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## **TOOLS FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WORLD CULTURAL HERITAGE: THE ROLE OF HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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Cultural heritage is a factor in fostering social and economic development and ensuring a sustainable urban environment, supporting the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. Its sustainable management leads to preservation of the community’s identity and memory as well as the historic urban environment, which leads to reciprocal benefits for heritage and society. The article examines the possibilities for sustaining the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage properties through the implementation of several key management tools as Management Plans and Management Systems, focusing mainly on Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA). It provides a comprehensive overview of the legislative provision and implementation of these tools at the national level.

The research methodology involves a mixed-methods approach, combining a review of the legal framework, secondary data analysis and qualitative data from case studies in Bulgaria. This methodology allows for a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness and limitations of current heritage assessment tools in Bulgaria.

The paper concludes that HIA is a vital component of sustainable cultural heritage management. By systematically assessing the potential impacts on heritage values, it provides a proactive approach to preservation of OUV of World Heritage sites. However, its effectiveness is contingent on its integration into State Parties’ policy frameworks and legal systems. Future research should focus on overcoming these challenges to ensure the continued relevance of the assessment and its alignment with broader sustainable development goals.

*Keywords:* impact assessment, cultural heritage, UNESCO, Sustainable development goals (SDGs), 2030 Agenda, management plans, management system

# ИНСТРУМЕНТИ ЗА УСТОЙЧИВО УПРАВЛЕНИЕ НА СВЕТОВНОТО КУЛТУРНО НАСЛЕДСТВО. РОЛЯТА НА ОЦЕНКИТЕ ЗА ВЪЗДЕЙСТВИЕ

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Културното наследство е фактор за насърчаване на социалното и икономическото развитие и за осигуряване на устойчива градска среда, подпомагайки постигането на целите на Плана за устойчиво развитие до 2030 г. Устойчивото управление на културното наследство води до запазване на идентичността и паметта на общностите и историческата среда, както и до реципрочни ползи за наследството и обществото. В статията се разглеждат възможностите за поддържане на изключителната световна стойност на обектите от световно наследство чрез прилагането на няколко ключови инструмента за управление като планове за управление и системи за управление, обръщайки специално внимание на оценката на въздействието върху културното наследство. Направен е и цялостен преглед на законодателното осигуряване и прилагането на тези инструменти на национално ниво.

Методологията на изследването включва смесен подход, съчетаващ преглед на правната рамка, анализ на вторични данни и качествени данни от проучвания на конкретни случаи на изготвени оценки на въздействие в България. Тази методология позволява да се проследи ефективността и ограниченията при прилагането на инструментите за управление на културното наследство в България.

В заключението статията посочва, че оценката за въздействието е жизненоважен компонент на устойчивото управление на културното наследство. Чрез систематично оценяване на потенциалните въздействия върху ценностите на наследството тя осигурява проактивен подход към опазването на изключителната световна стойност на обектите на световното наследство. Ефективността ѝ обаче зависи от интегрирането ѝ в политическите рамки и в правно-нормативната система на отделните държави. Бъдещите изследвания следва да се съсредоточат върху преодоляването на тези предизвикателства, за да се гарантира постоянната актуалност на оценката и нейното съответствие с по-широките цели на устойчивото развитие.

*Ключови думи:* оценки за въздействие, културно наследство, ЮНЕСКО, Цели на устойчивото развитие (ЦУР), План 2030, планове за управление, системи за управление

## INTRODUCTION

Rapid urbanization and modernization challenge the sustainable management of cultural heritage. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) are leading in establishing frameworks and tools for heritage management. In the recent decade a new tool has emerged – the Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA). It is developed for World cultural heritage properties as a priority, focusing on sustaining the Outstanding Universal value (OUV). HIA aligns with sustainable development, aiming to preserve and transmit World heritage for the future generations (UNESCO, 1972).

The aim of the study is to investigate the cultural heritage management concept in the international framework and to introduce key tools for World Heritage sustainable management, focusing on Heritage Impact Assessment as an innovative management tool. The paper delves into the legal and regulatory framework for HIA implementation in Bulgaria and its application to World Heritage sites.

