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SoPHIA model: the conceptual approach

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2. SoPHIA MODEL: THE CONCEPTUAL APPROACH*

2.1 *The background*

One of SoPHIA's aims was to develop a holistic, multi-domain, and intersectoral impact assessment model to evaluate interventions on CH. Thus, the outcomes of the state of art on impact assessment of CH interventions represent the basis for creating the first draft of such a model.

In particular, the main gap that emerged from the review was the discrepancy between the current legislation and policies on CH and impact assessment methods (SoPHIA, 2020b). In fact, although policy documents report that CH is increasingly perceived as a resource for all domains since it can actively contribute to achieve a wide number of objectives (such as social cohesion; diversity; well-being, as well as economic growth and environmental sustainability), only few methodological tools – e.g., Impacts 08 (Garcia *et al.*, 2010) – succeed in incorporating policy objectives and addressing each domain's imperatives relevant for CH interventions.

To facilitate the connection between the literature review and the SoPHIA model and to address the main gap found in the literature review, we focused on the relationship among the objectives of interventions on CH (emerged from the literature review and the analysis of policy documents and social platforms), the identification of their expected or desired impacts, and the assessment of these impacts.

In order to do this, we followed the research outcomes reported in some important documents published before the beginning of the SoPHIA project.

There are several documents that reconstruct the relationship among objectives, expected outcomes, and assessment of the impacts deriving from interventions funded by European funds.

These documents are produced by a variety of organizations with different aims: administrative, technical, and scientific research. Among

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these, the periodic investigations on national and European level made by the Court of Auditors are particularly useful (e.g., European Court of Auditors, 2020).

The SoPHIA's Consortium focused on three important international documents, that have introduced new perspectives:

- Europa Nostra, «Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe» (CHCfE, 2015);
- ICOMOS, «European Quality Principles for EU-Funded Interventions with Potential Impacts on Cultural Heritage» (2019, 2020);
- Garcia, B., Melville, R., & Cox, T., «Creating an impact: Liverpool's experience as European Capital of Culture. Impacts 08, European Capital of Culture Research Programme» (2010).

The CHCfE's report has played a crucial role in the assessment of the impacts related to CH intervention.

First, it underlines the importance of adopting a holistic approach based on the four domains social, economic, cultural, and environmental (CHCfE, 2015). Second, it also analyses interventions in terms of positive and negative impacts, and, finally, it sheds light on how to scrutinize the link between (policies, projects, initiatives) objectives and impacts.

The ICOMOS document introduces a new perspective for the analysis of the relationship between the objectives of the interventions and the desired or expected impacts by focusing not only on the outcome of the interventions but mainly on the quality requirements of the interventions' process that must be guaranteed to achieve the desired impacts.

Impacts 08 was the first research program to cover a full range of impact dimensions simultaneously (economic, as well as social and cultural) in evaluating Liverpool's 2008 European Capital of Culture. It also recognized the importance of a strong commitment to the assessment process through a longitudinal approach.

SoPHIA deepens the research reported in the above-mentioned documents. 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 and highlights the importance of the quality of interventions, by focusing on the results expected and achieved, also in terms of legacy.

2.2 Main features of the SoPHIA model

Research and analysis on impact assessment highlighted that CH interventions should be multi-domain, inclusive, and generative.

Multi-domain

Well implemented cultural interventions spread outcomes and benefits in a wide spectrum of domains. Thus, a need to analyse interventions in the cultural field under a multi-domain lens was identified.

Inclusive

A well-implemented CH intervention should be accessible for diverse categories of stakeholders.

Generative

CH interventions should produce impacts over time, and ensure, on the one hand, the transmission of a shared definition of «heritage» and, on the other, the dynamism that derives from the active participation of people. A longitudinal approach of the assessment allows us to explore this aspect.

The SoPHIA model adopts a holistic (multi-dimensional) three-axis approach, that aims to detect the *quality* of interventions in CH as above described by emphasizing:

- a) the multifaceted aspects of the impacts related to CH interventions (multi-domain);
- b) the complex interactions among stakeholders that can have different and sometimes conflicting interests on CH (people);
- c) the balance between current needs and the legacy towards the next generations (time)¹.



FIG. 1 – The three axes for a holistic impact assessment model: people, domains, time.

