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## Conclusions

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## 6. CONCLUSIONS\*

### 6.1 *SoPHIA model contribution to the ongoing debate on impact assessment of cultural interventions*

In the last decade, partially thanks to the vast movement surrounding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the debate on impact assessment, which is mostly lively around development economics and international cooperation, has been characterized by a «shift in emphasis from inputs to outcomes. However, it has been realized that outcome monitoring does not tell us about the success, or otherwise, of government programmes or the Interventions» (White, 2010, p. 153).

Different positions in the debate rest upon different conceptions of impact (Cicerchia, 2015), which have been, since the early stages of evaluation in the late 1960s, subject to change according to academic or practical context and motivation. Amongst evaluators, White (2010) notes that ‘impact’ typically refers to the final level of the causal chain (or log frame), and impact differs from outcomes as the former refers to long-term effects. In other views, endorsed, for instance, by the World Bank, «Impact is defined as the difference in the indicator of interest (Y) with the intervention (Y1) and without the intervention (Y0)» (White, 2010, p. 154). That is,  $\text{impact} = Y1 - Y0$ , and its assessment may be defined as an attribution process (Ravallion, 2008).

We suggest that SoPHIA’s perspective falls within the range of this second notion, whereby impact assessment is a (ex-ante or ex-post) process aiming at attributing changes in selected outcomes (or outputs) to a specific intervention. On this background, SoPHIA joins a research line that points out the underinvestment in evaluations that have led to «a lack of evidence about what works and what doesn’t – and at what cost» (White, 2010, p. 155). The ability to identify what works and what does not is crucial when the chosen field – as in the case of

\* While the research is the outcome of the joint effort of SoPHIA Consortium, par. 6.1 should be attributed to Annalisa Cicerchia, par. 6.2 should be attributed to Ana Zuvela, par. 6.3 should be attributed to Paola Demartini, Lucia Marchegiani, Michela Marchiori.

SoPHIA – is an operational one, and the commitment to support the practice with robust methodologies is strong.

In later years, the idea of one-to-one *attribution* of effects to causes has appeared as too bold and straight, and, in view of the need of allowing for multicausal, rather than linear causation schemes, scholars and practitioners have shown a preference for the idea of *contribution*.

What is to be found, therefore, are elements that have contributed substantially to reach a certain change in Y1, as compared to the initial state Y0. This is clearly the same perspective that UNESCO adopted in their Culture|2030 Indicators, a set of measures meant to assess the *contribution* of Culture to the SDGs, and in a sense is also incorporated in the SoPHIA approach.

As it aims at generating a holistic perspective, one of the distinctive traits of the SoPHIA philosophy is its comprehensiveness. This is true in three senses.

Firstly, the project builds bridges across the various disciplines involved. This represents a way out of the conventional silos-based approach in the social sciences, which does not imply dismantling the Silos, but rather creating areas of controlled merge among them. Silos can be very effective, and deep, disciplinary-specific knowledge and a critical mass of like-minded researchers are sometimes essential to tackling sophisticated problems. This is why «We should build bridges rather than try to break down silos», (Crossley, 2015). That is what SoPHIA is about. Each discipline – economics, sociology, cultural anthropology, – retains its own identity, theories, and conceptual framework; and the model guides the interactions among all of them, thus defining crossover areas and perspectives, potentially able to capture new phenomena and to look at them with enhanced tools.

This explains why SoPHIA does not start with a list of indicators. In the classical silos-approach, each discipline produces a list of variables (indicators) to measure, each related to a theoretical frame of reference that connects individual phenomena to general concepts and theories. Some assessment models follow that procedure, as it is the case, for instance, of those that provide checklists. They juxtapose a list from a discipline with another list from another discipline. They collect data according to the separate lists and store them in separate silos.

SoPHIA starts instead with a description of complex domains, themes, and subthemes that describe possible impacts of interventions on CH, and which can be the object of multiple disciplines. The resulting interpretative grid (see par. 4.3) is open and may be adjusted to accommodate different needs in contexts differing in scale, relevance, content, as the assessment endeavor is typically one with a variable geometry. In another sense, this variability also concerns algebraic values. Impacts may be positive as well as negative. They may be positive in some respects (for some areas, some questions, and some groups of people) and negative in some others. Expected or planned impacts may also be irrelevant (again, for some areas, some questions, and some groups of

people). This does not exclude the use of quantitative measures, like indicators, and is compatible with a variety of qualitative information-gathering (interviews, stories, archives, non-verbal material, etc.).

