



Research Article

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Albanian Civil Society and its Impact on Cultural Heritage Values on the Country's Development

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Abstract

Studies have shown that civil society associations play an essential role in preserving, documenting and promoting the cultural heritage of a country. They can engage in policy-making, lobbying, creating public awareness and practical projects to preserve and present cultural heritage. Civil society also plays a crucial role in shaping national identity and a sense of a country's past and cultural heritage. Through their activities, associations can help disseminate knowledge, raise awareness, and shape national identity. They impact the country's development through their participation in decision-making processes and the development of various projects for the development of cultural heritage. They can promote cultural tourism, create employment opportunities in the cultural sector and contribute to the country's economic growth. Cooperation between civil society associations and public institutions is essential to realize the common objectives of preserving the cultural heritage and developing the country. Experience shows that when there is good organizational and institutional cooperation, the results are more successful and sustainable, but this has yet to cause much interest in the scientific community. This article will focus on describing the role played by civil society in Albania in this process and highlighting some specific features of its participation. The goals and objectives of this study are to (1) describe civil society engaged in the heritage and the interaction between them; (2) describe how the role of civil societies is changing amid ongoing changes; (3) identify trends in the development of cooperation between national institutions of civil society.

Keywords: civil society, heritage, culture, politics, promotion, cooperation

1. Introduction

Albania has a robust legislative framework and a long tradition of safeguarding its cultural assets. The Venice Charter was inspired by the nation's participation in the II International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historical Monuments in 1964 (I.C.O.M.O.S., 1964). The fundamental Law No. 904844 took the place of 1971. Law No. 9048, dated 7.4.2003, "For Culture Heritage," validated the function of the Institute of Cultural Monuments (I.M.K.), an organization established in 1965 with the responsibility of overseeing and safeguarding cultural properties (Giusti, 2005).

In IPA II, the document outlining Albania's pre-accession instance to the E.U. (<https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180817-revised-indicativestrategy-paper-2014-2020-for-albania.pdf>), the close relationship between the preservation of cultural heritage and economic growth is particularly highlighted. One of the goals of the mid-and long-term governance plans (Strategy, 2017–2021, <https://kultura.gov.al/wpcontent/uploads/2021/02/finale-Strategjia-Kombetare-për-Kulturën-2019-2025-në-Anglisht.pdf>), has remained the strength of the cultural sector, as it was the only way to see the sector's progress in terms of social and economic factors. In the literature review on S.C.O.s and their impact on cultural heritage values and their connection to a country's development, there are several themes of particular importance. For example, we can consider the role of civil society organizations in preserving and promoting cultural heritage, where studies have shown that S.C.O.s play a significant role in the preservation, documentation, and promotion of a country's cultural heritage. They can engage in policy formulation, lobbying, raising public awareness and practical projects to preserve and present cultural heritage (<https://www.kultura.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Draft-dokumenti-Strategjia-Kombetare-për-Kulturën-2019-2025.pdf>). The contribution of S.C.O.s to shaping national identity, where civil society organizations play a key role in shaping national identity and a sense of contributing to the preservation, promotion, and care of cultural heritage in the country (I.O.H., 2011). Their influence is evident in several aspects. S.C.O.s in Albania have been active in identifying, documenting, and preserving the cultural heritage values of the country (https://www.agenda21culture.net/sites/default/files/files/documents/multi/c21_per_kulture.pdf).

