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Management Conference

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Management of sustainability and well-being for individuals and society

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Short Papers

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Contributing to Cultural Welfare: A Critical Review of Methods for Measuring the Impact of Culture on Sustainability and Well-being

MARA CERQUETTI[1] GIULIA LAPUCCI[2]

Abstract

In the context of increasing attention to cultural value and the value of culture for people and society, this paper provides a narrative critical review of methods for measuring the impact of culture on sustainability and well-being. After clarifying the interconnected and multifaceted concepts of culture, value and measurement, the research critically discusses different methods for grasping and understanding the benefits of culture. Both scientific literature and international documents are thoroughly examined to cluster current tools and models, identify gaps in the current debate on cultural welfare, contribute to theoretical development and provide recommendations for cultural management.

Key words: *culture; value; measurement; impact; sustainability; well-being*

Framing of the research. *Defining and measuring the value of culture means navigating and disentangling complex and intricate concepts, such as those of culture, value, and measurement.*

First, the overlapping and competing dimensions of culture, including its dual nature, should be recognised: on the one hand, culture refers to a limited set of activities produced by human beings; on the other hand, in a broader sense, it includes everyday activities as a whole in their different facets – social, economic and political ones (MacDowall, 2015, p. 2).

Regarding value, in the current context, its subjective nature is widely accepted. Recognising its extrinsic and relational nature means overcoming the misleading distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value. Indeed, as argued by Montella (2009, 2016), value always requires assessment by an external subject. When evaluating cultural services, value is influenced by the context in which the interaction takes place and depends on the characteristics of the offer and its users – their needs and desires, as well as the resources they have for benefiting from a service (Montella, 2016, pp. 109-110).

Finally, measurement cannot be reduced to the economic-monetary evaluation (Redden, 2015, p. 31). Measuring is a broad and multifaceted activity which entails defining the aspects to be included in the analysis, methods to be adopted, and processes to be implemented to make measurement a valid tool to support cultural management and the sustainability of cultural activities in the long term.

Nowadays, culture has become an essential component of sustainable development (Cicerchia, 2021). It is considered the fourth pillar of sustainability (Culture in Sustainability), a point of convergence with a mediating function between the three traditional pillars (Culture for Sustainability), and a central hub for the other pillars of sustainability, that is, the global dimension of sustainability (Culture as Sustainability) (Soini, Dessein, 2016).

Aiming to measure and monitor the contribution of culture to the national and local implementation of the Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in 2019, UNESCO provided 22 thematic indicators for culture (Culture | 2030 Indicators) divided into four areas:

1. *Environment and resilience: (1) expenditure on heritage, (2) sustainable management of heritage, (3) climate adaptation and resilience, (4) cultural facilities, (5) open space for culture;*
2. *Prosperity and livelihoods: (6) culture in GDP, (7) cultural employment, (8) cultural businesses, (9) household expenditure, (10) trade in cultural goods and services, (11) public finance for culture, (12) governance of culture;*
3. *Knowledge and skills: (13) education for sustainable development, (14) cultural knowledge, (15) multilingual education, (16) cultural and artistic education, (17) cultural training;*
4. *Inclusion and participation: (18) culture for social cohesion, (19) artistic freedom, (20) access to culture, (21) cultural participation, (22) participatory process.*

Although the dimensions mentioned above represent an overall contribution of culture to sustainability goals, this framework lacks a further step in recognising the close interlink between sustainability and well-being. As O'Mahony (2022) pointed out, even though sustainability and well-being are two global political priorities with various overlaps,

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they remain isolated, and well-being is poorly characterised in sustainability. In this regard, Chapter Six of the World Happiness Report 2020 addressed the connections between sustainable development and human well-being, studying the empirical relationship between the SDGs and subjective well-being using data from the SDG Index and the Gallup World Poll (De Neve, Sachs, 2020).

Due to the numerous interconnections between these concepts, it is crucial to incorporate a sustainability perspective when contemplating human well-being in the cultural sector.

