

Policy Brief

Protection and sustainable management of cultural heritage: The role of regional cooperation in preserving cultural heritage

This Policy Brief highlights the value of cultural heritage, and considers how regional actors can meet the challenges, and ensure sustainable management of these assets.

1. Introduction

There is a strong case for preserving and maintaining cultural heritage assets, given their significant intrinsic and instrumental value. In particular, the nature of heritage as a public good, as well as its positive externalities, provides a strong rationale for the public sector to ensure these assets remain available¹. As a shared resource, cultural heritage often falls outside of the market, making it vulnerable to over-exploitation and under-investment. Intervention is required to ensure sustainable management and adequate protection.

Research has identified many different benefits associated with heritage. Recent work has grouped these impacts into four categories: economic, social, cultural and environmental². Policies supporting natural and cultural heritage offer opportunities for regional growth and job creation, and for increase of the attractiveness of an area as a place to live, work or visit.

EU actions in the field of culture complement national cultural policy in a range of areas, such as the cooperation and coordination between institutions in different Member States. In line with Article 167 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union, the EU seeks to bring common European cultural heritage to the fore and to respect the diversity of national and regional cultures. Article 167 forms the legal basis for the majority of the EU's interventions in the field of culture.

There has been increasing interest in cultural heritage, particularly since the adoption of the European Agenda for Culture. The Agenda placed a focus on heritage and introduced the Open Method for Coordination as a means to foster cooperation between the Member States. Cultural heritage has been recognised by a number of programmes and funding opportunities at the EU level, including initiatives like [European Heritage Days](#), [the EU Prize for Cultural Heritage](#) and [the European Heritage Label](#). Cultural heritage has also been supported through the Structural Funds. The ERDF has provided support to culture, heritage and tourism with an estimated value of €14bn during the 2007-2013 period³. The Europe 2020 Strategy has further emphasised the importance of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, which are central to the cultural sector. In the Consultation on the Future Europe 2020 Strategy, the Commission underlined that the EU needs to provide more attractive framework conditions for innovation and creativity, including incentives for the growth of knowledge-based firms.

The recent report 'Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe' recognises the potential role of cultural heritage in achieving economic growth and social

¹ Public goods and externalities are examples of market failure (which can be described as a situation where, without intervention, the market produces too much or too little of a good or service).

² Cultural heritage counts for Europe. Full report (June 2015).

³ See http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/impact/evaluation/data_en.cfm.

cohesion. It further highlights the opportunities for Member States to work together to make cultural heritage a source of sustainable growth and jobs, while also recognising the need for sustainable management to prevent over-exploitation.

2. Cultural heritage: challenges at regional level

Regions are confronted with numerous challenges in ensuring sustainable management of cultural heritage, including the need to ensure adequate funding for conservation and protection of these assets. This has become particularly important in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, which led to reduced budgets of many public authorities.

Reductions in available funding may also increase the need for heritage assets to be used for income generation, even though this creates a further challenge of balancing between preservation and exploitation.

Accessibility is also a challenge with assets forming part of Europe's shared heritage, although again increasing access can lead to damage being inflicted. Digitalisation of resources and other advances in technology offer an opportunity to increase accessibility, while also preserving the assets in question.

3. Meeting the challenges

There are number of examples of good practice in the sustainable management and protection of cultural heritage. In particular, INTERREG IVC, which ran from 2007 to 2013, provided support for cultural heritage and landscape (as part of the environment and risk prevention theme). The supported projects demonstrate the value of cooperation at regional level and a database of good practices has been put together. Examples include:

- [HISTCAPE \(historical assets and related landscape\)](#) – which worked to understand the reasons for the decline of historical assets in rural communities. It also aimed to develop policies to address these issues, by looking at preserving cultural heritage, and the role that these towns can play as a focal point for economic activity and social cohesion. One of the good practices identified relates to the use of awareness-raising activities and community involvement as a way to support protection of cultural heritage. Specifically, the ways to involve the local community and other stakeholders, the ways to increase public interest in the management of cultural heritage and the methods for transferring this know-how to municipalities. For example, a project to renovate historic churches in Rheinland-Pfalz, Germany, benefited from the active participation and good organisation of key local actors (including parishes, farmers' associations and groups of local people), and resulted in the creation of jobs and business opportunities.
- [VITOUR landscape](#) –focused on developing policies to improve and innovate the safeguarding and enhancement of cultural landscapes in wine growing regions. The project took previously selected good practices (identified during a previous INTERREG III project) and tested them in another region in order to assess their transferability. One good practice example tested in this manner was the process of developing hiking trails from Wachau, Austria and Middle Rhine, Germany, which was replicated by Cinque Terre, Italy, and involved the use of technology (webGIS applications and mobile phone guides) as well as improved signage, monitoring and maintenance.
- [ZEN \(zero-impact cultural heritage event network\)](#) – was working on solutions to reduce the impact of events on cultural heritage environments. One of the good practices identified looked at the importance of considering and contributing to a positive legacy for the host region in economic, social and environmental terms. It was found that engaging with the local community and stakeholders was more meaningful compared to a focus on avoiding adverse impacts or the concept of 'zero-impact'. For example, the Oneiropolis festival was highlighted as an event, which was successful in creating a positive economic and social legacy on its host region which, in turn, produced a high level of support from the local community.

Interreg Europe provides support for conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage. It recognises that regional actors are well-placed to undertake this work as part of coordinated, place-based strategies, which foster sustainable regional

development, and supports the exchange of experience with other areas facing similar challenges.

Digitisation of cultural heritage is a key topic for several projects which address it from different angles. CD-ETA for example, aims to contribute to the improvement of digitisation strategies for natural and cultural heritages artefacts, based on common standards and approaches. Creating a digital platform for cultural heritage is a key theme for [HERICOAST](#), which considers innovation and digitisation as key factors for unlocking the potential of natural and cultural assets for sustainable tourism development.

Fragmented governance without proper cooperation structures is a key barrier for sustainable heritage management ([HERICOAST](#), [SWARE](#), [CHRISTA](#)), and requires the establishment of new participatory governance schemes. This barrier is addressed by providing tools to policy actors to improve the policies at local level, exchange of experience, and promotion of public-private cooperation models for sustainable heritage governance. New participatory and integrated models of heritage management amongst policy makers will be also explored.

4. Concluding comments

The EU policy framework recognises the value of cultural heritage and provides support to address challenges regarding its sustainable management and protection. Previous INTERREG IVC projects have highlighted the value of cooperation and sharing experiences. The current Interreg Europe programme supports regions to work together in addressing common challenges, such as the development of approaches for sustainable exploitation of both natural and cultural heritage assets.

[The Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platforms](#) stimulate knowledge exchange in four thematic areas, one of these is the Environment and Resource Efficiency Platform. Projects in the same family will be encouraged to learn from each other. To fine-tune the services and products of the Platforms to user needs, we encourage you to share your ideas with the relevant Platform managers and thematic experts. You will find their contact details [here](#).

Sources of further information:

- Cultural heritage counts for Europe. Full report (June 2015).
- Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. COM (2010) 2020 final.
- European agenda for culture. COM (2007) 242 final.
- INTERREG IVC [good practice database](#).
- Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe. COM (2014) 477 final.

[#CulturalHeritage](#), [#SustainableManagement](#), [#Cooperation](#)

4 November 2016

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