

The SDGs as a useful tool in vernacular architecture management: The case of “17 objectives and a map”

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Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contribute to unite cities, organizations, local governments, and people networks, sharing transformation policies and challenges for the future of the planet. At present, cultural heritage is widely recognised as a fundamental pillar in the achievement of the SDGs in the coming years. Focused on people and their work to place culture, education, heritage, art and social development as a focal point, a project has been developed by the hand of the Jaume I University (Castellón). "17 objectives and a map" is a project based on the 17 SDGs, which emphasizes the importance of traditional crafts, construction techniques and the heritage conservation to achieve the global goals. The history of construction shows that vernacular architecture have always been creative in adapting and optimizing buildings using the local resources available to fulfill people's needs in the best way. In this process -in a natural and sustainable way- climatic, economic, social and cultural factors have been taken into account. During the first phase of the project (years 2020 and 2021) workshops where heritage communities exchanged experiences and good practices improving mutual learning, were developed in a playful and fluid way, identifying and extracting SDG messages from different projects. With the help of specific designed toolkits, heritage communities became aware of the importance of sustainable actions to transform the heritage future. After several months of workshop, the results of this first phase served the participants to review their projects from an SDG perspective and to restructure some points of them in favor of a more sustainable future. Also, the results constituted an excellent starting point to work, in a pioneering way, in the field of the SDGs from a heritage perspective.

Keywords: cultural heritage, sustainable development goals, participation, heritage communities

1. Introduction

In 2015, all UN Member States adopted 17 Goals as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015), planning to achieve the Goals in 15 years. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are, broadly speaking, a call for action to protect the planet and put an end to poverty, a priori unattainable. This global purpose must be achieved at all levels, not only as an objective imposed by

central governments (global action), but also it should involve local governments, cities and local administrations and authorities (local action) as well as, and more importantly, involve society (action by people). UN also established the importance of people to achieve the objectives. In this scenario, everybody should be taken into account, since without people, associations or civil society, the SDGs could just finish being a simple list of intentions¹.

¹ Data obtained from the United Nations (UN)

The SDGs were a revision of the Millennium Goals, which were formalized in 2005. There were 8 goals and, at that moment, the role of culture was completely ignored.

1.1. SDG and culture

In the revision carried in 2015, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization established that culture was the fundamental axis to articulate the 2030 agenda (UNESCO, 2014). Culture had a decisive role to play in the SDGs: each of the 17 goals could be considered in some way relevant to culture.

The research presented aims to demonstrate how small communities play a key role in the implementation of the SDG, although often, they are not aware of it, it also plans to sketch a list of lines of action and good practices to improve and measure their efforts. This study could be considered a permanent observatory framework of the SDGs in the cultural heritage sector.

Cities are hives of ideas, culture, science, productivity for social and economic development. Citizen participation is essential to preserve the historical heritage of cities as it is a key agent in the governance and management of them. For the purpose of the work, participation has been measured in the heritage communities, including both public and private stakeholders working on value-sharing practices of cultural heritage.

2. Heritage communities in rural environments

The depopulation of rural areas is a problem that affects a large part of the so-called developing countries, Spain among them. With the overcrowding of urban areas due to the feigned improvement in employment opportunities and the consequent displacement of the population, the smaller provinces and especially the interior

villages, have been facing exponential losses of its younger inhabitants, for decades, generating aged and emptied towns.

This rural exodus affects the economy of the area, the basic services for its inhabitants and the maintenance of material and natural assets. Consequently, the cultural and natural heritage results unprotected, abandoned and little by little, ruined. It should be pointed out that, until a few years ago, traditional or vernacular architecture was considered second-class heritage scattered throughout the territory in comparison with the first-class monuments that enrich large cities. This "emptied Spain" generates a devaluation of the rural world, a shortage of appreciation for the rural heritage value that requires an increase in effort in citizen concern and participation.

The province of Castellón is a good example of this. According to data (INE, 2021) it is made up of 135 municipalities, and 86% of them are settlements of less than 5,000 inhabitants and 19 of them less than 100.

Experts point out that the demographic recovery of these areas and the safeguarding of their cultural heritage requires the coordination of special strategies between neighboring populations achieving a more efficient use of resources. Experts also recommend to implement measures that generate benefits for the inhabitants generating specialization strategies that capitalize on their singular resources, basing the identification of opportunities on the specific resources of depopulated areas.²

The approach on citizen participation can, partially compensate the lack of public resources, since active communities contribute to the quality of life and well-being of local people through work and action. Above all, it can be a element of social cohesion, generator of cultural identity and pride of belonging (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación, 2018).

