

**Research summary:
Cultural impact assessment:
a literature review of current practice around the world**

Last month, CDN's Research Program Manager Kim Dunphy made a presentation on a research on cultural impact assessment undertaken at CDN over the last year. Former CDN researcher Adriana Partal, now employed at RMIT Europe in Barcelona, was a collaborator in the process, undertaking much of the initial research during her time at CDN in 2013. The two sought to find out whether cultural impact assessment is occurring, particularly in



Photo: the beautiful medieval campus, University of Hildesheim

local government contexts around the world, and if so, how it is occurring. They shared their research at the recent International Conference on Cultural Policy Research in Hildesheim, Germany, where they enjoyed meeting and exchanging ideas with more than 450 cultural

researchers from all over the world. Comments and

challenges offered by attendees from Europe and Asia at the presentation will contribute to development of this research.

The report below is a summary of their findings, with their presentation available from <http://www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/publications/research-reports/>. The full paper is not yet published

Culture has increasingly been accepted as dimension of public policy and activity around the world in the last decade, alongside social, economic and ecological considerations.

Techniques for impact assessment of new initiatives on our economy, ecology and society are becoming more sophisticated, but these are not yet well established within the cultural domain. This article offers an overview of the field of cultural impact assessment through a comprehensive review of the modest international literature, including journal articles and more informal sources of information from 1988 to 2014.

Findings indicate that, while most documents did not offer definitions of culture and CIA, there was strong concordance between those published. Culture was consistently conceptualized in its broadest sense as a way of life, a system of knowledge, beliefs, values

and behaviours passed down to each generation. Strong concordance about CIA was also evident, with practitioners sharing an understanding of it as a process of evaluating the likely impacts of a proposed development on the way of life of a particular group or community of people.

CIA has largely been implemented since 2002, predominantly to understand the impact of development processes on particular cultural groups. CIA is documented most frequently in countries with indigenous populations, including Hawai'i, USA; New Zealand; Australia and Africa, and in areas relating to indigenous development, such as cultural heritage, resource management and conservation.

Methodologies documented were also quite consistent, with stages generally including scoping, desk research through existing studies, mapping of cultural activity, field surveys and community

consultation. No studies offered well-developed measures or

indicators, with the exception of a model discussed in the article even though it fell outside the review's inclusion criteria because it did not specifically identify as being about CIA. The Circles of Sustainability model developed by RMIT University and the UN's Global Cities Programme offers an impact assessment framework with standard measures of culture that might be useful for CIA in broader applications (Magee et al, 2013).

As yet, CIA appears to be the least well developed of all the impact assessment approaches, as evidenced by a much lower profile and documentation on the website of the IAIA, the International Association for Impact Assessment. Nevertheless, a strong relationship between CIA and other impact assessment approaches was evident, with CIA regularly being included, albeit as a subsidiary part of, environmental and social impact projects.

Use of cultural impact assessment in the cultural sector

A new use of the term CIA has emerged in the cultural sector, that is, organizations working with "culture", where culture is, as Holden defines, "the arts, museums, libraries and heritage that receive public funding" (Holden, 2006). CIA as discussed in this context is more often an assessment of the impact **of** cultural activities, rather than an assessment of impact of activities **on** culture. This use of the term CIA is related to a lively contemporary debate about cultural value, which is not about the value of culture in the broad sense of the term, as used by other proponents of CIA, but how funded cultural institutions measure the value



Photo: Adriana Partal presenting

of their activity, for example as discussed by Eleonora Belfiore (2010).

A major UK study about the “cultural impact” of museums, for example, included these two different conceptualisations of CIA without differentiation (Selwood, 2010). The article ostensibly discusses CIA, as the concept has been used in other sectors, and the challenges posed by the lack of a framework for cultural impact assessment, in comparison with social and economic domains where measures are better established. However, a strange conundrum was also evident, with the museum experience itself also being considered the “culture’ that was impacting on individuals. Therefore, the article is considering both the impact of culture: how does attendance at a cultural institution impact individuals?, and simultaneously, the impact on culture, how does people’s attendance impact the broader culture?, without making a clear distinction. Jensen’s blog post (2014) indicates a similar confusion, ostensibly discussing research about the tricky issue of ‘quantification of cultural impacts’, when it in fact refers to research about the social impacts of cultural activity.

Thus, it is clear that CIA is closely connected to other dimensions of IA in development, and currently subordinate to most of them, except when it is used by the cultural sector for a different function.

Future applications of CIA

The literature included considerable discussion of the need for meaningful approaches to considering impact, like those applied in other domains of development, if culture is to be fully recognised as a dimension of sustainable development. CIA is considered necessary for the establishment of cultural statistics and indicators to assist the achievement of a more culturally sustainable society. This topic has been discussed over the last ten years by international organizations such as IFACCA (International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture, the Convention on Biological Diversity based in Canada, UNESCO and United Cities and Local Governments.

UCLG, the international peak body for local government, is critical of local development initiatives for favouring economic, social and environmental assessments over cultural impacts. Its *Agenda 21 for Culture* includes



Photo: Kim Dunphy and Adriana Partal at ICCPR with Dr. Nancy Duxbury of University of Coimbra, Portugal

recommends application of CIA for initiatives that involve significant changes in the cultural life of cities (UCLG, 2006). However, achievement of this recommendation, like others previously, has been hampered by the lack of a well-established framework for CIA. Consequently, while there is strong interest and intention, there is little published evidence of CIA applied in relation to culture as a dimension of broader sustainable development anywhere around the world as yet, including in local government. This indicates new possibilities for the application of CIA, particularly in local government contexts where there may be strong connection to and valuing of local culture/s.

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