

Cultural Heritage and Value Creation

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Editor

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Towards New Pathways

 Springer

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Foreword

UNESCO welcomes with great interest the publication of this important scientific contribution to the ongoing discussion about the role of heritage in contemporary societies.

The diffusion of information on a global scale and the increase in tourism, migrations and urbanisation processes have contributed to significant changes in the notion of heritage and its management.

In the past few decades, the traditional concepts of heritage have been updated. New perspectives have been offered regarding the “synthesis” of different approaches to conservation that were previously defined and regulated in the last century.

One older approach that emerged in middle-class society during the French Revolution focuses on the physical conservation of heritage as a basis for the transmission of cultural values inherited from the past.

Another approach, based on cultural anthropology, views heritage as the expression of a living society. This expression evolves with society and, if protected, cannot be “conserved” in a strict sense, thereby risking the loss of significance and authenticity.

These two approaches are clearly reflected in UNESCO’s Conventions of 1972 (World Heritage Convention) and of 2003 (Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention). Each approach, in its specific role, has defined itineraries and concepts that have enabled an update of traditional models, including new heritage categories, thereby responding to social demands and to new leanings in the preservation of cultural values, which this book clearly identifies and analyses.

However, the innovative synthesis of different cultural approaches to the conservation of heritage is fulfilled by identifying, developing, safeguarding and enhancing the traditional concept of landscape.

The World Heritage Convention adopted the “cultural landscape” category in 1992, defining a heritage system in which “tangible” and “intangible” values are strictly linked and require more innovative interpretative modalities and management models than the “classic” ones.

The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which emphasises heritage's link to tradition and traditional know-how, identifies landscape through the application of cultural and social practices, spaces of common ritual and places of identity.

Because of the relevance of these approaches, UNESCO decided to use the approaches to reconsider the principle of the conservation of historic cities, including the preparation of a new recommendation for the "urban historic landscape" that was presented at the 36th General Conference held in the autumn of 2011. This recommendation, the first to directly concern historic cities, identifies within the concept of urban landscape a complex set of values that extends beyond the traditional concept of the "historic district", defining the city as a complex interaction of both cultural and natural and tangible and intangible dimensions.

This approach, which links sustainable development and adaptation to climate change principles, enables a continuous revitalisation of cultural values in a society through an ongoing process of transformation, thereby adequately meeting and processing a society's emerging needs.

Through a reconsideration of traditional concepts and an openness to new perspectives on heritage, the essays included in this book offer an innovative contribution to the international works in progress concerning this theme.

Rome, Italy, May 2014

Francesco Bandarin

Preface

What do we mean today by “cultural heritage”? Is the classical definition of “culture” relating to a purely material dimension still relevant, legitimising the protection of “cultural heritage” as opposed to protection and enhancement? Is it perhaps time to reconsider the scope of this concept in a new way based on a systems approach?

In addressing these questions, the authors of this volume begin with the following observation: at the specific international level of UNESCO—to which the United Nations assigned in 1947 the responsibility of protecting and promoting culture and which Italy observes with interest—our questions already have a clear answer.

“Cultural heritage” in the UNESCO system has always been perceived, evaluated and promoted as an integral part of a specific social and economic fabric, the identity of a defined community. In other words, as the following essays will highlight, UNESCO’s conventions and programmes have developed, perhaps unconsciously, what we describe as a “viable systems approach” to “cultural heritage”.

Using this approach, business scholars focused on business organisations have become interested in cultural heritage.

These scholars could reconsider the concept of culture and its evolution over time. They were impressed by the process of the democratisation of culture, which began in the mid-eighteenth century with Voltaire’s work, “*Essai sur les moeurs et l’esprit de nations*” (1756), which moves the idea of culture away from its classical tradition of elitist universality and extends the idea to the social aspects of everyday life and a contextualisation in time and space.

The determinants of these developments are primarily related to the following changes:

- (1) the major social and economic changes of the second half of the past century;
- (2) the redefinition of the role of the individual in multiple contexts and in the processes involving him;
- (3) perhaps most notably, the change of perspective when examining any type of problem or phenomenon.

The third point refers to the emergence of a systems approach that shifts the focus from parts to the whole, thereby extending the traditional analytical-reductionist approach.

