



RE-designing Access to Cultural Heritage for a wider participation in preservation, (re-)use and management of European culture



REACH POSITION PAPER

ABOUT CULTURAL HERITAGE RESEARCH IN HORIZON EUROPE

INTRODUCTION

The Horizon for Heritage Research Symposium was organised by the REACH Social Platform on the 20th of March 2019 in Brussels under the aegis of the European Commission.

Representatives of networks and from project consortia, from all over Europe, participated in the Symposium to discuss the needs and benefits of a joint coordination effort, in the light of the role that Cultural Heritage (CH) will play in the ensuing Horizon Europe Programme.

This Position Paper draws on the outcomes of the Symposium, synthesized in the Report and the Joint Statement, available online on the REACH website at <https://www.reach-culture.eu>, and it also incorporates the contributions provided in the subsequent consultation exercise that called for evidence from all stakeholders.

The present Paper is articulated in two sections:

Section 1 provides a position in relation to the priorities for CH research and an outline of specific Areas of Intervention;

Section 2 provides a position about the instruments that should support the results of research in order to produce actual innovation, impact and growth.

Liaisons with the ECHOES Position Paper and the ViMM Action Plan have been established to complement the research priorities of this document with those expressed by ECHOES in the research domain of material sciences and by ViMM for the future evolution of digital virtual museums.

PRIORITIES FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE RESEARCH

Two, main findings emerge from the extensive consultation exercise on the future of CH research in Europe: first, that more should be done in the design of research programmes to try to break down disciplinary silos; secondly, that research should be more thoroughly contextualised within developing as well as existing societal challenges. This position paper takes a thematic approach, and outlines specific research topics under each theme.

One pressing and increasingly worrying socio-political challenge confronting Europe is the need to build cohesion by countering a range of forces threatening to cause societal fragmentation. CH research has a vital, inclusive role to play in understanding, and in dealing sensitively with, the needs and motivations embedded in communities and groups of all descriptions.

In the case of natural and the built environment, research is frequently undertaken exclusively from the perspective of the STEM disciplines. However, given that humankind has helped to shape the natural environment as much as be shaped by it, by integrating all CH dimensions in a holistic 'cultural landscape' or 'nature-cultures' approach, we can more effectively discharge our growing responsibilities for preserving the past for the future.

For today's world, with societies undergoing massive and bewildering change on various levels, CH research is able to provide many opportunities to reflect on and gain valuable insights from how societies have experienced fundamental, rapid and disruptive change in the past. Given a context of the increasingly heterogeneous nature of society, and in a world in which many citizens experience a degree of dislocation, CH research on the construction of narratives and the significance of place and place-making becomes ever more important.

Areas of Intervention

Societal Cohesion: Minorities, Majorities, Groups: everyday lives, especially the excluded, marginalized, and right-wing minorities, the politics of nationalism and majorities.

- analysing the contributions of multicultural and diversity initiatives in terms of cultural creativity and innovation through cultural transfer and mixing, and understanding what policies and practices could promote positive intercultural relations; collaborative artistic ventures to include members of diasporic and migrant communities.
- methodological approaches (especially ethnographic) that give attention to affect and emotion in relation to heritage; social psychological and sociological approaches/methods in understanding experience – the role of personal characteristics (personality, social status, cultural background) in order to maximize the experience of visitors/users according to preferences and needs;
- democratising cultural processes, re-consideration of power structures to allow participation of new groups and the wider public, formulating non-exclusionary notions of heritage that do not rely on boundary-forming processes; innovative research on the dynamics of identity-building and groups-membership, creativity, adaptation (intra-group and intergroup dynamics); facilitating the creation of compatible groups of visitors/participants/stakeholders who are not only passive receivers of information but rather co-create experiences and contemporary culture;

- re-vitalisation of various forms of living, dynamic CH – the everyday understanding and practices of heritage - individuals and local groups busy with vernacular and amateur conservation (the built environment or artefacts), intangible CH practices and traditions - marginalised groups such as particular groups of migrants or newer generations of these; transgender heritage;
- addressing constituencies such as those who support the growing populism in Europe, and understanding how heritage ideas and practices articulate with political positions and may play a central role in how such groups formulate xenophobic positions.

