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## Foreword

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# FOREWORD

It is a great honor and pleasure for me to introduce this Special Issue of *Economia della Cultura* on the main outputs of SoPHIA – Social Platform for Holistic Heritage Impact Assessment – project.

SoPHIA is a European project (January 2020 – December 2021) funded under the H2020 program. It aims at contributing to the reflection on impact assessment and quality of interventions in European historical environment and cultural heritage (hereafter, CH).

The SoPHIA project addresses a critical issue for the CH sector, albeit still little explored and even less practiced. In fact, while the relevance of CH – tangible and intangible alike – for the well-being of individuals and communities is generally acknowledged, policymakers, cultural managers, and professionals still lack reliable tools to ascertain whether resources are used effectively and efficiently, and to give a full account of outputs, results, and outcomes that go beyond the narrow limits of formal accountability.

Thus, during the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage, the European Commission started a new stream of reflection on impact assessment by linking impacts of CH interventions with the concept of «quality of intervention». While high-quality interventions have several positive spillovers on local communities beyond cultural impacts, low-quality interventions may damage irreplaceable historical elements, their environment and related intangible heritage, identities, social practices, and even have a negative impact on citizens' perception of the actions supported by the EU.

Therefore, the European Commission started to stress the importance of a wider and deeper reflection on the desired, expected, and non-casual impacts of the interventions on CH supported by EU funds (e.g., structural funds). In order to ensure and monitor the quality of the interventions, EU policymakers need shared standards and holistic assessment models.

Against this background and under the H2020 work program (2018-2020), the call *Social platform on the impact assessment and the quality of interventions in European historical environment and cultural heritage sites* was launched<sup>1</sup>.

SoPHIA – Social Platform for Holistic Heritage Impact Assessment project was selected and was awarded the grant. In the last two years, the seven partners of the SoPHIA Consortium have worked hard to bring significant innovations and advancements to the important results produced by previous projects and reports<sup>2</sup>.

SoPHIA pursues three different yet complementary aims:

- 1) to create a holistic impact assessment model to evaluate interventions on cultural heritage
- 2) to gather a diverse community (research community, heritage professionals, experts, policymakers, practitioners, public and private actors) within a new digital social platform, to harness the benefits of the social media when applied to research and practice in the CH field
- 3) to provide suggestions for future European actions on impact assessment by drafting policy briefs and recommendations.

As for the holistic impact assessment model, the SoPHIA project aims at ensuring that interventions in cultural heritage (at local, national, and European level) have positive impacts on all dimensions of society. In line with the crucial switch *from a logic of spending* («it is important to allocate funds for culture») *to one of impact* («it is important to give evidence of the impacts obtained from the interventions») proposed by the European Commission, SoPHIA moves forward by presenting an innovative approach. First of all, it highlights the link between the quality of interventions and the impacts. In fact, it is crucial to define a precise quality goal, direction, and benefits for people and communities to measure the desired impacts of policies and actions. The SoPHIA model adopts a multi-dimensional approach based on three axes (domain, people, and time) to:

- analyze all aspects (domains) of society in which a CH intervention may create an effect;
- advocate for all people engaged in the intervention and that may benefit from the intervention itself;
- present a longitudinal perspective to measure the intervention’s legacy over time.

Referring to the second aim, SoPHIA promotes a participatory model that involves a wide and diverse number of stakeholders (academics, experts, practitioners, and policy makers working in the CH field, as well as active citizens) within a new digital social platform. The SoPHIA community has been actively engaged throughout the project by working with the Consortium in implementing the holistic impact assessment model and the policy recommendations.

Finally, the SoPHIA project aims at providing suggestions and recommendations on relevant issues in the field of impact assessment to support Europe’s future political and research agenda on CH intervention.

This Special Issue of *Economia della cultura* illustrates how SoPHIA has reached the three aims. It is structured in two main parts.

The first part presents the state of art on impact assessment of CH interventions, by considering academic literature, European and

international policy programs, and information retrieved from (institutional and non-institutional) social platforms. This analysis focuses on trends, strategies, opportunities, and gaps associated with impacts related to CH interventions, and it will be presented according to the four main dimensions linked to CH interventions in Europe (social, cultural, economic, and environmental domains).

The second part offers an overview of the research journey that led the Consortium to finalize the holistic impact assessment model (SoPHIA model). It started from the definition of the conceptual approach, as described in Chapter 2. Then a draft was drawn and tested in a few selected empirical settings. Chapter 3 illustrates the main innovative features of the draft and the case studies' analysis implemented by the Consortium to test the model, its adequacy, and applicability. Chapter 4 presents how the suggestions and reflections that emerged from the case studies have been turned into recommendations for the Consortium to develop the final version of SoPHIA model. It also presents an overview of SoPHIA model implementation process, by addressing its main issues and highlighting its open questions. Chapter 5 describes the role of SoPHIA as a community of practices on impact assessment of cultural interventions, supported by a digital social platform. Chapter 6 reports the innovative contribution of the SoPHIA model to the ongoing debate on impact assessment of cultural intervention. It also presents the contents of the four policy briefs produced by the Consortium and validated by the SoPHIA community to create the conditions that can promote and disseminate the culture and practice of holistic impact assessment. Finally, it launches future research directions to make the SoPHIA model concretely applicable in various contexts and to propose answers to the emerging challenges.

I would like to thank all the partners for their valuable work and their effort in accomplishing the goals we achieved so far: Interarts Foundation for International Cultural Cooperation (INTERARTS) from Spain; European Museum Academy (EMA), from the Netherlands; Institute of Cultural Policy and Cultural Management (EDUCULT) from Austria; National Technical University of Athens (NTUA), from Greece; Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design & Technology (IADT), from Ireland; and the Institute for Development and International Relations (IRMO), from Croatia.

Diversity and multidisciplinary have been key factors in the SoPHIA project: the SoPHIA Consortium merges different disciplines involved in the field of cultural heritage (management, architecture, design, archeology, museology, human development, etc.) and partners from seven European countries. This has been my first time coordinating an international team, and I can honestly say that it has been a great experience to work with so many colleagues from different fields and with different backgrounds. But the thing I appreciated the most was the feeling of belonging, the strong sense of a shared community

of people working to reach a common goal, that is the improvement of the CH community we all work in.

We hope that what we achieved together with SoPHIA project may play a role in the implementation of future EU actions in the fields of impact assessment and to serve as a useful contribution for addressing (old and new) challenges that may arise.

On behalf of the SoPHIA Consortium  
Michela Marchiori, *Scientific Coordinator*  
Roma Tre University, leading partner

### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> We refer to the EN-Horizon 2020 Work programme 2018-2020 within which the call TRANSFORMATIONS-16-2019 was launched.

<sup>2</sup> In particular, SoPHIA project started from three important international reports: Europa Nostra (2015), «Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe»; ICOMOS (2019), «European Quality Principles for EU-Funded Interventions with Potential Impacts on Cultural Heritage»; Garcia, B., Melville, R. and Cox, T. (2010), «IMPACTS 08 European Capital of Culture research programme. Creating an impact: Liverpool's experience as European Capital of Culture», University of Liverpool.