



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



**RICHERS**

RENEWAL, INNOVATION AND CHANGE:  
HERITAGE AND EUROPEAN SOCIETY

**RENEWAL, INNOVATION & CHANGE: HERITAGE AND  
EUROPEAN SOCIETY (RICHERS)**

**RICHERS Taxonomy of cultural heritage definitions**

**JULY 2015**

## INTRODUCTION

RICHERS is a research project funded by the European Commission within the 7th Framework Programme in the domain of Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities. Its main objective is to reduce the distance between people and culture, recalibrating the relationship between heritage professionals and heritage users in order to maximise cultural creativity and ensure that the whole European community can benefit from the social and economic potential of cultural heritage.

This policy brief presents evidence and recommendations emerging from the research undertaken during the first year of RICHES and the establishment of its conceptual framework. The RICHES research programme is located within the broad context of debates and discussion about the value, preservation, promotion and future of Europe's Cultural Heritage (CH).

As CH institutions are rethinking and remaking themselves, shifting from traditional to renewed practices of CH representation and promotion, using new technologies and digital facilities, new meanings associated with terms such as "preservation", "digital library" or "virtual performance" emerge every day. With the absence of a common Taxonomy in Europe, a variety of definitions of these CH-related concepts are shared and used interchangeably, making the task of research and recognition difficult.

The RICHES Taxonomy of terms, concepts and definitions aims to:

- ensure appropriate academic, professional and technical standards for research are met in identifying, analysing and understanding both existing ways and new models for defining CH and CH practices.
- develop a common CH language to serve the interests of the wider CH community including: policy-makers, cultural ministries of member states, regional, national and state authorities, public administrations, European institutions and researchers and professionals generally.

## EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

This policy brief aims to consider whether CH communities have a clear understanding and a coherent framework to use when addressing social and cultural issues, including technical, organisational, legal, economic and educational issues and the question of standards and audit/certification. The RICHES Taxonomy addresses the rise of new CH concepts, considering their multiple dimensions and their meanings which have and can vary and shift in unpredictable and unexpected ways. RICHES has acknowledged that there is currently a genuine lack of a clear, shared understanding of what CH is, how it is interpreted, and communicated differently in the digital age, and what questions it should be seeking to answer for the future.

The RICHES Taxonomy has been developed in response to the emergence of new terms and concepts that are used in the context of CH in contemporary European society. Of particular significance in this respect is the way digital environments have impacted upon the management, interpretation, communication, preservation and reception of CH (for instance, terms such as 'digital archiving', 'digital curation' and 'digital preservation' are now commonly used).

CH is experiencing a rebirth partly due to the uptake of new technologies. More than ever, CH is seen as an essential asset of a globalised, digitally-literate society, key to the preservation of our memory, involving the protection of rights (including copyright), and the making of collections in digital / electronic form for sustainable and accessible use over the long-term.

The application of digital technologies to transmit various forms of CH has already demonstrated enormous benefits, including cost reduction, enhanced visibility and social, cultural and educational inclusion. However, this process also gives rise to very real challenges such as: understanding individual and collective identity, belonging and cohesion in a changing European context; the effect of changing technologies on knowledge transfer, skills, production and reproduction, and new trends in the European economy. All need to be recognised, understood and managed by those involved in CH-related work.

To consider these developments, RICHES adopted a multidisciplinary and collaborative research process, with the objective of providing a better understanding of the current situation for the benefit of all stakeholders in the CH community. The analysis has focussed on different scenarios in the context of change in which European CH is transmitted, and on the implications for future CH practices. This proved to be a challenge, as some concepts have a wide-ranging and sometime conflicting usage. It was crucial to ensure that terms were relevant, linked to RICHES research, and connected with the frameworks that will be put in place – whether from a cultural, legal, financial, educational, or technical perspective.

In undertaking this evaluation, consultation took place between academics, researchers, professionals, scientists and students working in the different areas and disciplines of CH worldwide. This methodological approach provided the necessary resources, references and fresh perspectives required, achieving a set of concise, considered and tested definitions for the Taxonomy. The adoption of the definitions of the RICHES Taxonomy by the wider CH community, and most importantly, by policy-makers across Europe, will enable an improved, inclusive and forward-looking implementation of existing policies and practices in the field.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Main recommendations emerging from the research**

- CH-related terms, concepts and definitions should address diversified strategies and scenarios, as well as take into account the constant evolution of practices and the growth of innovation currently witnessed in the sector.