Multi-domain axis

The SoPHIA model presents a set of themes and subthemes that represent the main impacts connected to cultural interventions. The model shifted from the assessment of the impacts generated in the four traditional domains highlighted in the literature (environmental, economic, social, cultural), to a new framework focussed on areas of impact (themes and subthemes) that are not necessarily attributable to a single domain.

The innovative approach proposed by SoPHIA starts from the analysis of the *complexity*, *intersectoral nature*, and *multidimensionality* of the impacts. Often, impacts are conceived as unexpected, i.e., unrelated to any planned activities. Positive or negative impacts alike tend to be treated as surprises rather than as the expected effects or consequences of specific actions taken on specific impact areas expressly with the purpose of inducing a specific change.

In order to detect expected and unexpected, positive and negative, direct and indirect impacts related to CH interventions, the SoPHIA project adopts a new perspective that, in addition to examine the multidimensionality of impacts, tries to grasp and analyze the «cross-cutting» issues and the interconnections between domains.

Relevant studies have highlighted the potential interrelations between the four domains (Yung & Chan, 2015; CHCfE, 2015), as well as unintended consequences of cultural interventions (e.g. Harris & Ogbonna, 2002).

As already mentioned, methods that are sponsored and widely applied at the European level, such as the Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and Heritage Impact Assessments (HIA) fall short in their capacity to capture the multi-dimensional nature of a cultural intervention.

Therefore, there is a unanimous plea for a more global and objective assessment approach to assist in monitoring CH properties, causally linked to their cultural significance.

People axis

The second axis is the people axis, that includes both the actors who promote the assessment and the stakeholders engaged in the assessment process.

A stakeholder is an individual, group, or organization that has a direct or indirect interest in a particular initiative or organization (i.e., government or non-governmental organizations, communities of interests, professionals, citizens). A multi-stakeholder perspective on a

holistic model for CH impact assessment guarantees not only legitimacy but also its sustainability across all domains and it better reflects a set of interests rather than a single source of validation. The following is a tentative list of the main stakeholders involved:

- policy makers at different levels (regional, national, EU).
- local communities (to guarantee the construction of a shared heritage under an inclusive, and participatory perspective).
- youth and future generations (to consider the issues of legacy and responsibility).
- civil society organisations and networks.
- other implicated groups and populations on a case-by-case basis, not included above.

To assess the impact of a CH intervention, it is important to understand the various positions of different stakeholders towards the intervention. For this reason, the SoPHIA model opens new opportunities for the actors involved to express their voice and opinions by promoting a shared space where people (beneficiaries or not) interested in the project can be engaged in the assessment process.

Time axis

The third axis is the time axis. It defines at which moment of an intervention the assessment takes place. Based on this axis, the SoPHIA model is useful in all key moments of the life cycle of a CH intervention and beyond. Key moments are: before the intervention (ex-ante); after the intervention (ex-post); and during the intervention (on-going). Matarasso and Landry (1999) point out that the impact of a project is related to its outputs and outcomes. Nevertheless, in opposition to the outcomes of a project, the impact may change over time, as subsequent events unfold. A planned impact should be measured ex ante, while an unplanned impact can be reconstructed only ex post. And that poses additional questions about the appropriate time horizons for an evaluation.

Thus, referring to time implies the development of a longitudinal assessment method. Initially, this occurs at the planning stage of new developments that may impact heritage. Then, there is the post-development evaluation assessing the impact of a heritage-related infrastructural development at the local area. Moreover, there is the long-lasting impact of such developments, after the investment has been carried out, which in the end determines its sustainability. In each key moment specific assessment's objectives are leading the process and different people are involved.

<i>Quality features of CH interventions</i>	<i>The SoPHIA model in a nutshell</i>
<p>Domains The quality of CH interventions is multi and cross-domain</p>	<p>What To focus on relevant issues (themes and sub-themes) and their interconnections (cross-cutting issues and countereffects)</p>
<p>People The quality of CH interventions is connected to the people</p>	<p>Who To focus on different needs and their balance</p>
<p>Time The quality of CH interventions is creating a legacy</p>	<p>When To focus on the link between project design and the impacts of intervention</p>

Notes

¹ For further details on the SoPHIA model please refer to deliverables D1.3 and D2.3 (SoPHIA, 2020c; 2021c).