

# WHERE CULTURE LIVES

RESEARCH FINDINGS | CONCLUSIONS | RECOMMENDATIONS





Aruba



Bonaire



Curaçao



Saba



St. Eustatius



St. Maarten

Rebibá- "Duna Nos Awe Bo Pan Di Kada Dia"  
Curaçao - 2<sup>nd</sup> place



Client: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW)

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### **A Note on the Artwork**

The creative works featured throughout this report are the winning submissions of the *Where Culture Lives Artist Prize*, representing artists from Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, St. Eustatius and St. Maarten.

Each piece offers its own reflection to the question; 'Where does culture live?'

### **Copyright Notice**

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Inside my veins  
Is a hidden flame.  
Me  
I carry no name.  
Kindred spirit,  
Burning inside my soul,  
Aching  
To be bred.

BACKLASH  
IGNITED  
A wrecking of my beacon.

Like my back ain't had enough breakin' ?  
From all day pickin' !  
Sweet Salt Sweet Salt.  
Gah me stackin'  
Mountains upon mountains.  
A complete reflection of my injust.

WE BEND WE BACK  
AND WE PICK THE SALT  
TIL WE FINGERS BURN

A constant cycle of agony  
Turned industry.  
Hmph

SOUALIGA, LAND OF SALT.

Is that all they make us out to be?

FROM THE MORNING, TO THE NIGHT  
THEY GOT WE PICKIN, WITH ALL WE MIGHT

As if meen gah rights?  
Is this the reality?

*Petals*  
ON THE *Ground*

WRITTEN BY:  
KYRO

Kyro - "Petals on the Ground"  
St. Maarten - 1<sup>st</sup> place



# Executive Summary

## Background and Purpose

*Where Culture Lives* is a baseline study of arts and cultural practices commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) in collaboration with the *Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland* (RCN) and conducted by Lemonade Research & Consultancy BV and partners across Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius and Saba. This study explored how people across the ABCSSS islands engage with arts, culture and heritage in everyday life and aimed to identify appropriate methodologies for future cultural monitoring within the Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

## Methodology

The research applied a **context-sensitive mixed methods approach** that combined desk research, surveys, focus groups, interviews, validation sessions, artistic contributions and broader community engagement across all six islands. In total, **581 surveys** were conducted, complemented by focus groups and extensive conversations with more than **130 cultural practitioners, educators, policymakers, heritage professionals, NGOs, artists and community stakeholders**. In addition, over **100 persons** attended the **validation sessions** held across the islands to reflect on and validate the preliminary findings. The research was further enriched through the *Where Culture Lives Artist Prize*, which invited artists to creatively reflect on the meaning of culture in everyday life through visual arts, spoken word, photography and multidisciplinary works.

## Key Findings

The research found that culture across the ABCSSS islands is **vibrant and strongly embedded in everyday community life**. Culture is experienced not only through formal institutions, but through festivals and celebrations such as Carnival, Seú, Simadan and Dande, as well as through music, dance, storytelling, oral traditions, culinary traditions, beach traditions, spirituality, craftsmanship and community gatherings. Across the islands, culture functions as an important foundation for identity, belonging, memory, creativity and social cohesion.

One of the most important findings was the **high level of cultural participation across all islands**. Festivals, music events, concerts and community celebrations emerged by far as the most attended and visible cultural activities, highlighting the central role of music and collective celebration within Caribbean life. Survey findings also showed particularly strong engagement in music, visual arts, crafts and other community based cultural activities.

The research also showed the central role of **volunteers, artists, educators, NGOs, policy workers, elders and grassroots cultural practitioners** in sustaining cultural life, often with limited structural or financial support.

Schools were also identified as **important spaces for cultural transmission and talent development** through music, dance, theatre, visual arts and heritage activities.

Some key stakeholders in education clearly expressed serious concerns with regards to the absence of supportive cultural education policies. They signaled too much dependence on individual teachers or practitioners rather than strong cultural education curricula.

A notable finding is that the **islands also differ from each other**. Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao and St. Maarten generally offer somewhat **stronger opportunities for professionalization** and **clearer links between culture, tourism and the creative industries**. The less populated islands, such as Saba and St. Eustatius, show particularly **high levels of community engagement**, participation and volunteerism, yet face greater limitations in terms of scale, infrastructure and access to resources. Specifically with regard to the **BES islands**, there is a strong concern for **cultural preservation and identity** in the context of demographic change, migration, globalization and Dutch institutional influence.

While participation in culture is strong across all islands, respondents from the SSS islands showed significantly higher levels of community involvement, volunteering and cultural support activities. On islands such as Saba and Sint Eustatius, individuals often carry multiple roles simultaneously, acting as organizers, performers, educators and advocates within their communities.

The study also identified several **structural challenges** affecting the sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors, including access to funding, the main ones being access to materials and infrastructure, training opportunities and institutional support. At the same time, the **relationship between culture, tourism and the creative economy emerged as both an opportunity** and a source of tension.

While tourism was recognized as an important platform for cultural exposure and economic activity, participants also raised concerns about commercialization, limited inclusion of local creatives and the risk of reducing culture to “branding” rather than supporting sustainable cultural development and livelihoods.

Across several islands, participants further emphasized the need for stronger “cultural governance”, improved coordination from government, clearer communication around funding opportunities and long-term investment in talent development and support systems.

Lastly, participants emphasized **greater recognition of artists and informal cultural educators**, youth engagement, intergenerational knowledge sharing (*Traspaso Cultural*) and **the preservation of intangible cultural heritage** through storytelling, oral histories, documentation and digital platforms.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are suggested:

## Recommendations

- **Rethink arts and culture within a Caribbean context.** Future cultural monitoring should be grounded in the lived realities of the ABCSSS islands and embrace a broader understanding of culture that reflects language, heritage, creativity, community life, oral traditions and emerging cultural expressions.
- **Develop a context-sensitive cultural monitoring system** that combines quantitative and qualitative methods, including ethnographic observation, community engagement and participatory approaches capable of capturing a more diverse segment of cultural life.
- **Establish long term and adaptive cultural monitoring systems**, repeated periodically, to better understand evolving cultural realities for example like emerging creative sectors, the broader “orange economy”, AI and digital culture.

## *Paraiso* **Stima**

Mi prome rosea calma den mainta.  
Un sonrisa origina di mi alma.  
E prome rayonan colorido den shelo – mi ta contempla:  
"Mi bida ta bunita, pasobra mi isla ta bunita."

Mi prome pasonan banda di lama trankil.  
Un satisfaccion completo den mi mente.  
E colornan blauw cla y blanco  
ta ocupa mi bista – y mi ta contempla:  
"Ki dushi ta pa disfruta di e beyesa di naturalesa."

Mi curpa ta flota suave den awa.  
Mi wowonan cera, un libertad interno.  
E biento ta caricia mi cara, e sentimento aki  
ta paz completo – mi ta contempla: "Den mi bida  
tin harmonia, pasobra mi isla  
ta harmonisando continuamente."

*Aruba; mi paraiso stima.*



Ghislaine M. de Cuba - "Paraiso Stima"  
Aruba - 3<sup>rd</sup> place

# Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the openness, time and voices of many individuals and communities across the ABCSSS islands.

We extend our sincere appreciation to everyone who contributed as participants in the focus group discussions and respondents in the interviews and surveys. In sharing their stories, reflections and lived experiences, they have given this study its depth and pulse.

As the Lemonade research project team, we would like to thank:

Our Island Coordinators (Maria-Liz “Liesje”, Ashayna, Sharifa, Paula, Elton, Gregory, Ludmila and Lara), for their dedication, coordination and deep connection to their communities;

The Knowledge partners, The Boekman Stichting, NAAM (National Archaeological Anthropological Memory Management) and the University of St. Martin;

The culture, science and education departments across the ABCSSS islands: Departamento di Cultura Aruba (DCA), Departamento di Enseñansa Aruba (DEA), the Ministerie van Onderwijs, Wetenschap, Cultuur en Sport (OWCS) Curaçao, the Department of Culture Sint Maarten, and Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland – Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap (OCW CN) for their openness, collaboration and valuable contributions in providing a broad perspective on the cultural and educational landscape of the islands;

*Data analyst*, Rainier Kock, for his valuable support in the area of data analysis;

*OCW and their guidance committee*, for their guidance, insights and engagement throughout the process;

*The Surveyors*, for their commitment to reaching people and ensuring that a diversity of voices could be heard;

Papiamentu and Papiamento *translators* Solange Duncan and Melendy Neuman;

The *WCL Artist Prize Jury Members*, chaired by Jerry Gumbs for their care, attention and cross island perspective in reviewing the submissions;

*Lemonade’s Creative Hub support officer*, Mik Boland, for his support with social media and submission management for the WCL Artist Prize;

*The Creatives and Artists*, whose works brought forward layers of meaning, memory and imagination, further enriching this research beyond words;

And above all, the *People of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius and Saba* who participated as respondents, contributors and co-creators of knowledge.

Note on AI<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>This report was prepared with limited use of ChatGTP and Claude to support editing and certain parts of the quantitative analysis. All substantive analysis, findings, interpretations and final recommendations remain the responsibility of the authors.

Principio Sling - "Bou'i Palu"  
Curaçao - 1<sup>st</sup> place



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## List of Abbreviations

ABCSSS	Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius and Saba
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BES	Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba
CAS	Curaçao, Aruba and Sint Maarten
ICH	Intangible Cultural Heritage
LKCA	Landelijk Kennisinstituut Cultuureducatie en Amateurkunst
NAAM	National Archaeological Anthropological Memory Management
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
OCW	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
RCN	Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WCL	Where Culture Lives

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Dillon Jean Fidel Rannou - "It's in Our Nature"  
Bonaire - 1<sup>st</sup> place



# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Commission

This research report was prepared by Lemonade BV, as part of an assignment commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) in collaboration with the *Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland* (RCN). The overall aim of the assignment was to conduct a compact yet grounded baseline study of arts and cultural practices in the Dutch Caribbean; Aruba, Curaçao, Bonaire, St. Maarten, St. Eustatius and Saba, hereafter referred to as the ABCSSS islands<sup>2</sup>.

Using UNESCO's broad definition, arts and cultural practice are here understood as diverse forms of expression, participation and meaning making, embedded in everyday life and community experience (UNESCO 2003).

This understanding expands **beyond static sector classifications to include living cultural practices, traditions, community engagement, informal spaces and the dynamic interplay between creators, audiences, private and public institutions and other relevant parties.**

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<sup>2</sup> Although the constitutional status of the islands differs with the BES islands functioning as special municipalities of the Netherlands and the CAS islands as autonomous countries within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the term ABCSSS is used here to reflect the islands' longstanding historical, cultural and linguistic connections.