The work hypothesis suggests that the implementation of key management tools, particularly HIA, in the sustainable management of (world) cultural heritage properties significantly contributes to the preservation of community identity, memory, and the historic urban environment, thereby fostering social and economic development and supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, ongoing innovation in these sustainable management tools is necessary for ensuring the preservation of our collective cultural heritage.

This premise rests on the understanding that cultural heritage is vital for sustainable development, and its management through HIA as an innovative proactive tool helps the decision making process and offers reciprocal benefits for both heritage and society. The legislative provision of this new tool is still underestimated by the State Parties, incl. Bulgaria. The hypothesis will be tested through a mixed-methods approach, combining a review of the international and national legal framework, secondary data analysis, and qualitative data from case studies in Bulgaria. The limitations of the implementation of the heritage impact assessment tool in Bulgaria will be analysed. Fieldwork involving personal observations supplements the research. The author's experience in HIA preparation and participation in relevant trainings conducted by UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN further enriches the study and its conclusions.

The expected outcomes include (1) Identification of Effective Tools: The study is expected to identify key management tools like management plans, management systems, and particularly Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment in the sustainable management of (world) cultural heritage properties; (2) Insights into the international and national legislation: The research is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of relevant international and national cultural heritage management legislation and its implementation; (3) Analysis of Bulgarian Practices: The study is expected to provide analysis of the implementation of Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment in Bulgaria, (4) Future Research Areas and Policy Recommendations: The study might also identify areas where further research is needed, potentially paving the way for future studies in the field of cultural heritage management as well as might give some recommendations regarding policy and legislation.

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# **1. THE EVOLVING CONCEPT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT. REVIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATION FRAMEWORK**

The evolving concept of cultural heritage preservation has led to a shift in the way we manage these resources. Until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the focus was laid primarily on physical condition. Later it shifted towards its management, becoming a highly sensitive topic, especially in terms of World Heritage. Interestingly, the core document for World Heritage protection, the 1972 UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, does not directly address cultural heritage management. It outlines State Parties' conservation obligations but suggests establishing local competent bodies for implementation (Articles 4, 5, 29). But indirect references to governance are present.

The topic is more explicitly addressed to the periodically updated document Guidelines for the Implementation of the Convention (last updated 2023) as well as to other documents published by UNESCO and advisory bodies, such as: the Recommendation concerning the safeguarding and contemporary role of historic areas (UNESCO, 1976), the Valletta Principles for the Safeguarding and Management of Historic Cities, Towns and Urban Areas (ICOMOS, 2011), and others.

The Council of Europe introduced cultural heritage management within its overall policy in the 2000 European Landscape Convention. Here, "management" is defined as "action towards sustainable development that ensures permanent care, balancing and guiding changes caused by social, economic and environmental processes." (Europe, 2000). Further emphasizing the concept of sustainability, the 2005 Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society highlights "the importance and potential of cultural heritage, used wisely, as a resource for sustainable development and quality of life in a continuously evolving society." (CE, 2005).

## **2. TOOLS FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WH SITES**

### **Shifting Focus: From Protection to Sustainable Management**

UNESCO, its advisory bodies, and the Council of Europe have progressively broadened their legal instruments to include sustainable development and management alongside cultural heritage protection. Key tools have been established to ensure the protection of World Heritage sites and manage pressures arising from social, economic, and environmental factors. This article explores three main tools:

- Management Systems (MS),
- Management Plans (MP),
- Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA).

The first two instruments – Management Plans and Management Systems – are widely recognized. UNESCO has introduced them as mandatory for World Heritage sites after 2005 (UNESCO, 2023). The third one, Heritage Impact Assessment, is new and more innovative approach gaining international traction. Its growing importance is reflected in the ongoing efforts by ICOMOS, ICCROM, the WH Centre, and the WH Committee to encourage State Parties to integrate HIA into their national legislation.

During the extended 45<sup>th</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee in Riyadh (2023), it was emphasized that “all proposed major interventions in and around World Heritage properties should be subject to rigorous impact assessments” (UNESCO, 2023: Para 118bis). Additionally, UNESCO requires both project proposals and HIAs to be submitted to the WH Centre for review by the Advisory Bodies (UNESCO I. I., 2022).