Secondly, comprehensiveness and holistic approach include time and dynamic changes. Such changes may occur also in the balance among the domains. They are ideally equal (as in CHCfE, 2015), but in practice, their weight may grow or decrease in time. This is why SoPHIA aims at capturing relevant sequences and processes, rather than single fixed points in time. Different causal lines may follow different temporal lines. Physical impacts may take place immediately, while social and cultural impacts may require longer. As in the case of silos, a rigid prefixed determination of time for impact assessment can, indeed, be useful and needs it not to be discarded altogether. Nevertheless, the method should also allow taking into consideration pre-existing conditions, intervening events, turbulences, stops and interruptions, time gaps, medium – and long – term changes along multi-causal lines.

Finally, another emerging issue in the recent debate about impact assessment is the so-called «inherently undemocratic» nature of impact evaluation (Greene, 2009). That refers to those impact evaluation processes that prevent beneficiaries and stakeholders from getting involved. Robert Chambers (1992) defines ‘extractive’ the impact evaluations where researchers collect the data, go back to their ivory tower to analyse it, publish their article. On the other hand, ‘empowering’ research takes place within the community, allowing them to define their parameters, to take part in the analysis, so by deepening their understanding of their situation they can overcome obstacles, with research findings reinforcing this effort (White, 2010).

One of the main features of the SoPHIA model is the relevance of the *people* axes: their perceptions, their points of view, their (often conflicting) interests, their stories. Beneficiaries and stakeholders, individually and/or through their organizations (associations, enterprises, institutions, constituencies, etc.), represent a fundamental pillar of the evaluation process, and the information they provide feeds the analysis with a basic flow, on the same hierarchical level of quantitative indicator or technical inputs.

## 6.2 *Policy briefs to promote the implementation of SoPHIA model*

The discussion on the new model of holistic impact assessment in the domain of CH has to take the policy aspect into serious consideration. After all, the models or typologies of existing impact assessments, such as environmental impact assessment (EIA) or heritage impact assessment (HIA) that are in active use in CH planning processes are policy instruments or governing tools. The governing tools or policy instruments serve as linkages between policy formulation and policy implementation, which denotes that a new model of holistic impact assessment in the domain of

CH has to be understood as a means by which the policy on CH, or the change or thereof, will be put into practical effect.

For the policy change to happen, a whole spectrum of argumentative groundwork has to be done in order to provide analyses, information, arguments, and rationales for the required or necessitated change. In the scope of SoPHIA project, the argumentative support structure for the introduction of the new model was done, among other segments that were mentioned in the preceding chapters (analysis of literature review, methodological approaches and empirical research backing the SoPHIA model, etc.), through four policy briefs.

The purpose of these briefs was to deal with a set of topics that are pertinent for: a) arguing and/or advocating policy change in CH impact assessment; and b) informing and directing the formulation and implementation of a the SoPHIA model as a new impact assessment tool.

To this end, four main topics were addressed through the policy briefs. They are the following:

1. Transformational strategies for CH: resilience, sustainability, and green management.
2. CH and social inclusion: the importance of citizen's participation.
3. The relevance of data in CH impact assessment.
4. CH and education: new skills for heritage professionals.

All four topics are embedded in the discourse and practice of sustainable development and reflect a long-term perspective in planning, governing and managing CH. It has to be noted that all four briefs are addressing the supranational levels of policy source and action, i.e. levels of the European Union and international bodies such as the UN, UNESCO, Council of Europe, etc. The national and sub-national frameworks are given great importance in sense of policy relevance and points of implementation. However, given that the policies on CH fall under the remit of subsidiarity and are driven by the principle of affirming cultural diversity of Europe, the national and sub-national policy frameworks were not specifically analysed.

The policy brief on *Transformational strategies for cultural heritage: resilience, sustainability and green management* focuses on the burning issue of interconnections between environmental urgencies, climate change and CH<sup>1</sup>. The brief features invaluable analysis on juxtaposed trajectories of policies' development in both areas of environment and CH, underlining the intersections between those two trajectories. One of the main issues, that are specifically underlined by this brief, is the CH being overshadowed by the environmental issues coupled with the disregard for the potential that CH has in mitigating climate change perils. The broken link between CH and environmental policies is reflected in the general public. Citizens and society are often presented with a false dilemma between CH conservation and the imperatives stemming from the need for green management regarding climate change and resilience. The two appear to be opposed to each other due

to the lack of an appropriate holistic, detailed, publicly debated, and accepted framework.