² According to the Action Plan for the implementation of the 2030 agenda of the Government of Spain, in its analysis of SDG11 highlights that "there is a marked aging of the population and a high rate of rural depopulation" and poses several challenges.

<http://www.exteriores.gob.es/portal/es/saladeprensa/multimedia/publicaciones/documents/plan%20de%20accion%20para%20la%20implementacion%20de%20la%20agenda%202030.pdf>

Among those active communities that rescue, emphasize and claim the regeneration of their territory in this work, those that work for their heritage are highlighted: “people who value specific

twenty years, has presented the work of the university in the territory, under guidelines of democratization and expansion of access to it in cultural fields. In this way, the work of PEU-UJI,

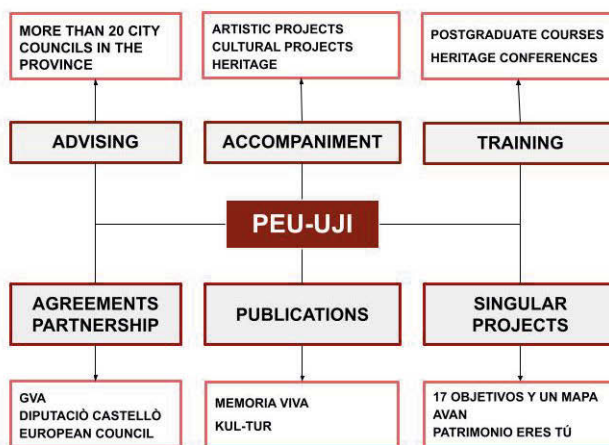


Fig. 1. Main lines of action and distribution of the projects (Source: Author based in data from PEU-UJI, 2022).

aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations” (Faro Convention, 2005).

Faro Convention (2005) defined the concept of “heritage community” in such a way that it remains inextricably linked to the definition of cultural heritage. In the context of the Faro Convention Action Plan (2018) the definition was enhanced as self-organised, self-managed groups of individuals who are interested in progressive social transformation of relationships between peoples, places and stories, with an inclusive approach based on an enhanced definition of heritage (Faro Convention, 2005).

Depopulation is a fact. But so is the existence of a multitude of projects managed by heritage communities dedicated to the regeneration and safeguarding of rural areas.

3. The work of University Extension Program PEU-UJI

Since 2006, Jaume I University of Castellón, within its University Extension Program (PEU-UJI), manages a project called “Patrimoni”. PEU is a transversal program that, for more than

which works from the territory for the territory, becomes a vehicle for communication, cooperation and university approach to the existing social context in populations of less than 5,000 inhabitants. PEU-UJI currently has more than 50 lines of work active, which were born from the demand of citizens’ groups of these rural areas. These groups appeal to public university’s works for that irrefutable reality of depopulation of areas in the interior of the province, and the consequent lack of protection of its rich cultural heritage.

Therefore, it is not a project derived from a research exercise, but rather it is a service (facilities, professionals, public infrastructures) for the heritage communities that request it. In this way, a mutual commitment was born to reflect and evaluate the proactive and horizontal networking between local stakeholders the technicians of the university.

The *Patrimoni* project, born in 2006 within the PEU framework, focuses on the pedagogy of heritage through a model of accompaniment and technical assistance as well as the definition of common spaces for reflection,

debate, sharing and search for heritage management appropriate to each local group (Portolés, 2019). It is a collective process of revaluation of cultural heritage and citizen dynamization in rural environments.

Patrimoni works in the territory, a collective process of revaluing cultural heritage while seeking citizen involvement through dynamic actions in rural environments. Each town works at a certain rhythm and intensity, so each of these processes is unique and unrepeatable. The towns involved today in *Patrimoni* project through a collaboration agreement are Cirat, Costur, Culla, Benlloch, Montán, Mas de Noguera (Caudiel), Sant Rafel del Riu/Barri Castell (Ulldecona), Sot de Ferrer, Suera, Teresa, Todolella, Vilafranca, Vilanova d'Alcolea, Viver and Xodos.

A network of specialists, researchers and friends of the project work together with them so that this work system is articulated according to the recommendations of the Faro Convention: administrations, professionals and civil society join forces as intervening agents in relation to cultural heritage (Schoebel, 2018).

In addition, *Patrimoni* is an agglutinator of projects in the field, in such a way that it establishes alliances between each one of the accompaniment processes, obtaining common denominators for all of them, in such a way that it coordinates and generates supra-municipal projects and, sometimes, international. Some of these projects are: “#peopleplacesstories” created for 2018 Cultural Heritage Year to define together the concept, value and complexity of cultural heritage, “Los Taulons” a project which gather people from both sides of the river Sènia with the aim of developing heritage actions together or “Tota pedra fa paret” from La Fontanella cultural association in Costur created for the dissemination of dry

stone tradition. Occasionally, the goals to be achieved in the development of these projects that encompass different teams/communities are difficult to measure, and the scope and involvement of the heritage communities could be blurred.

