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The impact assessment of CH interventions: main challenges and GAPS

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1. THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF CH INTERVENTIONS: MAIN CHALLENGES AND GAPS*

Assessment of cultural interventions in historic sites in the EU has never been the subject of a systematic approach; therefore, the EC, in its call for research projects (Topic TRANSFORMATIONS-16-2019 Call H2020-2018-2020), has stimulated a careful consideration of all significant factors that operate within the framework of resilience and sustainability. The National Technical University of Athens (NTUA) inaugurated the first semester of the SoPHIA project with the task to coordinate an extensive review of current impact assessment strategies as these appear mainly in Europe, and to compile literature on pertinent research, policies, and best practices in impact assessment of cultural interventions. The sections that follow describe the methodology of the literature review process as well as the main findings of the overall research¹.

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1.1 Methodology

The literature review on impact assessment of CH interventions was the first deliverable of the program, featuring literature of the last twenty years on assessing the impact of CH interventions across the cultural, social, economic, and environmental domains. Research drew from EU and non-EU academic resources, policies, and regulations, as well as social platforms. The latter may support formal EU initiatives and programs or they may represent the voices of informal groups led by individuals, small organizations, or communities which may advocate a cause or represent debates related to CH. Content was further structured around four cardinal chapters – Trends, Policies, Gaps & Opportunities, and Strategies.

In accordance with the SoPHIA's project, all sources retrieved had to respond to one or more of the four following questions:

– What are the main current trends in the field?

** While the research is the outcome of the joint effort of SoPHIA Consortium, chapter 1 should be attributed to Olga Ioannou.*

- What are the main policy programs and required quality standards in the field?
- What are the gaps and opportunities of the current level of impact assessment identified in the field?
- What are the strategic and policy-relevant issues identified in the literature?

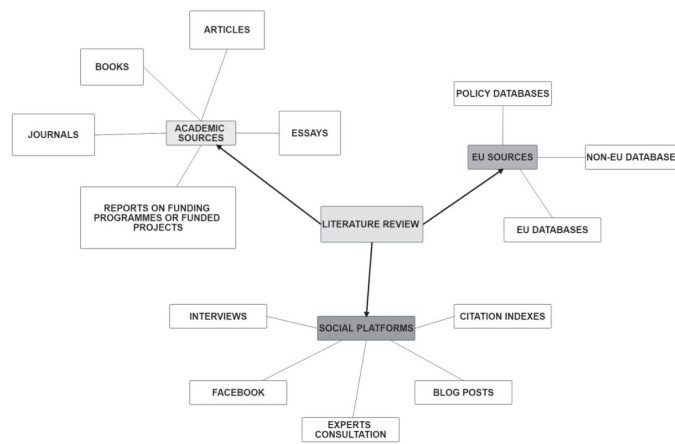


FIG. 1 – Types of resources for each domain for SoPHIA, 2020a.

The scope of research was originally limited to urban environments. Partners were asked to focus on tangible and intangible heritage within an urban context; to include resources dating from 1987 onwards; to make an attempt to geographically cover all European regions, as well as to include a percentage of non-EU resources; to select state-of-the art texts; and to be inclusive and inter-disciplinary in selecting their research material. The total amount of resources per sub-domain was set between twenty and a hundred. As far as the distribution of work among the partners was concerned, the literature review research was originally divided among the four domains of the holistic approach (CHCfE, 2015): a) Cultural domain; b) Economic domain; c) Social domain; d) Environmental domain. Each domain was then further divided into the three sub-domains. Each partner was assigned at least one of the sub-domains depending on their competences and the participation rates set for Work Package 1 (WP1).

For the first deliverable, partners were asked to submit one report per sub-domain. Submitted surveys varied in size between cases with vast literature to examine and those cases that the literature available was scarce. Reports were structured according to the four questions

posed by SoPHIA Literature Review research objectives. This way, research results could be presented in a horizontal, comparative manner, preparing the grounds for the second SoPHIA deliverable: the critical reflection essay on the gaps and opportunities that emerge in CH impact assessment. Report findings were to be tested against the SoPHIA model at a later stage.

