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## Cultural heritage at work for economy and society

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### **Increasing demand for integrated conservation strategies**

Research on how to achieve more effective heritage management models is more and more timely, moving from preservation to a more integrated approach (Shuster et al. 1997; Malkki and Schmidt-Thomé 2010; European Commission 2015). The resources for conservation of cultural heritage are diminishing. Sustainability concerns are increasingly driving investments in the construction sector – including conservation of historic buildings – towards new models (among many others, see Cassar 2009; Pereira Roders and Van Oers 2011; Biscontin and Driussi 2014). Societal changes are challenging the bases of some traditional approaches to preservation of national memories, while the rapid development of mass culture is triggering unforeseen and sometimes odd forms of enjoyment of heritage sites. It is therefore necessary to build new attitudes: opening up to a new understanding of historic preservation, investigating the relationships between the heritage sector and the issues of the economy and society, and highlighting the returns on investments in conservation beyond the narrow circle of the heritage sector.

The principal keyword of the research we present in this chapter is integration – which is not new, as integrated conservation was one of the main ideas proposed in 1975 by the Council of Europe. The focus of the research is built heritage; meant not as a separate field, but as a crossroads to include single objects as well as landscape, as the observed changes hold for all the scales and values. Integration concerns both domains and timescales. On the one hand, recent research points out the potential of the heritage sector as a factor for integrated policies concerning all four pillars of sustainability (CHCfE Consortium 2015). On the other hand, as arguments increasingly rise against large restoration works, a slow paradigm shift has been observed towards

Planned Preventive Conservation, Maintenance and Monitoring (Van Balen and Vandesande 2013), which entails a long-term vision. The main benefits of this new approach are expected to be cost-effectiveness for private owners and managers of historic properties, improved quality of protection of built heritage, environmental enhancement and also the empowerment of local communities, producing an increase in the human and relational capital available in a local context. The correct evaluation of these impacts is an issue, however, as available figures are often vitiated by advocacy or by an underestimation of some effects that are understood as pure externalities (Van Balen and Vandesande 2016).

In the last few years, international research has argued that long-term care could be a very effective strategy to manage changes – in a framework of learning environments, where heritage is understood as a tool for the production of social and human capital. We have observed a gap, however, when it comes to knowledge about the practical possibility of integrating the preventive conservation mindset and practices into the operational frames of comprehensive conservation programmes relying on agreements between different actors.

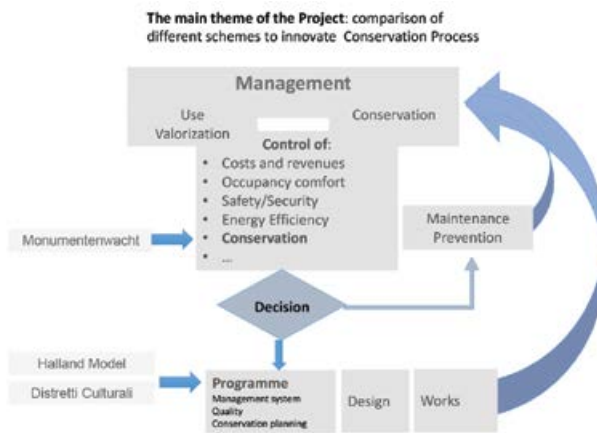
The CHANGES project aimed at contributing to closing this gap through an exploration of the potentialities of integrated approaches to cultural heritage management. We identified and compared empirical experiences, mainly by desk analysis and by action research (involving and interviewing stakeholders), in order to pinpoint the characteristics of effective models capable of including the diversity of European cultural heritage, and to identify the skills required to support the transition in built heritage activities. In order to define these skills and models, we studied the economic mechanisms underlying built heritage conservation in the context of the regional economy and the wider construction sector. The ultimate ambition was to enhance knowledge in heritage management (and relevant supply chains), especially on funding schemes, where an actual demand has been recognized (Pickard 2009).

