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**Towards
a Circular
Regenerative
Urban Model**



BDC

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TOWARDS A PLURALISTIC PHILOSOPHY OF THE CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Rosa Anna Genovese

Abstract

The evaluation of cultural properties, intended in the full richness of their authenticity, must be taken into equal account for their material and non-material (*Venice Charter*, 1964). The *Nara Declaration* (1994) stresses that the definition and the assessment of the value of authenticity must be referred to a multicultural dimension. The destiny of cultural heritage is linked to the evolution of modern societies, seduced by the advance of technology, in which the destruction of ecological balance and the progression of egoistic materialism. It is necessary to call for an ever increasing participation in the building of an ethics adapted to the post-industrial world, enriching the socio-economic debate with the introduction of a humanistic vision nourished by the very sap of heritage. An effective policy for cultural properties supported by the participation and “conscious consensus” of the population can constitute the central instrument to ensure the economic, social and cultural development of the Regions of the world and to guarantee integrated conservation of cultural heritage.

Keywords: integrated conservation, authenticity, conscious consensus

VERSO UNA FILOSOFIA PLURALISTICA DELLA CONSERVAZIONE DEL PATRIMONIO CULTURALE

Sommario

La valutazione dei beni culturali, intesi nella piena ricchezza della loro autenticità, deve tenere nella stessa considerazione i valori materiali ed immateriali (*Carta di Venezia*, 1964). La *Dichiarazione di Nara* (1994) evidenzia che la definizione e la valutazione dell'autenticità devono riferirsi ad una dimensione multiculturale. Le sorti del patrimonio culturale sono legate all'evoluzione delle società moderne sedotte dal progredire della tecnologia nelle quali si alternano la distruzione degli equilibri ecologici e la progressione del materialismo egoistico. Occorre sollecitare una sempre maggiore partecipazione alla costruzione di un'etica adattata al mondo post-industriale arricchendo il dibattito socio-economico con l'introduzione di una visione umanistica nutrita alle sorgenti del patrimonio. Un'efficace politica dei beni culturali, sostenuta dalla partecipazione e dal “consenso cosciente” della popolazione, può costituire lo strumento centrale per assicurare lo sviluppo economico, sociale e culturale delle regioni del mondo e per garantire la conservazione integrata del patrimonio culturale.

Parole chiave: conservazione integrata, autenticità, consenso cosciente

1. Introduction

The consideration that, even though the fundamental principles of the *Charter of Venice* are valid, the Charter had to be revised, taking into account the evolution of culture, in different geographic and cultural areas and its various interpretations, especially in the countries with a civilization different from the European one, induced Roberto Di Stefano to promote a Congress, held in November 1995 in Naples, entitled, *La Carta di Venezia trenta anni dopo* (Lemaire *et al.*, 1995; Genovese, 1995). During the debate, even though the principles and the contents stated by the Charter were attested, the necessity came out to open up the spirit of the Charter to cultural conceptions different from the western notions that had generated it.

In his essay *Quelle doctrine de sauvegarde pour demain?*, Raymond Lemaire had previously stressed that «when the Charter was edited, in Venice, in 1964, its authors believed they were enunciating principles of universal value. They were not aware that other civilizations, different from the European, could have a distinctive approach to the issues of restoration and protection, another sensitivity concerning the dialogue with the testimonies of their own past» (Lemaire, 1990, p. 217).

2. Authenticity and values

In the contribution on *Authenticité et patrimoine monumental*, Lemaire points out that the values underlying the concept of authenticity and the interest toward artwork, the recognition it is met with, are considerably different from culture to culture. Taking as an example the temples of the imperial Sanctuary Shinto of Ise in Japan and the Parthenon in Athens, he reminds us that the one hundred and twenty temples of the immense Japanese Sanctuary are reconstructed on an average every twenty years, re-proposed in their original shape. The carpentry and joinery workshops are kept permanently open while mops of cedars and fields of stubbles are grown especially to provide the yards with traditional materials. In Athens instead, the whole range of sciences and techniques available are applied to the conservation of the Parthenon; extensive researches are carried out to identify the stones that are thought to be the ones belonging to the monument, and to reassemble them into it, while those not yet identified, are stored and catalogued (Lemaire, 1994).

