

## Heritage Impact Assessment Policy within Western Balkans, Albania

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**Abstract :** As usually acknowledged, cultural heritage is the weakest component in EIA studies. The role of heritage impact assessment (HIA) in development projects is not often accounted for, and in those cases where it is, HIA is considered as a reactive response and not as a solutions provider. Because of continuous development projects, in most cases, heritage is unconsidered and often put under threat. Cultural protection and development challenges ask for prudent legal regulation and appropriate policy implementation. The challenges become even more peculiar in underdeveloped countries or endangered areas, which are generally characterized by numerous legal constraints. Therefore, the need for strategic proposals for HIA is of high importance. In order to trigger HIA as a proactive operation in the IA process and make sure to cover cultural heritage in the whole EIA framework, an appropriate system of evaluation of impacts should be provided. To obtain the required results for HIA, this last must be part of a regional policy, which will address and guide development projects toward a proper evaluation of their impacts affecting heritage. In order to get a clearer picture of existing gaps but also new possibilities for HIA, this paper will focus on the Western Balkans region and the undergoing changes that it faces. Concerning continuous development pressure in the region and within the aspiration of the Western Balkans countries to join the European Union (EU) as member states, attention should be paid to new development policies under the EU directives for conducting EIAs, and accurate support is required for the restructuration of existing policies as well as for the implementation of the UN Agenda for SDGs. In the framework of new emerging needs, if HIA is taken into account, the outcome would be an inclusive regional program that would help to overcome marginality issues of spaces and people.

**Keywords :** cultural heritage, impact assessment, SDGs, urban development, western Balkans, regional policy, HIA, EIA

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