SoPHIA

Social Platform
for Holistic Heritage
Impact Assessment

Type of action:
Coordination and Support Action (CSA)

D 3.4

POLICY BRIEF WITH RECOMMENDATIONS ON SOCIAL IMPACT FOR POLICY MAKERS

PUBLIC

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EC Grant Agreement number	GA nº870954	Lead beneficiary of this deliverable	IRMO
Start date of Project	1 January 2020	Due date of deliverable:	25 February 2022
Duration:	24 months	Actual submission date:	25 February 2022
		Version #	R0.8

Project funded by the Program of the European Union for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020		
Type		
R	Document, report excluding the periodic and final reports	x
DEM	Demonstrator, pilot, prototype, plan designs	
DEC	Websites, patents filing, press & media actions, videos etc.	
OTHER	Software, technical diagram, etc.	
Dissemination level		
PU	PUBLIC, fully open, e.g. web	x
CO	CONFIDENTIAL, restricted under conditions set out in Model Grant Agreement	
CI	CLASSIFIED information as referred to the Commission Decision 2001/844/EC	

Revision History

R#	Date	Description / Reason of change	Author
R0.1	10 September 2021	First draft	IRMO
R0.2	06 December 2021	Revised version after the consortium's comments	IRMO
R0.3	27 December 2021	Shortened version after AB comments	IRMO
R0.4	30 December 2021	Revised version	Cristina Da Milano, cultural policy expert
R0.5	14 January 2022	Final version	ROMA TRE
R0.6	20 January 2022	Revised final version	Erminia Sciacchitano, AB member, and Roma Tre
R0.7	28 January 2022	Final version after language editing	IRMO
R0.8	23 February 2022	Definitive version	Roma Tre and IRMO

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Based on the underlying understanding of cultural heritage as a potential contributor and resource for sustainable development and considering the lack of shared standards for the holistic impact assessment, the Horizon 2020 project `SoPHIA – Social Platform for Holistic Heritage Impact Assessment´ has sought to open the debate on the holistic assessment of cultural heritage interventions, to build consensus on it, to support the European Commission in the definition of guidelines for the next generations of funds for cultural heritage and to support stakeholders in cultural heritage in assessing the impact of their interventions, in view of the sustainability and resilience of cultural heritage.

The SoPHIA policy briefs represent research work focused on specific policies and problems policymakers and implementers face within this framework. Their purpose is to convince policymakers to change the direction of a particular policy by changing their perception. For this to happen, the policy briefs aim to accurately present the problems that policy is facing as well as to propose a solution to these problems by providing clear recommendations to policymakers.

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Introduction

The SoPHIA model to assess the impact of cultural heritage (CH) interventions is based on three axes: Domain, People, Time. Sustainability and resilience are both linked to the multifaceted aspects of the concept of impact (domains), to the complex interactions and interdependencies between resources and stakeholders (people) and to the balance between current needs and the legacy to next generations (time). The people axis points to the importance of social inclusion and citizens'participation that opens a whole spectre of policy issues relating to the impact assessment of interventions of cultural heritage. The Domain axis, concerning cultural, social, economic and enviromental impacts, refers to 6 themes and 28 sub-themes.

This Policy brief focuses on social impacts of CH interventions. In particular, "Social Capital Governance", and its sub-themes (encompassing Inclusive Access, Social Cohesion, Participation&Engagement), represents one of the most important themes related to social impacts. Another theme strictly interconnected to social impacts is "Education, Creativity, Innovation" and its subthemes include Education and Research. Transversal to all these sub-themes is the well-established idea that cultural heritage can play a very proactive role in contributing to social inclusion. This encompasses policy tools such as impact assessments that are involved in the process of planning cultural heritage, from its governance to preservation, activation and interventions through diverse possibilities of use. In a broader sense, cultural heritage is intrinsically linked to social inclusion through questions and articulations of cultural rights, cultural inequalities and access to culture. In addition, it is strongly linked to sustainability, especially in the domain of local customs, and the impacts of economic and social crises, as well as the effects of climate change on cultural heritage that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, driving inequalities even further (UNESCO, 2020). To this end, the deliberation on social inclusion and cultural heritage inevitably involves the interconnected domains - social, cultural, economic and environmental - fostered by the SoPHIA model.

