

Unlocking the social impact of built heritage projects: Evaluation as Catalyst of Value?

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1 **Unlocking the social impact of built heritage projects: evaluation as** 2 **catalyst of value?**

3 Cristina Coscia¹ and Irene Rubino²

4 **Abstract**

5 In order to be sustainable, projects concerning built heritage resources need to take into account multiple
6 dimensions, including the social one. More particularly, the implementation of initiatives combining either restoration
7 or adaptive reuse with the achievement of social goals may be in some cases greatly recommendable: in fact,
8 these types of interventions could be able not only to preserve and transmit the intrinsic and cultural components
9 of built heritage but also to extend the relevance of the resources to larger segments of society and overall generate
10 a multifaceted social impact. However, in order to effectively achieve social objectives, the adoption of evaluative
11 thinking seems recommendable. Given this framework, this paper advances to integrate the regeneration project
12 of a system of historical farmhouses located in Volpiano (Italy) with actions aiming to favor the social inclusion of
13 NEETS (i.e. not in education, employment or training youths). Considering that the redevelopment of the system
14 of the historical farmhouses was previously studied under the lens of corporate social responsibility, the integration
15 of the social impact perspective represents an evolution of the discourse. By a methodological and processual
16 perspective, the paper then proposes to follow the steps of logic models while combining qualitative and quantitative
17 evaluation approaches able to firstly describe and then quantify the multiple values engendered through the
18 interventions. Finally, the contribution highlights that the application of evaluative thinking and evaluation
19 procedures to built heritage projects with social objectives may facilitate both the definition and achievement of
20 shared goals and thus function as a real catalyst of value.

21 **Keywords:** social impact; well-being of citizens; evaluation; logic model; built heritage

22 **1 Introduction**

23 The multidimensional sustainability framework is currently acquiring increasing importance, and it is
24 now informing both public and disciplinary debates as well as decision-making processes at the global
25 level. In line with this tendency, the theme of the sustainability of multi-scale interventions (e.g. at the
26 building, urban and territorial scale) has undoubtedly started to be faced, and now the economic,
27 environmental, cultural and social dimensions need to be definitely taken into account (Korkmaz and
28 Balaban 2019; Lucchi et al. 2019; Coscia et al. 2018; Kohon 2018; Fregonara et al. 2016; Curto et al.
29 2014). This also applies to projects focusing on the *mise en valeur* of built heritage resources (Bottero
30 et al. 2020), and in this context a particularly emerging topic is the achievement of a sustainable and

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31 positive social impact through designed interventions. These may be represented, for instance, by
32 retrofit actions on the historical built heritage (Lucchi et al. 2019) – which are definitely acquiring a
33 strategic role for the revivification of these resources (Roberti et al. 2015)- but also by the integration
34 of social functions in regeneration processes involving cultural heritage (Bottero et al. 2020; Coscia and
35 Russo 2018). In fact, even if restoration and regeneration initiatives concerning built heritage resources
36 are usually firstly performed for the intrinsic values attributed to them, the scarcity of financial means
37 urges that the engendered value is maximized (Coscia and Rubino in press; Coscia and Curto 2017).
38 This is not only coherent with financial and economic considerations - including the emergence of new
39 investment paradigms that aim at achieving both economic returns and social impacts (Alijani and
40 Karotys 2019)- but it seems essential to: a) make cultural heritage more relevant and meaningful for
41 people; b) conceive cultural heritage in the framework of the circular economy (Kee 2019; Fusco Girard
42 and Gravagnuolo 2018; Foster 2020; <https://www.clicproject.eu/>); and c) find strategies able to foster
43 the maintenance and/or the existence itself of the buildings (Coscia and Chiaravallotti 2018). However,
44 the design and implementation of projects able to generate in an effective way a positive social impact
45 are far from being well-established procedures: firstly, social impact seems to still have multiple
46 definitions in the field, making the discourse difficult; secondly, the achievement of positive impacts
47 needs to be demonstrated and assessed, but evaluation practices are not always implemented because
48 either considered as not important or deemed as an avoidable cost; thirdly, the singularity of the cases
49 and the novelty of the paradigm make the identification of appropriate methods and metrics challenging.
50 In this framework, the goal of this paper is to shed some light on the relationships occurring between
51 built heritage projects and social impacts, highlighting that the adoption of a social impact-oriented
52 approach, together with the implementation of appropriate evaluation procedures, may function as
53 catalyst of value. More particularly, in section 2 we firstly explore the relationships occurring between
54 built heritage and the social dimension, including the concept of social impact. In section 3 we
55 summarize how social impact has been evaluated so far. In section 4 we then propose to apply a social
56 impact-oriented approach to a project to be implemented in a peri-urban context, namely a system of
57 historical farmhouses existing in Volpiano (Turin, Italy) (Coscia and Russo 2018; Testù and Machiorletti
58 2016). The selection of a rural/peri-urban context as a case study was performed considering that extra-
59 urban environments may be particularly interesting for the experimentation of projects that aim at
60 achieving both social and economic goals. In fact, whereas urban areas are usually associated to high
61 profits and competing economic interests (which might favor the pursue of economic goals rather than
62 social ones), initiatives with a social impact-oriented perspective might represent a particularly valuable
63 opportunity for the redevelopment of less valued rural and peri-urban areas. Additionally, the
64 redevelopment of the system of historical farmhouses located in Volpiano was previously studied under
65 the lens of a corporate social responsibility approach (Coscia and Russo 2018), and the integration of
66 the social impact perspective represents an evolution of the discourse. Section 5 offers final remarks
67 and conclusions.