## Rationale and Relevance

The assignment emerged from internal inquiries by OCW, which highlighted that existing research and monitoring efforts have largely focused on the European Netherlands, leaving the Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands mostly underrepresented.

This gap limits the ability of policymakers and stakeholders to effectively support Caribbean cultural ecosystems. Establishing a baseline for the ABCSSS islands is therefore essential as it allows a space for more inclusive, evidence based cultural policy and sustainable cultural sector development. **Cultural monitoring is fundamental in sustaining a healthy and dynamic cultural sector.** The data is hereby essential in supporting policymakers, researchers and other stakeholders in their decision making.

## Purpose and Scope of the Study

The assignment was twofold:

1. To conduct a baseline study to gain deeper insight into how people on the ABCSSS islands engage with arts and cultural practices, particularly within the cultural domains of cultural education, amateur arts, cultural participation, intangible heritage, heritage participation and talent development.
2. To pilot and recommend an appropriate research methodology and planning based on empirical data for the purpose of a future cultural monitoring project in the ABCSSS islands. The research methodology therefore intended to inform a future cultural monitoring system tailored to the Caribbean context.

The guiding questions OCW included were:

- Which forms of arts and cultural practice take place on these islands?
- Who practices them?
- How are they practiced?
- Where do they take place?
- How is the accessibility of the sector perceived by practitioners?
- Which research methods are suitable for describing and periodically monitoring arts and cultural practice on the ABCSSS islands?
- Which themes should be periodically investigated for future monitoring processes?

### Interpretation of Key Domains

These domains form the basis of the research and they recur throughout the report. Therefore, to navigate it effectively, it is important that they are clearly understood.

- **Cultural Education:** Learning about and through the arts and heritage, both within formal education systems and informal settings such as private lessons, workshops and museum programs (LKCA, 2021).
- **Amateur Arts:** Voluntary creative practices carried out during leisure time. These may include self-directed or organised activities such as music groups, theatre, visual arts classes or dance workshops, emphasizing personal engagement in the creative process (LKCA, 2021).

- **Cultural Participation:** Voluntary involvement in artistic, heritage and media-related activities outside professional or educational obligations. This includes both creating and experiencing culture for instance, participating in community festivals or volunteering in cultural institutions (Boekmanstichting, 2026).
- **Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH):** Living traditions, knowledge and skills that communities recognize as part of their cultural identity, including oral traditions, rituals, performing arts and craftsmanship (UNESCO, 2003).
- **Heritage Participation:** Engagement with cultural heritage through both top-down (e.g., government-funded) and bottom up (e.g., community-led) initiatives, reinforcing collective ownership and intergenerational transmission (Council of Europe, 2005).
- **Talent Development:** Structured efforts to identify and support artistic talent, including advanced amateur artists and aspiring professionals, through mentorship, specialized training or access to artistic networks (LKCA, 2021).
- **Creative (Orange) Economy:** Activities whose principal purpose is the production or reproduction, promotion, distribution and or commercialization of goods, services and activities of a cultural, artistic or heritage related nature UNESCO, Creative Economy Report (2013).

## 1.2 Structure of the Report

The overall research process is elaborated on in detail in the following chapters. Chapter 2 presents the methodology used during the research, including the overall research design, data collection methods and considerations regarding validity and reliability. Chapter 3 outlines the results from all research phases, including the most relevant findings of the desk research, focus group conversations and interviews, surveys and validation sessions. Chapter 4 provides the conclusions, discussions and recommendations, offering a concise response to the main research questions, followed by a discussion that provides context to these conclusions as well as recommendations for policy and future monitoring. This is followed by the reference list.

The report is further complemented by island specific research results as an attachment.

Ariadne Wever - "Legado di famia"  
Aruba - 1<sup>st</sup> place



# CHAPTER 2

# METHODOLOGY

# Chapter 2 - Methodology

This study used a “context-sensitive mixed-methods approach” carried out across four research phases, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods (Christolouka & Verdis, 2025). This approach was particularly useful in small scale island contexts, where oral traditions, close social networks and both formal and informal cultural infrastructures shape how knowledge is produced and shared. These different phases allowed for a balanced and well rounded view of the sector.

## 2.1 Data Collection Phases

Figure 1: Where Culture Lives Research Design



## Phase 1: Desk Research

In Phase one, a concise desktop research was carried out that focused on the current landscape of arts and cultural practices across the ABCSSS islands and the wider Caribbean. It drew on key cultural policy documents and other relevant studies which provided a valuable framework for exploring the dynamics of culture within these island communities. Some of the local works analyzed among others included the *Aruba Integrated Cultural Policy: Policy Report 2015–2017 – Cultural Excellence: “Our Culture, Our Priority”*, *Cultuurbeleid Curaçao 2020–2025*, *Cultural Policy Framework St. Maarten 2007*, *Beleidsnota Cultuur Bonaire 2010*, *Saba Cultural Agenda 2024–2028*, *Bonaire Cultuuragenda 2024–2028* and the *St. Eustatius Cultural Agenda 2024–2028*.

## Phase 2: Focus Group Conversations and Interviews

Phase two consisted of focus group conversations and supplementary interviews conducted by the lead researchers with key representatives from the arts and culture sector across all six islands between (July and October 2025). In total, over **131 key informants** participated in sessions that lasted approximately two hours each. These participants included individuals working in the fields of arts and cultural education both within and outside schools, heritage professionals, policymakers, cultural practitioners, representatives of funding organizations and the commercial sector, event organizers, heritage experts and other stakeholders with extensive knowledge of the arts and culture sector.

The discussions were organised around six clustered research domains: (1) cultural education and talent development, (2) amateur arts and community-based practices, (3) intangible cultural heritage, (4) participation in heritage and culture, (5) the role of NGOs and government and (6) the creative (orange) economy in relation to tourism and policy. The involvement of local partner institutions and island coordinators played a vital role in this process.

The research team explored existing cultural practices, participation patterns and their contexts, while identifying key themes, issues of accessibility and the role of government and support structures. All sessions were recorded and or transcribed with support from research assistants. A qualitative content analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes and patterns. The data were then analyzed across all focus groups to identify overarching themes, which are presented in the results chapter. These insights along with the previously collected data also supported the development of the survey instrument.

### Phase 3: Surveys

In phase three, surveys were distributed across all six islands using a combination of face to face and online methods.

The survey consisted of 25 questions, most of which were closed ended, with some open ended items included. Data collection was conducted by trained surveyors under the coordination of island coordinators.

**A total of 581 responses were collected:** Aruba (n = 193), Bonaire (n = 67), Curaçao (n = 165), Saba (n = 40), St. Eustatius (n = 41) and St. Maarten (n = 75). Of the respondents, 66.4% identified as female, 32.7% as male and 0.9% as other or non-binary.

Considerations regarding the sample were based on overall population size, as well as the percentage distribution across different districts, *barrios* and villages on each island in order to provide a more balanced representation of perspectives. Further attention was given to age group distribution to ensure the participation of younger respondents as well. **The survey was administered in English, Papiamentu and Papiamentu, reflecting the region's linguistic diversity.**

The questionnaire followed a W + H framework, examining what practitioners do, who participates, why they engage, where practices take place and how activities are carried out. It also addressed professionalization, accessibility, resource needs and key challenges and gathered perspectives on how policymakers and institutions could better support the sector. To ensure the reliability and validity of the tests, a data analyst conducted additional analyses<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>Of the 55 cross-island tests conducted, 40 were significant at the 0.05 level and 27 remained significant after the Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Claude Opus 4.6 was used to assist with the analysis.

## Phase 4: Validation Sessions

Validation sessions were conducted across all six islands in April 2026. The purpose of these sessions was to share the research findings with stakeholders in the field. This process ensured a meaningful return of findings to the communities and allowed for the inclusion of perspectives that perhaps were not sufficiently addressed. During the sessions, key research findings were presented, followed by breakout discussions in which participants contributed additional insights to deepen the conclusions and recommendations.

In addition, the awarding of the Where Culture Lives (WCL) Artist Prize also took place during these sessions. This was a valuable addition to the entire research project and deserved its proper recognition. Across all islands, a total **32 submissions** were received, spanning visual art, photography, spoken word and multidisciplinary works. The submissions were reviewed by a 7 member jury composed of representatives from all islands. The works offered an impression of cultural life, highlighting everyday practices, identity, memory and different forms of expression. As mentioned earlier, many of these works have been featured in this report.

Feedback was documented and used to further refine the final report.

## 2.2 Methodological Considerations<sup>4</sup>

Several considerations should be noted. The surveys relied on a selected sample of persons, meaning that not all perspectives within the cultural sector were captured. Hence, the research results, though robust, are indicative and not generalizable. Also, female representation within the specific surveyed population was comparatively strong; however, within the broader purpose of this baseline study, gender was not treated as a primary analytical factor, although it may provide relevant insights for future research.

**At the same time, a key methodological strength was the application of triangulation, whereby data from desk research, focus groups conversations, interviews, surveys and validation sessions were integrated to enhance reliability and validity.**

This approach, combined with a diverse sample across islands and sectors, ensured abroad and contextual perspective. The multilingual research team and strong local networks further supported accessibility and depth of analysis.

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<sup>4</sup>All quotes used in this report were retained in their original form, in accordance with the preferences expressed by research participants, in order to preserve the authenticity of their thoughts, as well as the spelling and linguistic characteristics of English based Creole and Papiamentu/u as used across the islands.

# SAMSON, SON OF THE STATIAN SOIL

Written by Rhea Courtar

## *Who is Samson?*

*Samson is a young boy, 13 years of age, who was born and raised on a little square mile Dutch Caribbean island, known to most as Statia. He is the Statia-born Una and Russell.*

## *No Other Way*

Samson woke up to the sound of a rooster crowing right outside his bedroom window, marking the start of a new day. His mom Una was awake in the kitchen preparing breakfast. Samson could see his dad R through the kitchen window tending to the farm in the far end of the backyard. The morning air was warm reminding you it was summer time. Samson entered the kitchen and hugged and greeted his mom, “Mawr Mommy.” Una hugged and greeted him in return, “Mawnin’, Son, you like like you had a good sleep.” A huge smile spread across Samson’s face, confirming that he did. “Now go check see if the oven ready to bake the bread”, Una said. Samson smiled again, this time at the thought of freshly baked bread from the stone oven. “Yes, Mommy”, he replied.

Samson then skips outside to the stone oven and peeps inside. He shoved around the coal with the long wooden stick just like his mom taught him and said, “Yup, it ready.” Una always baked bread on Saturday mornings. Samson went back inside to let his mom know that the oven was ready. “Okay, here. Take these and put them to bake.” his mom said, handing him the balls of dough. “Then you can hurry to go help your father tend to the animals.” He took the aluminum tray with the twelve rolls of dough, each no bigger than his fist and walked carefully to the stone oven trying his best not to let the rolls fall. He would surely spend the weekend being grounded as a consequence of being careless. And Samson had already made plans with his friends to go to the beach around midday. After he placed the bread rolls in the oven he ran over to help his dad.