Societal Cohesion: legacies of imperialism/colonialism

- Historical, anthropological, legal and philosophical approaches to understanding the differing positions of European countries (particularly East-West and North-South variations) in relation to imperialism and colonialism and its place (often contested) in memory, memorialization and national narratives, as well as its impact on cultural practices transmitted through generations;
- challenges to colonial and imperial presence in cityscapes and the public sphere, such as statuary and street-names; calls to decolonise museums, and demands for restitution, instances of returns to countries of origin, including theoretical and philosophical attention to notions of property, identity, temporality and the ontology of objects;
- strategies for transmitting contentious cultural heritage to wider publics (expanded collaborative models between researchers, cultural institutions and artists) involving greater participation across international borders and of diaspora.

Sustainability, and Environmental/Ecological Responsibility: 'cultural landscapes' bringing together holistically natural and cultural heritage in the Anthropocene Age

- ways of bringing together and managing various kinds of heritage (costs of maintaining continually expanding heritage), also creating sustainable change, where necessary;
- political, legal, ethical and social perspectives on whether heritage should always be maintained or whether models of non-durability might be more widely engaged, and dominant notions of sustainability challenged; delisting, deaccessioning (risks of disposing of items relating to periods or events that merit more attention in the future);
- models and practices of different forms of care, protection and safeguarding, managed loss, curated ruination, rewilding and disposal; issues of accepting entropy in conservation practice and of disposal from museum collections;
- preservation of toxic products and those that are variously implicated in environmental damage;
- educational potential of cultural heritage and environmental impact of citizen science work.

- ways to mitigate climate change (reducing, for example, the carbon footprint of sites); understanding the importance of traditional and indigenous knowledge (intangible CH) in adaptation strategies.

Rapid Societal Change: Creativity, Authenticity, Audiences, Users and Emerging and Disruptive Technologies

- heritage as means to analyse (through an historical, literary, archaeological lens) how past societies adapted to rapid change; artistic creativity as a way to explore experiences of change and possible futures;
- understanding - with regard to heritage and artistic creation - the impact, audience reception and implications of technology (social media, 3-D-printing, interactive holograms and deepfakes), and the relationship to generational change (the transmission of traditions and practices facilitated by digital tools);
- challenges to the role of institutions as arenas of reliable and authentic knowledge; how notions and practices of authenticity work in different languages, countries and subcultures; use of new forms of communication and collaboration (crowdsourcing); the role of social media in disseminating and helping to form views in relation to, for example, Islamophobia
- analysing the relationship between new, institutional ecosystems and high quality cultural production and artistic innovation; understanding issues around commercialisation and intellectual property rights - particularly folk traditions and crafts.

Narratives, Place/place-making and Identity.

- understanding place as a fixed, geographical focus for some, providing a sense of identity and belonging, and the significance of place for rural/small town communities disconnected from urban society; analysing the relationship between place and the value placed on CH;
- for migrant communities, intangible heritage as a way to preserve identity and relate to place (a sense of belonging - perhaps to the 'homeland');
- the relationship between identity (European/national/regional/local) and traditions, rituals, narratives and symbols - their development, and sometimes invention, and how their meaning is communicated;
- analysing the role of heritage in narrative-building for Europe – the legacy of a centuries-old background in scientific endeavour and respect for knowledge acquisition, and a rich repository of resources on good/best practices, including heritage that is contested, conflicted and traumatic.

- understanding how CH interpretation and shared historic experiences can contribute to an enhanced sense of togetherness between nations and in Europe; analyse ways to formulate an inclusive heritage discourse by facilitating interpretations and approaches in history research and education that are multi-perspective and authentic.

The areas of intervention outlined above can be developed in detail at a later stage. But what is clearly demonstrated here, for two reasons, is the great significance of CH research: 1) the central location of this research agenda in relation to societal challenges and some of the most pressing concerns of Europe's inhabitants ; 2) the potential for the research to generate considerable innovation and impact.

DEPLOYMENT OF RESEARCH RESULTS INTO INNOVATION

We share the conclusions of the Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020¹; we support the mission-oriented approach of Horizon Europe as a way to cope with the needs highlighted in the report, and we consider the relationship between research and civic society as central.

Also, we believe that the CH sector deserves increased attention and a more effective articulation in the research agenda of the European Union (EU), of the individual Member States and at the level of regional policies.

Even if, over the past few decades, CH has gained prominence in the EU's R&I Framework Programmes - achieving a significant position in H2020 - it is still necessary to emphasise that CH research should be considered an area of investigation in its own right, rather than just complementing other research areas. This is particularly important in the light of the latest EU policy developments, notably the designation of 2018 as the first-ever European Year of Cultural Heritage and the publication of the first European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage in December 2018.

In addition to the areas of intervention described above, three priority actions are identified that should be further developed to support the actual delivery of CH-related innovation, impact and growth: 1) research infrastructures; 2) public-private-partnerships (PPP); 3) participation in European innovation ecosystems.

