

LAYERS OF KNOWLEDGE



SPACE, TIME, AND MEANING

Edited by
Carlo Bianchini, Marika Griffo, Francesca Porfiri



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Study Days

Venosa, 1-2 December 2025

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INTRODUCTION

Carlo Bianchini, Marika Griffo, Francesca Porfiri

The activities collected in this volume are developed within the framework of the research programme *PNRR PE5 – CHANGES*, Extended Partnership 5, and specifically within Spoke 8 – Sustainability and Resilience of Tangible Cultural Heritage, funded by the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR). Spoke 8 addresses the challenges of Tangible Cultural Heritage (TCH) through an integrated research model that combines technological innovation, scientific methodologies, and humanistic approaches. Its main objectives include the development of digital infrastructures for inventories and cadastral systems to support multiple knowledge pathways and maximise accessibility; evidence-based evaluation workflows to identify the relevance, value, and cultural potential of sites, areas, and territories; and tailored strategies for inclusive and participatory management, fostering sustainability, resilience, and community engagement.

Within this research framework, the Study Days, called *Layers of Knowledge: Space, Time and Meaning*, were held on 1–2 December in Venosa (PZ) at the museum venue of the Archaeological Park, marking the conclusion of a three-year research path. The initiative was synergistically organised by the Thematic Lines 1 and 2 and, while presenting their respective outcomes, it aimed at displaying their strong complementary perspectives.

According to this approach, the event brought together all the Spoke partners and the projects funded through the cascade calls, providing a comprehensive overview of the results achieved, the interactions among research strands, and future perspectives.

The Study Days were structured into thematic sessions focused on the core methodological pillars of Spoke 8, including georeferencing strategies, the analysis of temporal stratification, and the semantic integration of heterogeneous data through advanced platforms for querying, interpretation, and dissemination. Contributions from partners and cascade call projects demonstrated the richness and coherence of the research activities, highlighting how different lines of investigation operated within a shared conceptual and operational framework.

Two case studies were central to the event: the Complex of the *Santissima Trinità* in Venosa and the Cathedral of Acerenza. Exhibitions and guided visits at both sites enabled direct comparison of 3D documentation campaigns and architectural analyses conducted during the project, fostering dialogue with other research lines and providing historical and architectural perspectives that effectively integrated the digital tools and methodologies developed within Spoke 8.

The Study Days also represented an important dissemination opportunity, encouraging the sharing of results and dialogue among partners, researchers, professionals, and cascade call teams. The collaborative atmosphere and continuous interdisciplinary exchange confirmed the strength of the network established over the three years and its potential to generate new shared research trajectories. The initiative concluded the Spoke 8 research path with a positive assessment, highlighting both the quality of the results and the maturity of the collaborations.

This volume collects the pre-acts of the Venosa Study Days, reflecting the thematic organisation of the event and the structure of the research programme. Section I, dedicated to PNRR partner projects, is articulated into three parts: *Archaeology and Historical Landscapes*; *Cultural Heritage, Communities and Value Creation*; and *Digital Methods and Information Systems for Heritage Knowledge*. Section II presents the projects funded through cascade calls and focuses on *Innovation, Governance and Intelligent Systems for Cultural Heritage*, showcasing experimental approaches, applied research, and innovative models that expand the research framework of Spoke 8.

Taken together, the contributions in this volume demonstrate how archaeological and architectural studies, community engagement, governance models, and advanced digital methods converge into an integrated framework for the sustainable, resilient, and shared knowledge of tangible cultural heritage.

GOVERNANCE AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AND VALUE CREATION

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Keyword

Impact assessment; Cultural Heritage; SoPHIA Model; Sustainable Development; Strategic Planning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, both scholars and policymakers have increasingly recognized that culture functions not merely as an outcome of economic development but as an essential driver of social, territorial, and sustainable growth. This paradigm shift—pioneered by works such as Sacco et al. (2009)—has reframed cultural heritage as a multidimensional resource that fosters social innovation, urban regeneration, community cohesion, and environmental stewardship. Major international organizations, including UNESCO and the United Nations, now position cultural heritage as a pillar of sustainable development, contributing to community resilience, inclusion, and collective identity formation (Nurse, 2006; United Nations, 2015; UNESCO, 2018).

The paper situates itself within this evolving discourse by exploring whether impact assessment (IA) can play a transformative role in the strategic planning of cultural organizations. It argues that in a context where culture is expected to generate social and environmental value alongside economic performance, new frameworks are needed to evaluate and guide organizational decision-making. The authors propose that IA can function not only as an accountability mechanism but also as a strategic and reflexive tool, fostering learning and institutional coherence.