Social inclusion refers to people's participation, which is not a new concept in culture and cultural heritage. The United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) defined the right to participate in cultural life that obliged "the part of governments (at national, regional and local levels) to ensure that this right is upheld." (UIS, 2012: 7). Placing participation in the context of human rights shows that the "right to culture" has been a key foundation of cultural policy and must be treated as a principle in the domain of culture and cultural heritage, especially across Europe where people's participation has become an inseparable component of cultural practices. Accordingly, participation is at the core of the SoPHIA model as it refers to one of the three axes on which the SoPHIA model is based, that is to say: the people axis. Active participation processes are vital to the successful generation and implementation of the SoPHIA model, which is defined as "holistic" not only because it is multi-dimensional but also

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because it considers people's and communities' participation as an essential element of the assessment process.

In the context of people's participation and cultural heritage, the cultural policy faces significant structural and reform challenges that are or should be aligned with the wider framework of sustainable development. The recent emphasis on good governance as a foundation for sustainable and equitable development within the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development rests largely on the effective participation of active citizenship. This mostly pertains to the multi-dimensional nature of inclusion that spreads across equal opportunities and enhances the representation of diversities, of marginal communities, of "others", encompassing focus on education, urban development and economic well-being as inclusive categories that are of vital importance for cultural heritage. Since cultural heritage "enables social cohesion, fosters socio-economic regeneration and poverty reduction, strengthens social well-being, improves the appeal and creativity of regions, and enhances long-term tourism benefits" (ICOMOS, 2021: 12), it has the potential to be a crucial player for achieving sustainable development goals. However, policies on cultural heritage based on the cultural democracy paradigm have not always been effective in fostering these complex goals (Matarasso, 2019, 92-99), whereas a quite common scenario – based on the socio-economic paradigm – is that of heritage objects, sites, complexes, districts, and whole cities (or parts thereof) being seen as commodities that often do not portray the complex stories and legacies of heritage genesis, but serve as a scenic backdrop. This trend is – to a certain extent – in conflict with the goal of social inclusion since a great strength and clarity of vision is required to keep in balance those two legitimate but divergent visions of CH.

There are no clear policies on the conflicts and frictions that social inclusion is faced with in relation to cultural heritage. This is especially evident in the case of a lack of consultations with heritage communities. Some responses can be traced in the agreements on the supranational levels and the work of organisations and networks such as ICOMOS, Europa Nostra, European Heritage Alliance 3.3, United Cities and Local Government, etc. However, hopes and expectations are increasingly pinned on initiatives at lower levels of administration, public-private partnerships, civil society and peer-to-peer initiatives. All of these formats for cultural heritage work, planning and action are still considered experiments that do not necessarily have grounding or adequate support from policy structures, including legal provisions, access to funding, etc. These experiments are geared towards addressing the immediate needs and achieving practical results, yet seek the support of a coherent policy instrument that has the capacity and flexibility to respond to the ever-changing context of cultural heritage. This is clearly underlined by the SoPHIA model, which explicitly mentions inclusive access, social cohesion and civic participation as aspects pertaining to the Social Capital Governance domain, to be assessed to measure the impact/s of CH.

The SoPHIA model answers this call by providing themes of the impact connected to the social inclusion issue, through which it is possible to monitor and measure the expected changes in civic participation.

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This policy brief will provide an analysis of the policy framework for social inclusion and people's participation in the form of participatory governance that are recognised as "innovative approaches to the multilevel governance of tangible, intangible and digital heritage which involve the public sector, private stakeholders and the civil society" (EU, 2018: 7). Since these approaches put "people and human values at the centre of an enlarged and cross-disciplinary concept of cultural heritage" (EU, 2018: 12), they undoubtedly represent one of the best channels for increasing people's participation and consequently contribute to social inclusion through cultural heritage. However, given that the policy brief addresses the whole of European territory that is abundantly diverse in all aspects possible (social, cultural, political, economic, developmental, etc.), the analysis cannot dive into specific national frameworks, regional and local policies and responses to the issues that this policy brief addresses. Rather, the main focus of the analysis is overarching, supranational policy documents that have both normative and inspirational influence on the modes of socially inclusive and participatory governance of cultural heritage.

Furthermore, this policy brief intends to share a set of recommendations focusing on the approaches needed to strengthen people's participation in CH-related activities to achieve social inclusion goals and assess these processes by implementing the multi-dimensional SoPHIA model.

