

# Heritage Impact Assessment: a tool for sustainable development



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Companies with their business operations have a major impact on the environment, our surroundings, economy and society as a whole. Many impact assessments have already been developed to map this impact: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Economic Impact Assessment (ECIA) and Social Impact Assessment (SIA). Heritage Impact Assessment is a method to predict both the positive and negative effects of a policy or infrastructural development for the heritage and provides advice on how to enhance the positive effects and to avoid, limit or compensate the negative effects.

## HIA background

From 2000 the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) signaled that there was a significant growth in the number of State of Conservation Reports (SCRs). These SCRs describe potential threats to World Heritage Sites. The threats were mainly caused by the explosive increase in the number of large-scale construction and infrastructure works. Until now, heritage was only part of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and the assessment was mostly done by soil engineers. This was insufficient; there was a need for more precision around the nature and scale of the impacts on heritage. In this context the HIA was developed.

*“A process of identifying, predicting, evaluating and communicating the probable effects of a current or proposed development policy or action on the cultural life, institutions and resources of communities, then integrating the findings and conclusions into the planning and decision making process, with a view to mitigating adverse impacts and enhancing positive outcomes.”.*

ICOMOS Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessment for Cultural World Heritage Properties, 2011

## Encompassing all heritage values

If we look at the situation in Europe and especially the Netherlands, there are already a number of mandatory measures that have to be taken to protect archeology from the negative impacts of construction work. Dutch archaeological heritage policy requires that companies first have desk research done to determine whether archaeological values may be affected. But infrastructural and construction work can also affect other, above-ground or intangible heritage values. The concerned development can affect the integrity of a monument (i.e. to what extent the monument is still intact after development), the sightlines can be disrupted or the authentic atmosphere of a location can be severely diminished. Furthermore, intangible heritage can be affected by a development; it can cause the loss of rituals and celebrations, or artisanal knowledge, for example about vernacular architecture. An HIA also looks at cumulative impacts; one tower block may not cause as much damage to the monument, but it does if that one flat means the prelude to more high-rise buildings.

An HIA not only examines whether any archaeological values would be affected, but takes *all heritage values* into account (archeology, built, maritime, intangible heritage and cultural landscape). For each identified heritage value, a physical carrier is designated (the so-called 'attribute') and systematically assessed whether this attribute / these attributes would be affected or changed, to what extent and to what extent this is acceptable or not. In addition, there is an important role for

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stakeholder participation. HIA is not to be considered a conservation tool. A HIA is in principle pro-development, but in a conscientious way, taking into account the historical and social values of a location.

## Benefits

Ideally, an HIA would be part of the whole list of mandatory impact assessments for developments. That is not the case yet. It is clear that an HIA costs a developer more than just the mandatory EIA. That is why it is important to make clear that it ultimately yields more. As also described in the UN2030 agenda, culture - and more specifically heritage - is an important part of sustainable development because it touches on a number of important goals such as inclusiveness, the right to cultural heritage and the quality of the living environment. Because with an HIA consideration is given to the potential negative implications of an intervention early on in the process, the plans can often still be changed without large (financial) consequences. A plan can be adapted, or the negative impact can be reduced or mitigated. Any positive impact on the heritage will be increased if possible. Because stakeholders have the opportunity to express their interests their opinion can be included in the decision-making process. In this way the local support for the development(s) in question is increased. The result of an HIA are made publically accessible. An HIA can increase the knowledge about the local heritage and the opportunity to use the heritage as a source of inspiration. For example, the historical dimension of a housing location is often used for promotional purposes (*branding*). In short, with an HIA and the other mandatory assessments, a developer or policymaker can cover risks as much as possible and really stand behind his or her plans.

## HIA-Methode

At the moment there is still no consensus on how an HIA should be performed. The "ICOMOS Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessment for Cultural World Heritage Properties" (January 2011) does offer guidelines. The method consists of the following seven steps:

1. Information audit stage consisting of 1) screening 2) scoping 3) commissioning
2. Data collection stage consisting of 1) desk based study 2) additional data acquisition
3. Assessment stage consisting of 1) significance evaluation 2) identification of sources of impacts, 3) impact assessment
4. Mitigation design stage consisting of 1) modelling solution options, 2) evaluating options 3) mitigation and monitoring plan
5. Approval stage consisting of 1) HIA final report, 2) review process, 3) approval
6. Mitigating and evaluation stage
7. Public archiving

By means of a report with a series of matrices and images the process of assessment is made clear and transparent.

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## HIA in the Market

Who are the clients of HIAs? In recent years, the largest customer has been the World Heritage Committee. The World Bank and donors such as the IFC are also obliged to do HIAs, but the implementation often still takes place within the context of the environmental assessment.

Since more and more institutions (investment banks, contractors, engineering companies and governments) are seeing the benefits of HIA as part of their compliance, the number of HIAs is growing fast. Despite the fact that UNESCO, ICCROM and ICOMOS are doing their best to offer trainings worldwide, few HIA experts are still available.

## The Centre for Global Heritage and Development

The Centre for Global Heritage and Development is one of the nine joint multidisciplinary centres of Leiden University, Delft University of Technology and Erasmus University Rotterdam, the so called LDE alliance. The Centre initiates, stimulates and facilitates interdisciplinary and innovative research on heritage in its past, present and future social context.

Staff at the Centre for Global Heritage and Development is trained in the HIA method in accordance with ICOMOS standards. Please contact us if you are interested to hear more about this.

Centre for Global Heritage and Development  
Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University  
Van Steenis Gebouw, roomnr A0.08A  
Einsteinweg 2 | 2333 CC | Leiden | The Netherlands  
T: +31 (0)71 5274739  
[info@globalheritage.nl](mailto:info@globalheritage.nl)  
<http://www.globalheritage.nl>  
Facebook: [/LDEHeritage](https://www.facebook.com/LDEHeritage)  
Twitter: [@LDEHeritage](https://twitter.com/LDEHeritage)

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