68 **2 Built heritage and the social dimension**

69 The interrelations between built heritage resources and the social dimension are multiple, and they may
70 regard: 1) the definition of built heritage itself; 2) the effects that built heritage resources (and
71 valorization practices) may have on specific communities and society at large; 3) the intentional
72 inclusion of social goals into projects aiming to the *mise en valeur* of the resources.

73 With reference to the first point, it can be stated that built heritage resources are actually defined by the

74 meanings that communities attribute to buildings and other elements of the built environment (Cerreta
75 et al. 2014), as underlined for instance by the Faro Convention (Council of Europe 2005). Additionally,
76 built heritage can be defined as such also in light of the social significance (e.g. capacity of a
77 place/building to bind together members of the society, interpretation of a place/building as the reflection
78 of the rules and beliefs shared by a given community, etc.) attributed by communities to specific places
79 or buildings (ICOMOS Australia 1999).

80 With regard to point 2), it must be underlined that the existence of built heritage is not neutral: in fact, it
81 is known that its conservation state -as well as its physical and intellectual accessibility- engenders
82 positive/negative effects (Amin 2018), together with socio-economic consequences and various
83 externalities (Throsby 2012; Al-hagla 2010; Rosato et al. 2008; Manganelli 2007). Moreover, the
84 literature has also emphasized the role of built heritage in enriching the quality of life of people (Yung
85 and Chan 2015), e.g. contributing to the fulfillment of the aesthetic, cultural and leisure needs of a given
86 community, fostering the development of social capital (Murzyn-Kupisz 2013) and social inclusion
87 (Pendlebury et al. 2004) but also stimulating place attachment and sense of place (Jones 2016).
88 Additionally, on a specular perspective, it has also been acknowledged that the recognition of social
89 aspects is also fundamental in engineering assessments, retrofit interventions or technical analyses
90 (e.g. human comfort or energy efficiency) aiming to revitalize historic towns and buildings (Lucchi et al.
91 2019).

92 The need to maximize the value stemming from public and private expenditures, together with the will
93 of enabling social inclusion and finding sustainable solutions able to safeguard the preservation of less-
94 known built heritage resources, have then favored the development of projects combining conservation,
95 restoration and re-use of historical buildings with the achievement of social goals (point 3). In this
96 context, the adaptive reuse of buildings (Aigwi et al. 2019; Plevoets and Sowińska-Heim 2018) and the
97 engagement of local communities are strategies that have been implemented so far in order to extend
98 the relevance of built heritage for local targets and enable both the preservation of heritage and the
99 socio-economic sustainability of the interventions.