They are engaged in protecting historical monuments, important cultural sites, traditions, customs, and unique practices. Through their programs and projects, they have created awareness and valued cultural heritage as a national common asset that should be preserved for future generations. S.C.O.s play an important role in the care and promotion of cultural heritage through public awareness and education. They organize exhibitions, seminars, workshops, and other activities to sensitize and inform people belonging to the past and cultural heritage of a country. Through their activities, they can help disseminate knowledge, increase awareness, and shape national identity. S.C.O.s have an impact on a country's development through their participation in decision-making processes and the development of various projects for the development of cultural heritage. They can promote cultural tourism, create employment opportunities in the cultural sector, and contribute to the country's economic growth (A.H.O.L.G.P.E., 2022). Collaboration between civil society organizations and public institutions is essential to achieve common objectives in the preservation of cultural heritage and the country's development (https://amshc.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Raport-Vjetor-2023-AMSHC_compressed.pdf). Experiences show that when there is good organizational and institutional cooperation, the results are more successful and sustainable. These themes and conclusions are based on a review of literature and studies in the fields of civil society, cultural heritage, and country development. It is important to continue research in these areas to better understand the influence and role of S.C.O.s in promoting cultural heritage and the development of the country (C.S.W.D., 2022). S.C.O.s have a significant impact on the cultural heritage values and their connection to the development of Albania. These organizations are concerned about the value of cultural heritage and the importance of its preservation. This helps shape public awareness and increase care for cultural heritage. S.C.O.s have also contributed to the development of cultural tourism in Albania (O.P.P., 2015). Through their activities, they promote cultural destinations, such as historical cities, unique cultural sites, and traditional events. This creates opportunities for local economic development and an increase in tourism in areas with cultural heritage. S.C.O.s play a crucial role in sharing knowledge and collaborating with other institutions, including state and academic institutions. This creates synergy and mutual cooperation in the preservation of cultural heritage and the development of long-term strategies to promote Albania's cultural identity (B.P., 2015). Civil society organizations in Albania play a significant role in preserving and promoting cultural heritage, as well as its connection to the country's development. Through their engagement, they contribute to the cultural identity of the country and

create a suitable environment for economic and tourist development. Considering that cultural heritage plays a significant role in shaping education, identity, culture, social environment, and economy, its role in the process of nation branding offers many opportunities. It can symbolize a particular place, traditional skills can be used to produce a specific and unique product, a new business can leverage heritage brands to promote and market its product, cultural and natural assets are important settings in films, advertisements, music videos, television industry, etc. A community-based approach, which is important and manifested as one of the "Strategic Objectives" of World Heritage - "5 C," means that the concept of stakeholders or interested parties is broad and inclusive. A stakeholder is an individual or group that has ownership or legitimate interest and can influence the conservation and management of the object, as well as anyone expressing interest in cultural heritage that does not necessarily rely on property rights or directly benefit from the heritage (<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/5/461191.pdf>). Stakeholders may have varying levels of interest and involvement, as well as potentially conflicting interests. The level of importance of stakeholders depends on the assessment of their potential contribution to the management process or its obstruction (<https://www.kultura.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Vlerësimi-i-ndikimit-rregullator-për-librin-në-process-nga-Ministria-e-Kultur%C3%ABs.pdf>).

2. Methodology

This article will focus on describing the role played by civil society in Albania in this process and highlighting some specific features of its participation. The goals and objectives of this study are to (1) describe civil society engaged in the heritage and the interaction between them; (2) describe how the role of civil societies is changing amid ongoing changes; (3) identify trends in the development of cooperation between national institutions of civil society. To answer the three research questions, we conducted a systematic exploratory study of the SCOs and governance literature. A comprehensive picture of the phenomenon is provided for generalization using a quantitative study design (Maree, 2010).

2.1 Study design and setting

In order to describe and investigate alterations to the questions about the role played by civil society in Albania, a qualitative interpretative technique utilizing systematic review was employed in this study. Exploratory, descriptive, and contextual tactics were employed in a qualitative manner to help the researcher learn more about the phenomenon being studied. The purpose of exploratory research, according to Hunter et al. (2019), is to comprehend the underlying principles of particular occurrences and explain particular and systematic relationships among them in order to describe them in rich detail. A qualitative research design is naturalistic, concentrating on the environments in which interactions naturally occur, according to Maree and Molepo (2016). Two researchers collaborated closely throughout the entire endeavour to plan and carry out the inquiry. Collaboratively recruiting, gathering, and transcribing data, the researchers also individually analyzed the data to investigate two closely related research questions: the current study's question and another that examined the information-sharing process during matching.