The topic of human or cultural rights' and citizens' participation is at the core of the policy brief on *cultural heritage and social inclusion*<sup>2</sup>. The brief brings an analysis of the policy framework for social inclusion and citizens participation in form of participatory governance that is recognized as an innovative approach to the multilevel governance of tangible, intangible and digital heritage, involving the public sector, private stakeholders and the civil society. Active, or genuine participation processes are vital to the successful generation and implementation of a holistic impact assessment model.

The introduction of a new holistic impact assessment model requires a new evidence-base that will sustain it and provide the (statistical) foundation. To this end, the policy brief on *The relevance of data in cultural heritage impact assessment* is justified not only in the sense of its instrumental rationality but in the line of increasing accountability and transparency in policymaking<sup>3</sup>. The scarcity, scatteredness and low comparability of data at a European level are the most obvious problems in this domain. These problems can be attributed to the statistics depending on data collections and administrative sources which are not tailored ad-hoc, but address the general economy, society, and the culture heritage statistics produced by the Member States that differ to a high degree and are only partially comparable. This instance is counter-sensical in an (allegedly) evidence-based regime in which the (social) role and (economic) relevance of the CH are continuously rising due to its lucrative potential in the various forms of economic utilization but also for other goals of sustainable development, such as education and educational programmes that are intricately linked to the development of innovative approaches in dealing with and creating new CH.

Education is the main topic in the fourth brief on *Cultural heritage and education: new skills for heritage professionals*<sup>4</sup>. Although, as the title suggests, the brief focuses (for the most part) on vocational training, the brief stresses the fact that education on CH is not seen any more as a «secluded», «elitist» academic field, aiming at answering questions about the past but is an all-inclusive field, which involves aspects of life that previously were not considered, particularly the intangible aspects of CH and legacies. Accordingly, the brief sets to analyse and argue the approach to education on two main lines: education for the professionals, and education for the public, which co-jointly contributes to the protection, conservation of CH but also to creating new strata, meanings and forms of CH.

The analysis presented in the briefs is diverse in the thematic range with many same issues that are detected in all four briefs. One of those issues is worrisome discrepancies between policy rhetoric and practice in the sense that the policies are in place on a declarative level but are indiscernible on the levels of implementation i.e., practice. This can be interpreted from many aspects – from the normative 'looseness' in poli-

cies regarding CH due to the subsidiarity principle to the clash between dominant economic paradigms of incessant growth with the dire urgency to impose sustainability not only as a popular buzzword but as a normative and genuinely wide accepted principle that is imprinted in all aspects of daily life and thus reflected on all policy areas and levels.

Policy briefs bring conclusions that are formatted into recommendations for policy formulation, adaptation and change. The identification of the policy recommendations aims to determine specific areas of policy interventions that are needed for the formulation and subsequent implementation of the SoPHIA model. Following are the summarized points of policy recommendations that were transversally articulated in all four briefs. Shared points across all briefs best illustrate the directions for the needed policy shifts or changes that are required not only for the practical formulation and implementation of SoPHIA model but for the overall more sustainable, democratic, socially and environmentally sounded and grounded approaches to understanding, regulating, planning, governing and managing CH.

The first point is that the new model SoPHIA model needs to be considered not as a solitary policy instrument i.e., stemming from a single policy framework but as a multi and intersectoral policy instrument. To this end, SoPHIA model starts from the assumption that policy transfer, coordination and convergence are fundamental not only for successful implementation and positive effects of the SoPHIA model but also for achieving a wider spread of multi-stakeholder governance. This indicates the second common point in the policy recommendations, and that is the importance of citizens' participation that will not be only the level of instrumentalizing the social inclusion for the policy justification goals, rather that will be a normatively articulated category through which citizens' will be able to exercise their rights and access to CH as a common and shared resource. Citizens' participation and the reliance on local knowledge as a path towards more sustainable forms of environmental behaviour and care for nature and CH seeks stronger structures and networks of education along with higher investments and regard for research. This makes the third common point of policy briefs.

Full points of policy recommendations are available in respective policy briefs and should be consulted for a specific direction of policy action according to separate policy themes. However, the main three common points are here presented to further the debate on harmonization of the supra-national, national and subnational policy frameworks that are involved in the matters of CH and that include a wide span of public policies.