Evidence and analysis

Policy implementation analysis

The discourse of social inclusion and participation concerning cultural heritage has been developing since the early 2000s, with the *Faro Convention* or T*he Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* from 2005 being one of the most significant documents from the period. Drawing on the right to freely participate in cultural life enshrined in the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and guaranteed by the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966), the *Faro Convention* underlines the access to cultural heritage and democratic participation through Section III on Shared responsibility for cultural heritage and public participation. The *Faro Convention* was followed by the establishment of *The Faro Convention Network* made of a growing number of heritage communities. The involvement and engagement of local communities in stewardship of World Heritage is a recent policy and conceptual development from UNESCO in which the role of communities is underlined as pivotal to the *Strategic Action Plan for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention 2012 - 2022* through the strategic priorities of sustainable development and inclusive and systematic policy development.

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Similarly, the *Conclusions on cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe* from the Council of the European Union stipulate that "cultural heritage plays an important role in creating and enhancing social capital because it can: a) inspire and foster people's participation in public life; b) enhance the quality of life and the well-being of individuals and their communities; c) promote diversity and intercultural dialogue by contributing to a stronger sense of 'belonging' to a wider community and a better understanding and respect between peoples; d) help to reduce social disparities, facilitate social inclusion, cultural and social participation and promote intergenerational dialogue and social cohesion" (Council of the European Union, 2014: 1), among other. The *Council conclusions on participatory governance of cultural heritage* of the Council of the European Union, and the EU Commission Communication *Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage in Europe*, both issued in 2014, identify cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe, acknowledge its social dimension and underline the importance of activating synergies among different stakeholders to safeguard and valorise it. They also recognise the importance of transparent and participatory governance systems to be shared with the people to whom heritage ultimately belongs. The Conclusions branch into the main EU programmes such as research Horizon 2020, EU actions for the European Capital of Culture and European Heritage Label, and the support for community-led approach in European Structural and Investment Funds. The Conclusions give straightforward recognition to inclusion and participation as building blocks of democratic evolvement, sustainability, and social cohesion in the face of the social, political, and demographic challenges of present times.

The *New European Agenda for Culture* (2018) sees the dynamic role of European cultural heritage, along with the cultural and creative sectors, in strengthening European identity and creating a sense of belonging. In the new Agenda, the European Commission pledges to develop specific cultural actions contributing to social inclusion through Creative Europe and Erasmus+, and launch a project on "Cultural and creative spaces and cities" under Creative Europe to promote cultural participation and social and urban regeneration.

Most recently, inclusion has been affirmed as the shared theme of the European Heritage Days 2020 titled "Heritage: All Inclusive". The programme aims at putting people at the heart of the cultural heritage; the self-expression of their evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. However, the programme addresses inclusivity for visitors, i.e., it considers inclusivity as a category that "should inspire event organisers to assess their events in the context of the different experience and needs of visitors and make adjustments to make sure they can be enjoyed by everyone"[1]. This approach to inclusion on cultural heritage is (highly) problematic in the light of the aforementioned and following issues on conflicts and discrepancies in articulating inclusion as yet another tactic of widening the consumer base, whilst insufficiently dealing with the inclusion as a tactic for widening scope and quality of democracy, equality, access, etc.

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[1] Quote obtained from https://www.europeanheritagedays.com/Shared-Theme (27/08/21).

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Main problems

- *Lack of evidence to provide argumentative analysis for the necessary policy changes*

One of the main problems with the topic of social inclusion and cultural heritage, apart from the disparities and inconsistencies in the policy rhetoric and practices of inclusion and participation, is that it is very challenging to provide argumentative analysis and grounds for the necessary policy changes due to the scarcity of examples, or work-in-progress practices that can be considered as valid. Validity of the arguments for policy change should be built on a systematic evaluation process that is responsive and continuously open towards methodological innovations in the impact assessment approaches and methods. Currently, socially grounded evaluations, such as those of 'communities of practice' or holistic impact assessments, are still modest and unsupported in relation to the set frameworks of impact assessment as promoted by UNESCO. With the exception of the UNESCO frameworks, the evaluation and impact assessment approaches and methods are still very much based on the "one-size-fits-all" principle and lack the multi-dimensional aspect of heritage self-determination through the process of negotiating and attuning cultural, social, environmental, economic values with community involvement.

