



## Introduction & Goal

*One of the main pillars of Live DMA's Advocacy Roadmap (2025) is the recognition of music venues as cultural spaces. It is a recurring topic in our members' meetings and a guiding principle in our advocacy, cooperation, and research activities. We constantly return to this idea. Now that Live DMA is expanding to new countries and our dialogue with the European Commission and the European Parliament has become more frequent and direct, we are increasingly asked to define what we mean by this recognition. In parallel, the launch of the European Commission's Cultural Compass provides an opportunity to reaffirm our position and ensure that live music venues are fully recognised within future European cultural policies.*

*This document clarifies the common principles we stand for, while acknowledging the diversity of contexts across our network.*

*« I remember very well the moment when I decided how my first album was going to be. It was from a performance in a beautiful and small venue in Barcelona called Heliogàbal. I played with Refree and in that concert there were about 30 people in the audience (at that time I had to convince them to come). It was something intimate and imperfect but cathartic to me. Heliogàbal is just one of those venues where I played when I started as a teenager, just like El Pastís, Robadors 23, Jamboree, Mediterráneo, Alfa Bar, Jazz, for example. And that is something I won't forget. If it were not for all these spaces, I would not have been able to find myself as a musician, as a performer, as an artist. Long live these little temples of live music, we must protect them because, without them, music lovers are lost. » Rosalia*

Music venues are essential cultural spaces that must be recognised and supported as such.

Music venues are essential cultural spaces because they are the research and development department of the music value chain. They are a space for artistic experimentation, risk-taking when booking emerging artists, and support to their career development. They are where new projects are tested, where unknown artists play their first shows. Without these spaces, there is no sustainable pipeline of artists and their crews to be able to reach bigger stages later on.

Music venues - especially small and medium-sized - therefore often go beyond what we call the "music industry". At the core of these venues is what could be considered "non-yet-popular popular music": emerging artists, niche genres, experimental projects and new formats that are not commercially secure. This activity is often not profitable. These spaces offer a commitment to this programming because of its artistic and cultural value, not because it maximises income. This logic is very close to other performing acts that often don't have profitability at their core (such as contemporary dance or theatre) and are recognized institutionally for their cultural value beyond their commercial value.

Music venues also have a broader cultural, social and economic impact. They provide regular access to culture in people's everyday lives, close to where they live and work. They shape local identities and scenes, sustain independent artistic ecosystems, and contribute to the night-time economy (hospitality, transport, small suppliers). Many venues proactively work on inclusion, equality, audience safety and access for



marginalised groups. They host artistic residencies, workshops, debates and collaborations with schools, NGOs and community groups. In short, they are long-term cultural infrastructures embedded in local communities, not one-off event spaces.

The European Commission's Cultural Compass recognises culture as a driver of democracy, participation, and territorial balance. If this Compass is to genuinely guide national cultural policies, live music venues must be fully integrated into these frameworks on an equal footing with other cultural sectors.

We insist on the cultural relevance of music venues and on the need for popular and contemporary music including pop, rock, hip hop, electronic and experimental scenes to receive equal recognition as other art forms and musical genres. The artistic work taking place in these venues is not "less cultural" than jazz or classical music. It shapes the cultural references, identities and imaginaries of whole generations. Public policies that overlook popular and contemporary music, or treat it only through the lens of entertainment to reflect the real structure of today's cultural life and undermine a central part of Europe's artistic ecosystem.

For Live DMA, "recognition" means that music venues are treated as cultural spaces in public policy, in the same way as theatres, cultural centres or other recognised arts institutions.

Concretely, recognition includes:

- Being explicitly considered within cultural and arts departments and ministries, including participation in structured dialogues, consultations and policy design.
- Eligibility for cultural funding and specific programmes in line with their cultural role.
- Access to special measures for the cultural sector in times of crisis (e.g. emergency funds, compensation schemes, reduced VAT or social contributions where applicable).
- Inclusion in relevant tax, regulatory, social and urban planning frameworks that recognise music venues as cultural infrastructures.

Some local examples already show what this can look like. In Barcelona, the municipality has created the "Espais de Cultura Viva" designation for small live music and performing arts spaces. This category recognises small-capacity, proximity venues with a stable cultural programme and a social role in the neighbourhood and integrates them into the municipal regulatory and support framework, including dedicated subsidy schemes for investments and programming.

Such approaches provide a concrete model for other cities and countries: define which music venues fulfil a clear cultural function, give them an explicit status within cultural policy, and connect that status to adapted regulatory, financial and urban measures.

Live DMA proposes a common set of criteria to define when a music venue should be recognised as a cultural space. These criteria are a recommendation based on existing frameworks and practices across several European countries and should be used as a



shared reference and starting point in discussions with policymakers. A venue that aims at or follows these criteria should be considered a cultural space:

### **1. A physical space open to the public**

Music venues as cultural spaces are physical locations, with one or multiple stages, that welcome audiences for live performances.

### **2. Regular live music programming**

Music venues as cultural spaces have a function of creation, production and/or distribution of live music. They host a regular live music programme throughout the year.

### **3. Legally registered**

Music venues as cultural spaces are legally established as registered organisations, whether public, private, commercial or non-profit. This distinguishes them from informal or private party spaces.

### **4. Curated music programme**

Music venues as cultural spaces develop a curated artistic project, meaning that the majority of events are produced or programmed by the organisation itself. They have an independent music booking policy and aim to take risks to promote emerging artists and diverse music expressions.

### **5. Being socially responsible**

Music venues as cultural spaces aim at being socially engaged actors. They may support professional and amateur practices, collaborate with artistic communities and collectives, strengthen local communities, promote gender equality, and integrate young people and volunteers into their activities.

### **6. Responsible in terms of employment conditions**

Music venues as cultural spaces act as employers to staff and/or artists. Even when run by volunteers, they respect labour law and aim to implement fair working conditions, including fair pay and attention to mental health.

### **7. Responsible for staff and audience safety**

Music venues as cultural spaces ensure the safety of both staff and audiences.



## 8. (Self) perceived as cultural venues

Music venues as cultural spaces identify themselves as such, and are recognised as such by their audiences, artists, and communities. This perception is a crucial element of their cultural legitimacy, regardless of legal status or size.

### Conclusion

These shared criteria aim to provide a foundation for European-level recognition of music venues as cultural spaces. They can serve as reference points for dialogue with institutions, policymakers, and funding bodies at all levels. Once validated by Live DMA members, this statement will guide our advocacy actions in 2026 and beyond.

*Attachement : indicative list of recognition level in the different EU Members States (produced by AI, needs verification with the members )*