

How do we measure impact in heritage? We may have an answer.



[SoPHIA](#) – Social Platform for Holistic Heritage Impact Assessment – is a project funded under the EU Horizon 2020 research and innovation scheme, led by Roma Tre University in collaboration with other six organizations in Europe.

The general assumption on which SoPHIA is based is that, since the second half of the last century, culture, including cultural heritage, has experienced a profound mutation through which both its position and role in social dynamics have been transformed. Indeed, it has been widely recognized that culture and cultural heritage have strong impacts on society, in terms of social inclusion, integration and sustainable human development.

Based on the review of political and research literature and test cases a group of researchers have developed a draft model for how to measure the impact of all kinds of interventions in cultural heritage, considering the cultural, social, economic and environmental domains. The model is intended to be useful for sites, cities and other local or regional authorities in their planning and assessment work.

At this moment, consultations on the draft model are being upheld with researchers, practitioners and policymakers, alongside a testing phase in twelve different [case studies](#) across Europe. The case studies represent a variety of types of cultural heritage, comprising a landscape site, two museums, two programmes, three cultural districts, a place of remembrance, a historic city centre, an island and a monastery.

SoPHIA tries to respond to the **specific challenge** posed by the European Commission: the way cultural heritage is preserved and enhanced is a major factor defining Europe's identity and its place in the world. Jobs are created by the conservation, management and promotion of cultural heritage and these activities contribute to sustainable growth and social cohesion.

High quality interventions in cultural heritage and cultural landscapes contribute to local communities' well-being and to the development of sustainable cultural tourism. On the other hand, examples of low-quality interventions in the historical environment and cultural heritage sites give rise to complaints from experts and citizens. Low-quality interventions may even damage irreplaceable historical elements, their environment and related intangible heritage, identities, and social practices. Cases where EU funds (e.g., structural funds) are used for such low-quality interventions may have a negative impact on citizens' perception of the actions supported by the EU.

The European Parliament has urged the Commission to "include in the guidelines governing the next generation of structural funds for cultural heritage a compulsory quality control system". A factor hampering the positive outcomes of interventions and the effectiveness of the EU support actions is the lack of a common understanding of the requirements for the quality of restoration and also of all other interventions in the historical environment and cultural heritage sites at European level. Lack of shared standards for the holistic impact assessment – regulated by the Environmental Impact Assessment and the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directives – of these interventions also plays its role in this area.

About the **scope** of SoPHIA, the social platform brings together the research communities, heritage professionals, public and private actors and policy makers at local, regional, national and international levels concerned with the impact assessment and quality of interventions in historical environment and cultural heritage sites in Europe. Tangible and intangible heritage,

cultural landscapes and seascapes, heritage memory preservation, cultural identities of groups, communities and minorities, legislation, guidelines and codes of ethics and governance will be considered. The platform should map existing and emerging problems, practices and policy gaps relating to the impact assessment and the quality of interventions in historical environment and cultural heritage sites in Europe. It should overview past and ongoing research and collect, compare, analyse and promote best practices from Europe and beyond, thus becoming a major reference for transnational and interdisciplinary networking in this policy area. Education and awareness raising programmes for specialised communities and the public in general will be considered.

As per the **expected impact**, the action will facilitate the uptake and dissemination of best practices, thereby contributing to the development of strategic and integrated European and international policies and interventions. It will contribute to the coordination of a variety of stakeholders and will develop toolkits and recommendations for them. The platform will formulate recommendations and an action plan for future European action aiming towards harmonized impact assessment and intervention quality standards. It will also build a consensus on future needs and will support the EU in developing an innovative and focused research agenda on cultural heritage and on the quality of interventions in historical environment and cultural heritage sites in Europe.

SoPHIA's [Consortium](#) is composed by seven organizations across Europe, representing higher education and research institutions and non-profit foundations. SoPHIA's community is supported by an [Advisory Board](#) and a network of [stakeholders](#). Scientific outputs produced by the project are progressively made public and can be consulted in the [Archive](#) section of the website.

For more information, please visit www.sophiaplatform.eu. For any additional information, please contact info@sophiaplatform.eu. [Access here](#) to subscribe to the Newsletters.