- *Social inclusion and participation should be ongoing processes*

Additionally, the policy vocabulary on cultural heritage is not conducive to social inclusion. It is laden with meanings bound to intrinsic, past and fixed terms referring to "an enclosed world that cannot be entered" (BEMIS, 2011: 1). Policies and regulations denote heritage as a synonym of preservation and protection, making it more of a static and rigid area of policy regulation, rather than a dynamic, socially and environmentally attuned and responsive field of policy action.

The problem with the inclusion and participation in culture and cultural heritage is that it should not be reduced to the multiannual (one to three years) project periods that (may) kick-start or upgrade some of the inclusion and participation approaches and practices. Rather, social inclusion and participation should be ongoing processes that spread from the heritage into political, economic, and organisational domains strengthening citizenship, cultural rights and democratic quality of the cultural heritage treatment. Otherwise, social inclusion and cultural heritage will remain a project-based, multi-scattered and more random than structured policy option that will mimic the democratic character of the socially, politically, culturally and economically potent field of cultural heritage.

- *Balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches*

Another important issue that should be taken into consideration when discussing cultural heritage and participatory governance is the balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches. Participatory governance is a complex process that requires open, inclusive and collaborative leadership that will secure success in sharing responsibility for decisions based on consideration of interests of all sides.

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- *The need to enhance the key role of participatory practices within the context of climate change and cultural heritage*

Finally, the impact of climate change on cultural heritage has to be mentioned (sea level rise, washing away cultural heritage sites, soil erosion, storms and wind, etc.), as well as its intrinsic and instrumental values encompassing exclusion of people's' participation in climate change initiatives and variety of decision-making processes related to this issue. When cultural heritage is at risk, the right to access and enjoy heritage is also affected. Participatory practices within the context of climate change and cultural heritage, and people's' participation in consultation, planning, adaptation, and implementation of policies and measures, can have a long-term impact on people's integration and their social inclusion in cultural heritage and may further affect their cultural rights.

Policy implications and recommendations

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The analysis of the policy framework presented in this brief indicates that participation is on the agenda of the trends in cultural policies in Europe. Yet, it is difficult to find the reflection of the policy narrative in the practical policy implementations and implications. Today, the centrality of sharing responsibility in cultural heritage with people and communities in light of social inclusion and civic participation is still obscured. Inclusion and participation are not easy to acquire and determining which policies and approaches achieve the best outcomes remains a challenge. The actual policy mechanisms and legal provisions should productively activate and enable a greater number of inclusive and participatory governance practices in various cultural settings; from existing to emerging formats of cultural institutions that safeguard cultural heritage to contemporary articulations and approaches in use, governance, management, programming, interpretation, revitalisation, and preservation that should be shared with all interested actors. For this reason of inconsistent and insufficient implications of policies on social inclusion and participation in cultural heritage, introducing people's engagement and participation as a key criterion for all stages of policy cycles in culture and cultural heritage (from setting the agenda to formulation, implementation, evaluation, etc.) becomes an urgent necessity.

Some of the main points that emerge from this policy brief are articulated as short elaborations of the key issues and then expanded into a set of policy recommendations or guidelines for prospective policy planning and actions.

All of them – bottom-up approach (intended as participation in activities but also in decision-making processes), education, access and public space, research – have been identified by the SoPHIA model as sub-themes of the domains "Social Capital Governance" and "Education, Creativity and Innovation". This confirms not only the multi-dimensional and multifaceted nature of social inclusion but also that possible approaches can be used to tackle and assess it in the wider framework of CH.

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Bottom-up approach

Dealing with CH should ensure that it fosters social inclusion and social change. National and local administrations and decision-makers must improve the terms and conditions for the participation of people in matters that involve governing, managing, preserving, interpreting, utilising and planning cultural heritage. This seeks confrontations with barriers that currently prevent or limit communities' participation and needs towards allowing and enabling for bottom-up needs and ideas to become a part of the decision-making processes and policy structures. As the SoPHIA model underlines, the bottom-up approach is a vital step in achieving more socially inclusive policies on CH. Namely, using this approach is paramount to:

- create open policy, measures and guidelines for people's participation within decision-making processes on cultural heritage.

- create conditions and financial support for the establishment and development of bottom-up initiatives that deal with cultural heritage to provide sustainability of social inclusion and participatory processes.

- guarantee that all climate actions and initiatives on cultural heritage are taken in coordination with and with the participation of directly affected people and communities.

