MEMEX

MEMEX - MEMories and EXperiences for inclusive digital storytelling (2019-2022)

H2020 - EUROPEAN PROJECT

Policy Brief 2 - November 2021

Assessing social impact in MEMEX

The assessment tools used in MEMEX

The MEMEX project promotes social cohesion through collaborative and heritage-related tools that provide inclusive access to tangible and intangible cultural heritage and, at the same time, facilitate encounters, discussions and interactions between communities at risk of social exclusion. This is achieved by using Digital Storytelling (DS) as a way to gather personal stories related to heritage which will be visible through the MEMEX App. The project is based on the implementation of three pilot actions in Barcelona, Lisbon and Paris.

MEMEX results are being assessed both from a technological point of view, through the assessment of Technological Readiness Levels (TRLs), and from a social point of view, employing both traditional evaluation tools (questionnaires, interviews, observations, a benchmarking tool) together with innovative ones, such as the Societal Readiness Levels (SRLs). This is a method originally proposed by Innovation Fund Denmark to assess the level of societal adaptation of a particular social project, a technology, a product, a process, an intervention, or an innovation (whether social or technical) to be integrated in society, all aspects that are part of MEMEX project. SRL consists of 9 level, 1 being the lowest and 9 the highest: stages SRL 1-3 reflect the early work in a research project; stages SRL 4-6 represent the actual solution(s), the research hypothesis, and testing it/them in the relevant context in co-operation with relevant stakeholders; and stages SRL 7-9 include the end stages of a research project (refining the solution(s), implementing and

disseminating results). If the societal readiness level for a social solution is expected to be low, suggestions for a realistic transition towards societal adaptation are required.

This policy brief aims at presenting recommendations proposed by the MEMEX project related to the use of SRLs – or of a similar model delivered by the MEMEX team by the end of the project - to be supported by policy makers. It aims to pave the way for discussion about the need of delivering impact assessment tools between cultural and social organisations and policy makers at local and European Level. The recommendations are based on the preliminary impact analysis phase carried out in the first 18 months of the project, namely the use of SRLs to assess the impact of activities implemented so far during the 3 pilot projects.

Status of SRLs within MEMEX

The social impact analysis in MEMEX is strictly related to the different phases of the project needs analysis of the participants in the pilot projects; development of the pilot projects; definition and implementation of methodologies and tools to foster social inclusion through participative and co-creative processes related to cultural heritage.

NEEDS ANALYSIS: MEMEX started from SRL 2, which refers to the presence of groups at risk of exclusion who have limited or no access or participation to cultural life in their communities and of a set of tools to identify their needs and interests, ready to be adapted to the project's context and variables - and SRL3, which refers to the interface design given a single collection of requirements from users in the pilots. It respectively reached SRL 3, meaning a detailed matrix to match marginalised groups' needs and wishes with the cultural offer within their communities- and SRL 5, which refers to a co-design approach involving the communities, boosting social cohesion and inclusion.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PILOT PROJECTS: MEMEX started from SRL 4, which refers to a process of Audience Development based on diverse strategies to tackle lack of access, participation, and representation of these groups to cultural activities - and SRL 5, which refers to a list of strategies and related objectives and indicators. It respectively reached SRL 5, the identification of a process of active engagement, using outreach and active participation methodologies - and SRL 6, which refers to the connection between AD strategies and engagement processes through the DS workshops and the AD&DS trainings with partners and stakeholders.

SOCIAL INCLUSION: MEMEX started from SRL 2, referring to a set of methodologies to increase marginalised groups' cultural participation and thus their social inclusion identified and ready to be tested - and SRL 4, which is about setting a hypothesis of tool's features based on the observation and statistics on current skills and habits of use of digital tools; it reached respectively SRL 4, i.e. a set of tested, refined and validated methodologies that ensure participation and ownership of cultural heritage by marginalised groups) and SRL 6, which refers to a tool validated and actually used by a larger public than the participants directly involved in project activities.

Further refinements in SRLs are expected at later stages of the MEMEX project. It will be possible to review both the current and expected SRLs and to eventually propose a tailor-made SRL instrument that is applicable not only to MEMEX, but also for future projects of this kind.

These recommendations are aiming to increase the awareness of policy makers on key specific topics and to advocate for the reinforcement of their support from local to European level as key tools for assessing socio-cultural projects.

Key Messages to policy makers

- **Analytical and flexible application**
  Existing tools, such as SRLs, can prove useful and applicable to different contexts, needs and aims, but need to be applied in a critical and flexible way, adapting them to the characteristics of the projects and the specific environmental and (socio-cultural) conditions of the action.

- **Need to invest in research and testing of assessment tools**
  It is necessary to keep on researching and testing specific indicators, such as SRLs, with a focus on cultural and social innovation and sustainability.

- **Capacity building with a trans-sectorial approach**
  Funding schemes should increase and support capacity building processes for professionals operating in multi-disciplinary and trans-sectorial contexts to develop competences and skills in the field of assessment and evaluation.

- **Projects' award criteria**
  Programmes/funding schemes should consider assessment processes, methodologies and tools as fundamental award criteria, taking into consideration also unexpected results.

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Read more about the MEMEX project: https://memexproject.eu/en
Contact: alessio.delbue@iit.it, contact@memexproject.eu

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