As I have previously stressed in one of my essays, the concepts so far recalled on the safeguard of cultural heritage are indeed different from one another, as the major concern of the former conception is the survival of the exact shape as a substance (“formal authenticity”), with no interest in materials; the latter, does the opposite, overlooking shape, decreeing the consecration of material (“material authenticity”). After having variously evaluated the question, Lemaire states that the problem of the authenticity, both formal and historic, of a monument is extremely complex and that the use of the word “authenticity”, not integrated by an adequate specificity is devoid of any valid significance (Genovese, 2004).

The considerations here mentioned have been cause for reflection for many scholars, conservation and restoration experts, who were invited first to write for and then to participate in the international congress, promoted by the Specialization School in Monument Restoration of Naples, and by the Italian ICOMOS Committee, on *Autenticità e patrimonio monumentale* (Genovese, 1994) held in Naples, in September 1994; the

scientific results of this Congress have constituted the preamble to the *Nara Document on Authenticity*.

The numerous contributions arisen in response to the work of Lemaire have thus outlined two guidelines: one, aiming to separate the formal or aesthetic authenticity from the material or historical one, the other, asserting the unity of the concept inherent works constituted by material formed in a unique and irreplaceable way.

On that occasion in particular, Franco Borsi observed that the historic and the formal authenticity recalled in the essay, actually correspond to both the historic and the aesthetic requirements recalled by Cesare Brandi and, above all, that formal authenticity appears to be a pseudo concept, when applied to the transformation in time of the work of art – which remains authentic throughout each of its phases or epoch. Furthermore, Marco Dezzi Bardeschi highlighted the concept of evolutive authenticity, in reference to the three modern editions of *Laocoonte*, in opposition to a nostalgic return to the origins, and recalled how, not without dedicating the greatest attention to the formal aspect, authenticity should be linked to material.

In this context Roberto Di Stefano emphasized “the authenticity of values” the work bears; values interpreted according to a scale of prevalence to be determined in response to three instances, the historic, aesthetic and psychological. He remarked how «Restoration should never destroy the ancient and original authenticity replacing it with a new historic reality, but should characterize itself as a historic event [...]. It is thus necessary to critically determine what value, in an object (monument), is thought to offer the greatest utility to the person observing it, or rather the greatest utility for the majority of observers; this majority is changeable in different historic periods and in the culture of different countries» (Di Stefano, 1994, p. 126).

At this point it can be observed how Di Stefano was opening up towards human ecology, a theme he further investigated in another Congress, in 1997, entitled *Tutela cosciente e umanizzazione* (Genovese 1997a; 1997b) on account of the considerations and observations resulting from an in depth research by various scholars, assembled in the volume *L'uomo ed i monumenti. Una politica per la vita* (Di Stefano *et al.*, 1996).

The above-mentioned International Meeting on *Protection* «has confirmed the urgency to oppose the ongoing vulgar mystifications (of which there are many instances) of the meaning assigned by modern culture to the existing relationship between man and monuments, as testimonies of the evolution of civilization, in which the life of individuals has taken place as they have adapted to such evolution, keeping the intangible values, essential to create the vital energy they need to exist, unchanged. The rapid and progressive loss of those values generates enormous damage, affecting the conditions in which men survive and actually making them more gloomy.

The Proceedings of the rich debate, written and spoken, taken place during the Meeting [...] prove that there is a great quantity of thoroughly qualified people, and especially young people, who oppose and rebel against what is happening, and who demonstrate this by taking part in, or attending, the debate» (Di Stefano, 1997, p. 5).

But the need to extend the considerations on authenticity to other Regions of the world, particularly Africa and the Arab World, starting from the study of the architectural and urban restorations carried out in those places, was recalled by Mounir Bouchenaki during

the aforementioned Congress held in Naples (Bouchenaki, 1994). In that occasion, during which he represented the UNESCO Division for cultural Heritage, he also dwelt upon the critical approach to the concept of authenticity and the social meaning inherent to any restoration, previously introduced by Lemaire and Di Stefano.

The merit of the Neapolitan Congress, has thus been to nourish the particularly rich and stimulating debate on the theme of authenticity, within the scientific and professional community, sparking a series of considerations which were later taken up and expressed in many other international congresses; including the ones associated with the ICOMOS General Assemblies in Colombo (1993) and Sofia (1996); and above all, Nara in Japan.