The family owned a few goats, sheep, pigs, chickens and one cow. Just enough animals not to be too much of a hassle. Russell was busy pouring water into the *half-tank* he uses to give water to the goats. The goats were feeding on the fresh *tantan* he chopped the day before. Samson asked, “Daddy, you want me to collect the eggs so long?” Russell paused for a moment then replied, “I don’t think that’s a good idea. Yo’ might break them. You can go pour water for the cow to drink.” Samson was fine with the task. He walked over to the water tank where his dad stored water, scooped out some into the 10 gallon bucket on the ground until it was almost full. He walked slowly back over to where the cow was grazing to pour some of the water. The rest will go to the sheep. The cow swayed its head as if to tell Samson to go away and continued grazing. After that Samson helped his dad do several other small tasks until the pigs and sheep were fed and eggs collected.

# **CHAPTER 3**

## **RESEARCH RESULTS**

# Chapter 3 - Research Results

The results are presented collectively, integrating findings across all the islands, while highlighting notable differences where relevant. Detailed data per island are provided in the appendices.

## 3.1 Desk Research - Phase 1

The desk research shows that across the ABCSSS islands, policy documents position arts and culture as an important public matter, but most often in relation to other sectors rather than as a fully developed policy field in its own right. Four themes appear consistently:

**First, culture is inextricably tied to identity.** Across the region, policy frameworks present culture as a foundation for nation building and social cohesion. Herein references are especially made to ancestry, ethnicity, folklore, religion, language, dress, traditions, everyday social practices and the like.

**Second, there is a clear link between culture and education.** The value of arts education, cultural learning and heritage awareness is emphasized in both formal and non formal settings. This includes schools, but also museums, libraries, tra'i merdia, centro di barios, archives and heritage sites, where cultural practitioners and professionals play an important role in transmitting knowledge.

**Third, more recent policy frameworks increasingly connect culture to the creative economy.** Arts, music, media, design, digital

production and other creative industries are presented as areas with economic potential through innovation, entrepreneurship and intellectual property.

**Fourth, heritage tourism is widely identified as a strategic opportunity.** The analysis highlights the importance of historical, natural and cultural assets in shaping distinctive visitor experiences and strengthening cultural identity on all six islands. Several policy references point to the potential role of heritage tourism in supporting economic diversification while simultaneously preserving local traditions, landscapes and historical sites.

Differences are also shown between the policy documentation of the BES and the CAS islands. The analysis shows that **on the BES islands, policy frameworks are generally more recent and more accessible in the public domain, for example online.** The policy environment appears comparatively well developed in written form with for example the 'wet op de specifieke cultuurbeleid', being applicable to Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba. This law clarifies cultural policy, relevant conditions, governance and funding mechanisms that contribute to a rich cultural life. However, this does not necessarily guarantee meaningful local participation in decision making or equal access to benefits.

The analysis also shows that the CAS islands tend to operate within older or component based policy frameworks, often consisting of individual reports focused on specific themes. In addition, these policy frameworks are not always readily accessible through the public domain or online sources. In some cases, access to these policy documents could only be obtained through personal contacts or direct communication with stakeholders.

At the same time, these islands have greater access to specialized expertise through artists, researchers, cultural workers and policy professionals. This may suggest the existence of a more independent cultural ecosystem in which cultural development is shaped not only through formal government policy, but also through networks of institutions and practitioners operating within the cultural field itself.

## 3.2 Focus Group Conversations and Interviews - Phase 2

### Cultural Education

The conversations with the stakeholders show that in the ABCSSS islands, schools continue to serve as important spaces of cultural transmission and arts education as it is by law formerly part of the primary and secondary school system. There is a minimum amount of hours assigned for these subjects in the curriculum. **Students are exposed to music, dance, visual arts, storytelling, national symbols and varying forms of performance through both classroom activity and school based events.**

Aruba and Bonaire presents a relatively broad exposure through music, dance, theater, visual arts and handcraft within the school setting. Saba offers a particularly effective example of coordinated cultural education with students engaging in string band music, maypole dance, heritage centered field trips supported by the Saba Canon which is in development.

In St. Maarten, several schools provide music education through choirs, bands, dance and annual cultural presentations that introduce students to both local and wider Caribbean traditions. In Curacao, in primary education, different guest teachers such as *Tio Ali*, *Tio Ruchi*, *Sorendly*, *Ms. Gini de Palm* and many others support teachers in ensuring that the Curaçao culture and heritage is safeguarded and passed on to the next generation. In Statia, agriculture, dance and drama are offered within some schools through partnerships with community practitioners.

Across the islands, secondary schools include CAV/CKV (*Culturele en Artistieke Vorming/Culturele en Kunstzinnige Vorming*) or comparable subjects in their curricula, providing students with structured arts and cultural education. Furthermore, schools engage in a range of project based cultural initiatives, including *Edukashon Kultural Artistiko di Kalidat*, *Baila bo Historia*, Black History Month, National Day celebrations, *Siman di Kultura* and *Siman di Arte*, among numerous other programs implemented at primary and secondary educational levels. Taken together, the findings show that cultural, artistic and heritage education is present for the most part, at least formally, across the islands and that schools remain important spaces where cultural knowledge, identity and creative practice are being introduced to younger generations.

Although present in both primary and secondary schools, focus group participants across the islands were critical and noted that in many cases, as a whole, cultural education needs more support from education departments and or in some cases the school boards.

Many of the culture and arts teachers called for more contextualized curricula to cultural education and stronger systems for identifying and developing young talent. In practice, **what students received in many cases was trivial; it often depended on individual teachers, visiting practitioners or community organizations.**

Furthermore, a major challenge across the islands is the dependence on individual educators. Participants described art programmes that disappear when a teacher leaves, especially on smaller islands where access to specialized staff is limited. At the same time, examples such as the Leerorkest programme on Saba and Aruba, partnerships with cultural institutions and other school-led cultural initiatives show positive results but may not be the case in all schools.

The findings also show that in some cases that local heritage, history and intangible cultural practices are not well embedded in school curricula. While for example national symbols may be taught, in preparation for dia di himno y bandera (flag and anthem day) the traditions, stories and artistic practices that define each island's identity are often included only through personal initiative.

“Er bestaan geen lesplannen.” De docenten moeten de ruimte hebben om creatief te zijn. Algemene thema's worden gegeven. Er is geen methode in voortgezet.”

- Cultural teacher from Aruba

## Amateur Arts, Talent Development and Informal Cultural Education

The focus groups show that across all six islands, cultural, heritage and art activities in large part are community driven with some support of cultural departments and NGOs. Music, dance, visual arts, crafts, culinary traditions, theatre and other **practices in many cases are sustained by practitioners and organizations who carry the responsibility of teaching, organizing, fundraising and managing the administration.** Much of this work happens outside formal education, with community educators, artisans, musicians, storytellers and elders passing on knowledge in homes, churches, community spaces and social settings in the best way they can and with the means they have. Some examples mentioned across the islands included music related initiatives such as youth bands performing harvest songs, string band music, steelpan, tambú, tumba, simadan, dande, calypso and brass band music as well as programmes in vocal training, rapping and music production.

Other initiatives focused on ballet, street dance, traditional dances, acting, drama, comedy, modelling, spoken word, storytelling, creative writing and carnival arts. Furthermore, other popular activities included photography, film making, podcasting, painting, mural creation, fashion and clothing design, kite making, traditional boat racing, gardening and traditional cooking. Several community based initiatives also supported the transmission of oral history through interviews with elderly community members.

According to the participants, informal cultural educators receive little recognition, limited compensation and almost no structural support, even though they often fill gaps left by the “formal education” system.

Funding is frequently cited as being absent or difficult to access, especially for some grassroots groups that are sometimes challenged with the administrative capacity to meet some of the grant requirements. Dedicated cultural spaces are also limited, particularly on the smaller islands and the perception that the arts do not provide viable livelihoods discourages youth participation and professional development.; “culture does not pay.”

At the same time, participants pointed to promising initiatives across the region, including community arts programmes, music education, mural projects and small projects that support local artists. However, these efforts remain fragile and often depend on individual commitment rather than institutional support.

“At our dance theater we train about 250 students every year in ballet, jazz, African, contemporary and musical theater with professional-level productions and theatrical performances to give students real stage experience.”

- Dance school director on St. Maarten

## Intangible Cultural Heritage

The discussions revealed that intangible cultural heritage remains an important part of identity on the ABCSSS islands. **Participants on every island described traditions that are still practiced, celebrated and passed on through generations, including Simadan<sup>5</sup>, Seú<sup>6</sup>, Jollification<sup>7</sup>, Dande<sup>8</sup>, traditional foods, music and crafts.** These practices continue largely because of the efforts of volunteers, families, elders, small community organizations as well as the departments of culture and other NGOs.

Across the islands, participants shared similar concerns. Safeguarding intangible heritage shows to be limited, as much of the knowledge, if still present, is still held by many aging practitioners without formal archiving or structured transfer to younger generations. The sentiment was that many traditional music, crafts, oral histories and cultural practices are therefore at risk, particularly where school based cultural programming is limited and youth participation is declining. This according to the participants of the focus group conversations.

“Barionan manera Rincon, Tera Korá i Antriol ta keda baluartenan kulturál importante. Na mesun momento, konosementu tradishonal manera práktikanan di piskamentu, tradishonnan kulinario (p.e., stoba, piska ku funchi), i historia oral ta cada mas na riesgo di disparsé.”

- Respondente di Boneiru

“Areas such as Rincon, Tera Korá and Antriol remain important cultural strongholds. At the same time, traditional knowledge such as fishing practices, culinary traditions (stoba, fish and corn meal) and oral history is increasingly at risk of disappearing.”

- Respondent from Bonaire

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<sup>5</sup> Simadan is Bonaire’s traditional harvest celebration about collective agricultural labour with music, dance, food and community thanksgiving.

<sup>6</sup> Seú is Curaçao’s harvest tradition celebrated through a public parade that commemorates the island’s agricultural heritage.

<sup>7</sup> Jollification is a Saba and St. Martin/St. Maarten tradition in which neighbours and friends come together to help with communal labour, with food and drink, offered in return.

<sup>8</sup> Dande is an Aruban New Year tradition in which groups of musicians go from house to house singing blessings of goodwill and prosperity.