In the case of the experience with the *17 objetivos y un mapa* project³, the work tried to quantify all these common objectives. As Fernando Prieto (2020), director of the Sustainability Observatory, explains, “what is not measured cannot be improved”. In this case, a work methodology is used to obtain concrete measurements and then employ them to improve implementation of the SDGs in the patrimonial territory.

4. Field work

The work is based on a general objective, implement the Sustainable Development Goals in all the projects that are part of the PEU groups, both in current and future practices, activities and processes.

The specific objectives to be achieved with the work are:

- Approximate the objectives of Sustainable Development and the 2030 Agenda to the social work communities of the PEU, breaking down the goals of each one of them and establishing relationships between SDGs and heritage.
- Identify goals and SDGs that characterize the work of the participants in the territorial sphere based on initiatives, actions and good practices of the different groups.
- Raise awareness among participating groups and communities about the need for all agents to work together and the potential of their actions to achieve a fairer, more inclusive and sustainable world.

³ <https://17ods-peuui.com/>

- Reach future commitments from the different communities to align their processes with the SDGs and work to achieve the specific objectives (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Participation process with members of PEU UJI and “Cultura y ciudadanía” from Ministry of Culture (Source: ARAE Patrimonio, 2020).

The starting point is disparate. While some participants, mainly those directly related to public administration, are familiar with the SDGs and have incorporated them into some of their daily practices, others are not familiar with them. Therefore, a flexible methodology is proposed to facilitate the indicated objectives and that adapts them to the circumstances of the participating groups.

One of the difficulties that the project has needed to resolve is the restrictions derived from the Pandemic caused by COVID 19. The work was initially conceived as a series of face-to-face participatory workshops, but the existing socio-sanitary situation in March 2020 led to a reformulation of the project and the methodology, adapting it to the circumstances existing at that time, taking advantage of the possibilities offered by technology today, but without giving up the physical tools that allow the sense of touch to be used in decision-making

4.1. Phase 1.1. Preparation of work material

A work kit (Fig. 3) was sent to each participant by snail mail. It consisted of a dark blue hexagon envelope of heavy weight paper, symbolizing SDG 17 (Partnerships to achieve the goals),

within which 17 tokens were included, one from each SDG. Following Zero Waste Philosophy, plastic waste from the workshop of a Valencian artisan was used for the tokens. The envelope included instructions for use and a QR that allowed direct access to the 17ODS-PEU UJI website created as a support resource for the project.



Fig. 3. Toolkit sent to all participants (Source: ARAE Patrimonio, 2020).

4.2. Phase 1.2. Work of associations

Using the toolkit received and with the support of the website, which helped them to understand different targets of every goal, each group worked on their own in the identification and analysis of the goals and objectives that were already part of their internal and external work processes. The internal work consists of discovering its strengths and weaknesses, and tries to identify them aligned with any of the SDGs. The participant's external job is to uncover opportunities and threats, and then try to align them with some SDGs. These analyses could be improved in the future work processed.

The first part of their work consisted of extracting 4 or 5 SDG in favor of which the organization, community or administration were actually working on. Then they selected the tokens and pasted them on the provided hexagon (around the central circle).

The second part of the activity consisted of becoming aware of the objectives that they would like to work towards throughout next months and place the tokens of those 3 or 4 goals outside the

hexagon, like satellites. Participants shared their results with the community in different Social networks with the hashtags #ODSterritorio and #ODSpatrimonio (Fig. 4).



Fig 4. Example working process toolkit (Source: ARAE Patrimonio, 2020).

Subsequently, organization and participants worked on the results with the aim of understanding the interests and common points among the participants and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships.

With the data collected, a big range of statistics were created to help to summarise the information.

The data showed that the heritage communities and other stakeholders work contributes in a wide range to the achievement of the SDGs, although there are a series of objectives that stand out above the others.

With the statistics created, the percentage of people who were already working on each SDG was extracted. Thus, it became apparent how some SDGs stood out from the others. For example, more than 70% were already working in their projects with the perspective of SDG number 5, *Gender Equality*.

In a general view, is possible to see in the general charts (Fig. 5) wich SDGs are the ones that are currently most worked by the participants. 4 *Quality education* and 5 *Gender equality*, and the work trends, those SDGs in which they would like to work in the future: 12 *Responsible consumption and production* and 15 *Life on land*.