1.1 Rethinking Cultural Value

A key reference point in this debate is the European *Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe (CHCfE)* report (2015), which identified four interrelated domains of heritage impact—social, economic, environmental, and cultural. The report emphasizes that heritage value cannot be captured by single quantitative indicators such as visitor numbers or revenue. Instead, it must be understood as a complex system of interactions between human experience, cultural continuity, economic vitality, and ecological sustainability.

Building on this insight, the European Commission's Horizon 2020 program launched the *Transformation-16-2019* call, which emphasized holistic and multidimensional evaluation. From this initiative emerged the SoPHIA (Social Platform for Holistic Heritage Impact Assessment) project, coordinated by Roma Tre University. SoPHIA represents a major methodological innovation: it integrates diverse dimensions of heritage impact across three analytical axes—domains, people, and time. These interdependent perspectives encourage institutions to reflect on how their actions affect different stakeholders and how impacts evolve over short-, medium-, and long-term horizons.

Despite this theoretical advancement, the authors observe that impact assessment remains inconsistently implemented across the cultural sector. There are no universally shared standards, and organizations often face a confusing array of evaluation models. Funders increasingly demand impact evidence as a condition for support, yet smaller or less structured institutions frequently lack the capacity to meet these expectations. This fragmentation has created what the research calls an “evaluation paradox”: organizations are pressured to measure impact but lack the methodological and strategic resources to do so meaningfully.

The Italian context illustrates this tension clearly. Third-sector cultural organizations have been pushed to adopt formal impact evaluations, while public cultural institutions—including museums and archaeological sites—still rarely integrate evaluation into their strategic processes. Even autonomous State Museums that have modernized in other respects tend to operate without consolidated strategic planning frameworks. As a result, they miss opportunities to link evaluation with learning, accountability, and innovation (Solima, 2022; Argano, 2025).

To explore these dynamics empirically, the study investigates the Museo della Forma Urbis and the Parco Archeologico del Celio, in Rome. Both cultural institutions, newly established and lacking strategic documents, provide ideal contexts for testing whether participatory impact assessment can support the very construction of strategic vision. Two central research questions guide the inquiry:

1. *Can impact assessment improve strategic planning in cultural organizations?*
2. *Can participatory assessment exercises help organizations to articulate goals and objectives?*

2. METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the study applies the SoPHIA model (Marchiori et al., 2021) in a collaborative and qualitative framework. Researchers conducted three semi-structured interviews with museum leadership to reconstruct each institution's mission, identify objectives, and map intended beneficiaries. These qualitative insights were then aligned with SoPHIA's multidimensional structure to create an “impact map” linking specific activities to expected outcomes across social, cultural, economic, and environmental domains.

3. FINDINGS

The results highlight several important findings. First, the process of assessment itself functions as a learning tool. By explicitly linking actions to consequences, the organization gains greater self-awareness about its role within the local community and the value it produces. Second, impact assessment (IA) enhances strategic alignment by translating general aspirations into measurable and stakeholder-oriented goals. Third, it improves communication and transparency, building credibility with funders, policymakers, and the public. In this sense, IA contributes to what the authors describe as a “reflexive turn” in cultural management, where evaluation becomes a participatory and formative process rather than a bureaucratic requirement.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

However, the study also acknowledges significant challenges and limitations. Implementing sophisticated assessment models demands expertise, time, and resources that many small or emerging institutions lack. Without adequate support, there is a risk that impact assessment becomes a formalistic exercise designed merely to satisfy funders. Moreover, the choice of indicators remains a delicate issue: quantitative metrics such as visitor counts are often insufficient to capture deeper forms of cultural and social value. The authors warn against the tendency to prioritize “what can be measured” over “what matters,” which could distort institutional priorities and underrepresent the transformative power of cultural engagement.

Despite these obstacles, the research concludes that impact assessment (IA) can function as a strategic catalyst when internalized within an organization’s governance processes. For institutions like the Museo della Forma Urbis, it can even help build strategic identity from the ground up—articulating vision, mission, and objectives through collaborative reflection. The broader implication is that IA should not be seen as a peripheral activity but as a core management practice that strengthens institutional legitimacy and accountability.

In conclusion, the paper argues that the integration of impact evaluation into strategic planning represents a path toward more sustainable, transparent, and socially responsive cultural organizations. Rather than a one-size-fits-all model, IA should be treated as a flexible and adaptive process tailored to institutional capacities and contexts. When implemented thoughtfully, it aligns operational choices with societal goals, reinforces stakeholder trust, and supports the long-term sustainability of cultural institutions as active agents of development and innovation.

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