- Developing a shared CH lexicon requires close and enduring interaction between multiple stakeholders, including CH institutions and research organisations, policy-makers and civil society. These interactions hold the promise of enabling organic, grounded articulations of meanings and understandings, which can respond to and follow the evolution of the tools, phenomena and processes they describe. Whilst meanings and terms are always bound to change and shift, such interactions are important as they constitute the basis for ensuring that novelty and innovation are shared and meet wide stakeholder consensus. To work towards greater synergies, event-based interactions should be encouraged alongside longer-term networks and partnerships.
- It is crucial to work towards a common research culture in the EU, which values multi- and inter-disciplinarity, diversity and inclusiveness in ways that do not undermine the clarity, validity and reliability of terminologies and theoretical and methodological frameworks. For this reason, it is important to create the conditions and hubs for open debate (one positive step in this direction that could be made would be the inclusion of the Taxonomy as a discussion topic in all relevant, forthcoming events). Questions and concerns as well as outcomes and innovative approaches may then be shared in order to optimise the benefit for research groups, individuals, experts, CH managers, stakeholders and policy-makers worldwide.
- An internationalist approach is essential in order to understand renewal in CH practices, and the need to integrate a full range of perspectives represented by different minorities, groups and cultures. This approach can be consolidated by encouraging CH institutions to adopt inclusive, democratic practices in CH curation, preservation and communication, which value and capitalise upon a variety of voices - those of visitors, users and European citizens more widely.
- Some of the most promising approaches for bridging the gap between institutional and citizen understandings of CH, such as co-creative practices and crowdsourcing, should be encouraged and adopted on a wider scale. It is important, therefore, to develop and consolidate channels and mechanisms for sharing and learning from, and building upon, best practices. Institutions should be encouraged and supported in the evaluation of such practices, and in sharing results within the wider cultural sector to promote institutional goals and European social development.
- Endorsement of the Taxonomy by the European Commission is, therefore, recommended. Such an endorsement could take the form of an appropriately referenced use of the Taxonomy's terms and definitions in official reports and communications, as well as in the Commission's CH-related programmes (such as the European Heritage Days, EU Prize for Cultural Heritage, European Heritage Label, and H2020 research projects).

### **Constraining factors and challenges emerging from the research**

It is acknowledged that policy-makers face constraints and challenges from a number of different directions. The research within RICHES and the methods implemented in developing the RICHES Taxonomy have helped not only in the observation and analysis of tensions manifested by the effect of digital technology in cultural arenas, but also in the detection of emerging trends in the preservation, promotion and diffusion of CH. In that sense, the main challenges today are:

- **The fast pace in which technology evolves:** it is widely recognized that the capability of computing power and information technology doubles every twelve to eighteen months. The rapid development of digital and virtual technologies will bring about paradigm shifts: an accelerating process of adaptability, transformation and exponential growth within the CH sector will reach unprecedented heights in the next, few years.
- **Lack of technological knowledge and skills gaps:** underinvestment in specific training for cultural managers in the advances of technology may result in a lack of knowledge of new technologies and their possibilities. Domains such as technological creativity and digitization are fast-paced and in constant flux. It is imperative that cultural managers and

strategy designers keep up with current advances and share a common ground of understanding.

- **Barriers to engagement and methods for exploitation:** engagement with new practices in the field of CH and choosing the correct initiatives to promote physical and digital CH content is sometimes difficult. Policy-makers need to know the specific language in order to develop creative and innovative approaches and implement new strategies to bring about an effective and sustainable exploitation of CH in the digital age.
- **Long-term sustainability of crowdsourcing approaches:** open, collaborative approaches towards CH research have been proven to be effective. However, after the initial momentum, it is important that stakeholders' interest does not fade. For any collaborative research initiative, such as the Taxonomy, to withstand the test of time, it needs to continue to maintain the cooperation of the community, providing updates and adding new concepts to ensure that it remains significant as a source of knowledge.
- **Keeping CH research relevant for society:** CH research must provide value to key stakeholders. In this sense, the RICHES Taxonomy can serve as a prime example, as it has curated a shared lexicon with which to talk about CH and to facilitate stakeholder communication for creative and academic endeavours.

The challenge for policy-makers is to think about the new dimensions that the advent of innovative technologies and other societal changes have brought to the fields of CH and CH-based practices, and then to determine a coherent and interdisciplinary framework of understanding. The RICHES Taxonomy is now a resource which provides a forward-looking approach in helping to anticipate developments, overcome barriers and exploit opportunities in the context of change; it is a baseline of terms and definitions that can be applied and referenced in multiple CH practices and scenarios across Europe.