While each tool has its specific focus, all three – MPs, MSs, and HIAs – share a common objective: preserving the Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage sites. This article provides a brief overview of the two established tools (MPs and MSs) and delves deeper into the innovative HIA approach for sustainable heritage management.

### **Management Systems: Tailored Frameworks for Protection**

Cultural heritage management systems are developed within the broader context of national, regional, and local legislation, historical and cultural development, and the specific heritage of each site. They are crucial for preserving local and national identity. As such, MSs vary greatly among countries, reflecting their unique cultural resources, traditions, communities, and administrative systems (UNESCO, 2023). MSs are dynamic and should involve stakeholder participation to adapt to political and social changes.

- The Operational Guidelines for the 1972 Convention highlight key principles for effective MSs, echoing the Valletta Principles (2011):
- Understanding OUV: All stakeholders must understand the OUV of the World Heritage site.
- Inclusive Planning: Planning processes should involve all stakeholders.
- Cyclical Management: Establish a defined cycle for planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and feedback.
- Vulnerability Assessment: Regularly assess the site’s vulnerability.
- Stakeholder Coordination: Develop mechanisms for collaboration between partners and stakeholders.
- Resource Allocation: Allocate necessary resources and invest in capacity building.
- Integrated Approach: Employ an integrated approach to planning and management.

The Bulgarian Cultural Heritage Act defines the national cultural heritage protection system in which, according to Art.11(1), the state and municipal bodies playing key roles. Furthermore, the Art.17(1) defines that the local implementation authority rests with Mayors of the municipalities.

### **Management Plans: Guiding Documents for World Heritage Sites**

Management Plans (MPs) are specific documents designed to ensure the maintenance of the OUV of WH properties. While primarily used for WH sites, they can be adapted for nationally significant sites as well. MPs are formalized documents with a defined structure, content, and validity period, requiring periodic updates. They act as the guiding documents within a management system, informing all phases (planning, implementation, and control) of cultural heritage site management.

The need for MPs emerged in the early 1990s with UNESCO's policy shift from conservation into management. Till then only Conservation Plans were used for developing an appropriate strategy for the conservation of OUV of the WH sites, through the values approach defined in the Burgh Charter (1987).

A key role in establishing the requirements for MPs played the UNESCO Management Guidelines for World Cultural Heritage sites (Feilden, 1998). Since 2005, UNESCO has requested preparation of MPs for WH sites and Tentative List inscriptions, and in 2008 their content was formalized, focusing on the preservation of OUV. The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the Convention (UNESCO, 2023) stipulate that each World Heritage site “must have an appropriate management plan or other documented management system that specifies how the OUV should be conserved...” (UNESCO, 2023: para 108).

The standards for Management Plans preparation were introduced in 2013, when UNESCO (along with the advisory bodies ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN) published the WH Resource manual “Managing Cultural World Heritage” (Wijesuriya, 2013). It has become an essential tool for the WH Management Concept development and for the MPs preparation. In recent years, UNESCO and the advisory bodies have issued a number of complementary explanatory documents and information on good practices in World Heritage management.

Following the UNESCO requests for elaboration, adoption and implementation of management plans some State Parties, like Bulgaria, have adopted the combined form – the Conservation and Management plans. In the synchronization process of the Bulgarian legislation with UNESCO requirements, changes were made to the Cultural Heritage Act, providing for the preparation of Conservation and Management Plans (CMP). The specific requirements and methodology for CMP preparation are presented in the “Regulation on the scope, structure, content and methodology for the preparation of conservation and management plans for single or group immovable cultural property” (MK, 2011) adopted by the Bulgarian Council of Ministers.

## **Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment: Proactive decision-making**

Impact assessment is a relatively new tool in the heritage field. While it has been widely used in other sectors such as environmental protection, legislation, health, and social welfare for some time, its application to cultural heritage is rapidly gaining global recognition. This growing trend involves assessing the impact of various factors on cultural heritage, including management systems, cultural policies, strategic and legislative initiatives, potential effects on World Heritage sites, etc. By evaluating these elements, impact assessments contribute to the effective protection and management of cultural heritage.