Well-being is a multidimensional concept that encompasses every aspect of the life of individuals and communities. Swarbrick (2006) identified eight dimensions of well-being: physical, spiritual, social, intellectual, emotional/mental, occupational, environmental, and financial. In the current scenario, the close link between well-being and health that we can observe results from the revolution that has transformed the concept and definition of health (Cicerchia, 2022). Indeed, the shift from the bio-medical model to the bio-psycho-social model represents a fundamental change in the way health and illness are understood and approached (Engel, 1977). This model widens the focus, previously centred on purely biological factors, by incorporating psychological and social factors into the understanding of health and illness, highlighting how an individual's well-being depends on all three spheres. Indeed, the concept of health has enlarged its horizons since the World Health Organization (WHO) provided a definition in 1948 that has remained unchanged ever since: "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1948, p. 1). The definition of health rooted within society and culture, influenced by internal and external determinants, together with the salutogenic approach introduced by Antonovsky (1996), provided a new framework to understand and promote factors that contribute to health and well-being. In 2020, WHO added that health and well-being "are influenced by a range of biomedical, psychosocial, social, economic and environmental factors that interconnect across people in differing ways and at different times across the life course" (WHO, 2020, p. 39).

This emerging approach has impacted the evaluation of culture. Thus, when analysing cultural policies and activities promoted by cultural organisations, scholars have devoted increased attention to the impact of culture on the quality of life, health and well-being, as well as on the economy and society at local, national and international levels (McCarthy et al., 2004; Bollo, 2013; Lee, 2013; Scott, 2013; Tuck, Dickinson, 2014; O'Brien, 2015; Cicerchia, 2017a, 2017b, 2022; Crossick, Kaszynska, 2016; OECD, ICOM, 2018; Brown, 2019; Gariboldi, Marconi, 2021).

Moving from the theory to the practice of evaluation, the first issue to define is the field of investigation (what to measure). Indeed, measurement can be applied not only to the effectiveness of public policies at different levels, i.e. European, national, regional and local, but also to the activities carried out by a single organisation or, more specifically, to a single project or activity. Second, it is a matter of how, that is, choosing the methodology, which could be qualitative or quantitative or mixed, also considering difficulties in quantifying dimensions that are not necessarily quantitative. Furthermore, we cannot overlook the effects of measuring. As already argued, not only do numbers matter (Blomkamp, 2015, p. 12), but they have the power to construct understanding of the world (Redden, 2015, p. 29). Another crucial aspect is the need to standardise methodologies to compare data. Finally, we must take into account the reasons for measuring. This issue has become relevant in the context of spending review – and connected austerity measures in using public resources – and evidence-based policy and public management. Thus, measurement has become central for accountability, especially in the case of public policies or activities carried out by public organisations or financed by public expenditure. In addition, it has recently been recognised as an essential tool for promoting cultural welfare.

Purpose of the paper. *The paper aims to provide a review of methods for measuring the impact of culture on sustainability and well-being. To achieve this goal, we analysed models for holistic impact assessment, focusing on the tools they offer for measuring the contribution of culture to promoting multidimensional forms of well-being of both communities and individuals. The research critically discusses different methods for grasping and understanding the multifaceted benefits of culture. It seeks to identify the nuances and synergies that emerge when multiple dimensions of impact assessment are considered simultaneously. The analysis intends to identify gaps in the current debate, contribute to theory development and provide recommendations for cultural management.*

Moreover, the research investigates if and how these models adopt both a multidimensional approach and a multi-stakeholder perspective, highlighting tools designed for different beneficiaries: cultural and creative organisations, policymakers, individual citizens, or communities. The attention to these specific elements is the basis for the next step of the research, namely the definition of a holistic framework integrating different scientific contributions. This model may be specifically tailored to the evaluation of cultural and creative activities, providing an approach that embeds the principles of cultural welfare into the managerial structure, from design to evaluation. Cultural welfare practices lack a shared impact assessment conceptual framework and model; their evaluation is often limited to spot intervention, missing the opportunity to root this approach in the way an organisation works. In doing so, we aim to contribute to advancing methodologies that capture the intricate interplay between cultural, social, economic, and environmental factors, ultimately promoting a more holistic understanding of the broader impacts of cultural initiatives.