100 Overall, the development of awareness about built heritage as a possible agent of change has led to
101 some reflections about the “social impact” engendered by projects concerning built heritage resources.
102 However, it must be noted that multiple definitions of social impact exist, and they may vary according
103 to the discipline and field of application, such as environmental studies (Burdge and Vanclay 1996),
104 program evaluation (W.K. Kellogg Foundation 2017), third sector (Zamagni et al. 2015), etc. In line with
105 the terminology mainly used in the program evaluation field, in this paper we will use the term social
106 impact to indicate the medium/long term effects of given interventions. In fact, even though the use of
107 social impact in the cultural heritage literature may assume different nuances, it is possible to state that
108 the term generally makes reference to the changes engendered by a project on individuals,
109 communities and even society at large. The types of effects explored by scholars are various and they
110 frequently include: residents and/or visitors’ perceptions about projects aiming to enhance the local built
111 heritage (or even perceptions’ linked to its decline, as described in Amin 2018); the wellbeing and quality
112 of life of residents (Mohaddes Korassani et al. 2019; Murzyn-Kupisz 2013); the degree and quality of
113 community life; sense of place and attachment (Amin 2018); local community involvement and local
114 capacity building (Mohaddes Korassani et al. 2019). Then, an alternative (or complementary) approach
115 is the application of indicators and metrics, which are frequently expressed under the form of counts -
116 e.g. number of participants in a given cultural activity, number of volunteers engaged, number of new
117 jobs, etc.-, amounts -e.g. amount of euros collected from visits to a regenerated site- or percentages -

118 e.g. percentage of increase in the number of visitors- (Nocca 2017). However, in addition to single
119 qualitative and/or quantitative approaches, the evaluation disciplines have then developed more
120 specific - and sometimes hybrid- methods. In fact, with the introduction of social aspects and impacts,
121 traditional approaches and “pure” quantitative assessment methods have entered into crisis.

122 **3 Achieving and evaluating social impacts of built heritage projects: some** 123 **approaches**

124 Overall, the evaluation frameworks that are usually applied to the evaluation of social impacts are: 1)
125 multicriteria (or dashboard) models, which are especially used when multiple dimensions and criteria
126 need to be weighted and considered; 2) synthetic models, which tend to express into monetary terms
127 the value created; 3) processual models, which are particularly recommended when new value chains
128 and relationships among stakeholders are created (Camoletto et al. 2017).

129 Among the methods that take into account a variety of criteria, an interesting path is the one
130 experimented by S. Mohaddes Korassani and colleagues (2019). Researchers evaluated the social
131 impact of restoration works addressed to a historic fortress in the context of a life cycle management
132 model: firstly, social themes (e.g. health and safety, wages, experiences, wellbeing, cultural
133 development, access to tangible resources, employment, community involvement) and stakeholders
134 (e.g. workers, local communities, consumers, society and actors involved in the value chain) were
135 identified; secondly, appropriate indicators (i.e. semiquantitative in their case) were selected and thirdly
136 a scoring system (a range from -2 to +2, where -2 indicates a not acceptable performance, 0 a
137 performance aligned with international standards and +2 an ideal performance) was adopted; authors
138 calculated “social topic scores”, “stakeholder scores” and then the “total score”.

139 From the point of view of synthetic and financial analysis models, it is useful to recall the experimentation
140 of SROI (Social Return on Investment): this approach is frequently adopted, since it does not only allow
141 to express the value created into monetary terms, but it is also suitable to be incorporated into
142 multicriteria analyses (Camoletto et al. 2017).

143 As highlighted by the practices of organizations focusing on the conservation and valorization of the
144 historical built heritage - such as The Churches Conservation Trust (<https://www.visitchurches.org.uk/>)
145 and the Architectural Heritage Fund (<http://ahfund.org.uk/>) – the adoption of processual models from
146 the very beginning of a project may be very fruitful too. For instance, the Logic Model and Theory of
147 Change frameworks prescribe to follow a “*plan backward, implement forward*” way of operating,
148 recommending to firstly outline the desired impacts and then identify outcomes, outputs and inputs (W.K.
149 Kellogg Foundation 2017; Camoletto et al. 2017; Coryn et al. 2011). In addition, the Theory of Change
150 also describes how and why an intervention or project fosters planned and unplanned changes in a
151 given context, with reference to specific outcomes, targets and stakeholders (Morra-Imas and Rist 2009,
152 p. 152; Funnell and Rogers 2011). In both the frameworks, a clear definition of impacts, outcomes etc.
153 from the very beginning of the project is essential not only to guide operational steps but also to inform
154 evaluation (e.g. methods to be followed, metrics to be monitored...), which is seen as an integral part
155 of the whole process.