Education

Social inclusion, participation and participatory governance of cultural heritage are not topics or practices that are understandable to many people. Formal education on cultural heritage mainly rests on preconceived views on the historical, social, symbolic, cultural and economic value of heritage. For this reason, the strong axis for creating interrelations between social inclusion and cultural heritage should be built on informal education that creates direct contact with heritage. In particular, the link between heritage and communities that SoPHIA model strongly fosters should be based on:

- informing people and communities (particularly in suburban and rural areas of European countries) about their cultural rights to access cultural heritage and participate in the decision-making process.
- adapting the policy vocabulary on cultural heritage that would be meaningful and understandable to people and communities and a variety of social groups.
- fostering and financially supporting 'in situ' learning programmes that take into account the socio-cultural relationships, as well as interests and specific needs of local cultural heritage and communities.
- financially supporting peer-to-peer learning and exchange between 'heritage' communities, promoting transfers of experiences in both positive and negative aspects of living in the heritage-laden surroundings.
- developing capacity building programme on people's and communities' engagement in the process of cultural heritage adaptation to climate change.

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Access and public space

In recent times, one of the main issues about tangible and intangible cultural heritage is its commodification and 'economic use and benefit' of heritage. On the one hand, such practices have led to heritage objects and sites often becoming purposed for the tourism industry limiting access and use to local communities. On the other hand, the intangible heritage practices are outside the 'radar' of mainstream interests of public investment and/or adequate 'policy appreciation' that maintains relational treatment of intangible practices as 'must-haves' or 'diversity imperative' of cultural policy provision and support.

Therefore, according to the SoPHIA model, which considers Education a theme in itself as well as a sub-theme of its Domains, it has to be strongly recommended to:

- support policy transfers between different policy areas, e.g. spatial planning and urban development with cultural policy, securing socio-cultural use of heritage sites and objects, thus enabling public access and opportunities for 'hands-on' social inclusion and interaction.
- develop a multi-stakeholder governance framework that recognises cultural heritage as a shared and common resource.
- promote digital means and tools to foster more comprehensive access to the cultural heritage and participatory governance practices for all social groups.

Research and data

Knowledge sharing and dissemination of existing examples and evidence on processes of social inclusion and civic participation are some of the main challenges for achieving these goals in cultural heritage, including the lack of appropriate mechanisms that trigger possibilities for inclusive societies and enable people and communities to participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives, sense of belonging and shared identity. Research is another sub-theme of the SoPHIA model'stheme "Education". In order to strengthen it, it is recommended to:

- finance research on inclusive cultural heritage practices through innovative methodological frameworks, based on qualitative and holistic approaches.
- promote trans-sectoral and trans-disciplinary exchanges of data and information on cultural heritage, social inclusion and participation in cultural practices.
- finance further research on the impact of participatory approaches to cultural heritage on the socio-cultural sustainability of cultural heritage.
- foster the involvement of heritage communities in the research processes of sharing, obtaining, exchanging and creating new knowledge on socially, culturally, economically and environmentally responsible and responsive cultural heritage policies.

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Project identity

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Project title: `SoPHIA – Social Platform for Holistic Heritage Impact Assessment´

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Consortium members: Interarts Foundation for International Cultural Cooperation (INTERARTS), Spain; Stichting European Museum Academy (EMA), the Netherlands; Institute of Cultural Policy and Cultural Management (EDUCULT), Austria; National Technical University of Athens (NTUA), Greece; Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design & Technology (IADT), Ireland; and the Institute for Development and International Relations (IRMO), Croatia.

Funding scheme: This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 870954.

Duration: 1 January 2020 – 31 December 2021

Budget: €1,511,070.00

Website: https://sophiaplatform.eu/en

The Horizon 2020 project `**SoPHIA – Social Platform for Holistic Heritage Impact Assessment´** (2020-2021) is a research and innovation project that sought to open the debate on the holistic assessment of cultural heritage interventions, to build consensus on it, to support the European Commission in the definition of guidelines for the next generations of funds for cultural heritage and to support stakeholders in cultural heritage in assessing the impact of their interventions, in view of the sustainability and resilience of cultural heritage. During the two years of its activities, the consortium partners, together with a diverse community of stakeholders interested in interventions in cultural heritage sites in Europe, have worked together towards the definition of an effective holistic impact assessment model for cultural heritage interventions, quality standards and guidelines for future policies and programmes. The SoPHIA deliverables corresponding to these tasks are available at the project website, as well as on the H2020 portal.

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