Methodology. *The research is developed by adopting a narrative critical review (Green et al., 2006; Ferrari, 2015; Pautasso, 2019). Both scientific literature and international documents were thoroughly examined. In addition to scientific databases such as Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar, grey literature was investigated. Even if the narrative review is more likely to introduce bias because it includes only research selected by the authors, in this case, it was preferred because it allowed the authors to include policy documents, green papers and project reports that are not retrieved by academic databases.*

Due to the many methods and approaches, navigating this topic can be very challenging. A key contribution to better understanding the geography of impact assessment approaches came from the SoPHIA project and its deliverable 1.2, "Concise Essay mapping existing Gaps, Issues and Problems".

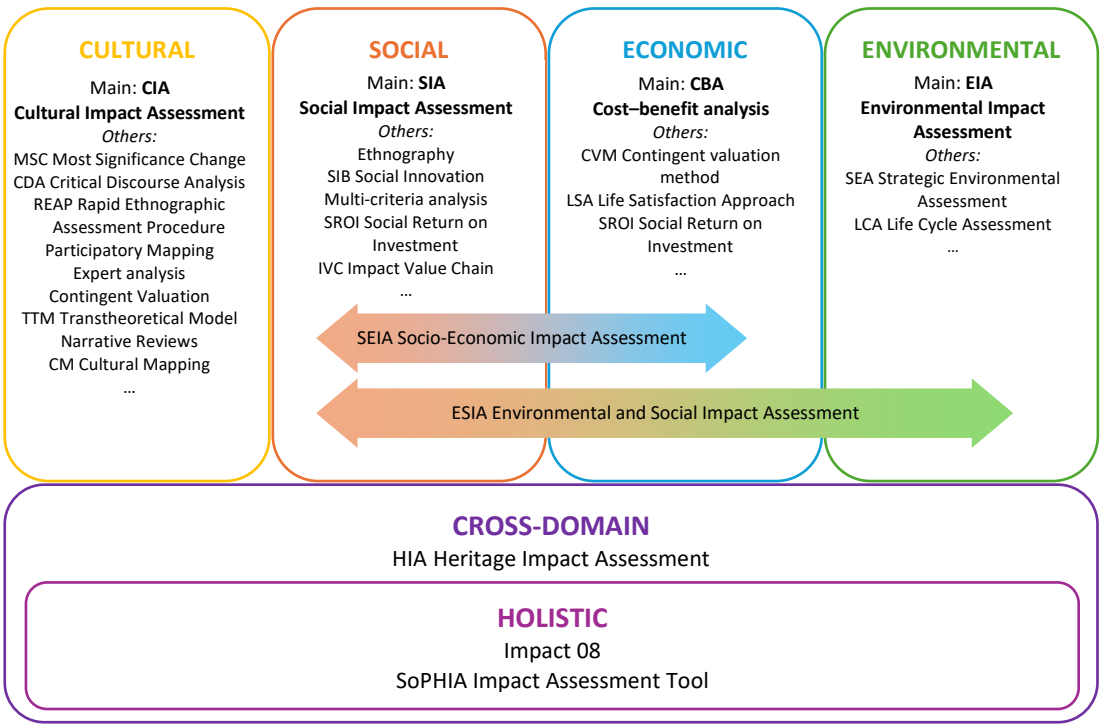
Results. *For a long time, impact assessment in the cultural sector has been characterised by a clear, almost impenetrable, delineation of the areas of investigation. Evaluation practices, borrowed from other sectors to the cultural one, were often limited to a single domain – social, cultural, economic, or environmental – losing sight of the interconnections and mutual influences between the different impact spheres of these activities. Consequently, cultural impact has often been evaluated through a narrow lens rather than adopting a holistic framework to understand its effects. In more recent times, evaluation tools designed at the intersection of different areas of investigation have begun to appear, in line with the recommendations provided by Europa Nostra's report "Cultural Heritage Matters for Europe" (CHCfE Consortium, 2015, pp. 17, 97-102). The report emphasises the importance of adopting a holistic four-domain approach (social, economic, cultural, and environmental) in cultural impact assessment. Indeed, it is based on the recognition of the role of culture as a fourth pillar for sustainable development – together with economic, social, and environmental pillars – as stated in the Hangzhou Declaration "Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies" (UNESCO, 2013).*

Different approaches still populate the constellation of impact assessment, and many of them still adopt a single field "language" to describe phenomena whose impacts are spread in different spheres, such as The Life Satisfaction Approach (LSA). LSA is a quantitative tool developed in economics that provides a monetary evaluation as an output. Through a survey, LSA provides information about respondents' life satisfaction, their degree of participation and engagement in the arts and cultural activities, and other socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the respondents. Tools such as this do not adopt an integrated and interconnected view and do not align with the holistic framework.

