

“Quality” of interventions on built Cultural Heritage

Stefano Francesco Musso | stefanofrancesco.musso@unige.it

Università di Genova, Italia, Department dAD - Architettura e Design

Abstract

The paper deals with a Document prepared by an expert group, chaired by the author, established by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) under the mandate of the European Commission. The action took place in the framework of the flagship EU Initiative of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018: “Cherishing heritage: developing quality standards for EU-funded projects that have the potential to impact on cultural heritage”. The main objective of the “Document on quality principles for EU-funded interventions on cultural heritage”, is to provide guidance for all stakeholders directly or indirectly engaged in EU-funded heritage conservation and management (European institutions, managing authorities, international organisations, civil society and local communities, private sector, and experts).

Keywords

Principles, Quality, Conservation, European Union, ICOMOS.

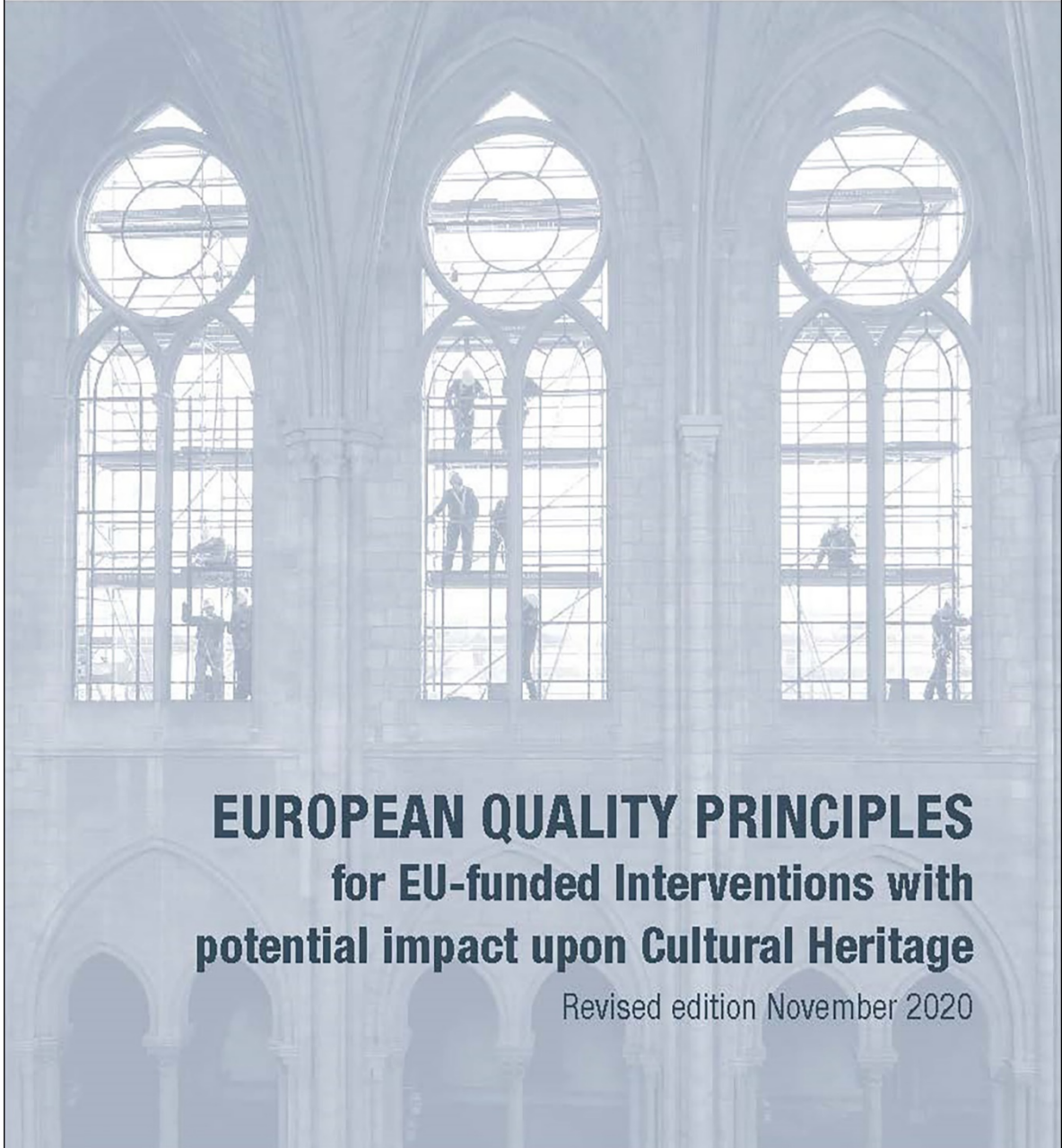
Framework and purpose of the document

2018 was the European Year of Cultural Heritage¹ and the European Commission launched 10 *Flagship-Initiatives* including the one called *Cherishing Heritage: developing quality principles for interventions on cultural heritage*², requested by the European Parliament in response to some questions on the topic and the request expressed in the 'Joint Statement' of the Latvian Presidency, at the end of the 2015 Conference *Heritage, Contemporary Architecture and Design in Interaction*.