1) Research Infrastructures

Like other scientific fields, the humanities and social sciences need to be supported by dedicated research infrastructures. There is a demand in the CH sector, particularly in areas linked with digital transformations, to accelerate research cycles. This can happen by enabling collaborative, interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral projects, by avoiding the inefficiencies of out-dated practices, by fostering new paradigms of data-driven research and by triggering, eventually, linked multiplier effects with wider industry (fashion, games, industrial design, to mention just a few examples). This is also acknowledged by the ESFRI Roadmap.

Therefore, we consider that it is necessary to:

- undertake a critical analysis of the use, and users, of CH data, and the implications of shared pan-European infrastructures;
- facilitate access to CH data on a larger scale than is currently available (e.g. online platforms with free-access publications, images, audio.etc.);
- improve infrastructural services in order to support more effectively large-scale integration, interoperability and multi-disciplinarity of CH research.

The CH sector requires research infrastructures that can provide customised services for the archiving and preservation of digital CH. Digitisation of CH content is expensive, time consuming, and subject - maybe more than other scientific sectors - to ageing factors that could jeopardise the whole investment. For

¹ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/support-policy-making/support-eu-research-and-innovation-policy-making/evaluation-impact-assessment-and-monitoring/horizon-2020_en

example, the generation of metadata associated with digital content is still mostly a ‘manual’ activity; the selection of content to be included in digitisation programmes is often decided on an individual basis; and sound digital preservation services are missing in many CH institutions. Such aspects ought to be addressed by appropriate EU research infrastructures, rather than by single CH institutions, thereby avoiding inefficiencies and the duplication of effort.

Furthermore, important issues involving the preservation and storage of, and access to, CH are not limited to the digital arena. Management of physical objects needs the implementation of sophisticated logistics solutions, integrated with, among many others, curatorial competences, knowledge of materials and environmental sciences, security and traceability. In this case, too, a dedicated EU-wide infrastructure is needed.

2) Public-Private Partnerships

Placing CH research on a fully, economically sustainable basis requires the participation of funders that complement the resources allocated by the public sector. However, the institutional value of CH and its fundamental role in the definition of national identities commands a high level of attention by states that, for this reason, have developed intricate legislation to regulate the management of CH – legislation, which varies from country to country. This situation has resulted in deadlock: private funders are encouraged to invest in the CH sector but, at the same time, national laws may discourage such investors from considering possible business ventures in CH. For this reason, advocacy groups should support a reform of CH-related policies, at national and EU levels. Similar cases are to be found in other scientific domains, where innovative PPP solutions have been experimented with, whether successfully or not. Research on PPP in the CH sector is required, based on screening success stories from other domains, reviewing lessons learnt, and re-using best practices. Not addressing this key point means that investors from outside Europe will continue to stipulate ad hoc agreements with individual states, and thereby undermine the efforts expended by the EU on programmes designed to help in the construction of a European identity. We welcome the suggestion of a possible future partnership ‘Linking the past to the future: cultural heritage and the cultural and creative sectors’, with a lead under Cluster II, Pillar II of Horizon Europe, as indicated in the document *Orientations towards the first Strategic Plan implementing the research and innovation framework programme Horizon Europe* (Summer 2019: 57).

3) European Innovation Ecosystems – a sustainable, CH co-ordination structure

CH offers a vast societal and market potential that should be harnessed in a sustainable and responsible way. In this regard, CH research must be included in discussions about Europe’s future (as heritage is, in any case, what is preserved from the past for the future), and should be part of the ecosystems of researchers, innovators, industries and governments² that is fostered - as foreshadowed in the draft texts of Horizon Europe as “European innovation ecosystems”.

In this context, and in the light of representations from across the whole of Europe’s CH sector we support the creation of a new, permanent and sustainable coordination structure open to all stakeholders, broadly defined as actors in any sector or discipline with an interest in CH research, including public, private and civil

2 Ref. “LAB-FAB-APP Investing in the European future we want: report of the independent High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU research & innovation programmes”. ISBN 978-92-79-70571-7.

society stakeholders³. By providing a unique facility for bringing together researchers from different countries, and acting as a knowledge broker, this structure would enable advocacy of the sector's needs and requirements, and be a conduit for debate on challenges and expectations, at the European and international level.

³ This structure has been discussed at the Symposium Horizons for Heritage Research held in Brussels on 20/3/2019 under the aegis of the European Commission, Unit Inclusive Societies of DG Research and Innovation.