Aiming to fill this gap, the already mentioned SoPHIA's deliverable "A concise essay mapping existing gaps, issues, and problems" (2020) provided an overview of tools and methods developed in four domains: social, cultural, environmental, and economic. A total of 42 different methods were collected. To comprehend the distribution of these methods, here is an overview of their allocation based on their respective domains: 14 in cultural, 24 in social, 4 in economic, 3 in environmental, and 4 are related to two or more domains.

In particular, among these 42 methods, 6 are used in two different domains, but they are characterised by a single-field approach (e.g. economic methods applied to the social dimension, such as SROI – Social Return on Investment, which is present in both social and economic domains), 2 of them are classified as attempts to create synergies between methods of two domains (i.e. SEIA – Socio-Economic Impact Assessment and ESIA – Environmental and Social Impact Assessment), and finally 2 of them are labelled as cross-domain methods, namely HIA – Heritage Impact Assessment and Impact 08 (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Impact Assessment Methods divided by domain (own elaboration based on the initial classification provided by SoPHIA Project, 2020)



Our analysis is still ongoing, but some first considerations can be made focusing on those methods highlighted as cross-domains, i.e. HIA and Impact 08, in addition to SoPHIA Holistic Impact Assessment Tool.

Even if HIA and Impact 08 are both identified as cross-domain, HIA does not provide a comprehensive approach to assess the impact of culture across all dimensions of society. As pointed out by Ashrafi et al. (2021a, 2021b), HIA has been developed by ICOMOS within the framework of EIA – Environmental Impact Assessment, to measure the potential impact of a proposed development on cultural and historical resources, such as archaeological sites, historical buildings, or cultural landscapes − with specific recommendations to mitigate any negative impacts (ICOMOS, 2011). It is also worth mentioning that HIA is increasingly required to analyse the possible effects and consequences of development on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of World Heritage Sites. Indeed, the very vocation of the "HIA Guidance" developed by ICOMOS (2011) is to provide a methodology for assessing the potential impact of a change or development on OUV attributes as part of a broader EIA process. This characteristic means that it often refers to a well-defined and delimited area of action, UNESCO sites, making its application in other contexts challenging and often inappropriate. Furthermore, this method does not offer useful tools to investigate the impact of culture on well-being. Indeed, this example shows a common obstacle when addressing the topic of cultural impact assessment, namely the risk of encountering tools that assess the impacts of a proposed development on cultural heritage. As a result, this tool can provide information only limited to the enhancement and conservation activity of the site under analysis as it focuses on safeguarding cultural heritage rather than on the impacts it may have on the society that hosts it.

The second cross-domain method is Impact 08, a holistic longitudinal impact analysis. It was successfully used to assess the economic impacts of Liverpool European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2008 (Garcia et al. 2008, 2010). Impact 08 developed a holistic approach by focusing on five areas: 1) cultural access and participation; 2) economy and tourism; 3) cultural vibrancy and sustainability; 4) image and perception; 5) governance and delivery process. As pointed out by Baioni et al. (2021, p. 15), Impacts 08 has been able to incorporate policy objectives and address the different imperatives relevant to cultural intervention in each sector analysed. Beyond quantitative metrics, Impact 08 adopted qualitative methods, considering the lived experience of residents as an essential component of the study and providing insights about positive and negative aspects from residents' perspectives. What emerges is that the tool's nature, that is, being designed to evaluate Liverpool's experience as ECoC, weakens the holistic approach of the evaluation. Indeed, due to the context in which it took shape, this assessment paid strong attention to outputs, particularly visitor flows and tourism, and demonstrated a slight concern for sustainable development issues in the city. The report provides insights on dimensions related to human well-being (e.g., occupational well-being, cultural engagement and participation, sense of belonging, local identity), but fails to mention environmental impacts directly. Overall, this example contributes fundamentally to introducing the holistic approach in the sector. However, it is important to note that it was developed and designed specifically for an exceptional event such as ECoC. Therefore, it is more appropriate to measure the impact of similar events on an urban scale rather than to evaluate the impact of culture in other production contexts and on different geographical scales.