In 2017, the Council of Europe thus invited the European Commission to prepare a *guidance document on quality principles for EU-funded interventions on cultural heritage*³. The Commission involved ICOMOS International for this purpose, setting up a group of experts that I had the honor of chairing⁴.

The final Document, entitled *European Quality Principles for EU-funded Interventions with potential impact upon Cultural Heritage*⁵, includes, at the beginning, a list of concise *Recommendations* and a *Checklist* of guiding criteria aimed at managers at all levels to encourage thoughtful decisions, consistent with protection and controllable, regarding the projects subjected to their assessment. In 2020 the process of adoption of the Document by the national and international ICOMOS committees was completed.

ICOMOS



EUROPEAN QUALITY PRINCIPLES for EU-funded Interventions with potential impact upon Cultural Heritage

Revised edition November 2020



Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union

Fig. 1 Cover of the Document

The Document regards the entire life cycle of each program project of intervention on cultural heritage, favoring aspects of method and process, without ignoring the cultural assumptions which, however, do not lend themselves to rigid regulatory determinations.

For this reason, the introduction to the document states, first, that the «Cultural heritage has value in its own right: an inheritance, or legacy, that is not only material, since it embeds ideals, meanings, memories, traditions, abilities and values that constitute a shared source of remembrance, understanding, specificities, dialogue, cohesion and creativity for Europe and for the entire world».

The document is divided into sections: aspects of quality, planning, design, implementation, governance, risk assessment, research, education and training, awards. Each section has several paragraphs including: an introductory part, the *Lessons learned* from past experiences and the *Recommendations* to overcome the critical issues that have emerged.

Quality concerns in cultural heritage interventions

The section offers a synthesis of some concepts deriving from international papers, conventions, and standards, recognizing the cultural and relative nature of the concept of quality. On the other hand, «Defining 'quality' in interventions on cultural heritage is a crucial and challenging issue», because:

- stakeholders (citizens, public sector, voluntary sector, politicians, professionals and experts) have specific views on quality;
- the quality may depend on the perspective of individuals, communities, local contexts, the historical condition and geographical location, the characteristics of the heritage involved and the objectives of the planned intervention;
- the dialogue between all the parties involved in the interventions on their meanings and purposes is crucial.

Placing local communities at the center of heritage policies, as requested by the 2005 *Faro Convention*⁶ and the *UNESCO Recommendation on the historic urban landscape*, requires integrated and participatory approaches. The achievement of the quality of the interventions is also possible only by increasing the awareness that each actor involved has the principles of conservation.

The Document thus recalls the following internationally shared *quality principles*:

- Understanding of - and respect for - cultural heritage and its significance: it is paramount that uses of - and interventions on - cultural heritage respect and keep the character of a place and its consistency and values.
- Adequacy of feasibility studies and detailed conservation plans: analysis and diagnosis of the cultural

asset are requisite for any intervention.

- Precaution in designing: «be prudent, especially if knowledge/information is insufficient or unaffordable».
- Authenticity and integrity: essential.
- Accessibility and inclusiveness: interpretation should be the result of meaningful collaboration between heritage professionals, host and associated communities, and other stakeholders. Every effort should be made to communicate the site's values and significance to its varied audiences (cognitive accessibility)
- Reversibility of the interventions: recommended.
- Efficacy: the desired results must be formulated and agreed upon in advance
- Preventive care: «it is always better than subsequent traumatic interventions».
- Minimum intervention: «do as much as necessary and as little as possible».
- Compatibility of design solutions: «use adequate materials, techniques and detailing» regarding the material and physical-chemical-mechanical interactions between the new and the existing ones.
- Multi-disciplinary: «call upon skill and experience» from a range of relevant disciplines
- Use of the cultural asset and regular programmed maintenance: necessary to extend life of the cultural asset.

A brief reference to the main international documents on protection follows, in the belief that common values are the basis of common principles. Already in 1931, the Charter of Athens proposed some principles for the conservation of cultural heritage rooted in the awareness that humanity shares common values considered "common heritage", that our historical environment reflects the history and traditions of peoples and that we transmit their bequest to future generations is the common responsibility of all peoples. After the Second World War, these values were enshrined in the founding conventions and treaties of the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and the European Union. Even the European Charter of Architectural Heritage of 1975 is still a reference document. as well as the more recent *Davos Declaration Towards a High-Quality 'Baukultur'*, adopted in January 2018⁷, which hopes for continuity between cultural heritage and contemporary creation. Finally, there are many doctrinal texts, resolutions, declarations, and ethical principles⁸ developed by experts from all over the world, starting from the Venice Charter of 1964, from which to start to proceed further, in the light of the profound changes underway in the world.