Other way to analyze data is extracting results for each SDG, it allowed to note the importance of a given SDG in the activities of the participants. It's possible to see the relevance of number 4

General chart

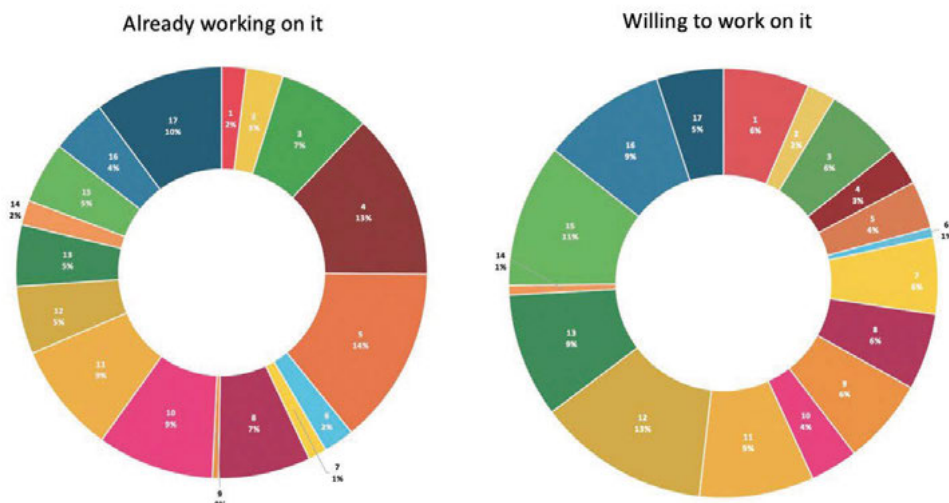


Fig. 5. Pie charts about percentage of people who were already working on / willing to work on each SDG (Source: ARAE Patrimonio, 2020).

“Quality Education” in the current practices of the different teams -more than 70% of participants were already working on it- or the future trend in working on SDG number 12 “Responsible consumption and production” (Fig. 6).

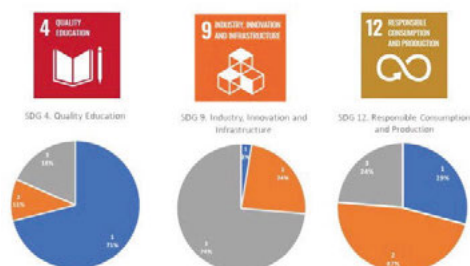


Fig 6. Pie charts extracted from the responses of participants in phase 1 (ARAE Patrimonio, 2022).

With the aim of understanding the real interests of the participants, current practices and future ones were analyzed, obtaining those SDGs with stronger presence in the participants. It allowed the organization to connect groups from different fields but with similar interest in SDG in micronets where stakeholders could share ideas, Best Practices, debate about how to focus on SDG, how to measure progress in one SDG or target etc. As can be seen in Fig. 7, Objectives 4, 5, 11, 12 and 17 stand out above the rest.

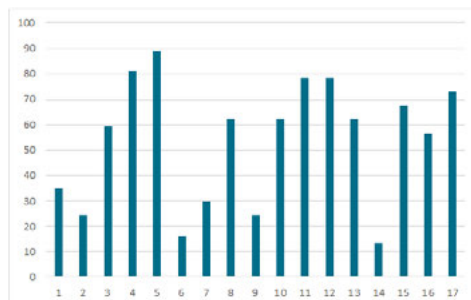


Fig 7. Statistics about SDG (% of people) interested in each SDG (already working + willing to work on it) (Source: ARAE Patrimonio, 2022).

4.3. Next steps. Phase 2

The project is currently beginning its second phase, with the main objective, after the conclusions obtained in the first one, of creating

synergies that contribute to social and cultural transformation and enhance this multi-stakeholder partnerships -from different fields but with similar interest- that could share knowledge, ideas, experiences, etc. to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

After this first phase, it corresponds the establishment of a series of indicators, of valid quantitative or qualitative standards, that allow the monitoring and evaluation of the work carried out in each of the proposed goals. It will help the stakeholders to measure the degree of achievement of the proposed objectives.

5. Conclusions

The first phase of work allowed us to involve the community in the work in favor of a more sustainable, egalitarian future, through analysis, awareness and training on the goals related to their projects.

Specific resources and methodological tools were provided to allow individual reflection and team working, and each agent expressed their commitment to work on the SDGs from specific lines.

The results obtained in the first phase made it possible to understand the interests of the parties and to focus on those SDGs with which the different groups mostly identify. This allowed to formulate future work strategies that facilitate the continuity of the project.

After knowing and verifying the whole process of work of the heritage communities and their commitment, the aspiration in the current second phase is to build own indicators, in collaboration with these services and heritage communities, to make the hidden face of cultural heritage values visible.

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