1.2 *The role of cultural heritage for the EU*

One could not possibly devise a holistic assessment of cultural interventions without relating in depth to the continuum of European CH first: CH is a vast topic, which encompasses the significant experiences of all human existence – from monuments to scripture, to landscape, to songs. Just as the definition of CH keeps transforming, so do the topics, the subjects and the intertwined disciplines. As Europe proceeds into the 21st century, CH gets redefined as subject as well as our perception of shared human creation (Ceginskas & Kaasik-Krogerus, 2019). Hence, the EU adopts the broadest possible definitions of CH in order to muster a holistic approach. CH is valued as a complex weaving of multiple narratives continuously (re)defining what it means to be European, but also as a cornerstone of sustainable development, or a way to improve people's lives and living environments (Labadi, 2007). CH is both a stimulus for new creation, and a common good to be preserved and is perceived as both a common asset, and a shared responsibility. Thus, CH interventions are not easy to measure and assess by concrete standards and indicators. The relationship among culture, sustainability and well-being is still an open challenge and it is not easy to measure as it depends on the data available and the methodology used (Bacchini and Valentino, 2020).

Today, CH counts as an important driver for fostering economic development and becomes one of the main instruments towards social cohesion (Throsby, 2001). At the same time, CH fuels EU pertinent policies for supporting sustainable tourism, the establishment of hubs of cultural and creative industries, the growth of local employment, social inclusion, and quality of life (Sacco *et al.*, 2009). Beyond cultural policy, CH is currently mainstreamed in national and European policies for regional development, cohesion, environment, energy and climate change, tourism, education, research and innovation aiming at creating added value (Opacic, 2019; Pepe, 2018). CH is strategically deployed to serve the European cause in weaving a common narrative towards a shared future. Thus, CH serves the EU framework as an important resource for social innovation, and sustainable and inclusive growth (Sørmoen, 2009). As a social construct, CH is closely linked to social values, social capital, social inclusion, social cohesion, continuity of social life, and community participation (Vergo, 1989; Lähdesmäki

& Mäkinen, 2019). Social participation is likely to ensure sustainability, and the creative use of heritage as a component of today's and tomorrow's ways of life. CH has the potential to generate new directions and is simultaneously a means and an end for Europe to foster its present and future (Mäkinen, 2019; Lähdesmäki, 2014). The SoPHIA project is dedicated to explicitly articulate CH interventions as measurable and tangible, so as to assess its potential contribution to the future, and to the EU objectives.

1.3 *Findings of the literature review*

The literature review on impact assessment of CH interventions was a complex task, as an attempt to bring together trends, policies, gaps, opportunities, and strategies regarding the assessment of cultural interventions.

a. *Trends*

Trends discuss recurring themes in the understanding and managing of CH and cultural management impact assessments, as well as emergent phenomena related to the impact of CH interventions on four domains: social, economic, environmental, and cultural (CHCfE, 2015). These domains constitute the backbone of the SoPHIA project. They were reflected in the literature review on impact assessment of CH interventions.

Within the Cultural Domain, the literature review on impact assessment of CH interventions spotted a wide array of definitions of CH and of its impact (Gibson et al, 2010), such as i) having diverse socio-cultural impacts on communities, ii) as a dissonant social resource, iii) as repeatedly related to well-being, iv) as able to serve as a sensitive resource with conflict, and v) as a vehicle to the construction of memory, identity, a sense of place or the image of place that can also support local or regional identity constructions (Yu, 2018). At the same time, the impact of tourism on local communities was thoroughly discussed, as CH interventions may favor the needs of tourists rather than natives but can also create beneficial economic spillovers that in turn benefit culture (Causi, 2021). CH management issues of participation and accessibility are also often discussed as there appears to be a lack of framework to facilitate public engagement. Trends also include urban change as it appears as a debate of the values that underpin future urban development policies and strategies, while the issue of safeguarding CH is advocated as an essential factor to sustainable urban development (Giovanangeli, 2015). Last, but not least, digital heritage is a growing area of endeavor in CH and should be counted in.

In the context of the Social Domain, CH is discussed to be a resource for promoting social cohesion, diversity, and intercultural dia-

logue. CH is also described as a resource for innovation, sustainable and inclusive growth: investment on cultural heritage can generate revenue in the form of social benefits-culture as social capital and as builder of such (Dümcke & Gnedovsky, 2013). CH is also related to individual and community well-being. Notably, a shift is noted towards a socially responsible heritage management and heritage literacy through knowledge creation, active engagement, and community involvement while new methods for participating in heritage management and value assessment emerge when citizens step in as heritage managers in order to ensure participation (Carrà, 2016). Civic engagement can become a means of boosting civic pride and community confidence while building a stronger social capital, while new networks are being created to connect people, to create new partnerships and ecosystem of artist (Babic, 2015). Community-defined values are preferred over legislation and policy values for their social relevance while a digital shift is noted towards creating value out of data.