Enabling quality of interventions on cultural heritage

The section examines the critical factors for the quality of interventions: 1) coherence between European, national, regional and local policies and priorities and the objectives of sustainable development; 2) clarity of the objectives of the projects; 3) evaluation of suitable technical alternatives; 4) strengthening the operational capacities of the institutions responsible for heritage; 5) social, cultural, economic, environmental opportunities and evaluation of the benefits and impacts of the interventions; 6) risk assessment and damage mitigation; 7) presence of detailed construction plans; 8) monitoring and evaluation of the results of the intervention; 9) scheduled post-intervention conservation and maintenance.

Programming at the EU, national and regional levels. Understanding the critical factors for the quality of the interventions, during the planning of the funds and the preparation of the related calls for tenders, is important. For this reason, cultural heritage experts with specific skills must also participate in these phases.

Project briefs and tenders. Conducting adequate research and investigations on the assets involved, before preparing the documents of each project, is essential for an understanding of their values and to guarantee the quality of the outcomes. This requires the involvement of cultural heritage experts with specific skills.

Design. Each project must be an expression of knowledge, understanding and interpretation of the cultural heritage involved, their historically stratified consistency, their context, and their values. The quality of the results depends on this.

Procurement. Cultural heritage projects require specific contract forms that recognize the necessary knowledge, the required skills, and the particularities of the implementation process. Time and economic-financial flexibility are necessary, and forms of procurement based solely on cost containment are not acceptable.

Implementation. The correct implementation of the projects requires knowledge and understanding of the assets involved. For this, cooperation between the parties involved is necessary, with the help of experts with specific skills with respect to the assets involved.

Project monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring and ex-post evaluation of the results of the construction site are also essential to improve the quality of future interventions.

Strengthening drivers of quality

The section explores four "horizontal factors" that can affect the quality of interventions: "governance", risk assessment, research, education, and training.

Governance is the process of due diligence (good governance) that can lead to good performance, correct stakeholder engagement and quality results. Good governance is an attitude that presupposes ethical integrity and attention to conflicts of interest.

Risk assessment and mitigation is fundamental for the quality of the project and its outcomes, together with damage mitigation. The areas of risk concern: governance, the operational capacity of the administrative and technical structures involved, changes in projects, economic problems, and possible fraud.

Research on cultural heritage must extend basic knowledge and offer a rigorous basis for the operational choices of conservation experts and support for informed decisions by politicians, administrators, technicians, and citizens.

Education and training are essential to meet the conservation and management needs of cultural heritage. Educational programs have inevitable impacts on the quality levels of interventions and must be continually updated.

Rewarding quality requires time, commitment, and dedication. For this, the EU is invited to strengthen existing awards in the sector or to establish new ones.

Provisional conclusions

As mentioned, ICOMOS International and the majority of national ICOMOS Committees in the world adopted the Document. Some objectives have already been achieved. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Culture has been officially involved in the planning and negotiation phase of the European Structural Funds for the period 2021-27, precisely to ensure that funding that may have a direct or indirect impact on cultural heritage is assessed by competent experts in the sector. The European Court of Audit has recently for the first time undertaken an assessment of the results of the loans granted in past years to interventions on cultural heritage, adopting the Document as a reference for its work. The Ministers of Culture and European Affairs of the Member Countries of the Union, gathered at an informal summit in Paris in 2019, signed a declaration that explicitly refers to this document as a reference for further actions to promote and support the policies of the European Union on Cultural Heritage.⁹

¹ "The European Parliament, with its Resolution of September 2015, urged the Commission "to include in the guidelines governing the next generation of structural funds for cultural heritage a compulsory quality control system, to apply throughout a project's life-cycle"

https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage/european-year-cultural-heritage_en

² https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage/about_en - https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage/sites/eych/files/eych-initiatives_en.pdf

³ Council of Europe Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society - Council of Europe Treaty Series - No. 199 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/0900001680083746>.

⁷ The members of the Expert Group: Elena Dimitrova (BU), Marie-Laure Lavenir (ICOMOS), Paul McMahon (IR), Baiba Mūrniece (LTV), Stefano Francesco Musso (IT - Chair), Gergely Nagy (HU), Christoph Rauhut (D), Grellan D. Rourke (IR), Erminia Sciacchitano (EUC) and Bénédicte Selfslagh (B).

⁵ The Document is downloadable from the site: <http://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/2436/>

⁶ Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society - Council of Europe Treaty Series - No. 199 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/0900001680083746> - all the links have been checked on August, 26, 2022

⁷ European Parliament resolution of 8 September 2015 "Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe" (2014/2149) P8-TA (2015)0293 (TEXTS ADOPTED European Parliament 2014-2019).

⁸ <https://www.icomos.org/fr/ressources/chartes-et-normes>

⁹ Declaration adopted during the informal meeting of European Union Member State Ministers responsible for Cultural and European Affairs - Paris, 3 May 2019