We applied a qualitative study design and a literature review to explore and deepen the understanding of C.S.O.s' involvement in cultural heritage values and the country's development. Systematic literature reviews aim to use replicable, scientific and transparent processes that permit an audit trail for the conclusions made (Tran Field et al., 2003, p. 209). This article explores literature from various sources to highlight and understand C.S.O. implications in heritage practice from different literature streams. So, the literature review will focus on clarifying the nature of C.S.O.s by reviewing academic, policy, and project documents (e.g., deliverables). These will be studies that provide evidence of how C.S.O.s are engaged in heritage practice and their involvement and experiences in the development process by those operating directly in heritage practice. Literature

review selection was based on two criteria: (1) time of publication of perceived journal quality, documents, policy papers, familiarity, and citation frequency (Sellers et al., 2004; Seller et al., 2006) and (2) representation of a broad array of subject areas in civil society and its impact on cultural heritage.

The identified literature was later validated by researchers from different academic and political institutions. After identifying relevant sources that fulfil study objectives, data that serve as evidence are described, interpreted and analyzed. The objectives of the systematic review task are to:

- Collect and critically analyze the term and concept of C.S.O.s from the perspectives of disciplines and fields of heritage practice
- Discover working definitions as heuristics
- Allow the conceptual identification of important features and characteristics of C.S.O.s from broad perspectives.

The study focused on literature from official Albanian sources and had full-text articles available (academic articles, reports, secondary resources, project documentation, and policy papers) that were no longer than eight years ago; only literature from 2015 was included to ensure contemporary study. Since the research team operates primarily in Albanian, articles from other languages were excluded. Part of this research even research utilized document analysis, including legal documents, reports of the European Commission Reports, Civil Society Council, and related documents, to gauge the type of contribution made by C.S.O.s to the heritage process.

All the relevant studies were evaluated for relevance and availability. Thereafter, all the identified documents and studies were consolidated and divided amongst the members of the research team for abstraction based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Sources identified from two key terms, "Civil Society Organization" and "Heritage", are:

- Academic sources, 35 documents
- Policy sources, 60 documents
- Project documents, 316 documents

3. Analyses

The method used to analyze the data was (Reflexive) Thematic Analysis ((R) T.A.) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) and (2013), T.A. is a conceptually flexible method for qualitative research that enables researchers to actively find, analyze in-depth, and report patterns of meaning in the data about the research question. Thematic analysis is a data-driven method that identifies reoccurring themes or topics and relations among them in texts through inductively coding statements into sub-categories and categories (Xanthopoulou D. et al., 2007). In this way, the identified themes and patterns are strongly linked to the data themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was conducted during 2023 and 2024. Years of analysis were eight; therefore, 2015 is excluded. Of particular interest were themes and trends associated with the entry of civil society into the development of cooperation between national institutions.

Thematic analysis can be done in six steps, according to Braun and Clarke (2006). They pointed out that the procedures did not have to be followed in a straight line because the researcher could have to switch between the stages. The following are six steps for theme analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): 1. The researcher gets familiar with the data by reading it over and over again to get a feel for its semantic interpretations. Additionally, the researcher may write down general observations that could help shape a theme at a later time. 2. Next, codes that may be related to the study issue are created to capture important analytical concepts found in the data. To make sure critical codes are not overlooked, repeat this. 3. Codes that are associated with a specific notion are grouped to create themes. The themes reveal meaningful patterns throughout the data. 4. The themes are examined in light of the coded data and the entire set of data. The analysis can be organized, and the connections between the themes can be specified using a thematic map. 5. The