In the context of the Economic Domain, there are two distinct but complementary perspectives of value, which have recently emerged: heritage values (associated with culture) and societal values (associated with economic-political-social & environmental uses of heritage) (Avrami *et al.*, 2000). Economic values are being increasingly more often analyzed as use values, non-use or passive values and beneficial externalities (Mason, 2008; Rizzo & Throsby, 2006). CH interventions are often seen as investment projects with economic and social benefits: culture is intended as a productive sector; as a driver for national or local economic growth and as a vector for human development (Gomes & Librero-Cano, 2018). Measurement of culture's contribution to development at a national level is performed using indicators of employment, cultural activities' contribution to GDP and household expenditures on culture. Last, one must mention new types of events that are being created, which combine cultural experiences with economic benefits, like cultural festivals and ECoCs (Garcia *et al.*, 2010; Cicerchia, 2016).

In the context of the Environmental Domain, issues of sustainability and especially the repercussions of significant phenomena of our time, such as climate change, over-tourism and urbanization globally remain central in the environmental discourse (Gruber, 2008). There is a growing consensus that an improved monitoring of the progress towards mitigation is required (Foster, 2020). In that direction, adopting circular economy principles and instrumentally integrating the built heritage in planning are recently presented as an important means of regenerating CH sites while reducing land use and preserving ecosystem services (Fusco-Girard & Gravagnuolo, 2017). Digitization of environmental data is also discussed as an opportunity of establishing databases that allow for the free flow of information and thus ensure transparency and openness in environmental impact assessments. A significant num-

ber of urban struggles of citizens all around Europe who reclaim to incorporate their cultural/environmental heritage to the everyday life is also noted.

b. Policies

The theme of ‘policies’ runs through the major documents and recommendations that have been developed since the beginning of the 1990’s by organisations and institutions actively involved in CH management. Key policy makers have been: The European Union (Commission, the Council of Europe, European Court of Auditors, EU funded programs, ECoCs, EYCH), the United Nations, UNESCO, and ICOMOS, ICOM, Europa Nostra, OECD, ICLEI. The key objectives of the policies mentioned regard mainly the economic and social innovation encountered in cultural festivals, ECoCs and the adaptive re-use of old buildings related to circular economy principles, sustainable tourism, and softer forms of interventions; digitization as means of ensuring access, transparency and openness; social cohesion and togetherness, social engagement, participatory governance and thus democracy, local governance, inclusion-inclusivity, volunteering. Creating knowledge and awareness, training, research, creativity, identity, cultural memory work, remembrance, peace and security, reconciliation also constitute policies, as well as the sectors of well-being, quality of life, economic, social, environmental sustainability, resilience, protection of tangible and intangible heritage against gentrification, climate change, over tourism, over population, urban growth. Strong global partnerships, evidence-based and result-oriented monitoring and transversal, holistic, integrated, cross-sectoral approaches are also policy-based CH processes. Some of the identified policies have been developed during the early 2000’s and have been found to have influenced EU regulations immensely ever since. Some policies areas, like the recent UNESCO 2030 culture indicators for the SDGs, have not yet been fully explored or exploited. EYCH, ECoCs, EU 2017 strategy for CH fall into this category.

Despite the high number of policies advocating some of the objectives mentioned before, IA methods still fail to integrate these objectives in a consistent manner. An important part of the literature research identifies the shortcomings of policies, the current methods of impact assessment and their implications in CH interventions management as well as the opportunities that arise within the contemporary scene.

c. Gaps & Opportunities

Gaps in all domains manifest mostly as innate weaknesses of the impact assessment methods proposed. This is evident – mostly in the En-

vironmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) – that, despite having been regulated since the late 1980s and amended many times over the past four decades, they still lack a clear set of quality criteria for CH interventions. In all the other domains there seems to be a lack of consistency in the methods employed for IA or a lack of clarity as to which method should be used or even, a lack of data comparability.

Another gap acknowledged as such in all the domains lie in the indeterminacy of the definition for CH, not yet solid and widely accepted, as mentioned before. Its elusive character creates uncertainty and that in turn leads to underevaluation of CH. The value of culture is different among domains and therefore it becomes increasingly more difficult to employ tools and/or methods to measure, quantitatively or qualitatively, changes in value in impact assessments in a comprehensive manner.

Last but not least, it has been found that public engagement and/or active involvement more often than not are missing, underrepresented or undermined during impact assessments. Despite policy imperatives, impact assessments have failed so far to integrate the public in a consistent and meaningful manner. This often creates a lack of consensus and at times may lead to phenomena of contention as well. It also jeopardizes the sustainability of projects after their implementation. Community needs to have a primary role in the preservation of historic urban heritage for there is a gap between taught appreciation and the more personal emotional bonds towards CH, and a sense of collective ownership and belonging from which an authentic need for taking care of heritage arises. Other gaps regard particular aspects of each domain and thus remain limited.