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

A variety of definitions of CH-related concepts are shared and used interchangeably, making the task of research and recognition difficult and complicated. Having this challenge in mind, the research carried out by RICHES involved an iterative process in order to develop a re-conceptualization of terms and definitions normally used in the CH context. The research methodology included desk research and a collaborative process of debate and reflection between project partners and external experts; this included an open workshop organised in Barcelona. The research phases undertaken to develop the RICHES Taxonomy have been:

**Phase 1 - Setting an initial list of terms and definitions to build upon.** At a very early stage of the project, an initial list of general terms and definitions related to the RICHES fields of research was created and sorted into various categories. This first phase was concluded around mid-April 2014, with a list of 100 terms and 97 definitions.

**Phase 2 - Building the Project's Foundation.** In order to engage more widely with CH specialists and interested members of the public, to gather more ideas, compare terms and reach new definitions, a dedicated workshop, entitled *Building the Project's Foundation*, was held in May 2014 in Barcelona. As a result, new terms and definitions and insights and views from the public were gathered to explore in more depth.

**Phase 3 - Constituting an Editorial Team.** By the end of the workshop, the RICHES Taxonomy comprised a list of 158 terms and an Editorial Team was formed to oversee the next stage of the process. This involved providing a structure for taxonomic definitions, merging, reshaping terms and considering them within the scope of the RICHES' objectives.



and beyond, based upon new developments and stakeholders' feedback. Now is the time to start to embed the Taxonomy and work towards ensuring the successful realisation of its objectives. The Taxonomy will:

- provide a means for an integrated, unified **and global approach** to the lexicon of CH;
- be a new, **living tool** which will support and add rigour to research methodologies in CH fields;
- offer a **space for discussion and reflection**, a virtual space for dialogue and debate;
- evolve, adapt and expand in a dynamic way in order to capture and represent innovation and novelty in the CH domain.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

### PROJECT NAME

RICHS: Renewal, Innovation and Change: Heritage and European Society

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### COORDINATOR

COVENTRY UNIVERSITY (COVUNI)

Coventry, United Kingdom

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### CONSORTIUM

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STICHTING NATIONAAL MUSEUM VAN WERELDCULTUREN (RMV LEIDEN)

Leiden, The Netherlands

STICHTING WAAG SOCIETY (WAAG)

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

THE UNIVERSITY OF EXETER (UNEXE)

Exeter, United Kingdom

PROMOTER SRL (PROMOTER)

Pisa, Italy

FUNDACIO PRIVADA I2CAT, INTERNET I INNOVACIO DIGITAL A CATALUNYA (I2CAT)

Barcelona, Spain

SYDDANSK UNIVERSITET (SDU)

Odense, Denmark

STIFTUNG PREUSSISCHER KULTURBESITZ (SPK)

Berlin, Germany

TURKIYE CUMHURİYETİ KÜLTÜR VE TURİZM BAKANLIĞI (KYGM)

Ankara, Turkey

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## FUNDING SCHEME

FP7 Framework Programme for Research of the European Union  
SSH.2013.5.2-2 Transmitting and benefiting from cultural heritage in Europe

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## DURATION

December 2013 - May 2016 (30 months)

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## BUDGET

EU contribution: 2,432,356 €

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## WEBSITE

RICHERS website: <http://www.riches-project.eu/>

RICHERS resources website: <http://resources.riches-project.eu/>

RICHERS blog on Digital Meets Culture: <http://www.digitalmeetsculture.net/riches/>

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact RICHERS project by writing to [info@riches-project.eu](mailto:info@riches-project.eu)

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Use the hashtag #richesEU to join the RICHERS Project community on Twitter.

Subscribe to the RICHERS Project YouTube channel: [www.youtube.com/richesEU](http://www.youtube.com/richesEU)

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## FURTHER READING

RICHERS Booklet, <http://www.digitalmeetsculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/RICHES-Booklet.pdf>

D2.1 CH Definitions and Taxonomy ([http://www.digitalmeetsculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/RICHES-D2.1-CH-Definitions-and-Taxonomy\\_public.pdf](http://www.digitalmeetsculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/RICHES-D2.1-CH-Definitions-and-Taxonomy_public.pdf)) – RICHERS theoretical framework of interrelated terms and definitions, within which further research may be conducted and shared and CH-related practices may be further developed.

V. Bachi, A. Fresa, C. Pierotti, C. Prandoni, The Digitization Age: Mass Culture is Quality Culture. Challenges for cultural heritage and society, Digital Heritage. Progress in Cultural Heritage: Documentation, Preservation, and Protection (5th Euromed International Conference Proceedings), 2014, DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-13695-0\_81 ([http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-13695-0\\_81](http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-13695-0_81))