156 Coherently with this background, in the next paragraph we will describe how the application of a
157 processual and evaluative approach to the regeneration of a system of historical farmhouses located in
158 the nearby of Turin (Italy) could not only facilitate the collaborative definition of social objectives but also
159 favor their achievement and the generation of additional value.

160 **4 Enhancing value through an evaluative and social impact-oriented** 161 **framework: the system of historical farmhouses in Volpiano (Turin, Italy)**

162 In 2015 the Municipality of Volpiano – i.e. a town of about 15 thousand inhabitants located 16 km North-
163 East of Turin (Italy) - encouraged a collaborative agenda with some local stakeholders (such as the
164 Politecnico di Torino university and bank foundations) to promote the cultural values of a system of
165 historical farmhouses while maintaining agricultural production and enabling economic sustainability
166 (Coscia and Russo 2018; Testù and Machiorletti 2016). The analytical and decisional processes were
167 conducted adopting an original and innovative perspective, i.e. integrating principles of corporate social
168 responsibility (CSR). Management guidelines for the conversion of this system of farmhouses into a
169 sustainable and multifunctional production system, in which the feasibility check was tested by a
170 "hybrid" set of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods, were then provided accordingly. In this
171 paper we want to report an advancement of the initial CSR approach, incorporating a social-impact
172 oriented key.

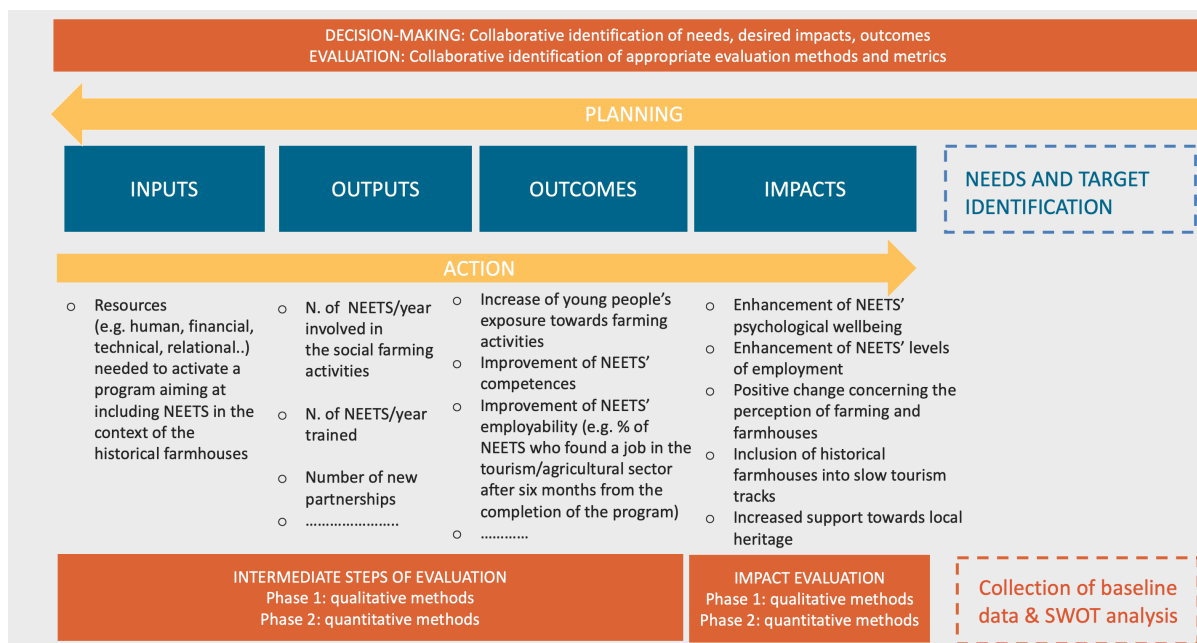
173 In order to propose a feasible project consistent with a CSR perspective, preliminary considerations
174 were performed and different evaluation methods were applied. More specifically, the evaluation
175 approaches and methodological phases adopted to identify the most beneficial scenario were the
176 following: 1) SWOT analysis; 2) stakeholder analysis and mapping; 3) community impact analysis (CIA)
177 and 4) costs-revenues analysis carried out under a CSR perspective. SWOT analysis and techniques
178 of stakeholder analysis and mapping were carried out paying particular attention to a set of contextual
179 dimensions (e.g. accessibility, demographics, socio-economic trends and conditions, agricultural and
180 industrial activities...): the interrelation between the two instruments was considered essential not only
181 for its ability to critically analyze the context but also to highlight the initial social pact between the
182 subjects involved. For its suitability to inform the decisional process, SWOT analysis is in fact frequently
183 integrated with other evaluation tools (as recently performed for instance by Bottero et al. 2020, who
184 integrated the SWOT analysis into a structured analytic hierarchy process). The stakeholder analysis
185 took into account not only decision makers and institutions but also private entrepreneurs, the local
186 population and temporary users of the areas under consideration; community impact analysis was
187 performed preliminarily identifying the social groups potentially affected by the interventions; finally,
188 costs and revenues analysis aimed to verify the economic sustainability and profitability of the
189 hypothesized interventions. Overall, evaluations led to a proposal focusing on the renewal of 5
190 farmhouses characterized by accessibility, the presence of agricultural production activities and
191 expected low costs of planned restoration works (Coscia and Russo 2018). More precisely, the selected
192 project advanced to integrate the cultural and economic dimensions with a social one, i.e. proposing
193 the implementation of a multifunctional agriculture model that combined traditional and new cultivations
194 (i.e. crops and hazelnuts respectively) with social farming activities (i.e. ortho-therapy, ortho-didactics,
195 bare-foot paths, pet therapy). On the one hand, investors took advantage of "green" incentives, but on
196 the other one they renounced to a part of the profits and of the risk premium to favor the fulfillment of
197 social functions that could benefit the community at large, coherently with a CSR perspective (Coscia
198 and Russo 2018). In other words, objectives strictly linked to the enhancement of local agricultural
199 production were combined with the intention of improving the quality of life in rural areas, increasing
200 occupational opportunities and improving the attractive power of the areas through diversification.