Participants also pointed to island specific pressures, including migration, an aging population and what some participants describe as “Dutch environmental regulations” that affect traditional island practices for example like conch and iguana protection. *Sopi Yuana* (iguana soup), is a considered a traditional delicacy on some of the islands but the tradition of hunting iguanas with a *chinchá* (slingshot) is not common practice anymore.

At the same time, important signs of continuity remain visible, including string band revival efforts, active teaching communities, Carnival, harvest celebrations and enduring craft traditions.

## Heritage & Cultural Participation

The focus groups results show that across the ABCSSS islands, Carnival remains one of the most visible and widely shared forms of cultural participation. Especially in Aruba, Curacao and St Maarten. Participants described it as **a key expression of identity, creativity, community and moreover also an economic activity.**

At the same time, rising costs, dependence on sponsorship and limited public funding are placing increasing pressure on its sustainability. Across several islands, participants also noted a broader decline in handmade traditions, local music and intergenerational knowledge transfer, particularly in costume making and other craft based practices once passed down through families and communities in collective settings.

“Black heritage needs to be celebrated more. Younging should know where they come from and be proud of it. ... we know that Carnival comes from up the islands but black voices gets silenced here in Aruba because we are too scared to speak up for what is rightfully ours.

Building up the black community back by education and giving them the comfortability and space to speak up allows us to also take up space and be leaders especially for cultural activities that started with us. I am not saying we should do it alone but our voices also matters.”

- Respondent from Aruba

Despite these challenges, participants also pointed to important signs of renewal. Youth led organizing, stronger cultural sections within Carnival and continued celebrations such as *Simadan*, *Dia di Rincon*, *Dia di Boneiru*, *Seú*, *Kaya Kaya festival*, *Dia di Bandera Kòrsou* and *festival un canto pa Aruba su himno y bandera* and others show that cultural participation remains active and meaningful. On St. Eustatius in particular, renewed energy around Carnival and heritage sites reflects what is possible when local leadership is supported and given the room to innovate, according to some participants.

At the same time, the conversation results show that heritage and cultural participation remain structurally constrained, especially on the smaller islands. Participants describe limited infrastructure, funding systems that are poorly suited to small-island contexts and governance practices that do not always value or credit grassroots cultural work according to the stakeholders.

Overall it should be mentioned that even though a viable part of heritage and cultural participation, limited information regarding other forms of heritage for example monuments, heritage sites, archiving, memory management and other forms of cultural participation was shared.

## Non-governmental and supporting organizations (NGOs) and Government

The focus group conversations with the NGO and government sectors show that across the six islands, support for culture, arts, and heritage is present, but the systems connecting departments, organizations, funding and practitioners remain fragile in many ways. Some of the NGOs were also somewhat critical as they mentioned that even with all the possibilities nowadays, the sign ups are limited.

While resources and commitment exist, many participants on the other hand said **support is still difficult to access, particularly for smaller NGOs and cultural practitioners facing complex administrative requirements**. As a result, there is a continued need for grant-writing support, project management training and hands-on guidance.

“Information on programs, grants and support is not reaching the wider community.”

- Community leader on St. Eustatius

Some islands have developed stronger support structures for the cultural sector. For example, Let's Act, a social cultural programme operating in Aruba and St. Maarten is led by CEDE Aruba, the St. Maarten Development Fund and Foresee Foundation with support from the *Fonds voor Cultuurparticipatie*. The programme aims to strengthen cultural infrastructure, promote inclusion and cultural entrepreneurship and encourage collaboration between cultural and community organizations. *Cultuurfonds Caribisch Gebied* (CCG), *Kurason pa Kòrsou* (former *Samenwerkende fondsen*) and *Nationaal Cultuur Instituut Curaçao* (NCIC) are organizations that are also supporting smaller NGOs with funding, grant writing and implementation.

In Bonaire, Saba and St. Eustatius, participants pointed to a recurring gap between Dutch (central) policy design and local cultural realities. Information about grants, facilities and opportunities often does not reach practitioners in clear or consistent ways they said. More broadly, unpaid labour, limited youth pathways and weak visibility of existing support continue to undermine sector development.

Participants across all islands also stressed the need for a centralized cultural database to map practitioners, track support and reduce duplication.

Specifically, from our conversations with policymakers and cultural professionals, it was shared that considerable efforts are being made to support culture across the islands through research, funding, coordination and programmes such as for example, Gang di Arte and Arte di Palabra, Although challenges remain and some concerns are understandable, participants noted that much of the work in cultural policy, research and programme management takes place behind the scenes and is not always visible to the wider community. “That should also be taken into account”, one participant said.

## Creative ‘Orange’ Economy and Tourism

The stakeholders, particularly in Aruba, Curaçao and St. Maarten have shared that there is much potential between culture, the creative industries and tourism. They indicated that most practitioners in the field still rely on multiple income streams, government support remains fragmented and youth migration continues to affect the talent pipeline. On the less populated islands, these challenges are intensified by limited scale, in many ways a challenged cultural infrastructure..

Stakeholders indicated that tourism is the dominant market movement across most islands, yet its relationship with culture remains complex and even contradictory. Some shared that **while tourism creates opportunities for visibility and income, it also tends to privilege branding over cultural development especially in the case of Aruba and St Maarten.** Participants described tensions between visitor driven representation and authentic local expression, including the dominance of mass produced souvenirs over local craft and limited inclusion of practitioners in tourism planning.

Particularly in the creative sector, a common finding across the islands is that there are not enough stable conditions to help people move from short term project work to making a sustainable living. So not only based on incidental activities and projects. Practitioners identified recurring barriers, including the absence of a clear policy specifically in this area, limited access to dedicated spaces, limited business support, complex funding systems and insufficient assistance to help creatives navigate grants and opportunities.

This does not mean that there are no policies in place or that there is no department, it possibly just shows that the practitioner is not aware of the policy or where support can be found, or that the strategy is not well known by the practitioners. An example of this is Curaçao, where a New Export Strategy (NES) exists and is being rolled out; however, practitioners mentioned not being aware of it. Bridging that knowledge/information gap is essential in order to support the creatives in this journey. This was also a recurring theme in the other domains as well.

“Artists on the French side have better opportunities via subsidies and cultural funding but on the Dutch side with limited funding and structural support, combined with the high cost of living, creatives get pushed toward salaried jobs.”

- Cultural program director on St. Maarten

Mary Thielman - "Nature Lady"  
Saba - 2<sup>nd</sup> place

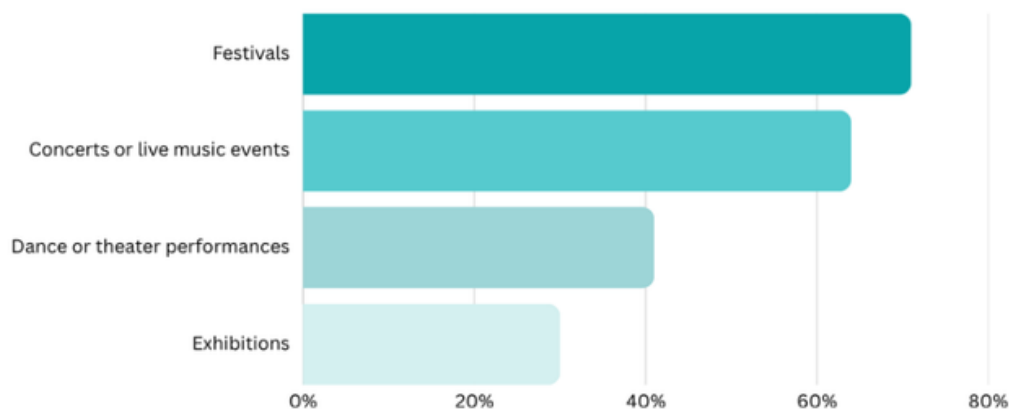


### 3.3 Surveys - Phase 3

#### Cultural Participation

The survey results show that cultural participation is widespread across all six islands. Festivals and concerts attendance represent the biggest forms of cultural engagement. There is some variation though across islands when it comes to visits to cinema, exhibitions and heritage sites.

Figure 2: Cultural attendance in ABCSSS islands (n=581)



#### Trends and Island Differences

**Festivals are the most attended event type on every island.** This would include Carnival. The participation rates range from 54% on Bonaire to 90% on Saba of the surveyed group. That was the highest rate recorded for any event/activity attendance category on any island. Concert or live music event attendance follows a similar pattern with Saba in the lead again at 82%, compared to 40% on Bonaire for example.

If all the islands are looked at, cross-island variation is greatest in cinema attendance, where for example Curaçao (53%) and Aruba (42%) in large part exceed the SSS islands. Most notably St. Eustatius was at just (10%.) A possible explanation could perhaps be that Curaçao and Aruba have broader cinema options.

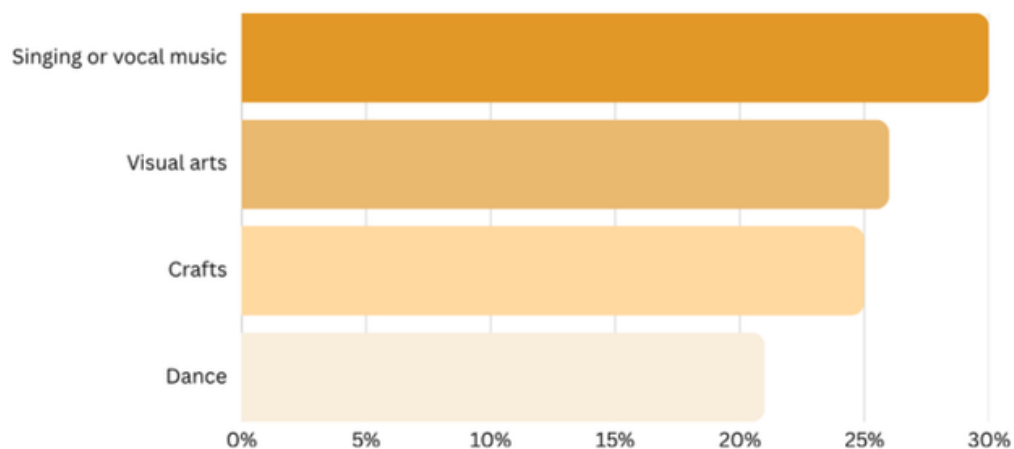
Exhibition attendance shows a very similar result. Curaçao leads at 36%, followed closely by Aruba at the same level. The surveyed group of Bonaire shows just 6% comparatively. Heritage site visits present a more balanced result, though Saba (45%) and St. Eustatius (46%) have higher rates than the ABC islands. This result is consistent with the findings of the focus group conversations on Saba and St Eustatius regarding heritage preservation. The participants had much pride in the heritage sites on their islands.

Attendance at literary events recorded the least overall (22%), though participation is somewhat higher in Saba (28%) and Curaçao (27%). The surveyed group in Bonaire showed the lowest attendance at 10%.