topics have names and definitions. Here, the researcher crafts an analytical story to clarify what is occurring in the data, how it connects to the research question, and why the reader needs to be aware of it. 6. A report includes a written summary of the analysis. Thematic analyses were carried out independently; after themes had been created for each, these were contrasted to examine the distinctions and similarities between them. As a prelude to the research process, the researchers contacted officials of the Ministry of Culture to provide a complete list of civil organizations that were engaged directly or in cultural heritage values and at least once in the last ten years they had been part of civic activism at the local or central level. The categories of SCOs engagement, heritage, success, issues, and project description had initially been utilized for organizing the data, and these groups largely matched the categories of questions. After the notes and codes were copied to individual spreadsheets, the analysis was finished using Microsoft Excel. An index system was created to track each code generated and make it easy to locate the corresponding raw data (for example, a code generated from line 50 of the policy paper from the Ministry of Culture would be assigned the index A50). Thematic analysis should be seen as a method in and of itself, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), who also outlined certain considerations for applying this method. For instance, they recommend that before starting a thematic analysis, it's crucial to take into account the ontological and epistemological framework being utilized, the type of coding (latent or semantic), and whether inductive or deductive reasoning will be employed (Clarke & Braun, 2016).

Because researchers have a distinct positionality when it comes to data interpretation, reflexivity is an essential component of qualitative analysis, which is why the lead researcher kept a reflective notebook throughout (Braun & Clarke 2006, 2022). As a result, this method promoted awareness of individual effects and improved the quality and confirmability of reflexive theme analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The definition of coding terms is an essential step in the content analysis process (Neuendorf, 2002). The researcher held a series of iterative discussions to identify the terms for coding civil society and heritage in the cultural development of Albania. The themes were then examined in light of the coded extracts and the complete dataset, as shown in Table 1. Disagreements arose between the researchers, and the themes were reworked, divided, merged, or eliminated and discussed until full consent was obtained. Each subject was narrowed down in terms of its concentration and scope in order to be named and defined. For every subject, distinct names and definitions were created. After discussing the subject matter, the researcher came to an agreement. One of the researchers has emphasized the connection between the analysis, study question, and prior literature in his presentation of the findings, which is full of vivid and fascinating examples.

Table 1. Summary of Theme of SCOs heritage interaction and role

Themes	Code	Dimension (Categories)	Description of Codes
Albanian civil society interaction in heritage (IH)	IH1	Sharing or promoting of information about cultural heritage	Presenting and comparing the information of culture heritage works or national institutional opinions.
	IH2	Engaging in historical constructions	All activities and efforts that aimed understanding, preserving, and revitalizing historical buildings, structures, and sites
	IH3	The meaning of political processes	Proposing ideas through acknowledging, maintaining, and maintenance of historical legacies and cultural assets within the framework of social values, governance, and policy-making, or arguing the meaning of heritage works. Examining or modifying the proposed ideas based on collecting information about the content
CSOs role (CSOR)	IH-CSOR1	The care and protection of cultural heritage	Measures taken to protect and preserve both the concrete and intangible components of a society's cultural heritage (<i>Risk preparation and disaster management; documentation and research; legal protection and regulation; education and awareness; community engagement and participation; capacity enhancement and training; international collaboration and cooperation</i>)

Thames	Code	Dimension (Categories)	Description of Codes
	IH-CSOR2	Employment and local economic development	Different tactics, activities and initiatives that maximize the historic asset's economic value not only of the cultural site, such as development of heritage tourism, training and capacity building, cultural events and festivals, heritage conservation and restoration, cooperation between the creative industries, entrepreneurship, and local government initiatives for community-based tourism.
Development Trends (DT)	DT	Evolution and advancement of cultural heritage preservation and development	A range of stakeholders—including governments, corporations, academic institutions, local communities, and international organizations—is necessary to promote progress in this area. (government assistance; local communities; educational and research facilities; commercial and travel industry sectors; global organizations)
Off-topic (OT)	OT	Messages irrelevant to the discussion task	Issues and discussion not relating to the assigned topics or tasks

To ensure the inter-rater agreement, two experts coded all the materials based on the knowledge construction coding scheme.

In order to participate in the self-reflective process of "bracketing," which requires the researcher to separate and set aside (but not give up) their "a priori knowledge and assumptions, with the analytic goal of attending to the participants' explanations with an open mind," the researcher recorded their opinions and prior knowledge of the phenomenon prior to data collection (Christensen et al., 2014).