This tool is purposefully developed to support the decision-making process. Originally used as a reactive tool for analyses of the impact on the OUV of World Heritage sites, HIA has evolved into a proactive tool. It assesses the potential impact of new developments on the OUV of a WH property, its buffer zone and a wider area, aiming to prevent negative impacts and enhance positive ones. HIA also considers the impact on the urban environment, historic landscapes, cultural context, and social, economic, cultural, and educational aspects. The assessment takes into account “the dynamics of change and the role of generational continuity by proposing planning alternatives” (Ripp, 2016).

Recognizing its importance, UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM, and the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) have been actively engaged in raising awareness and building capacity for HIA preparation through a series of online lectures and in-person/online trainings (Krachanova, 2023). The first guidance dwelling into HIA topic and giving practical information on how to conduct it is 2011 “Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties” by ICOMOS (ICOMOS I. c., 2011). In 2022, a crucial step was taken by the publication of an update version of “Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context” (UNESCO I. I., 2022), providing a more comprehensive resource for HIA practitioners.

### **3. HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT: A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK**

#### **Need for HIA, Scope and Methodology**

The need for HIA stems from the recognition that our cultural heritage is an invaluable testament to our past, a guardian of our identity, and a legacy to be preserved for future generations. Cultural heritage is a fragile and non-renewable resource that requires protection not only through legal safeguards and physical conservation measures but also through careful evaluation of the potential impacts of new developments and any other interventions. This includes assessing the potential effects of new constructions, infrastructure, and other initiatives within pro-

tected areas that could negatively impact cultural heritage, particularly its most valuable elements. It can also help the strategic and investment planning, allowing for the assessment of potential impacts and the prescription of measures to mitigate negative impacts and enhance positive ones.

The HIA Scope encompasses a comprehensive evaluation of potential impacts on various aspects of a World Heritage site, including:

- Historical, archaeological, architectural, and urban values, which define the site's significance and are mainly derived from the Statement of OUV;
- Historical urban environment, which concerns the surrounding urban context – especially the relationship with the built environment and historical fabric;
- Cultural landscape, which encompassing the site's natural and man-made features and their interactions;
- Tourism as one of the major activities that may affect negatively the site's integrity and authenticity;
- Social, economic, and cultural context evaluating the potential effects on the local communities, livelihoods, and cultural practices associated with the site.

By examining these diverse aspects, HIA provides a holistic understanding of the potential impact of proposed interventions on the World Heritage site and its broader context.

The methodology for conducting HIA was developed by UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS, and IUCN and is presented in the “Heritage Impact Assessment Guidelines for Cultural World Heritage Properties” (ICOMOS I. c., 2011). It was further refined in an updated version titled “Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessment in a World Heritage Context” (UNESCO I. I., 2022). According to the updated methodology the potential impacts assessment process comprises 11 steps:

1. Screening – Collection of baseline information;
2. Scoping – Defining the scope of HIA;
3. Baseline assessment of the World Heritage site – identifying values and attributes from the OUV and other sources;
4. Proposed action and alternatives;
5. Identifying and predicting potential impacts;
6. Evaluating impacts;
7. Mitigation and enhancement;
8. Reporting;
9. Reviewing the report;
10. Decision-making;
11. Follow up (UNESCO I. I., 2022: 29).

The first step (1 and 2) and the final ones (9 to 11) are carried out by State Party (through relevant institutions). The intermediate steps (3 to 8) are carried out by the impact assessment team. The public consultation process is an essential component of HIA as public consultation with local authorities and communities, conducted

through mandatory interviews and sociological surveys. This promotes awareness among the local community about the future of their cultural heritage and encourages civic engagement.

## **HIA and Sustainable Development**

Heritage Impact Assessment serves as a cornerstone for achieving sustainable conservation and management of cultural heritage, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of historic urban environments. HIA extends beyond the single cultural heritage site's boundaries, encompassing the broader socio-economic context, the sentiments of local communities, the influence on diverse heritage types, as well as the overall cultural landscape.