201 If on the one hand this scenario definitely took into account the social dimension (with reference to both
202 the methods followed, the identified objectives and the recommended functions), on the other one it is

203 possible to suggest that the shift towards a social impact-oriented approach could not only further
204 strengthen the social outcomes of the project but also influence the planning processes and the
205 evaluation strategies adopted. In fact, the adoption of processual methods and of a logic model finalized
206 to the explicit achievement of social goals would entail the more robust and cross-cutting use of
207 qualitative-quantitative assessment tools aimed at: 1) a deeper recognition of the needs to be fulfilled,
208 especially with reference to specific targets: in fact, the recognition of the needs is a fundamental step
209 to inform the definition of goals and strategies; 2) the identification of the desired impacts, followed by
210 a more granular definition of outcomes, outputs and inputs; 3) the collaboration among stakeholders
211 since the very beginning of the project, as to share responsibility in the decision making process and in
212 the definition of objectives and indicators; 4) a clear definition since the initial phases of the evaluation
213 strategies, methods and metrics to be followed. In fact, the adoption of an impact-oriented approach
214 would transform a simple collaborative agenda into a real partnership of different stakeholders (i.e.
215 Municipality, university, owners of farmhouses, local entrepreneurs, associations operating in the third
216 sector...) able not only to generate innovative solutions to pre-identified problems but also create value
217 (e.g. institutional, relational, reputational...) rightly through collaboration. In this sense, the qualitative
218 tools of the SWOT and above all of the stakeholder and network analysis (Coscia and Zanetta 2018)
219 interrelated with the CIA can both strengthen the detailed analysis of the responsibilities and impacts
220 by subject and inform economic-managerial analysis in a "social" sense. In more empirical terms, this
221 would translate into the description of the processes triggered among stakeholders and into the
222 monitoring of the outcomes of the activities, e.g. according to the indicators collaboratively defined in
223 the decisional phases of the project. Overall, the inclusion of a specific social objective in the realm of
224 the proposed interventions could offer the possibility to enhance the overall value of the project itself,
225 especially for identified social targets. In fact, engaging specific segments into the activities organized
226 in the historical farmhouses (and inspired to social agriculture principles) would allow to make local built
227 heritage more relevant for larger portions of the local community, possibly activating virtuous cycles of
228 support.