4. Findings

4.1 Albanian civil society interaction in heritage

Despite the lengthy history of the Albanian legislative apparatus on cultural heritage, intervention still faces a number of challenges that impact work and results pertaining to the application of the law, technician and specialized company training, the absence of best practices and shared protocols in project definition, and other significant obstacles related to cultural heritage protection that have been identified on the Albanian side (Riza, 2012). The United Nations Office for Project Services (U.N.O.P.S.), the European Union's Office of European Delegation in Albania, and UNESCO—the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization—are among the partners and supporters for 2020. Cultural Heritage without Borders (C.H.W.B.), the Albanian American Development Fund (A.A.D.F.), the Albanian Fund for Development (F.S.H.Z.H.), the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania (K.O.A.S.H.), Turkish Agency for Collaboration and Coordination (TIKA), National Agency for Territorial Planning (A.K.P.T.), and Faculty of Architecture and Urban Development (F.A.U.) are among the organizations involved on cultural heritage values in Albania. Even local civil society organizations are often involved in the activities and promotion of cultural heritage, even in those cases when this is not the direct goal for which they were created, and this is demonstrated by the high number of their involvement in such activities. The review of the documentation shows that the number of organizations engaged in cultural heritage with financed or self-financed projects is 634 organizations, including volunteer and local youth organizations, up to international organizations active in our country. Descriptive analysis of numerical data for civil society engagement shows that 134 of them are organizations that have been active for more than three years in the same field of cultural heritage, and 85% of them belong to cross-border or international civil society organizations which cooperate with local actors, but their contribution is difficult to identify.

These organizations in the fields of their activities result in expertise in historical constructions, in the organization of traditional festivals, activities to preserve the language and cultural customs of a community, and educational activities on cultural heritage. Through their activities, they aim to protect and preserve cultural heritage from degradation or disappearance, as well as sensitizing the

public about the importance of this heritage. In many cases, civil society organizations have played a key role in promoting cultural heritage activities.

The main activities of the civil society organizations in the field of cultural heritage which have been part of this study and which have fulfilled their activities in the preservation of cultural heritage in the last eight years have been included mainly in the following activities:

In the promotion of culture and tradition, in which all the organizations identified, 634 are engaged in the basic activity of civil society organizations (Tushi, 2007). Even when the focus of the project they had completed was not promotion, one of the activities they had carried out was precisely the promotional activity. In the analyzed activities, it was found that almost all organizations had as focus and promotion of culture and local traditions, the organization of traditional fairs and festivals in specific localities, the organization and commemoration of cultural events and other activities that are directly related to the promotion of cultural heritage. All C.S.O.s have participated in exhibitions, seminars, and educational meetings to raise public awareness about the importance of cultural heritage and its care.

In the reconstruction and restoration of cultural heritage objects, the participation of a reduced number of civil society organizations is greatly reduced, only 14 of them. This is also due to the fact that this activity requires experts in monuments, artefacts, and restorers of other valuable objects with previous experience in this field. This is more of a specialized construction activity than an activity in cultural civil society. But also here, civil society organizations are not represented and engaged, in the selection process, their work will be restored until the restoration process is supervised.

The involvement of C.S.O.s in political processes is much smaller, with only 20 of them being active in influencing public policies. They are mainly found at the consultation tables for the promotion of policies that promote cultural heritage and less in campaigns and legal initiatives that initiate policies in this direction.

A key finding in this study is that only three C.S.O.s are skilled in the use of technology to apply and include aspects of cultural heritage preservation, while it is massively applied by almost all C.S.O.s to promote cultural heritage through websites, social media, and various applications.