### **Framing three empirical models**

Three main models were explored. The Monumentenwacht organization, as practised in the Netherlands and the Flanders province of Belgium, focuses on regular inspection and maintenance (Van Hees et al. 2015). The ‘Halland model’ experience in Sweden used funds for unemployment relief to recover buildings at risk, aiming at training workers and creating new jobs (Gustafsson 2009). And the Distretti Culturali programme developed in Italy aims at coor-

dinating public and private investments in order to reach higher standards of empowerment, involvement and management (Barbetta et al. 2013).

The research involved a systemic comparison of the models within their specific contexts, in order to better understand the different approaches and to prepare the applied actions. The comparison required a preliminary understanding of the main differences, identifying in which phases of the process the models act. For this purpose, a simplified chart of the conservation process was drafted, highlighting the core aims, outputs and outcomes of each model (Figure 15.1). This chart may be useful in the future to develop further reflections on policies in the heritage sector.



**Figure 15.1** Workflow of the conservation process, pointing out the phases covered by the analysed models

The chart describes a double circular process, with an inner circle focused on use, prevention and maintenance, and a wider circle passing through major works, programmed and designed before being executed. Control and assessment are the gates for step-by-step decisions on whether regular maintenance is enough – thus keeping activities in the frame of a preventive conservation system – or whether major interventions are needed, going through the crucial step of the programme phase. Together, the two sub-processes compose one management and decision-making system (Della Torre 2018). This positioning helps to clarify how the individual models contribute to conservation, while a further comparison helps to identify and describe the spillover effects produced.

The Monumentenwacht model is focused on the monitoring of the state of conservation, or condition assessment; occasionally also encompassing small maintenance works, but staying away from other phases. The model was developed first in the Netherlands, then in Belgium, and other replicas have been set up in several European countries. Tested for several years, it has proved to be successful in the implementation of a preventive approach to conservation.

The Halland model and the Distretti Culturali were created in different political, economic, legal and societal frames. Although embracing different targets and priorities, they both work on the programme phase. They use similar approaches, based on the involvement of many different players, to face, in the meantime, the issues of funding conservation works, improving conservation practices and exploiting the making of heritage as a driver for local development. In order to describe these processes, we have applied the 'trading zone' model, implying that very different actors can be called to interact and to cooperate, crossing borders between heritage and other societal and economic sectors (Gustafsson 2009). This approach has been called 'upstream' (CHCfE Consortium 2015, 195–8), as benefits are realized even before the interventions on cultural heritage are carried out. Dialogues and agreements between the different sectors produce territorial capital and contribute to an environment in which cultural heritage is recognized as a resource, finds the support that is needed, and plays a role in sustainable development.

In order to analyse the different models, a comparative assessment of their impacts was carried out, addressing conservation quality, enhancement of the capacity and skills of the involved target groups, involvement of people and communities, market factors and support for decision-making.

'Conservation Quality' refers to the basic target of conservation of built cultural heritage and was the focus of our field activities. One of the issues was to detect if better conservation is obtained by means of regular and careful maintenance activities and/or better conservation works, enhanced thanks to better programmes, projects and more skilled execution (Van Roy 2019). The link between works and maintenance proved to be affected by the different practical and legal contexts.

Under 'Enhancement of Capacity/Skills', analyses were developed of the evolving attitudes of players directly involved in the process; that is, decision-makers, technicians and professionals, public officers and enterprises.

'Governance and Social Capital' was split into three themes: (a) people/community involvement; (b) impact on the market; (c) impact on decision-making.

The evolving relationships between different public and private actors were analysed through these themes.

CHANGES partners described their experiences in the three models according to these criteria. The discussion produced some preliminary findings and questions to be checked in the following applied research.

## **Insights from the applied research**

The study of the Monumentenwacht model focused on the relationship with the owners, checking the follow-up of inspections and reports in order to develop insights into side effects of the programme's implementation, such as empowerment of persons and community involvement (Van Balen and Vandesande 2015). These effects were born as pure externalities, but they are more and more regarded as targets to be pursued. A set of representative cases were directly studied for maintenance practices, the decision-making process and the skills and knowledge involved in the process (Vandesande 2017; Van Roy et al. 2018). A critical review was carried out of the reception of Monumentenwacht reports by owners: the social and legal boundary conditions turned out to be crucial (Heinemann and Naldini 2018; Naldini et al. 2018). Thus, Monumentenwacht's theoretical framework, and particularly its preventive conservation and monitoring tasks, were matched with practice. The effectiveness and quality of the interventions based on the reports were analysed, mainly through focus groups and questionnaires.