229 For instance, the implementation of a specific program aiming to favor the social inclusion of not in
230 education, employment or training youths (also known as NEETS) could be integrated into the
231 multifunctional model already proposed for the system of historical farmhouses of Volpiano. The NEETS
232 phenomenon interests countries across all Europe, and a recent report has illustrated that, among
233 European countries, Italy counts the highest percentage of NEETS (Eurostat 2019). According to the
234 same report, NEETS are distributed in cities as well as suburbs, towns and rural areas, and the cost of
235 their inactivity for the Italian state has been estimated in 36 billion euros in 2016 (Fagnani 2017). For
236 several reasons, the elaboration of strategies and programs able to facilitate the socio-economic
237 inclusion of this particular segment of young people are thus particularly needed and should inform
238 national and local agendas. Recent examples show that social agricultural programs have been
239 implemented in Italy to mitigate NEETS' personal discomfort, enhance their wellbeing and facilitate their
240 integration in the job market (Centro Nazionale di Documentazione e analisi per l'infanzia e
241 l'adolescenza 2018; Finzi and Romero Aranda 2016). Additionally, also the promotion of local cultural
242 heritage has been identified as a promising initiative to engage NEETS, suggesting that the
243 experimentation of social agriculture programs in the context of the *mise en valeur* of historical
244 farmhouses could be particularly fruitful. In this view, the adoption of a collaborative and impact-oriented
245 approach would allow both to help public actions and enrich the CSR approach, which usually largely
246 relies on the attitudes of single entrepreneurs. In this case, the responsibility and achievement of social

247 goals would be shared among different stakeholders, instead. In the case of Volpiano the social theme
 248 of the NEETS could be firstly declined and highlighted in the SWOT and subsequently related to the
 249 analysis of the impacts and of the stakeholders, both at the scale of the farm system and at the enlarged
 250 one of the peri-urban area. Figure 1 (Fig. 1) graphically shows the suggested process, making reference
 251 to the specific intervention concerning NEETS and the historical farmhouse system of Volpiano.
 252



253
 254 Figure 1. Enhancing the social value of built heritage projects: applying a social impact-oriented approach in the
 255 strategical phase (source: authors' own elaboration).

256 If qualitative and processual analyses could be performed to map the value created by the collaborative
 257 approach, indicators such as the percentage of participants who found a job after six months from the
 258 completion of the program, the number of volunteers adhering to local social agriculture initiatives, the
 259 increase of awareness about the historical value of the farmhouses, etc. could be employed to evaluate
 260 the social outcomes and impacts engendered by the project. Additionally, an estimation in monetary
 261 terms of the value created by the program could be performed too, also considering the costs avoided
 262 for public finances thanks to the potential overcoming of the NEET status by some of the participants
 263 to the program. Finally, it must be underlined that such estimate will influence the subsequent
 264 quantitative phase: in fact, it will provide new factors to be introduced in the items of the financial-
 265 management analysis and in the identification of the threshold values of the profitability indicators of
 266 the management Discounted Cash Flow Analysis.

267 5 Conclusions

268 The inclusion of evaluation procedures from the very beginning of a built heritage project, throughout
 269 its development and after its completion represents with no doubt a cost. However, the adoption of
 270 evaluative thinking could be overall considered more as a sort of investment rather than a simple cost,
 271 since it is useful to: 1) clearly define the goals, impacts, outcomes, outputs and inputs of a project; 2)
 272 foster collaboration among stakeholders since the very beginning, encouraging shared responsibility
 273 and a cooperative definition of the desired objectives and actions; 3) incorporate monitoring activities

274 throughout the project, as to timely check whether intermediate and final objectives have been achieved
275 or not and then perform prompt corrections if needed; 4) describe and estimate the change generated
276 by the project, also in light of the accountability framework; 5) possibly express in monetary terms the
277 value engendered by the performed actions; 6) not only build human and institutional capital but also
278 provide useful data for future local planning and development. As shown in the case study of the
279 historical farmhouses of Volpiano (Italy), the adoption of a social impact-oriented approach that explicitly
280 includes the achievement of social goals may not only strengthen the CSR approach but also overall
281 extend the relevance of built heritage projects, thus functioning as a catalyst of value. Additionally, it
282 can be added that the accomplishment of social goals may not only represent a benefit in itself but also
283 enable well-being conditions favoring the activation of positive behaviors and support towards heritage.
284 Given this framework, next steps of future research could be represented by the investigation of these
285 new, more extended value chains, as to better understand and quantify the added value of built heritage
286 projects encompassing social goals.

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