The *Nara Document* on authenticity (*Nara Declaration*) was the result of the work of about forty ICOMOS experts coming from twenty-two nations, who came together in Japan, in November 1994, to carry out an in depth analysis of the concept of authenticity according to the cultural diversities and the different categories of cultural heritage (Larsen, 1995).

The point 4 of the preamble to this document, stresses that «in a world that is increasingly subjected to the forces of globalization and homogenization, and in a world in which the search for cultural identity is sometimes pursued through aggressive nationalisms and the suppression of the cultures of minorities, the essential contribution made by the consideration of authenticity in conservation practices is to clarify and enlighten the collective memory of humanity» and point 5 stresses that «the diversity of cultures and heritage in our world is an irreplaceable source of spiritual and intellectual richness for all humankind». Then, the paragraph *Values and authenticity*, point 10, reads as follows: «Authenticity, as is considered and stated in the Charter of Venice, appears as the essential qualifying factor concerning values. The understanding of authenticity plays a fundamental role in all scientific studies of the cultural heritage, in conservation and restoration planning, as well as within the inscription procedures used for the World Heritage Convention and other cultural heritage inventories». Finally, point 11 of the Charter states that «all judgment about values attributed to cultural properties as well as the credibility of related information sources may differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture. It is thus not possible to base judgment of values and authenticity within fixed criteria. On the contrary, the respect due to all cultures requires that heritage properties must considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which they belong».

During the Nara Conference, in concluding her report on the concept of authenticity and its use in the practices of historic heritage, Françoise Choay stressed that the historic built heritage concerns, in priority, similarly and with the same urgency, the living memory of all populations, and how such memory is the only thing that, concerning heritage, could re-establish the legitimate use of the notion of authenticity. Refusing the conception of authenticity as an instrument for the evaluation of cultural heritage, she remarked that it is useful only as the base of cultural and anthropological identity (Choay, 1995).

The *Nara Declaration* therefore increases the number of factors the concept of authenticity is linked to, specifying that the very definition and judgment of the value of authenticity must be referred to a multicultural dimension. The document clarifies the relation between the attribution of values and the assessment of authenticity through the process of study and interpretation, in connection with the nature of the cultural property and its context, employing “information sources”, including conceptions and form, materials and substance,

use and function, tradition and technique, location and place, spirit and expression, original condition and historic evolution.

The approach chosen by Andrzej Tomaszewski in numerous writings about twenty-first century conservation, which he places within a framework moving towards a pluralistic philosophy, contains the greater part of the evolution of the debate so far described, thereafter resumed by him together with Jean Barthélemy, Michael Petzet, Andras Roman, in the session on *Conservation* which I coordinated, in Madrid, in December 2002, during the International Scientific Symposium on *Stratégies pour le patrimoine culturel du monde. La Conservation dans un monde globalisé: principes, pratiques, perspectives*, of the thirteenth ICOMOS General Assembly (Martorell Carreno, 2002).

Andrzej Tomaszewski stressed that: «Both material and non-material values should be taken equally into account when assessing cultural property from the point of view of the (to use the phrasing of the Venice Charter) “full richness of their authenticity”. Ignoring the equivalence of these aspects condemns western conservation to a prejudiced viewpoint, to valuing the material above the spiritual. It also demonstrates its isolation from current trends in modern science and the experiences of other cultural regions of the world. One can and must believe that due to international exchanges of views and experiences, the protection and restoration of non-material values of cultural property and their “memory values”, the recognition and treatment of material cultural property as “places of memory”, will characterize the further development of conservation in the coming century» (Tomaszewski, 2004, p. 48).

ICOMOS has launched, at the international level, an action which, starting from the respect of authenticity leads to the policies of integrated conservation and sustainable development, envisaged by UNESCO, is intended to pursue three aims: the protection of urban and architectural heritage, the intention to include this protection in the socio-economic future of the various realities throughout the world, and the adaptation of the new initiatives to the geographic and cultural contexts of the places of origin.

The *Convention for the protection of cultural and natural world heritage* of UNESCO (1972) establishes that in order to be inscribed onto the List a heritage site must hold outstanding universal value and respond to criteria of “authenticity” for cultural heritage, and “integrity” for natural heritage. The World Heritage has greatly contributed to raise awareness over this, emphasizing the extraordinary diversity and the richness of a cultural, environmental and human heritage, which is unique and prestigious.