HIA represents a crucial methodology for integrating cultural heritage preservation into contemporary development processes. This integration is demonstrably aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), fostering a synergistic relationship between cultural heritage protection, and achieving broader sustainability objectives. This interconnectedness is firmly outlined in the "Policy for Integrating the Sustainable Development Perspective into World Heritage Processes" (UNESCO, 2015).

## **International Legal Framework for Heritage Impact Assessments**

Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) as a new instrument is weakly legally secured at the international level. The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (1972) state that:

"Impact assessments for proposed interventions are essential for all World Heritage sites" (UNESCO, 2023, *cp.* para 110).

"...State Parties shall ensure that heritage impact assessments are carried out for development projects and activities planned to be implemented in/around the World Heritage site..." (UNESCO, 2023, *cp.* para 118bis).

The "Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessment in a World Heritage Context" (2022) mentions that in case of new developments (both within and outside WH properties) the WH Centre may request a State Party to prepare a HIA (based on paragraphs 172 and 174 of the Operational Guidelines for the Convention of 1972). This recommendation does not have legal consequences for the State Party, but they are of utmost importance for managing the change and preventing the OUV's deterioration. An important trend introduced by this manual is the synchronization of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and the World Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) in terms of methodology.

The engagement of international organizations, represented by UNESCO through the World Heritage Centre, the World Heritage Committee, and its adviso-

ry bodies, demonstrates the significance of HIA as a crucial tool for preserving the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of World Heritage sites. This commitment is evident in the recommendations they provide to Member States regarding both HIA and environmental impact assessments.

A prime example is the decisions taken at the 45<sup>th</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee in Riyadh, 2023. Over 150 of these decisions addressed impact assessments on cultural, natural or mixed heritage sites. The topic emerges in four aspects: (1) as a request for an Impact assessment on project or on a strategic/action plan; (2) as a feedback to already delivered Impact assessments; (3) as a recommendation for Impact assessment integration into national policy and (4) as a recommendation for incorporation: of “impact assessments into the local heritage management system” (UNESCO, 2023). A comparative analysis of UNESCO data indicates that for the period 2017–2022 the World Heritage Committee has requested the preparation of 148 impact assessments, including HIA (UNESCO, 2022). These figures clearly illustrate the rapid global adoption of HIA and highlight its recognition as an essential tool for addressing negative impacts on the OUV and establishing sustainable management of World Heritage sites.

### **Impact Assessments in Bulgaria: A Comparative Perspective**

Impact assessments are not entirely unfamiliar concepts in Bulgaria. They are primarily employed to evaluate the quality and implementation of legislative acts and policies. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is also widely used. All of these tools are accompanied by corresponding legal acts regulating their application. In contrast, there is lack of a comprehensive legal framework for Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment which is still in its early stages of development in Bulgaria. The national Cultural Heritage Act does not provide for procedures for commissioning, preparing and processing of such assessments. (Krachanova M. T., 2023)

HIA as a new tool for World Heritage Sites management was introduced in Bulgaria in 2017 by experts from UNESCO, ICOMOS and STAB within the framework of a joint advisory mission related to the challenges facing the Ancient City of Nessebar. Experts, representatives of the Municipality of Nessebar, the Ministry of Culture, various cultural organizations and stakeholders from the local community were also trained in conducting HIA.

Despite the rapid international adoption of Heritage Impact Assessment, it has yet to be incorporated into the Bulgarian Cultural Heritage Act (CHA). In 2021, a working group was launched for its amendment and for the establishment of procedures for their commissioning, preparation, and processing. Presently HIA is only conducted at the request of UNESCO for specific World Heritage Sites. This has led to a limited number of HIAs being conducted – only two to date, both concerning the Ancient City of Nessebar – a historic city inscribed on the WH list in 1983.

In 2018, the first HIA was conducted in Bulgaria, paving the way for a significant development project at the “Severna Buna” Fishing Port in Nessebar. This assessment, meticulously prepared for the proposed rehabilitation and modernization of the port, received approval from the World Heritage Centre. In 2022, the investment project was successfully implemented, marking a ground-breaking milestone as the first full-fledged application of HIA procedures for a World Heritage site in Bulgaria.