4.2 Role of civil societies

The role of civil society organizations in the field of cultural heritage is related to the exact and correct definition of the nature of the organizations themselves. Since C.S.O.s are never specified and clear in defining their involvement in the matter of cultural heritage, this makes their role inclusive. Of course, we all agree that they have an important effect on social change. C.S.O.s' actions in the field of cultural heritage and their involvement in concrete projects have influenced the insistence on cultural values and the identity of our community; they have strengthened our society textured with heritage values and have built our society. Some of the ways they exercise their roles are:

All the organizations identified in the country (634) focused on the care and protection of cultural heritage; some (127) of them were more specific, contributing to help prevent the loss of cultural heritage and protect the cultural and historical values of the community.

The role of sensitizing the public through their activities and raising the awareness of the population regarding their identity and culture was another role that was fulfilled by the majority of organizations, and over 400 projects were financed in these eight years.

The role, perhaps not directly, but which could be concluded from the analysis of the documentation taken into consideration, was that of creating opportunities for employment and local economic development through the use and exploitation of cultural heritage. Activities related to cultural heritage, such as the preservation and promotion of historical monuments or local traditions, the increase in the number of tourists in the country and the increased attention, especially in the last three years by the local government, have enabled S.C.O.s to influence the economic development of specific areas.

Change and development in the field of cultural heritage is a long and complex process, but the continuous commitment and cooperation of many different actors, not only S.C.O.s, may make the process less challenging. Today, everyone confirms that the S.C.O.s have the capacity and experience to implement programs that promote peace and inclusiveness, as well as the mitigation of structural gaps in societies, no matter how developed they are.

But for development to happen, no single actor can serve as a variable, so cooperation is the foundation. The study refers that in the last two years there has been an increasing cooperation and the number of calls for joint project in heritage has increased significantly.

A new element evident only in the last three years is that the local government has directed over 400 projects that have focused on heritage and the return to values and tradition, seeking support from local and national S.C.O.s.

5. Discussion

The findings on Albanian civil society's interaction with heritage underscore both the progress made and the challenges faced in preserving cultural heritage. Despite a rich legislative history, challenges persist, including the need for better training, shared protocols and overcoming significant obstacles (Kurti, 2022). Partnerships with international organizations like U.N.O.P.S., UNESCO, and the E.U., as well as local entities such as C.H.W.B. and A.A.D.F., play a crucial role. Even local civil society organizations contribute significantly, demonstrating a widespread commitment to heritage preservation (Dervishi, 1999). Over 600 organizations engage in various activities, from promoting culture and tradition to reconstruction and restoration efforts. While promotion activities are widespread, fewer organizations are involved in restoration, which often requires specialized expertise (Hazizaj, 1998). Political engagement remains limited, with only a small number of organizations actively influencing public policies. However, the use of technology for heritage preservation is growing, albeit still limited to a few organizations (Krasniqi, 2004). The role of civil society in heritage preservation is multifaceted, encompassing protection, public awareness, and even economic development. By sensitizing the public and advocating for cultural values, these organizations contribute to social cohesion and economic growth. Cooperation among various factors, including civil society, government, and international partners, is essential for effective heritage preservation. Increased collaboration in recent years indicates progress, with local governments increasingly supporting heritage projects in partnership with civil society (Dervishi, 2014). Overall, while challenges remain, Albanian civil society demonstrates the capacity and commitment to preserving cultural heritage, paving the way for future development and cooperation in this critical field.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the interaction between Albanian civil society and heritage preservation presents a nuanced landscape of progress and challenges. Despite a robust legislative framework, various obstacles persist, including issues with law application, training deficiencies, and the lack of shared protocols. However, partnerships with international organizations and the active involvement of local civil society demonstrate a collective commitment to safeguarding cultural heritage.

Despite these challenges, civil society organizations play a vital role in heritage preservation. They contribute to the protection of cultural values, raise public awareness, and even stimulate economic development through heritage-related initiatives. Moreover, their efforts contribute to social cohesion and inclusivity, highlighting their broader impact on society.

In essence, while the journey towards cultural heritage preservation is complex and ongoing, the capacity and dedication of civil society organizations, in conjunction with concerted cooperation among all stakeholders, offer hope for the continued safeguarding and promotion of Albania's rich cultural legacy.

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