## Creative Practices

The survey identified 13 categories of creative practice, with singing, visual arts and crafts as the most commonly reported disciplines. Saba consistently records the highest participation rates across nearly all practice types. The sampled survey group suggests a small but relatively active community in the area of culture.

Figure 3: Most popular creative practices across ABCSSS islands. (n=581)



## The Islands

The surveyed group showed that singing is the most widely practised activity on four of six islands. It ranges from 21% on Curaçao to 42% on Saba. Visual arts participation is highest on Saba (48%) and Curaçao (28%), while crafts are for the most part practised on Aruba (32%) and St. Eustatius (20%).

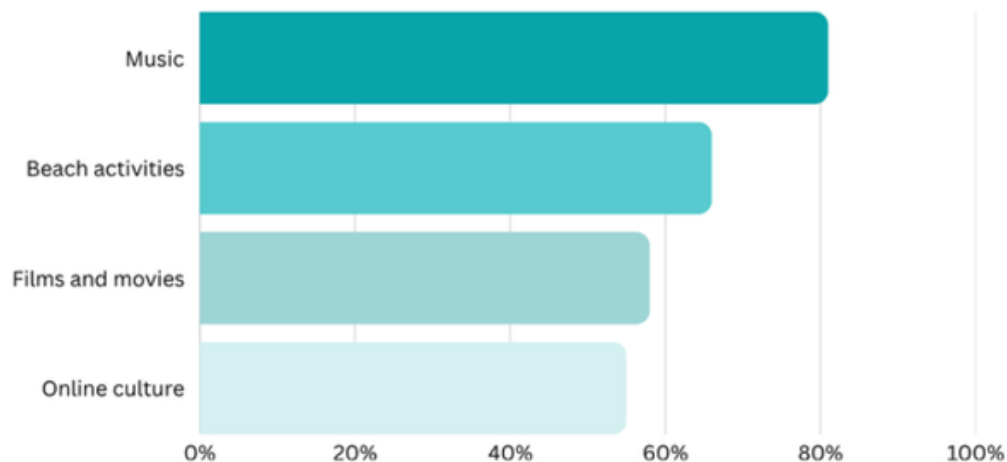
Saba stands out again as a notable case. Despite its small population, it records the highest participation rate in visual arts (48%), film (32%), literary arts (30%), music production (30%) and heritage practices (20%). Across nearly every practice category, Saba records rates well above the dataset average.

The surveyed group showed that theatre and research are niche type activities across all islands. These are each practised by fewer than 10% of respondents overall.

## Cultural Consumption

The surveyed group showed that listening to music is the dominant form of cultural consumption across all six islands. This was followed by beach based cultural activities and film viewing. Online cultural consumption is markedly higher in Curaçao and Saba. Library usage is highest on Curaçao and Saba and near zero on St. Eustatius and St. Maarten.

Figure 4: Cultural consumption in ABCSSS islands. (n=581)



### Island Particularities

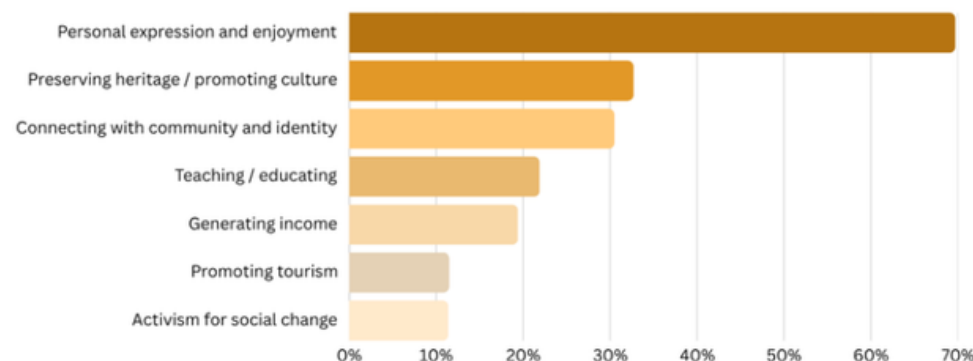
The surveyed group showed that music consumption is pretty consistent across islands, ranging from 73% on St. Maarten to 87% in Curaçao. These are relatively high percentages. Beach culture, as in beach style activities, is most prominent in Aruba (65%) and Curaçao (81%). A possible reason for this could be due to the availability of the beaches as outdoor cultural activity spaces are very prominent on these islands.

The surveys showed that library usage is highest on Curaçao (25%) and Saba (30%) and lowest on St. Eustatius (2%) and St. Maarten (5%). Online cultural consumption is highest on Saba (68%) and Curaçao (67%) and lowest on St. Maarten (44%). Reading is most common on Curaçao (50%) and Saba (48%) and least common on Bonaire (24%) and St. Eustatius (24%).

### Motivations for Arts and Cultural Practice

The surveys show that personal expression and enjoyment is the most noted motivation for arts and cultural practice across all six islands. Heritage preservation and community engagement are in second place. Only in the case of Curaçao it shows that income generation is a significant motivator. Personal expression and enjoyment is also cited by most respondents on every island, ranging from 58% on Bonaire to 80% on Saba.

Figure 5: Motivation for arts and cultural practice in ABCSSS islands. (n=581)



## Trends

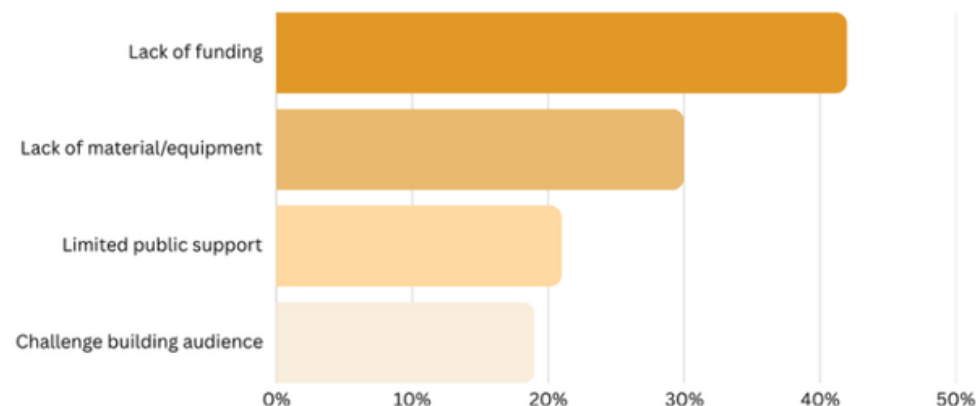
On three of the six islands, heritage preservation ranks as the leading secondary motivation for arts and cultural practice: Aruba (44%), Saba (42%) and St. Eustatius (29%). Community building is the leading secondary motivation on St. Maarten (31%, tied with heritage). On Curaçao, income generation stands out as the distinctive secondary motivation, cited by 34% of respondents, nearly double the rate of any other island. This is quite notable in the sense that the findings align with Curaçao's significantly higher rate of professional practitioners (33%) and arts and culture income earners when crosschecked. On Bonaire, heritage (15%) and community (12%) rank second and third, though at somewhat lower rates than on other islands. Teaching and knowledge transfer stand out on the SSS islands, reaching 32% on St. Eustatius and 30% on Saba, compared to 23% on Aruba and just 8% on Bonaire. Tourism as a motivation is highest on Saba (22%) and St. Eustatius (29%).

Bonaire presents the lowest secondary motivation rates across nearly all categories, which aligns with its high proportion of hobbyists (81%) and low cultural income when cross-referenced.

## Challenges Facing Arts and Cultural Practitioners

The survey results show that funding is the most widely reported challenge across all six islands, followed by access to materials and equipment. The SSS islands in addition, report challenges around venues, training and public recognition, while government support is also considered a concern.

Figure 5: Top challenges for cultural practitioners in ABCSSS islands. (n=581)



### Funding

**Overall, 42% of respondents reference funding as a significant challenge**, though the rate varies sharply by island. Of the surveyed group, St. Maarten recorded the highest figure at 55%, followed by Aruba (45%), St. Eustatius (44%) and Bonaire (42%). Curaçao, reports a funding challenge rate of 34%, the lowest overall, but yet still the single most reported challenge on that island.

On the question of the difficulty of obtaining funding, responses reveal a polarised picture. Across the sample, 18% describe funding as “very difficult” to obtain, while a further 14% describe it as “somewhat difficult.”

Remarkable here in the results are that 19% have never tried to obtain funding and 21% consider the question not applicable to their practice. This means that a significant portion of the cultural practitioners operates entirely outside formal funding structures. When benchmarked with the desk research and the focus group conversations, it is not that strange in the sense that many of the participants indicated the complexity of filling out the forms for funding or in many cases not even hearing about these funds.

### Materials, Venues and Training

Access to materials and equipment is the second most-cited challenge (30%), with the highest rates on Saba (38%) and St. Eustatius (37%). Venue availability is a statistically significant differentiator across islands. The results in Saba show a 32% venue challenge, compared to just 10% in Curaçao and Bonaire.

Training challenges are most common on Saba (30%) and St. Maarten (21%) as well, while Aruba (17%) and Curaçao (12%) report lower rates. This reflects a broader pattern in the data, including of the focus groups and the desk research that **the islands with smaller population size tend to face sharper resource limitations across all material areas.**

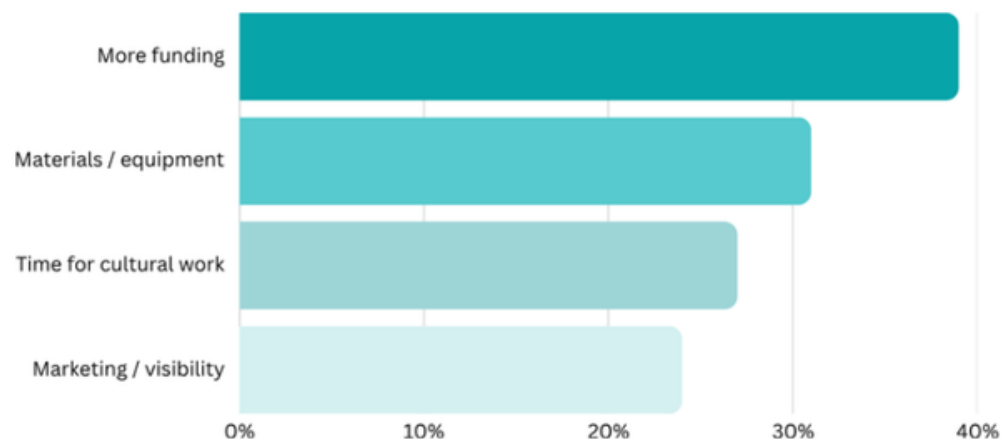
### Government Support

**The surveys show that government support as a challenge** is reported on all islands; in Curaçao (26%) and St. Maarten (23%) and in the BES islands this figure is somewhat lower; St. Eustatius (13.5%) and Bonaire (9%). These results are consistent with the sentiments expressed during the focus groups and interviews conducted across most islands. Participants emphasized the need for sustainable investment in the cultural sector and greater continuity, despite the progress that has already been made.

