet, Université Lyon 2 (Droit), École Supérieure d'Art et Design de Saint-Etienne, CERCRID, Erasmus Mundus Digicrea

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LOCAL AUTHORITIES

City of Saint-Etienne, DRAC

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Analysis
THE LOCAL INNOVATION SUPPORT SYSTEM

Saint-Étienne boasts strong higher-education institutions actively engaged in artificial intelligence research and development. On the other side of the spectrum, the city also has a vibrant cultural and creative sector—particularly in the performing arts—that remains rooted in more traditional practices. Many of these organizations express a real desire to integrate AI into their work, yet often lack the knowledge, tools, and support to do so effectively.

Across all levels, there is now widespread recognition of the urgency to catch up with the rapid evolution of AI.

In response, France has been developing national strategies over the past few years, notably through the expansion of funding programs supporting AI-driven projects.

Territorial and local administrations are following this momentum by offering their own adapted versions of these funding schemes, tailored to their respective scales and contexts.

Currently, there is a lack of clearly identified actors offering certified, high-quality training in the field, as well as a shortage of private funding.

We also observe a contrast in positioning and maturity levels: national-scale institutions—such as ministries, universities, and major national initiatives—tend to operate with defined missions and structured objectives, while many cultural and creative sector stakeholders (ICC actors) remain in a more exploratory phase, approaching AI with curiosity but also uncertainty.
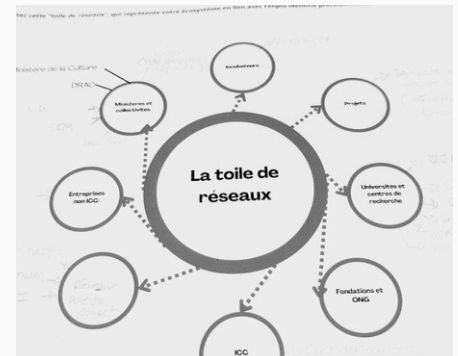
Conclusions
& RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Certified and continuously updated training at all levels

Continuous, certified training is essential to support the integration of AI in the performing arts. It strengthens the skills of artists and professionals, ensures informed adoption of technologies, and fosters innovation within organizations.

Conclusion: Develop and fund certified training programs that are accessible at all levels and regularly updated, to ensure that stakeholders in the sector have the skills needed to fully harness the potential of AI in their practices.

2. Local regulation

Several groups emphasized that the development of their own portfolios depends on a solid legal framework adapted to local realities. Regulation indeed plays a key role in the successful implementation of many initiatives. Beyond the ongoing efforts at the European and national levels, it is crucial for each territory to reflect on the intended or prohibited uses of AI, taking into account its specific context and the characteristics of its local actors.

Conclusion: Territories must have the necessary resources to define AI uses that are adapted to their ecosystems. Only a contextualized approach can prevent SMEs and local stakeholders from being disadvantaged by regulations designed for large organizations, while ensuring inclusive, fair, and sustainable innovation.

3. Dedicated spaces and resources

Whether through creative hubs, training organizations, experimental spaces, or specialized human resources, the needs are multiple and essential to implement effective actions. Having dedicated spaces and resources is a prerequisite for enabling the performing arts to fully explore the potential of AI and support the transformation of artistic practices.

Conclusion: Sustainably support experimentation and creation around AI in the performing arts by providing dedicated spaces, resources, and training, in order to foster inclusive innovation adapted to local realities.

4. Networking events and connections

It has been observed that, despite significant strengths in higher education, businesses, and the cultural and creative industries (CCI), these actors engage little with one another. To foster synergies, stimulate innovation, and boost activity, it is necessary to increase meetings and events that encourage dialogue and collaborative project development. Moreover, collaborative workspaces between these groups should be facilitated by public authorities, who can, through funding or structured support, initiate sustainable synergies.

Conclusion: Supporting and structuring the promotion of AI-related initiatives through events, festivals, professional gatherings, and dissemination activities helps strengthen exchanges, increase project visibility, and encourage the collective appropriation of new practices.

Overall Conclusions

- There is a critical need for training on emerging technologies - artificial intelligence - to ensure broad adoption and foster inclusivity.
- This upskilling must be supported by appropriate regulatory frameworks that guide ethical and responsible practices.
- Strengthening collaboration between stakeholders and enabling system interoperability are essential to build resilience, share resources, and create meaningful synergies.
- Establishing intermediary structures or coordination bodies would help facilitate dialogue, organize initiatives, and support the development of an AI-driven ecosystem.
- Acting now is imperative: given the rapid pace of technological evolution, stakeholders must engage proactively to seize opportunities rather than risk being left behind.

What happened next?

These workshops mark a first step toward innovative collaborative work. They provide participants from diverse backgrounds with a dedicated space and time to advance systems and explore solutions to cross-sector challenges.

 At the scale of Saint-Étienne, a growing number of stakeholders are eager to address questions related to artificial intelligence, rather than leaving them confined to informal discussions. This event enabled meaningful encounters between people who would not usually have the opportunity to meet: artists and legal experts, engineers and public bodies.

Moreover, the event served as a field study for the CERCRID, the legal research unit of Jean Monnet University. Finally, the outcomes of these discussions strengthen the legitimacy of a forthcoming call for projects focused on AI in creative practice within higher education, by clearly identifying existing needs.

Our methods

THE INNOVATION PORTFOLIO POLICY CANVAS

The Prototyping Workshop Methodology and the Innovation Portfolio Policy Canvas guide local stakeholders to analyse their local ecosystem, make an inventory of actors and resources, identify and create a potential innovation portfolio and analyse their local innovation support system.

THE OPSI MODEL

The OPSI-model (Open Public Sector Innovation OECD) is adapted to analyze the innovation character of the policy area. Participants explore whether the policy involves new legislative measures or is more exploratory in nature, allowing for a deeper understanding of how the policy might influence the local ecosystem

THE LIEPT MODEL

The Lund Innovation Ecosystem Portfolio Tracking (LIEPT) model is a tool that provides a framework for tracking changes in innovation portfolios in ecosystems where impact and growth happen not in one organisation but in many. This relies on collaborative efforts by many stakeholders.

What is ekip

The ekip partnership funded by the European Commission consists of 5 universities, 4 consultancies, 4 creative and cultural organisations and 4 cities. Together we develop innovation policies for the cultural and creative industries in Europe. We do that in various ways: through research, consultations and interaction with people in the sector at policy labs and focus groups and assessments in city ecosystems.

Want to know more? Want to do it in your city?

Would you like to explore the topic of artificial intelligence further? Visit the ekip website, where you'll find relevant policy posters, presentations, videos, and articles.

You can even host your own session in your city! It's an empowering and insightful way to bring together local stakeholders across sectors and disciplines for a focused discussion on a topic of shared importance. The ekip method and approach are open for anyone to use including a Facilitator's Guide and templates available in the ekip Knowledge Bank under *Tools and Methods*.

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