The year 2022 saw the emergence of the second HIA, carefully crafted in response to the Municipality of Nessebar’s plan to construct a primary school within the Ancient necropolis of Mesambria, an area encompassed in the World Heritage site’s buffer zone. Going beyond impact assessment, this evaluation put forth a compelling proposal to establish a branch of the Archaeological Museum on the site. This proposed museum would serve for presentation of the immovable and movable cultural treasures unearthed during the necropolis’ archaeological exploration, ensuring their preservation and accessibility for future generations.

A significant step towards enhancing cultural heritage management practices is the establishment of a training program on Cultural Heritage Impact Assessments in 2022 by the University Centre for Professional Development in Cultural Heritage at Sofia University “St. Kl. Ohridski”. This initiative was materialized under the auspices of the research project “Professional Development in Cultural Heritage,” funded by the National Scientific Program “Cultural and Historical Heritage, National Memory and Social Development.” (Кабаков, 2021)

#### **4. FUTURE RESEARCH AREAS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

A potential future research area is the adaptability of HIA – the potential to adapt the methodology for sites of national and local significance.

HIA is specifically developed for World Heritage (WH) sites and the protection of their attributes and values, as reflected in the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value. So the assessment based is on the adopted Statement and Criterion that demonstrate the site’s exceptional value. This specific approach is inherent only to World Heritage specialists and differs from the system adopted and applied under national legislation, including in Bulgaria. On the other hand, UNESCO considers that the methodology for conducting impact assessments “is also designed to apply to all forms of heritage beyond those inscribed on the World Heritage List” (UNESCO, 2022, p. 3). In this sense, adapting this methodology to assess the impact of sites of national and local significance in accordance with the specific features of the national system and national legislation would contribute to its recognition by a wider range of specialists.

A field of research emerges to investigate the compatibility of this methodology with the adopted by the State parties national methodologies in order to find

commonalities and differences. A scientific approach should be used to develop an adapted model and assess its effectiveness, strengths, and shortcomings through analyses, case studies, interviews, and pilot applications.

Regarding policies and management, it is recommended that impact assessments be included in the legal framework of the States Parties to the Convention. This would facilitate the process of using HIA, as one of the main obstacles to their wider dissemination is that in most countries it is not regulated by the respective law on cultural heritage and a subsequent regulation for their application, as is the case in Bulgaria.

An opportunity to introduce and promote HIA is the capacity building which UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM and IUCN are doing very extensively internationally. But it is essential to introduce this tool nationally and to equip the state parties, the administrative and heritage experts with the necessary skills to effectively conduct HIA.

## **5. CONCLUSION: THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF HIA IN SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT**

This research underscores the crucial importance of Heritage Impact Assessment as a tool for achieving sustainable management of cultural heritage, particularly in the context of World Heritage sites. HIA offers a comprehensive and proactive approach, evaluating the potential impacts of development projects on various aspects of cultural heritage: as historical, archaeological, architectural, and urban values; historical urban environment and cultural landscapes; tourism and its potential effects on integrity and authenticity; social, economic, and cultural contexts of local communities.

By integrating HIA into development planning processes, decision-makers gain a crucial understanding of potential consequences. They will have the tools to mitigate the possible negative impacts and risks on the OUV of WH properties and to enhance positive outcomes. HIA can also promote sustainable development that aligns with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The growing international recognition of HIA is evident in its increasing application and integration into national policies. However, challenges remain for its inclusion in the legal frameworks of many countries, including Bulgaria. An opportunity to introduce and promote HIA is the capacity building initiatives which are essential to equip the state parties with the necessary skills to effectively conduct HIA.

Future research directions could explore refining HIA methodologies for broader application beyond WH sites and develop standardized frameworks for assessing the complex interplay between HIA and various SDG targets.

By addressing these challenges and fostering research, HIA can be further solidified as a cornerstone for sustainable cultural heritage management, ensuring the preservation of our collective past for generations to come.

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