## Needs of Arts and Cultural Practitioners

The survey shows that needs reported by arts and cultural practitioners closely reflect the challenges they face, but with some additions. **Time, marketing and networking emerge as significant needs** that are not explicitly captured in the challenge categories. This could possibly suggest that the limitations to cultural participation also have to do with constraints for example in the area of organization and capacity. Some of these points also came forth in the focus group conversations as well.

Figure 6: Top needs of cultural practitioners in ABCSSS islands (n=581)



## Gap Analysis

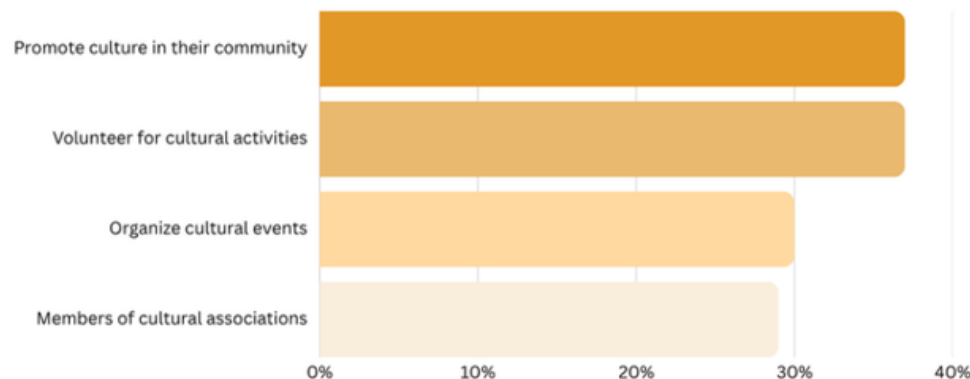
The gap analysis compares the percentage of respondents reporting each dimension as a challenge against the percentage reporting it as a need. The gap score, defined as the average of challenge and need percentages, gives a good measure of what is seen priority on the islands.

The surveys show that **funding** has the highest gap score on every island, ranging from 27 on Curaçao to 49 on St. Maarten. **Materials** were ranked as second on most islands, with gap scores between 28 (Bonaire) and 55 (Saba). **The alignment between challenges and needs is strongest for funding and materials.** This could possibly mean that these are both commonly experienced and often identified as priorities for action.

Saba consistently records the highest need rates: 55% for funding, 55% for materials, 32% for networking and 30% for both studio space and training. The data paints Saba as a community of highly engaged cultural practitioners within a setting where there is minimal institutional infrastructure.

The survey shows that cultural practitioners across the ABCSSS support their communities through promotion, volunteering, organising events and membership in cultural organizations. There is high engagement in that sense. The data even shows that the SSS islands are significantly more active in community support than the ABC islands. This is one of the clearest findings in the ABC-SSS comparison. Causes that are worth looking into is scale and the feeling of community perhaps less individualized than on the ABC islands.

Figure 7: Cultural support and engagement in ABCSSS islands (n=581)



## The SSS Difference

The survey results show, as just previously mentioned, that respondents on the SSS islands are more actively involved in supporting culture than people on the ABC islands. On average, SSS respondents reported taking part in two kinds of support activities, compared with one on the ABC islands.

Saba in particular stands out. In Saba 78% of respondents said they promote culture in their community, 57% volunteer, 52% organise events and 52% are members of cultural associations. These levels are about double those on Aruba and higher than Bonaire, which had the lowest levels of support in most categories.

This result could possibly suggest that **when formal cultural infrastructure is limited, community members often step in themselves** and as a result, individuals are more likely to take on multiple roles to help keep cultural life going. A certain level of agency is displayed. Both the desk research as well as the focus groups support this finding as well, especially on the SSS islands, where it is common for one person to wear many hats or to be a jack of all trades as they would say.

## Island Comparisons

When comparing for example the ABC islands (n=425) and the SSS islands (n=156) the data reveals three statistically significant differences in the direct group comparison.

### Significant Differences

The clearest difference between the ABC and the SSS islands is the level of **community support activity**. Respondents on the SSS islands were more likely than those on the ABC islands to say they promote culture, volunteer organise events or support cultural associations as was mentioned earlier.

Respondents on the SSS islands also reported a broader range of needs. On average, they identified three needs, compared with two among respondents on the ABC islands. This suggests that cultural practitioners on the lesser populated islands are dealing with a wider set of resource constraints and supports findings from the focus group conversations.

A further difference appears in cultural income. Respondents on the ABC islands, especially Curaçao, reported earning either a main or side income from cultural work. This highlights perhaps the observation that the “more developed cultural sectors” on the higher populated islands, offer more income opportunities. At the same time, these findings are based on the survey sample, so they should be interpreted with care and explored further in future research with a larger sample.

### Non-Significant Differences

What seemed to show no significant difference amongst the surveyed groups, was **attendance at cultural activities, creative practices, total challenges, professionalization level and gender composition**. In these areas there are no significant differences between the ABC and SSS islands and even the BES if done as a separate category. This *non-finding* is itself a valuable result as it indicates that **“culture is life” across the Dutch Caribbean and is part in parcel to a very high degree of everything that islanders do**. What differs though is the support ecosystem surrounding that participation which often goes back to policy and funding as indicated in many of the research phases.

## Qualitative Findings

As mentioned in the methodology, the survey also included open ended questions. This is mentioned here again, to provide more context. Across the six islands, the two open-ended questions generated 943 responses in total. Q12 was (“What cultural activities are missing in your community?”, n=575) and Q25 was (“Final comments”, n=368).

After cleaning the non-substantive entries, the responses were coded into 14 thematic categories. Each response was assigned up to three themes to capture the multi-dimensional nature of many contributions.

## Most Frequent Themes

**Music and Performing Arts (n=109).** The most frequently mentioned theme focused on the desire for more live music events, local band support and performance opportunities. Respondents on multiple islands made reference to a decline in the frequency and diversity of live music outside of festival periods.

“Nos mester traha riba nos teater nashonal. Bo no por jama bo mes un pais sin un teater. Talento, artista, arte tur tei... pero nos NO tin un teater ekipá pa por ekspresá, presentá i dokumentá nos arte.”

- Respondente di Korsou

“We need to work on our national theater. You cannot call yourself a country without a theater. The talent, the artists, the art are all here... but we do not have a properly equipped theater where we can express, present and document our art.”

- Respondent from Curacao

**Heritage and History (n=94).** Many concerns especially about cultural heritage are expressed across all islands, with particular emphasis on knowledge transfer between generations. Respondents would like more education about indigenous and colonial history, preservation of oral traditions and documentation of local stories. This in a more structured way.

“Statia is known as the historical gem, but us, as a people, hardly know our history, but we don't recognize it around us. Something like Seu would be nice.”

- Respondent from St. Eustatius

**Youth and Education (n=74).** The third most common theme focuses on engaging younger generations. Respondents advocate for more sustained cultural education in school curricula, youth-oriented workshops in arts and crafts and mentorship programmes. They find it important to connect established practitioners with emerging talent.

“In my humble opinion, I believe that a substantial amount of the newer generations have lost a sense of patriotism. This can be due to the lack of attention that is given as it pertains to our (sxm) historical lineage, such as past historical figures, traditional music and arts and historical moments. Learning starts at home but also during the primary education.”

- Respondent from St. Maarten

**Festivals and Carnival (n=63).** In the open ended questions respondents called for expanded festival programming to extend beyond Carnival to include for example jazz festivals, cultural fairs where one could combine multiple disciplines and year round events.

“I think we could use more cultural activities in regards to food. We have dedicated events to art and music, but to my knowledge nothing dedicated to food. We have cultural food at these other events but it might be nice to have a food specific event.”

- Respondent from Saba

**Visual Arts and Crafts (n=57).** Survey respondents indicated a demand for more exhibition spaces, art workshops and opportunities to sell artisanal work. This coincides with the quantitative data as well. Several responses mentioned the gap between tourist-oriented craft markets and authentic local artistic practice.

**Funding and Government Support (n=38)** as recurring themes. The qualitative data reinforces the quantitative finding that funding is the top challenge. Several respondents, particularly in Curaçao, expressed frustration that prior research and consultations have not resulted in tangible policy changes. This was also a common theme during the focus groups on many islands; that there was little follow up after their voluntary contribution in many research projects. That frustration is a note for further recommendation.

**Professionalization and Income (n=26).** A smaller but important group of responses mentioned the economic viability of cultural work. These respondents described the challenges of sustaining a livelihood in this field and the need for business skills training, collective organising and fair compensation structures. A feedback that was also heard during the focus group conversations.

**Spaces and Infrastructure (n=14).** Though less frequently mentioned, but still important to mention were the responses about physical infrastructure. This also coincides with what was mentioned in various research phases. Specifically these respondents cite the need for rehearsal spaces, community art studios and dedicated cultural venues that are not shared with commercial or governmental functions.

Graveyard Verses - "We from Here"  
St. Maarten - 3<sup>rd</sup> place

## We From Here

I from here  
Born of foreign parents  
Raised here. Live here  
All I know is here  
Will most likely die here  
Where is here?

Here is home  
I could walk these empty streets  
Yet never feel alone

Here is paradise  
Yeah, I have my struggles,  
But I can't forget the nice  
The music, the arts  
The food — we got spice  
Stirred in a melting pot  
So good, I need it twice

You from here

Child of the soil  
Born of movement  
Your ancestor's beat  
Feel their rhythm inside you  
Follow your feet

We from here  
Generations of creatives  
Telling stories every day  
With every aspect of our existence  
So we never lose our way  
May we teach it to the young ones  
For the fire must live long  
May we see it in every portrait  
May we feel it in every song

We From Here

### 3.4 Validation Sessions - Phase 4

The validation sessions conducted across the six islands largely confirmed the findings presented in the preliminary report. The participants were sharp in their reflections as they focussed a lot on the conditions in which arts and culture lives on the islands and less on the practices themselves. During the sessions they called for greater institutional support, increased recognition of artists, creatives and informal cultural educators and more sustainable investment in cultural infrastructure and development. These observations also coincided with the feedback of the other research phases. Participants also advocated for a broader understanding of culture; an understanding that includes relationships with **nature, environmental practices, sports culture and everyday social life** as important forms of identity and expression.