Observing together with the stakeholders the follow-up of the inspections, the CHANGES project developed new awareness about the relationship of the model to the conservation process at large – that is, beyond ordinary maintenance – and its effectiveness both in conservation and in popular involvement. A critical point was detected in the lack of control over the suggested works, the quality of which did not meet expectations. Many stakeholders underlined how continuous care of historic properties is often impaired by a lack of budgeted resources. The problem seems to arise both over exceptional events (earthquakes, floods, fires, and so on) and more ordinary needs. Even clearly foreseen maintenance costs are seldom covered in private and public budgets. The CHANGES research highlighted some tested and implemented tools to carry out cost estimations, which should be integrated into facility management practices in order to budget planned and preventive conservation activities and promote effective risk preparedness.

The models that focus on the programme phase (Halland and Distretti Culturali) were evaluated on their final results: first, in terms of the quality of the carried-out works, and second, in terms of the continuity of the projects. That sustainability often proved to be an issue, as projects turned out to be unable to continue by themselves after a financed start-up, even if the implementation of a better and continuous management system had been one of the targets.

In Sweden, a ten-years-after analysis was carried out, checking what happened to the buildings recovered thanks to the Halland project. The results were different in each of the places involved, as the management systems were locally based and not coordinated by a centralized agency. Nevertheless, most buildings were still used and correctly maintained, telling interesting stories about community involvement and awareness in the context where the 'trading zone' concept had been implemented (Gustafsson and Ijla 2018). In Italy, the research was framed by the follow-up of the Distretti Culturali programme (Della Torre 2015) in the Brianza and Valtellina areas. The results included improvements to practices of conserving and managing heritage properties, replicable models of public-private partnership (Moioli 2018; Moioli et al. 2018) and integrated actions as indicators of the attitude to innovation in problematic areas (Foppoli 2018).

## The common lesson learned

As stated earlier, integration concerns timescales as well as fields. Previous studies on long-term conservation activities detected owners' attitudes as a critical point, as owners do not seem willing to anticipate expenses for an advantage which has yet to be seen (Dann 2004). In line with this, practitioners have not been very interested in predictive cost analysis. Similarly, decision-makers tend to avoid risk management regarding big hazards, even if the effects of climate change have already been pointed out as factors which make these issues more and more dramatic (Cassar 2005). Even if there is a consensus about the convenience of preventive attitudes, behaviours are generally described as unresponsive. In terms of behavioural economics (Thaler and Sunstein 2008), the detected unresponsive attitudes are not surprising. The strategies studied by CHANGES partners are not based on nudging but on empowerment tools which aim at enhancing stakeholders' capacity to adopt conscious decisions. In the CHANGES project, owners' attitudes were analysed and discussed while working in the field side by side with the stakeholders in different national contexts. This process detected the same basic

criticalities, but also other ones more specifically linked to the organization of budgets; these can be addressed by empowerment techniques (Di Porto and Rangone 2015).

The main added value of the CHANGES research is the comparison of approaches, which previously had been developed successfully but studied separately. The focus has been moved to more general common targets, highlighting the limits of current activities as well as their potentialities from a more integrated perspective. A relevant point was the detection of different weaknesses in different countries. The diversity of national contexts not only follows the legal frameworks, but also different cultural approaches to preservation and forms of professionalism. The comparative analysis showed that in some countries, interventions are controlled by professional architects, generally obtaining a better quality of conservation work, at least for protected buildings. However, there is a lack of regular inspections and maintenance. In other countries, inspections are regular even for not-listed historic buildings, but the interventions, although timely, are not controlled, resulting in a lack of quality. This is also due to the scarcity of qualified craftsmanship. In other cases, there are concerns about the lack of diagnostics and scientific support, which spoil conservation quality.