Finally, the Holistic Impact Assessment Model proposed by SoPHIA represents a key contribution to spreading a holistic approach in the cultural field. SoPHIA Social Platform for Holistic Heritage Impact Assessment is a project funded by the European Commission under the H2020 work program (2018-2020) to develop a holistic, multi-domain, and intersectoral impact assessment model to evaluate interventions on cultural heritage (Baioni, 2021). The SoPHIA model is not a "ready to use" tool that can be applied universally; instead, it is a "conceptual model" that must be transformed and customised into an operational framework (Arif et al., 2021, pp. 87-88). What makes this tool valuable is the role that it assigns to the indicators and qualitative measures collected. They are organised according to domains and subdomains, but their contribution is not limited to the area of affiliation; instead, they are helpful in evaluating transversal aspects of key issues. In addition, the model differs from other impact assessments as it adapts to the analysis needs of three categories: policymakers (from local to European level), managers and practitioners, and institutional observers and independent researchers (SoPHIA, 2021). SoPHIA model adopts an approach developed on three axes: 1) domains, represented by issues organised by themes and interconnected subthemes; 2) people, divided between promoters of the assessment and stakeholders involved in the evaluation process (e.g., policymakers, local communities, civic society); 3) time, represented by the balance between current need and legacy but also related to the moment in which the assessment happens (ex-ante; on-going; ex-post) (Arif et al. 2021, pp. 77; Baioni et al. 2021, pp. 17-20).

The multi-domain axis encompasses six different themes − further divided into subthemes, for a total of 28 − in which a cultural intervention can potentially impact. They are organised as: 1) social capital and governance; 2) identity of place; 3) quality of life; 4) education, creativity, and innovation; 5) work and prosperity; 6) protection. Themes and sub-themes are described, along with their cross-cutting issues and counter-effects. The assessment is developed thanks to quantitative indicators, and the perspective of people − direct beneficiaries and workers engaged in the implementation of the initiative − on the intervention's quality (Arif et al. 2021, p. 75).

As Arif et al. (2021) pointed out, the repetition of indicators among themes and subthemes was an obstacle to the development of the model, which caused redundancy. This issue was addressed through the testing phase by implementing a clear differentiation of themes and subthemes. Topics affected by this phenomenon more often were those related to social capital, prosperity and attractiveness, and well-being (Arif et al. 2021, p. 71).

One of the main holistic features of this tool is the ability to show interconnections between various areas thanks to cross-cutting issues and counter-effects described for each sub-theme. The theme of Quality of Life, originally named Well-being/Quality of Life (Ioannou, 2021), was a privileged viewpoint to observe counter-effects; for this reason, it has been lightened, leaving the dimension of well-being in the dimension of counter-effects.

Research limitations. *The research is theoretical since it analyses and discusses pre-existing theories, methods and models. The research focuses mainly on holistic tools, not the various methods that populate the impact assessment universe. Moreover, the analysis is still in progress. Its further development entails a thorough analysis of the impact assessment methods under investigation to develop an original holistic framework for measuring the impact of culture on sustainability and well-being.*

Managerial implications. *The analysis suggested by the research could be a valuable resource for cultural management and policymaking. The review provides cultural managers with a set of approaches and tools that could be applied to the cultural sector. By critically discussing them, the research also guides cultural organisations in defining their measuring methods and instruments.*

The paper recommends integrating a holistic perspective into managerial practices to achieve more sustainable and well-being-oriented outcomes. It emphasises the importance of a comprehensive approach that considers the diverse dimensions of culture and provides practical insights to enhance cultural impacts. Indeed, the interconnected and multifaceted nature of culture, highlighted in the paper, calls for interdisciplinary collaboration within organisations between cultural experts, sustainability professionals and well-being specialists to develop holistic strategies guided by the integrated cultural welfare approach.

Originality of the paper. *The paper provides a comprehensive overview that helps understand and evaluate the benefits of culture. To the best of our knowledge, even if studies have provided a variety of models and tools, an analysis of holistic methods under the lens of the contribution of culture to sustainability and well-being has never been carried out. The analysis developed within the paper could help identify trends, overlaps, and gaps in the current debate about holistic approaches.*

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