Across all six islands, but particularly on Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao and St. Maarten, concerns were raised about the influence of tourism and external branding on cultural representation without sufficient investment in local cultural foundations, education, creative industries and community development.

Another recurring theme which also coincided with the open ended questions of the surveys and as well as the focus and interviews was the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage. **Participants emphasized the importance of oral histories, documentation and preservation, digital platforms, youth engagement and “traspaso di cultura” - intergenerational knowledge transfer.** Cultural education, as was shared on various islands, “does not begin only in schools, but also within homes, neighborhoods and everyday community life”.

Particularities per island were:

**Aruba:** Participants emphasized stronger collaboration between cultural, educational and governmental sectors, alongside greater investment in heritage and cultural education, visibility and **community-centered development** rather than only tourism-driven representation.

**Bonaire:** Participants stressed the need to **engage younger generations** even more in cultural preservation while expressing concerns about demographic change, pressures on Papiamentu and the limited support and recognition given to artists and creatives.

**Curaçao:** Participants highlighted longstanding concerns around, from their perspective, weak **entrepreneurial support for creatives, the importance of locally led cultural research** and the need to further explore innovation, subcultures and the Orange Economy.

**St. Maarten:** Participants called for stronger **cultural infrastructure, fairer support systems for creatives and greater focus on implementation rather than continued research**, while raising important questions about identity and cultural representation.

**St. Eustatius:** Participants emphasized cultural identity, **the legacy of slavery** and the limited presence of cultural education in schools, while also pointing to the need for more arts programmes, stronger community engagement and institutional support.

**Saba:** Participants noted **positive developments in cultural education** through collaborations between schools and heritage organizations, while stressing the need for updated materials, stronger institutional capacity and clearer discussions around identity and belonging in a changing community.



Qiwena Afra - "Na Altar ku Seú"  
Curaçao - 3<sup>rd</sup> place

# CHAPTER 4

# CONCLUSIONS, CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

# Chapter 4 - Conclusions, Critical Observations & Recommendations

To recap, this study had two main objectives posed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW). First, it aimed to establish a baseline understanding of how people across the ABCSSS islands engage with arts and cultural practices, with particular attention to the domains of cultural education, amateur arts, cultural participation, intangible cultural heritage, heritage participation and talent development. Second, it sought to pilot and recommend an appropriate research methodology, grounded in empirical data, to support the development of a future cultural monitoring system for the Dutch Caribbean.

This final chapter presents the main conclusions followed by several critical observations and recommendations for future cultural monitoring processes and cultural policies within the Caribbean part of the Kingdom.

## 4.1 Conclusions

The study concludes that culture across the ABCSSS islands is strong, visible and deeply embedded in everyday life as captured in the following themes.

### Culture as Identity and Belonging

Culture remains a key foundation for identity, language, collective memory, belonging and community pride across all six islands. Traditions, oral histories, music, storytelling and heritage practices continue to connect generations and shape local identity. **The findings show that arts and culture are not experienced as isolated policy fields, but as part of everyday social and historical life.**

### Culture as Everyday Practice

Cultural life across the ABCSSS islands is not limited to formal institutions or organized events alone. **Culture lives in homes, schools, churches, neighborhoods, beaches, festivals, food traditions, music & dance schools and informal learning spaces.** Participation in arts and culture therefore largely takes place through everyday interaction and lived practice.

### Community Resilience and Community-Based Leadership

**Much of the cultural ecosystem is sustained by volunteers, elders, artists, NGOs, teachers and grassroots organizers. Amateur arts, community-based practices and informal cultural education form the backbone of cultural life throughout the region.** At the same time, this work often remains underrecognized, underfunded and dependent on personal commitment rather than sustainable institutional support.

Particularly on the SSS islands, levels of volunteerism and community engagement remain exceptionally high despite limited infrastructure. This demonstrates the important role of collective agency and social participation in sustaining cultural continuity.

## Value of Cultural Education and Talent Development

**Schools continue to play an important role in introducing younger generations to arts, heritage and identity.** However, cultural education remains unevenly structured and often depends on individual teachers, temporary projects or external practitioners.

The findings also show that pathways for young creatives to develop toward professional practice remain fragmented, particularly on the smaller islands. Access to mentorship, professional infrastructure, training and creative opportunities remains limited despite the visible presence of artistic talent across the region.

## Rich yet Vulnerable Intangible Cultural Heritage

Intangible cultural heritage is still highly present and meaningful throughout the islands. **Traditions such as Simadan, Seú, Dande, Jollification, Carnival, storytelling, crafts and traditional foodways continue to function as important carriers of identity and collective memory.**

At the same time, many forms of intangible heritage continue to depend on **aging practitioners and informal transmission processes.** Safeguarding, documentation and intergenerational transfer systems remain limited, creating concern that valuable cultural knowledge may gradually disappear without stronger preservation efforts.

## Creative ‘Orange’ Economy and Tourism: Opportunity and Tension

**Tourism and the creative or “Orange” economy present important opportunities for visibility, entrepreneurship and economic diversification across the islands.** Particularly on Aruba, Curaçao and St. Maarten, stronger links exist between culture, tourism and the creative industries.

It is concluded that culture is too often positioned primarily as a branding instrument or tourism product without sufficient investment in local artists, heritage safeguarding, cultural education and grassroots ecosystems. **Long-term cultural sustainability therefore requires stronger ecosystem building and community ownership beyond tourism campaigns or festivals alone.**

## Structural Gaps in Support Systems

Across all research phases, limited funding, weak infrastructure, lack of venues and materials, administrative barriers and insufficient policy continuity emerged as recurring concerns among practitioners and organizations.

**Many cultural practitioners continue to operate outside formal support systems** altogether because funding mechanisms are experienced as difficult to access or insufficiently adapted to small-island realities. Particularly on the BES islands, participants pointed to recurring gaps between Dutch policy frameworks and local cultural realities.

## Island Differences Matter; BES vs CAS

**The findings show important differences between the islands.** Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao and St. Maarten generally offer somewhat stronger opportunities for professionalization and clearer links between culture, tourism and the creative industries. The lesser populated islands, such as Saba and St. Eustatius, show particularly strong levels of community engagement, participation and volunteerism, yet face sharper limitations regarding scale, infrastructure and access to resources. At the same time, cultural participation itself is consistently present across all islands. The clearest differences therefore lie less in cultural engagement itself and more in the support ecosystems surrounding that participation.

Specifically when it comes to the BES islands, to make the distinction, there is the strong concern for cultural preservation and identity in the context of demographic change, migration, globalization and Dutch institutional influence. In Bonaire, participants specifically raised concerns about pressures on Papiamentu, rapid demographic growth and shifts in local cultural identity since 10-10-2010. In Sint Eustatius and Saba, questions surrounding belonging, heritage preservation and the transmission of local knowledge to younger generations were also prominent next to infrastructural challenges as previously mentioned.

## From Research to Implementation

A recurring message throughout the focus groups, surveys and validation sessions was **that the sector no longer requires recognition alone, but concrete implementation and long term commitment.** Participants consistently called for stronger cultural policies, more accessible funding systems, improved infrastructure, support for grassroots organizations, stronger safeguarding of heritage and greater investment in cultural education and talent development.

Angelita Peterson - "Daddy's House"  
Saba - 1<sup>st</sup> place



## 4.2 Critical Observations

### Culture on ABCSSS Islands as A Living Vibration

Arts and culture across the ABCSSS islands function as a “living vibration rooted in our Caribbean belly,” as David Rudder’s calypso powerfully captures.<sup>9</sup> As mentioned in the conclusion, culture is not confined to formal institutions, policy sectors, or artistic industries alone; it lives through language, memory, storytelling, music, food, ritual, movement and everyday social interaction. A critical observation from this finding is whether existing **cultural frameworks in the Kingdom of the Netherlands are truly equipped to recognize culture as a lived practice** rather than primarily as an institutional activity.

### It Takes a Village vs Jack of All Trades

The above conclusions also show that cultural life across the ABCSSS islands is sustained largely through community resilience and grassroots leadership as part of the proverbial “village.” Volunteers, elders, artists, teachers, NGOs, policy makers and cultural organizers collectively carry much of the sector. At the same time, this reveals a deeper contradiction.

Many practitioners simultaneously function as creators, educators, organizers, fundraisers and advocates simply to sustain cultural life, much like a “jack of all trades.” What is often celebrated as resilience also reflects structural absence. The research results show that much of **the sector still depends on unpaid labor, informal organization and personal sacrifice**. One can critically ask how long communities can continue carrying the cultural sector without stronger institutional investment, infrastructure and policy continuity.

### “Gimme Room to Dance”

“Gimme room to dance,” a familiar expression within the Caribbean carnival space, becomes symbolic here, as it reflects a plea to clear the way so people can be free to dance. Communities are already creating, teaching, organizing and transmitting culture, often with limited means. What they increasingly demand is room: room to sustain culture, develop talent, safeguard heritage and build long-term cultural ecosystems on their own terms. Yet as the survey results show across the islands, funding, infrastructure, venues, training opportunities and grant access remain uneven and often inaccessible, especially for smaller organizations and practitioners.

A critical observation is how **policy and support systems can shift from limiting cultural practice toward actively enabling it**, so that practitioners truly get the “room to dance.”

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFh9rFRxTp4>

## The Orange Economy is *Not* just a Shiny New Object

The Orange Economy and creative industries, often considered the “hot item” on the scene, present important opportunities for entrepreneurship, visibility and economic diversification across the ABCSSS islands. At the same time, the findings reveal that the concept is not always clearly understood and is **sometimes reduced to political rhetoric, tourism branding, or short-term trends without deeper structural investment**. Closely linked to tourism and heritage tourism on the islands, culture is often mobilized as branding, entertainment, or visitor experience with limited focus on local artists, heritage safeguarding, cultural education and community ownership according to the research.

Lastly, a critical observation concerns how creative economy strategies, which entails much more than what is being presented, can support development, creative entrepreneurship with real **sustainable job opportunities and promising emerging cultural domains, without reducing culture to a market product detached from identity, heritage, memory and community life**.



Kenji Off the Grid- "Being adventurous on a hidden island in the Caribbean"  
St. Eustatius - 3<sup>rd</sup> place

## 4.3 Recommendations

Complying with the second aim of the assignment, namely “to pilot and recommend an appropriate research methodology,” three main recommendations emerged.

### Recommendation 1: Rethinking Arts and Culture in the Caribbean Context

It is recommended, first and foremost, to rethink arts and culture within the specific realities of the ABCSSS islands and the wider Caribbean context as highlighted in the critical observations. This requires **moving beyond narrow definitions of culture and instead examining how people in the Caribbean engage with culture**, experience it and assign meaning to it “as a living vibration”.