Based on the analysis, we argue that engagement, capacity-building and dissemination are key in making projects more sustainable and improving conservation quality. This implies a change in attitude and a new toolkit. Conservation experts are therefore called to implement not only hard skills, but also the soft skills required to cooperate and get integrated into more and more complex processes, consistent with the 'trading zone' concept (Moioli 2019).

## **Guidelines to optimize investments towards integrated benefits**

The project has resulted in recommendations to policymakers and influencers for more effective and sustainable funding policies. The recommendations can be further developed according to the different national rules and cultural contexts.

A first pointer is that regular inspection and maintenance can improve physical conservation by prevention, and can also empower people and involve communities. Policies should facilitate innovative practices that build on

traditions, rather than simply stressing traditional crafts. Changes in local/national approaches and regulations are needed in order to holistically address all phases of the integrated conservation process, and to get more stakeholders engaged.

Second, planned and preventive strategies should address the uses of the premises and the interaction with the environment. An integrated understanding of sustainability entails a comprehensive approach to heritage. The analysed case studies show that an integrated approach is fundamental to enhancing decision-making and helping the management of the properties. Yet, while awareness has risen of the potentially positive impact of cultural heritage on economic development, the factors which influence the capability of the heritage sector to trigger economic activities still need to be better clarified. The link between heritage, creativity and the economy is often represented in confused or oversimplified ways, even though recent collection of empirical data supports the importance of integration (Cerisola 2019). Furthermore, it is crucial to enlarge the perspective of preventive and planned conservation to the historic urban landscape; that is, larger settings including unprotected buildings.

Third, a shift in the attitudes of owners and policymakers is needed, stepping from emergency to prevention and management (including maintenance and major interventions). This means that cost–benefit estimation analyses and risk management should be taken into account, encouraging informed budgeting for conservation over the long run. The availability of grants, loans and other financial incentives, especially targeted at prevention and small repairs, proved to be effective in encouraging owners to procure activities of continuous care. Future research is needed to focus on the use of the findings and to develop more interoperable and user-friendly (digital) tools, both for cost evaluation and for knowledge management, while keeping in mind that each heritage object is unique and impossible to standardize.

Another point is that restoration of strategically chosen monuments can foster integrated projects, in which benefits are much more sustainable if incorporating sound management systems and capacity-building actions. The shift towards more sustainable and resilient management of historic properties requires a change in attitudes. This change should be among the aims of any investment in the heritage field. Therefore, strategic interventions should be embodied in comprehensive plans managed at regional level. The analysed cases proved that well-designed actions can foster openness to innovation, enhance managerial skills and create alliances between the public and the



private sector, creating value by the ‘upstream’ cooperation between different sectors and supply chains.

A fifth point is that the engagement of stakeholders, including owners, citizens and decision-makers, is often critical, so that this issue has to be carefully addressed from the onset of any project, in the spirit of the Faro Convention. One of the issues is how to involve private owners in a ‘trading zone’ discussion on the public role of privately owned cultural heritage. Single actions are often unable to durably engage actors. Comprehensive projects, led by regional and urban authorities, proved to be more effective and sustainable through tailored measures for the engagement of citizens, while learning lessons about the many criticalities that can obstruct innovation processes. The adoption of new business models and public–private partnerships (PPP) could be effective, provided that targets are clearly formulated from the beginning and popular involvement is not overlooked (Boniotti and Della Torre 2016).

All the previous research questions refer to a pivotal discussion about what is meant by ‘development’, as too often there is confusion between development and growth. The mainstream attitude to consumption is hardly compatible with the long-term vision, sustainability and intergenerational fairness of historic preservation. Does historic preservation have the capability to make development fully sustainable? The project outcomes show that further interdisciplinary research is needed, given the complexity of the analysed processes, and in order to transfer the outcomes not only within the pilot cases, but to a variety of stakeholders and society. We have studied effective models, but it is advisable to follow these over time, including the testing of new services, such as digital archives for filing reports, planning maintenance and budgeting costs in advance. Further evidence-based research is needed, as the implementation of these schemes at the national level could work better if supported and monitored by research.

Relationships with stakeholders proved to be a key factor in all the national contexts involved, and this issue must be carefully dealt with in the future.

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