



The Basics of Cultural Heritage Management

Nowadays, the wide field of Cultural Heritage Management (CHM) is steadily growing, since museums and heritage sites (public or private, local, regional or international) adopt various approaches, methods and practices in order to redefine themselves in a constantly changing world. It is as a strategic process that guarantees the long-term protection of cultural heritage (CH) considering its sustainability and taking into account the current needs of the public. CHM can be the main vehicle for helping museums and heritage sites to identify and respond to challenges, secure sustainable competitiveness, and be resilient to climate change, natural hazards and pandemic risks. However, many museums and heritage sites, especially smaller ones, continue to suffer from inefficient management due to lack of funding and support, as well as the pressures of ongoing crises. This introductory factsheet looks into some basic premises for and basic notions of CHM based on the state-of-the-art literature.

Cultural heritage as a dynamic, diverse, and evolving concept

According to UNESCO, CH refers to: a) **Tangible CH** – i.e. movable CH (paintings, sculptures, coins, manuscripts), immovable CH (monuments, archaeological sites, and so on), and underwater CH (shipwrecks, underwater ruins and cities) –; b) **Intangible CH** – i.e., oral traditions, performing arts, rituals –; c) **Natural heritage** – i.e., natural sites with cultural aspects such as cultural landscapes, physical, biological or geological formations –; d) **CH endangered by destruction and looting in armed conflicts**. This detailed categorisation of the types included in CH makes it clear that the term is broad and diverse. This is also highlighted by the recent literature, in which CH is described as a notion that is characterised by dynamism, complexity, diversity, elasticity, inclusion and multiplicity. It is approached as a dynamic rather than a static concept, which is constantly changing as a result of complex

historical, political, social and environmental processes. The content of the term has been considered open-ended and fungible and, nowadays, has become inclusive and extensive. This approach clearly links CH to the current situation of the world making it more relevant to the contemporary societies. In this respect, CH sector as a whole has a role to play in the present and future of humanity and therefore the management of CH is of utmost importance. Since our understanding of CH is changing, the way in which we manage the various types of CH is still being defined and shaped.

What is Cultural Heritage Management?

CHM refers to a complex and changeable process through which we can manage the diverse aspects of CH, using a wide set of tools and practices including identification, excavation, recording, documentation, protection, conservation, restoration, interpretation, enhancement, promotion, presentation, distribution, exhibition, education, communication, economics, monitoring, marketing, evaluation, strategic management, ICT, risk management, law, etc. It is worth noting that since our understanding of CH is changing in space and time, and the involvement of various disciplines and fields in CHM is extensive, the way in which we manage the various types of CH is constantly defined and shaped.

What are the main objectives of CHM?

The overall objectives of CHM are to:

- ensure short-term and long-term protection of CH with a view to make the utmost of its benefits for the public while considering its sustainability
- transmit CH values to the next generations

Cultural Heritage Management and sustainability

At the core of the CHM should be the concept of sustainability that currently dominates the global discussion in the cultural heritage sector. Generally, sustainable development is defined by the Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development as “*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”. In the CH sector, sustainable CH is about both preserving cultural heritage for future generations and balancing and coordinating the CH needs and the

needs of people who would like to experience it. The concept of sustainability acts as a framework for developing long-term strategic cultural policies and rethinking about patterns of consumption and current practices, modes of operation and managerial organization through a comprehensive approach that includes care for the environment and public health, develops practices for using new technologies and brings the concept of social awareness to the forefront.

What are the issues and principles an efficient CHM should take into account?

The first step a museum or a heritage site should take into account in order to draft a successful and implementable CHM is to understand the needs, challenges and bottlenecks in this area as well as identify the opportunities. It is then that museums and CH institutions should start to design a CHM. It is helpful if one has a thorough understanding of the character of the CH (tangible or intangible) to be managed, is acquainted with the wide set of legal instruments (hard and soft law ones) for safeguarding CH, of the resources, both human and financial, and of the relevant key stakeholders that are involved in the protection and development of CH. In this context a CHM should reflect:

- **a people centered and environmentally friendly approach** in order for museums and heritage sites to be able to respond to challenges and needs and to seize opportunities
- **a clear orientation towards the concepts of inclusivity, innovation, accessibility, relevance, democratisation, sustainability, resilience, ethics, diversity, professionalism, cooperation, and community participation**
- **flexibility and adaptability**
- **strategies accompanied by clear policies, guidelines, and a road map on strategies implementation and resource allocation in order to facilitate the success of the process**
- **a clear knowledge of the application of digital technologies, methods, tools, plans, actions, etc.,** which are of relevant to the CH sector.

CHM in periods of crises

The COVID-19 pandemic and the energy crisis, which is a transformative and tough period for mankind, has paved the way for innovation and new ways of managing CH. The CH sector in Europe does not need to waste this opportunity by going back to the traditional ways of

operating. Instead, it needs to build on the best practices of the pre-pandemic situation and the lessons learned over the pandemic to develop a more sustainable CHM, while taking advantage of technological developments and digital innovation. CH professionals need to go beyond existing practices of digitizing collections and find new ways to make visiting a museum or heritage site an interactive and immersive experience that engages the audience in the context of the fourth Industrial Revolution.

The Project

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