

ICCROM 2013 Forum follow-up:

Evaluating the Outcomes of Heritage Conservation Science

ICCROM, Rome July - December 2015



Background

In its findings, the Forum highlighted the lack of visibility of the sector, and called for more active engagement with outside parties at multiple levels, from the public to governmental, to raise awareness and shape policy. Particular emphasis was also placed on the need for strategy development at a national and international level. To facilitate this, data collection was identified as a key area for focus to evidence the relevance of heritage conservation science research and its capacity to deliver benefit.

Accordingly, ICCROM with the support of the Forum consortium partners is currently working to prepare a pilot study on evaluating the outcomes of heritage conservation science. This initiative aims to assess the feasibility of developing tools and collecting data to provide a quantifiable basis to support needs assessment, strategy development, and policy making, while assessing the contribution of the sector to its client communities.

The think-tank meeting

As a first step, a think-tank meeting was held on 9th and 10th July at ICCROM in Rome to initiate an interdisciplinary dialogue on this topic and define the aim, scope and content of the pilot study. ICCROM gathered together experts from the fields of conservation, heritage science, cultural heritage statistics, education and social sciences. Their contribution provided a deeper insight on the methods used in other fields to evaluate needs and outcomes, and explored the possibilities for applying these in a systematic and structured way to heritage conservation science.

Key questions posed:

- Is it feasible to evaluate heritage conservation science outcomes and identify needs in a systematic way?
- What are the desired outcomes of such an exercise?
- What types of tools and methods are being employed outside our field?
- What are the dimensions and levels for focus, and what types of data need to be collected?
- Would it be worthwhile to progress this through a pilot study?

A series of presentations covered the current trends and challenges in cultural statistics; general principles of evaluation practices; and recent initiatives undertaken within heritage conservation science sector.

The meeting shed light on current developments in the field of cultural statistics, highlighting the current transition from descriptive statistics (inputs and outputs) to measuring outcomes and effects. Considering the increasing number of initiatives in the area of impact assessment and evaluation at European level, attention was drawn to methodological challenges such as the integration of qualitative and quantitative data and the different levels of focus; be those measurements of outputs to show efficiency or outcomes to demonstrate effectiveness.

In addition, key practical issues encountered within evaluation studies such as audience identification, context analysis and principles of system decomposition were discussed in detail.

With regard to recent initiatives within the heritage science field, a general framework for structuring needs assessment at various levels of client communities was presented. A summary of the key findings and recommendations from the think-tank meeting is provided below.

Key findings

1. Tools and methods for needs and value-added evaluation

Tools and methods are needed to evaluate needs and value-added of science within the heritage conservation field, to improve effectiveness, and demonstrate its ability to deliver benefit to its immediate client communities. This process could also serve to identify the needs of the sector, enhance its performance, and improve its visibility.

2. Common frameworks, language and methods

It is important to establish common frameworks, language and methods in order to plan and implement evaluation studies.

3. The key role of ICCROM

Among the key findings, experts acknowledged that the current numerous initiatives at national and international level appear disconnected and function in isolation, while a consensus over a common approach is yet to be reached. It was suggested that ICCROM could play a key role in advancing these issues as an intergovernmental organization with world-wide membership.

Recommendations

1. Descriptive Statistics:

- a. Descriptive statistics are needed to better understand the scale and health of the sector through mapping its current capacity, reach and diversity.
- b. As a preliminary step, it is recommended to focus on developing the criteria for such statistics.

2. Evaluation Practices:

- a. Review evaluation practices currently used in the field (the type of evaluation studies; levels and dimensions for focus; research methodologies employed; and types of data collected etc.);
- b. Identify commonalities, and use these to create a common framework, and terminologies that are useful to the field (watchpoint: needs are contextually bound).

3. Case studies (data mining – testing)

- a. Identify case study examples within Heritage conservation science research (e.g. preventive conservation);
- b. Undertake a pilot study in collaboration with the partner-institutions to test and review the evaluation framework;
- c. Identify organizations that generate large data sets relevant to our sector & explore epidemiological and data mining techniques for data collection and analysis.

4. Indicators

- a. Use the pilot study to clarify the mission and vision of heritage conservation science, and to steer the development of indicators;
- b. Develop metrics and indicators to communicate the impact of heritage conservation science and demonstrate relevance to policy makers and funding institutions;
- c. Provide a tool that could be used by the member-states of ICCROM.

The pilot-study

In its key findings and recommendations, the think-tank meeting was useful to better define the aims, scope and focus of the pilot study. The non linear relationship between heritage science

outputs and societal benefits was acknowledged as a key challenge. It was recommended that the evaluation study should initially focus on heritage conservation science and the outcomes and benefits it delivers to its immediate client communities. Furthermore, it was suggested to identify and demonstrate the links with heritage conservation and the field of cultural heritage at large.

Aims:

- a. To raise awareness of the importance of outcome evaluation studies as a means to enhance good governance and sustainability of the heritage conservation science sector, and to ensure benefit delivery to its client communities;
- b. To develop a common framework and methodology to guide outcome evaluation; an evaluation tool that could be used by ICCROM member states to support needs assessment, strategy development and policy making;
- c. To communicate impact, improve visibility and demonstrate relevance to policymakers;

Scope:

- a. In the framework of this project the term heritage conservation science encompasses disciplines relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of cultural heritage, acknowledging heritage conservation science part of the wider spectrum of heritage science.
- b. The pilot study will focus on delivery of benefit by heritage conservation science to client communities within cultural heritage.
- c. As a further step the pilot study will identify and trace links between heritage conservation science and heritage conservation, and cultural heritage in general.
- d. Looking ahead: this pilot study will lay the foundations for initiatives to place the contribution of heritage conservation within the larger context of value added by cultural heritage to society.