The systems approach, if applied in the fertile field of studies on business organisations and financial systems, is of major significance concerning the issues related to cultural heritage.

This approach helps to overcome the excessively reductionist original vision of culture, which focused on individual objects or items of significant value, shifting attention instead to the complex relationships and interactions among components.

The first chapters of the book are particularly dedicated to these themes. The essays of Montella, Barile and Saviano develop a new theory regarding the representation of “cultural heritage” based on a perspective related to the viable systems approach.

Providing new lenses to analyse cultural processes, the authors find scientific basis for the line of reasoning developed in the second part of the book, which is dedicated specifically to the conventions and programmes implemented by UNESCO to enhance the particular cultural heritage linked to the rural and agricultural world.

In the following chapters, the essays of Scovazzi, Petrillo, Di Bella and Di Palo analyse the way in which two UNESCO conventions—the first addressing material cultural heritage in 1972 and the second examining intangible cultural heritage in 2003—became the primary tools for enhancing cultural heritage or cultural elements in a living space and for affirming, at the national level, the need to introduce new rules that safeguard and promote cultural heritage.

From this point of view, the study on cultural landscapes by Petrillo, Di Bella and Di Palo is emblematic.

Historically, landscape has been viewed as the most comprehensive and complete expression of cultural heritage, contextualised at geographical and historical levels. However, the new proposed concept of culture creates interesting economic and social reflections at a more general level.

First, the field has been considerably extended because of new attention to the “whole”. A combination of components, relationships and interactions has been added to the outstanding natural wonders and monuments, towards a landscape viewed as the historical sediment, layout and material evidence of civilisations in a constant flux.

Second, the process of fruition has changed, with an increasing degree of involvement by the user.

Furthermore, landscape has become qualified as a production factor or a driver of competitive advantage for products “made in” or distinguished by specific geographical contexts.

As a result, the value of cultural heritage tends to be viewed as a use value in relation to its possible contribution to the elevation of the share capital of the context and the well-being of humanity.

This approach solves the dilemma between protection and enhancement because it is the enhancement that makes heritage deserving of protection.

Finally, a “landscape system” changes over time. As the components of its structure change, the purposes of the system may also vary. This dynamic can occur through a process of continual adjustments or through more incisive and radical transformations.

Rural landscapes usually exhibit the first type of change. The adaptations of techniques and practices shared by the community occur in a gradual manner, in an environment of harmony.

At other times, however, the landscape can be radically transformed from a top-down act of government, instead of a bottom-up process. In these examples, we observe virtuous dynamics, as in the case of the Pontine marshes in southern Lazio, the subject of depth reclamation and deforestation. The result was a completely different landscape in which the use-value for local communities undoubtedly increased.

However, in numerous other cases, these incisive transformations resulting from focused governance were not virtuous, including the case of the “Vele”, popular districts built in Scampia in Naples.

In UNESCO’s area of interest, these issues had been “felt” for a long time, unlike the situation that occurs at the national level when widespread enmity remains towards the “reception” of cultural values regarding agricultural traditions that deeply shape Italian landscape (as shown in the essay of Scepi and Petrillo on the specific cases concerning the enhancement of Italian rural and agri-food aspects).

At a recent UNESCO conference in Paris dedicated to landscape, I highlighted the ways in which the evolving governance of landscape, at all levels, remains a crucial issue for the future.

Reconsidering the traditional meanings of the concept of culture, as Montella invites us to do in his opening essay, based on a viable systems perspective and on the rational schemes developed by Barile and Saviano, may be an answer to this problem.

The application of the so-called “value in use” to “cultural heritage”, correctly interpreted as based on knowledge and respect for the past, would help to overcome the conflict between environmental protection and enhancement and could be a significant element of reflection regarding the identification of development paths aimed at guaranteeing the sustainability and viability of landscape systems.

Finally, we must pause for a moment and look over the hedges in our own gardens to consider what happens at the international level, to understand the reasons and then to act accordingly.

The ultimate goal of this book is just that: to provide a key for understanding cultural phenomena to those who govern these processes, with the belief that the “UNESCO system” can provide causes for reflection of great importance.

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