As far as Opportunities are concerned, CH assessment will re-establish the importance of Cultural Statistics within the Cultural Domain (Montalto, 2020). Cultural impact through education is a long-term goal to be established, while the potential of heritage in relation to cultural memory work opens the path of empowerment for communities of inheritance around the globe. Expanding the understanding of relations between people and heritage seems to be the way to create a firm base for CH in the future.

In the Social Domain there is the opportunity for volunteerism promotion in terms of CH programs and the greater use of technology and smart specialization. CH clearly presents a strategic cross-sectoral resource for Europe if implemented at a local level governance as key to integrated urban planning policy and practice. Furthermore, intensive cultural-based institutions can play a «civilizing» role with opportunities for the development of more community-oriented value system, decreasing criminal activity.

In the Economic Domain, innovative methods for measuring impact continue to emerge. Such innovative methods for capturing outcomes are ready to be devised, while new qualitative methods are employed

for understanding how and why assessment is important for establishing CH interventions. Economic impact appears to be gradually related to overall regional development.

Within the Environmental Domain, the enhancement of the EIA and SEA relationship as well as the integration of HIA to EIA can facilitate the development of EIA as a holistic model. The creation of educational programs and innovative narratives, bottom-up public movements and new governance models can foster assessment. Last, but not least, networking is key for creating awareness in the field.

d. Strategies

As far as Strategies are concerned, facing globalisation, migration, anti-migration populism and overcoming dichotomies between politics and reality in CH interventions will clearly enhance the Cultural Domain.

For the Social Domain there are numerous strategies resulting from the research, such as setting up complex projects actions, equally distribute positive effects among social classes, enhancing volunteering activities for building cohesion, encouraging amateur initiatives, empowering citizens to become heritage managers through participation, involvement of a wide group of stakeholders in valorisation, preservation management and seeking evidence about the process of engagement, not just the changes: CH of a territory or a city should be able to involve, in its project activities, the entire community where social and creative activity is concerned. In that sense, a CH intervention should be assessed also by the degree of community participation. Society and CH can further intertwine in activities like the support of new networks and public-private partnerships, seeking evidence about the process of engagement, allowing local and regional authorities to acquire an active role in CH management and adopting a circular systemic approach.

Strategies in the Economic Domain pertain to implementing economic impact assessment from an urban and spatial perspective as well, using economic development in more inclusive terms for creating prosperity and making sure it affects more people, ensuring participatory governance.

Last, the Environmental Domain calls for the adoption of a holistic approach. Reducing social inequality in managing shared environmental resources, engaging in circular economy and adaptive re-use, integrating public opinion from early on in a project and regulating neo-liberal practices are all such strategies.

1.4 Discussion

The systematic mapping of the current landscape of approach to CH impact assessment, as well as the critical analysis of the findings,

have been instrumental in revealing both what CH impact assessment stands for in the European context, as well as what the main challenges in current impact assessment are.

Multiple interpretations of CH meaning and the values to be assessed in the CH interventions are systematically embedded into each theme, in order to clarify the main themes and pillars that lead to an integral understanding of the objectives, targets and indicators needed to serve CH impact assessment. Two key points ought to be mentioned here: one is that *CH is increasingly perceived as a resource in all domains*. It is also believed that CH can actively contribute to a number of desired EU objectives such as social cohesion; diversity; well-being, but also economic growth and environmental sustainability. CH is no longer considered separately and per se, but in relation to advancement in other domains.

Second, there is a discrepancy between current legislation and policies on one side and assessment methods on the other: policies and legislation seem to be more ambitious than the results that methodological tools can achieve. Thus, although policies or regulations emphatically stress the importance of civic engagement and participatory governance (in fact, collaboration among municipalities, institutions, citizens' associations, and grassroots movements, have been proven critical in the development of new laws, policies and regulations), impact assessment methods have not been designed to integrate the public opinion. Although scarce examples of successful impact assessment do exist, such as Impacts 08², current assessment models so far lacked a comprehensive framework that could consolidate the extent of CH interventions impact in all domains.

Notes

¹ For further details on these topics please refer to deliverables D1.1 and D1.2 (SoPHIA 2020a; 2020b).

² By Impacts 08 we refer to the impacts' assessment method implemented by a joint research programme between University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University. Impacts 08 Programme aimed at developing effective and new methodologies to capture the multidimensional impacts connected to Liverpool's European Capital of Culture 2008 in a longitudinal approach (see Garcia et. al., 2010).