Finally, all readings, considerations, and subsequent application or use of policy briefs must take vigilant note of the profound differences in the contexts and topics that briefs address. These differences have been jolted into a single framework of the policy recommendations, yet their meaning and practical formulations, implications and evaluations can, or rather, should have different outcomes, different methods of



understanding and overall approaches. For this reason, the proposed policy briefs, the analytical arguments and recommendations behind them should be accepted as negotiable, open-end guidelines for calibration of new policies and attuning of the old (existing) ones.

### 6.3 *Future directions of research*

If the policy briefs are addressed directly to supranational institutions and to policy makers to create the conditions that can promote and disseminate the culture of holistic impact assessment for CH interventions, in this final paragraph we focus on the need to launch further avenues of research to make the SoPHIA model concretely applicable in various contexts and propose it as a tool capable of offering an answer to the emerging challenges of our society.

It should be emphasized that the Sophia model was built thanks to the dialogue and interaction that the members of the consortium have activated with academics, professionals and practitioners of the CH sector. Furthermore, as explained in chapter 3, the model, developed in its fundamental dimensions (i.e., domain, people time) has been refined thanks to the collaboration of professionals and stakeholders of the twelve cultural organizations selected as case studies. Despite having found the applicative value and potential of the model in the case studies, the SoPHIA project was born as an intervention that falls within the H2020 stream named «Collaboration Supportive Action» (CSA) and did not envisage experimentation activities for the implementation of the designed model. Therefore, the research results obtained so far require further study and development.

There are three future directions of research that can be outlined below<sup>5</sup>.

The first direction proposes to deepen the applicability of the model by providing for an extensive experimentation in cultural organizations differentiated by size, location, areas of specialization, institutional purposes and governance characteristics.

This experimentation will focus on some specific phases of CH interventions that involve various stakeholders interested in impact assessment. For each of these phases, The SoPHIA model can represent a valuable basis to build upon. Namely, we refer to:

- i.* the drafting of the tender for the allocation of funding, in which it is appropriate to identify expected impacts and related evaluation criteria, to select the most suitable proposals (ex-ante evaluation);
- ii.* the development of the intervention (ongoing evaluation), in which the SoPHIA model can be implemented as a dashboard that can be useful for managers in charge of the project, to be accountable for the outcomes of the intervention;



*iii.* the impact monitoring after the end of the project (ex-post evaluation) that can be run by different evaluators, such as public institutions, independent observers, as well as advocacy groups who may be interested in understanding the cumulative and long-term effects generated by interventions on CH.

The second research direction aims to investigate the specificities of the impact assessment of investments in the CH sector with reference to the allocation of funds deriving from the Next Generation EU (NGEU) plan. To date, there are great investment opportunities in the cultural sector generated by public funds which could also be a driving force for private funds. This streams of interventions concern, for example, the regeneration and enhancement of small villages with a valuable artistic and cultural heritage, the valorization of landscape and rural areas, as well as investments devoted to valorize tourist and cultural attractions. In all these cases it will be necessary to develop skills and tools for assessing the expected impacts. The evaluation, therefore, will have an accountability function towards public taxpayers, a fundamental function for a progressive improvement of policy choices and, finally, will also be crucial to establish whether «goals» and «objectives» of the Plans are reached and, therefore, to establish the eligibility of the payment requests by Member States.

In this line of research, the challenges proposed by the New EU Bauhaus (NEB) initiative must also be considered, since that project aims to design future ways of living, inspired by creativity, art and culture, calling for a collective effort to image and build a sustainable and inclusive society.

Finally, the third research direction intends to explore the potential of SoPHIA model for institutional investors who are increasingly interested in investments that generate positive measurable social and environmental impact alongside a financial return. As a matter of fact, the capital market may be interested in investing in the CH sector, since the related impacts may generate positive direct and indirect effects on society and may be a lever for the achievement of sustainable development goals as underlined by the UNESCO Agenda 2030 for Culture.

### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> For further details, please refer to deliverable D3.6 Policy briefs with recommendations on environmental impact for policy makers (SoPHIA, 2021l).

<sup>2</sup> For further details, please refer to deliverable D3.4 Policy brief with recommendations on social impact for policy makers (SoPHIA, 2021h).

<sup>3</sup> For further details, please refer to deliverable D3.5 Policy brief with recommendations on economic impact for policy makers (SoPHIA, 2021i).

<sup>4</sup> For further details, please refer to deliverable D3.3 Policy brief with recommendations on cultural impact for policy makers (SoPHIA, 2021g).

<sup>5</sup> For further details, please refer to deliverable D3.9 : Future need and research agenda (SoPHIA, 2021m).