In the Caribbean, culture is deeply embedded in languages, food, music, oral traditions, spirituality, carnival, community based practices and many other experiences influenced by regional histories, colonialism, transatlantic slavery, indentureship and migration. At the same time, these cultural realities are shaped by the constitutional, political and institutional framework within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Future cultural policy and monitoring systems should therefore recognize this duality: simultaneously Caribbean and Kingdom-based.

This implies the continuous exploration and development of culturally relevant domains, indicators and methodologies that reflect the **lived realities of Caribbean societies rather than relying solely on particular models of “cultural measurement.”** Such approaches should be flexible, participatory and sensitive to local meanings and expressions of culture.

In addition, there is a strong need to strengthen sustainable regional cultural networks and partnerships across the Caribbean both within and outside the Dutch Kingdom, as well as with South American countries and by extension, West African regions that share related historical and cultural trajectories. Building regional and transatlantic consortia among cultural institutions, universities, artists, researchers and policymakers can foster **collaborative research, facilitate knowledge exchange, support the development of shared indicators and encourage more context-sensitive approaches to cultural monitoring.**

### Recommendation 2: Contextualized Mixed Methods Research Approach

The second recommendation builds upon the first. Based on the idea of a reconceptualization of what arts and culture could mean within the context of the ABCSSS islands, **it opens up possibilities for developing a methodology that is more reflective of the lived realities, cultural expressions and social dynamics of the region.**

The findings of this study suggest **that a contextual mixed methods approach** is the most appropriate methodology for cultural monitoring within the ABCSSS islands.

Similar to the methodology applied in this research, a phased design is essential to ensure that the monitoring process remains grounded in local realities, cultural dynamics and the specific structures of the arts and culture ecosystem.

Such an approach recognizes that arts and culture within the Dutch Caribbean cannot be adequately understood through standardized quantitative indicators alone. Rather, cultural monitoring must incorporate both quantitative and qualitative **methods that capture the relational, embodied, oral, performative and community-based dimensions of cultural life**. This methodology therefore allows for a more holistic understanding of how culture is practiced, transmitted, experienced and sustained across the islands.

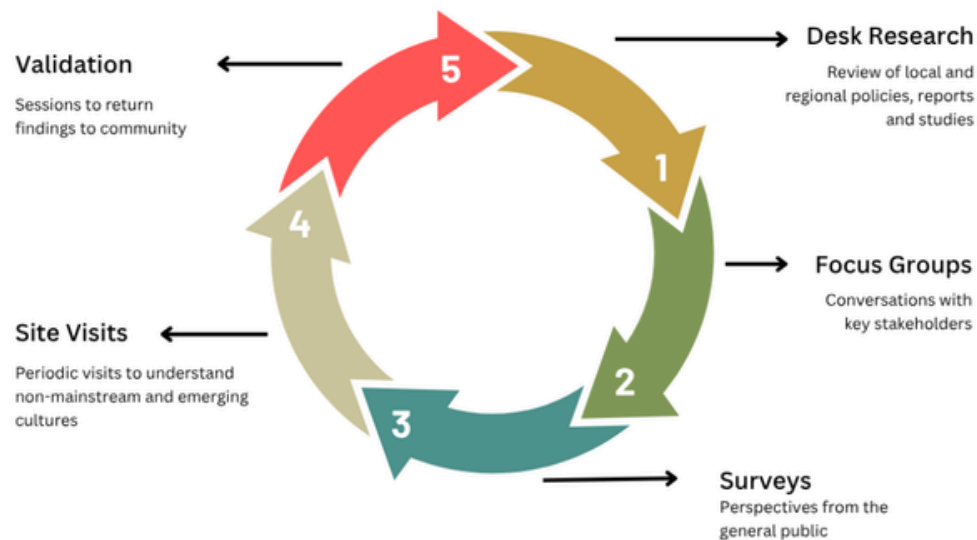
The proposed approach is structured in five interconnected phases:

1. Desk Research
2. Focus Groups and Interviews
3. Surveys
4. Site Visits and Ethnographic Observation
5. Validation Sessions

Particularly important within this version is the inclusion of **site visits and ethnographic observation grounded in a local experience**. This addition is essential because it creates opportunities to observe emerging, everyday and lived cultural expressions directly within their natural settings. Such practices are often overlooked in standardized research methodologies, yet they are critical for understanding the evolving cultural landscape of the ABCSSS islands.

These site visits function as forms of **“mini-monitoring practices” that collectively contribute to a richer, more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of culture**. Through direct engagement, researchers are able to observe how culture is practiced, negotiated, embodied and transformed within communities.

Figure 8: Future Research Design Model for Monitoring



Examples of cultural expressions and themes that may emerge through site visits include:

- Urban youth culture
- AI and digitally emergent cultures
- Social media and gaming cultures
- Architecture and spatial cultural practices
- Youth band culture
- Lesser-known traditional practices
- Bike and drifting culture
- Religious-cultural practices
- Surfing and bodyboarding communities
- Motorbike and Harley rides during flag and anthem celebrations
- Fishing communities and related traditions
- Culinary practices, including traditional, contemporary and fusion cuisines

These visits allow researchers to engage directly with participants in their own environments, often in ways that are less orchestrated and therefore more authentic. This strengthens contextual understanding, relationship-building and trust between researchers and communities. Furthermore, it enables researchers to **capture cultural forms and practices that may otherwise remain invisible** within formal institutional frameworks or quantitative datasets.

This recommendation does not disregard the value of quantitative research. Rather, it recognizes that cultural realities within the ABCSSS islands are often best understood through a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The integration of both methodologies allows for a more holistic, inclusive and contextually grounded representation of cultural life and practices across the islands.

### Recommendation 3: Proposed Monitoring Timeline

It is proposed that this cultural monitoring cycle be possibly repeated every **three to five years**. Each completed cycle would contribute to a progressively deeper understanding of the cultural ecosystem of the islands.

**Over time, this iterative process would strengthen the monitoring system itself and support the development of increasingly refined and appropriate methodologies for the region.** At the same time, it must be acknowledged that culture is never static. Cultural expressions, technologies, social practices and creative industries continuously evolve. Monitoring systems must therefore remain flexible and adaptive.

The findings further suggest that in areas where data is particularly lacking, such as the **creative industries or digital culture, more elaborate and exploratory research processes may initially be required** to establish baseline understandings and generate usable data. Compared to other cultural sectors, the creative industries currently appear to be among the least developed in terms of available and systematic data collection.



Jocselyn Mora - "Heartbeat of the Rainbow"  
St. Maarten - 2<sup>nd</sup> place

# Epilogue

This research began as **an assignment fueled by passion** and a shared commitment: to map cultural practices across our six Caribbean islands. Yet over time, it became something more. For us as a project team, it evolved into an invitation to listen more carefully and to recognize culture not as a fixed sector, but as a living ecosystem carried by creativity, memory, resilience and imagination. What started as a research exercise in May 2025 gradually unfolded into a process of *encounter*, with a strong interest to collaborate, create and move forward together.

Across the islands, **culture appeared in places and practices that do not always fit institutional frameworks**: in beach life and roadside gatherings, in oral traditions and Carnival, in spirituality and migration stories. It appeared in multilingual realities, digital spaces, nature and ecological knowledge, intergenerational exchange, food practices, fashion, music, humor and everyday forms of care and connection.

Several lessons from this project will remain with us. **Building trust and inclusive approaches proved to be important** in conducting meaningful research on our islands. Local coordinators, surveyors, cultural practitioners and partners were very important to the process, despite limitations regarding budget, time and resources.

We also learned that artistic expression can reveal forms of knowledge not always captured through surveys, statistics or interviews alone.

In our view, the Where Culture Lives Artist Prize became more than a complementary activity but rather **a presentation of a parallel narrative enriching the research itself**. Furthermore we also experienced that the validation sessions evolved into spaces of shared conversation and co-ownership rather than mere moments of validation. It felt like *Islands in conversation*.

At the same time, the process also revealed moments of critical feedback which in some cases produced **a feeling of uneasiness, particularly surrounding questions of ownership, representation and decision making** with regard to cultural monitoring processes. For example, several voices on some of the islands shared the sentiment that, given their constitutional autonomy, they should have had a more prominent role from the onset in a project such as this one. We do recognize and appreciate the deeper message beneath these positions, which is a call for genuine partnership and respect for the constitutional and cultural realities of the islands themselves.

We extend our gratitude to OCW for their collaboration and sincerely hope that this research meets the intended expectations and serves as **a source of inspiration for future dialogue and development!**

***Masha danki - Thank you - Hartelijk dank***

*Jorien, Gregory, Ludmila and Elton*

## *Statia's Cultural Symphony*

*Drums are rolling, the stories unfold,  
Of Statia, the Caribbean island so beautiful and bold.  
A mixture of cultures, a vibrant blend,  
Traditions and memories that never will end.*

*With the whistle of the fife, many accents can be heard,  
French, Papiamentu, and Dutch in every word.  
Many speak English with an island dialect's touch,  
Different voices, yet one community we hold so much,  
Bound together in the spirit of the Golden Rock so bold.*

*With each shake of the maracas, the locals dance and sway,  
To rhythms of soca, zouk, calypso, and reggae.  
While laughter and music fill the night so bright,  
Our grandparents reminisce of the good old Bull Fight.*

*With a blow of the conch shell, the children gather to eat,  
A Statian delicacy of peas and rice and tender goat meat.  
Fry jacks and johnny cakes, treasures of the past,  
With local drinks like bub and blijden that didn't last.*

*The steelpan sings as traditions unfold,  
In flamboyant celebrations on Emancipation Day so bold.  
Carolers rise with joy on their way,  
At five in the morning on Christmas Day.*

*We stand proud and tall, our hearts full of pride,  
As we sing the Golden Rock song far and wide.  
A small island rich in spirit and soul,  
Statia's culture shines bright—forever strong and whole.*

*At last, we hear the roar of the bongo drums,  
Sending a message clear that Stadians are rare.  
Filled with love and compassion, patriotic and true,  
Statia and its hardworking people stand proud and bold.*

*From the mighty Quill to the wide-open sea,  
Lives the strength of our island's identity.*



Zuwena Soares - "Statia's Cultural Symphony"  
St. Eustatius - 2<sup>nd</sup> place

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## Busca Bon 1

### Naturalesa di Aruba



Skirbi mas tanto elemento di naturalesa, di Aruba, cu bo ta wak riba e pintura aki. Manda bo contesta pa [Revistakiniki@gmail.com](mailto:Revistakiniki@gmail.com).

Addonsito Croes- "KiNiKi Magazine"  
Aruba - 2<sup>nd</sup> place

Elvis Levenston "Groove with You"  
Saba - 3<sup>rd</sup> place