This is why the habitat of the future should take better inspiration from its places of origin, be better adapted to the climate, employ the natural materials and resources in a more appropriate way, shunning the inhuman uniformity and arrogance of industrial models, in order to return to the poetry, conviviality and quality indispensable for life.

«The necessity to acknowledge the immaterial aspects of cultural heritage (the knowledge, the practices concerning nature and its universe, oral traditions, languages, dialects, customs, popular and religious festivals, social practices and rituals, knowledge and craftsmanship skills, ancestral cultures, etc.) is one of the current objectives of the constitutive process of the List, and strengthens the adoption of the *International Convention for the safeguard of Cultural and Immaterial Heritage* (17 October 2003) by UNESCO. The immaterial cultural heritage is characterized, in its full articulation, by its being transmitted from one generation to the next, and by being constantly recreated by the

communities and groups in close correlation to the surrounding environment or its history. It promotes respect for cultural diversity and human creativity, spreading, dynamically and certainly not frozen into unchangeability throughout time, the observance of human rights, the sustainability of the development of all countries, and the formation of their identities, to which each one of us is called» (Genovese, 2012).

The progressive disappearance of the different aspects of the immaterial heritage may lead to a loss of coherence in urban environments and to a loss of the global authenticity of cultural identity. Thus it is necessary to call for an ever increasing participation in the construction of an ethics adapted to the post-industrial world and to our technologically advanced society. From this point of view, an educational effort based upon humanism and “know how” should become the preponderant factor for the re-conquest of our heritage.

«The new challenges to be faced in an essentially changed world press us to extend preservation perspectives and fields to: cultural routes, ensemble, cultural landscape, urban landscape, environment, setting, rural heritage, industrial heritage, plurality of cultural categories; and to attempt to upgrade regional and national specificities to an expression of global differentiation against global uniformity» (Genovese, 2005, p. 79).

3. Cultural policies and conscious consensus

The cultural heritage, therefore intended as the ensemble of the properties belonging to the history of civilization, constitutes a vital resource for humanity. In globalization, which has seen the triumph of the economic dimension, heritage represents the roots, the starting point from which to build a project for the future and should be considered an example demonstrative of the possibility of sustainable development based on community consensus.

Due to international cooperation, interdisciplinary approach, and the contributions of the many actors involved in the process, the project of conservation has become:

- the guarantee of intangibility and duration of the heritage itself;
- the drive for cultural growth (of identity, function, generally recognized and shared roots. etc.);
- the drive for economic development (because capable of activating new functions, of generating employment, whether directly, indirectly or as satellite activities);
- a drive for social mobility and change (because it increases the perception of shared values and the feeling of common belonging, involving the inhabitants residing in low income historic fabric areas directly or indirectly, improving their conditions and so on).

It should be recalled that since the first half of the 20th century European Governments have tried to develop a policy for the protection of cultural property, without however preventing an extensive transformation of cities and their territories, imposed by the logics of industrial society, and the development of a civilization of machines inexorably bound to overwhelm the civilization of man.

During the second half of the century the concept of conservation began to assert itself as being a distinct subject form restoration; that is, intended as a goal to be achieved through restoration and the aid of specific legislation, appropriate technical-administrative bodies and dedicated funding. Cultural debate has therefore shifted from restoration to conservative preservation, and has tried to define the reasons for which the collectivity should commit itself to such social objective, which constitutes a “duty of the State”.

With Alois Riegl, a new path has been taken, allowing for the evolution of the concept of

protection of historic and artistic properties into the modern concept of conservation of the values within such properties; a notion that is still struggling to assert itself today, given the prevailing frantic search for materialistic development. The great contribution given by Riegl is that of having changed the very concept of protection, by stating that it must be applied to monuments not only as works of art and history, but also as testimonies of the values that are recognized by men as a collectivity, and not just by an educated elite minority. There follows that protection should be carried out through technical interventions intended not merely for material and structural preservation, but also for the conservation of the values the properties hold. Thus preserving the values contained within cultural heritage means preserving man and his psychic and physical wellbeing.

The Congress of Athens (1931) (Giovannoni, 1945; Perogalli, 1954; Genovese, 1979) and the Venice Congress (1964) (Gazzola, 1972) tried to appeal to governments throughout the world for the establishment of rules that would preserve the memory of the past for future generations; but the search for a balance between conservation and the use of properties does not seem to have achieved positive results. The new culture, offspring of the concepts of Alois Riegl, has begun to assert itself only in recent years through a more lively “social participation”.

«What has been affirming itself at present time instead is the basic duty of the State to guarantee the “right of the citizen” to live a better life in a society which – having overcome the merely nationalistic vision, and become instead part of the more general framework of international cooperation – is in search of a global development not only sustainable, but actually in accordance with the dual need of man for material property and spiritual values.

The quest to satisfy both these contemporary needs constitutes a real “duty of the State” and imposes no longer the “conservation of cultural property” of art and history, but a “policy of cultural property”, that is a set of guidelines of the initiatives the State should undertake in the various fields of the associated life, towards the previously mentioned development. These guidelines should be selected with the aware consensus of the whole population (through the democratic participation and the control of its transparency) sharing first of all the reasons for conserving the things having value and which people must have the possibility to acknowledge and interpret freely (beyond any kind of hidden conviction). Moreover, it is the people who have to select the way to enjoy the specific and particular benefits (economic and cultural) such things offer; a way of “utilizing without consuming” (that is to say conserving) which requires complex ways of management, economic, technical and administrative investments, as well as sometimes considerable costs, which have to be justified by sure benefits, only material, for the population.

The “policy of cultural property” thus considered, is much more than what up to some years ago was intended as “conservation of cultural property”, because it means having recognized that only the political conscience will enable to achieve conservation as the transformation of an existing resource into a property able to provide substantial chiefly spiritual, utility» (Genovese, 1996).

From this point of view, the conscious consensus of the majority in accepting the choices for a dynamic action capable of producing cultural development is fundamental.

4. Conclusions

The evaluation of cultural heritage, to be intended in the full richness of its authenticity, should equally take into account material and non-material values and be referred to a multicultural dimension.

To ensure the conservation of the cultural and environmental heritage to the advantage of the collectivity, it is also necessary to reach a balance between public and private interventions and start from three fundamental standpoints:

- *Knowledge*: education and instruction are important in fighting a widespread shallow of culture, whilst information (from which the education and instruction of the individual depend) constitutes an essential factor for the appropriate conservation of cultural heritage. Knowledge of historic stratification and of cultural, social and economic conditions of architectural and environmental heritage requires the highest professional qualification of the operators of conservation and protection, who should be structurally involved in decisions about appropriate policies and strategies.

- *Corrective actions*: we should appreciate how the future of our cultural heritage is bound to the evolution of modern societies – that have been seduced by the progress of technologies – in which the best and the worst alternate, mixing progress to negative drawbacks such as the destruction of the ecologic balance, the advance of egoistic materialism, the uncontrolled growth of destructive powers. All this calls for a debate we should never try to shun, but actively take part in, after having acknowledged how the balance resulting from industrial society is not, after all, so seductive. Considering the deterioration and dehumanization in the current prospects of life it should come as no surprise that the cult of heritage is expanding everywhere.

Society is expecting us to take part in the elaboration of new objectives for humanity by enriching the social-economic debate with the introduction of a humanistic vision nourished by the very sources of heritage. We are, thus, called to re-formulate the general framework of our action, defining exactly what priorities to adopt against the impending threats. The reorganization of public structures for the protection and enhancement of heritage requires the carrying out of corrective interventions for the intended use of land, functionality and development strategies, protection of the environment and sustainability, civic commitment, local governance, strengthening of communities.

- *Carrying out appropriate policies and creating management instruments*: an effective policy for cultural heritage, supported by the participation and the conscious consensus of different levels of the population, constitutes, today, the central instrument to ensure the economic, social and cultural development of the different Regions of the world and to guarantee respect of integrated conservation of architectural and environmental heritage. Cultural policies should lean towards the conservation of the values contained within heritage and the fruition of the heritage itself, privileging the interests of collectivity, founding their action on social equality, cultural context, the recognition of the rights and participation of the community once properly informed.

A new paradigm of universal values is necessary to interpret and share the changes taking place in a now globalized and multicultural world, including the value of culture, and for it, those of conservation, restoration and landscape as “human rights”.

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