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The spirit of place between the intangible and the tangible

L'esprit du lieu entre le matériel et l'immatériel

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**PROTECTING THE SPIRIT OF PLACE
IN ORDER TO CONSTRUCT A POLICY FOR LIFE
CONSERVER L' ESPRIT DU LIEU
POUR CONSTRUIRE UNE POLITIQUE POUR LA VIE**

Abstract. The vulnerability of the cultural heritage is increased because of the wars, the interethnic conflict, the acts of vandalism, the natural catastrophes but also for as many insidious risks like the climatic changes, the atmospheric pollution, the urban development and inappropriate planning regulations, the uncontrolled tourism development, the bad restorations, the foolish management of cultural property.

The globalized world, based on the exasperated individualism leading man to increasing anxiety, uncertainty and alienation, not satisfying intangible needs, has also supplied us a knowledge not conceivable. And knowledge by itself is freedom.

Therefore, the myth of change and speed that has also provoked an unprecedented crisis of values, involves the antibodies that will allow to recompose the world in order to find an ethic based on solidarity and to understand that we all play an irreplaceable role.

The conservation of the cultural property is an essential part of the revolution that will replace man and his environment at the centre of the society and allow him to find again the knowledge of his main objective that is to protect the tangible and intangible values inside our heritage, the spirit of place, thus satisfying the three requests (historical, aesthetic, psychological).

The essential requirement will be to promote a culture of conservation of the heritage and prevention of the catastrophes (natural and unnatural), to encourage the international cooperation between Governments, non-governmental Organizations, cultural Associations, in order to speed up the dialogue and the exchange between specialists, to disseminate the

information on the theoretical principles and the operating procedures, to identify strategies, conservation policies, appropriate investments and programs able to integrate cultural, social and economic requirements in order to build a policy for the life based on the satisfaction of the tangible and intangible values.

Résumé. La vulnérabilité du patrimoine culturel a augmenté à cause des guerres, des conflits interethniques, des actes de vandalisme et de pillage, des catastrophes naturelles mais aussi en raison des risques autant insidieux tels que les changements de climat, la pollution atmosphérique, les réglementations inappropriées en matière d'aménagement, le développement touristique incontrôlé, les mauvaises restaurations, la gestion insensée des biens culturels.

Le monde globalisé, basé sur l'individualisme exaspéré qui conduit les hommes à des états d'anxiété, d'incertitude et d'aliénation croissants, tout en laissant insatisfaits les besoins immatériels, nous a même fourni des connaissances insoupçonnables. Et la connaissance est par elle même liberté.

Par conséquent, le mythe du changement et de la vitesse qui a lui aussi provoqué une crise des valeurs sans précédent porte en soi les anticorps qui serviront à recomposer le monde pour trouver une éthique faite de solidarité et pour comprendre que chacun de nous joue un rôle irremplaçable.

La conservation des biens culturels est une partie essentielle de la révolution qui ramènera l'homme et son environnement au centre de la société et lui permettra donc de reprendre conscience de son objectif primaire qui est de conserver les valeurs matérielles et immatérielles présentes au sein du patrimoine, l'esprit du lieu, et de satisfaire ainsi les trois instances (historique, esthétique, psychologique).

Promouvoir une culture de la conservation du patrimoine et de la prévention des catastrophes (naturelles et "innaturelles") devient indispensable en favorisant la coopération internationale entre Gouvernements, Organisations non gouvernementales, Associations culturelles, pour faciliter le dialogue et l'échange entre spécialistes, diffuser l'information sur les principes théoriques et les processus opérationnels, identifier les stratégies, la politique de sauvegarde, des investissements appropriés et des programmes en mesure d'intégrer exigences culturelles, sociales et économiques afin de construire une politique pour la vie basée sur la satisfaction des valeurs matérielles et immatérielles.

The vulnerability of the cultural heritage has increased because of the wars, the interethnic conflicts, the acts of vandalism, the natural disasters but also for risks equally insidious like the climatic changes, the atmospheric pollution, the urban development and inappropriate planning regulations, the uncontrolled tourism development, the bad restorations, the foolish management of cultural property.

Especially important were also the events, theories and laws that have marked the history of conservation of cultural heritage in the world, even including the relation to the great Revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

On the occasion of the bicentenary of the French Revolution a Symposium, sponsored by Roberto Di Stefano, President of ICOMOS International, on "Revolutions and cultural properties" was held in Naples, on 20 and 21 November, 1989, in the Donnaregina fourteenth century church, to identify the impact of revolutions on the conservation of cultural heritage (Di Stefano et al. 1990).

From 1789 to 1989, several events have profoundly marked the evolution of mankind in Europe, Latin America, Asia, Africa and through the Oceanic space. Most of the Latin American revolutions in the first half of the nineteenth century, and many European revolutions of 1848, which have adopted the humanitarian ideals of the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* and the political, legal and administrative principles announced with the accession of Napoleon result from the 1789 French Revolution. Similarly, almost all the Marxist-Leninist revolutions start, at least in their initial phase, from the 1917 revolution of October.

In the introductory report of the Symposium, Léon Pressouyre emphasized two contradictory views concerning the effects of revolutions on cultural heritage and particularly on the tangible heritage.

"According to the first analysis _ that of the "*conservateurs*" historians _ the most constant effect of revolutions on heritage is its systematic destruction by vandalism.

[...] On the contrary, the second interpretation of the revolutionary event having to be severely criticized is the one, based on the coherence of an ideological or even legal system, rather than on the more confused historical data, that would intend to prove that the revolutions have really created the concept of cultural heritage - built or not built - and set up ways to ensure its survival, if not its perennity." (Pressouyre, 1990, 12-13).

We can say that the revolutionary mythology behind the symbolic selections of vandalism, also illuminates the choices and the aspects of conservation. The Revolution also proposes a history of the past starting from a selective conservation of the monumental heritage.

It follows that it is not possible to study seriously the conservation policies without any reference to the ideal behind them and without considering that every revolution has privileged an aesthetic form and tried to impose an exclusive plastic expression.

There are, therefore, many aspects arising from the relationship Revolutions - Cultural Heritage as well as obstacles put in conservation by deep social changes, produced by the revolutionary and reformist events in nineteenth and twentieth century during two centuries dominated on one side by the "Reign of Reason " claimed by revolutions, and on the other side by the " Reign of Sciences " asserted by the industrial society.

A phenomenon quite clear that engages increasingly modern people comes out from the revolutions, the idea of human right. "One of the dangers of the modern world is precisely in the fact that man is being persuaded never to dream again the reign of law and, instead, to seize with all necessary actions and every form of selfishness the material welfare.... Hence the current danger of the reinstatement of ruling over the Force, at the advantage of the blind longing for the abjuration of faith in freedom (and in the spiritual and cultural values giving it life) and in the cynical substitution of quantity to quality and of appetites to law." (Di Stefano, 1990, 115).

The various revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth century should be therefore referred to the development of industrial revolutions in order to analyse how each Country has faced the problem of conservation both in terms of cultural policy and theoretical and doctrinaire development, and finally in terms of practical (professional , economic and entrepreneurial) achievements in the field of restoration.

In this light we must develop the investigation on the industrial revolution and its relationship with other revolutions in order to better understand the birth and development of the concept of conservation and related theories.

The acquisition of a new concept of welfare may, thus, give rise to a deep transformation of the whole contemporary society and the conservation of cultural heritage can assume the characteristics of a revolution.

The speed of change that invests today's economy and inform of itself every aspect of reality has created in people a condition of continuous uncertainty, fear of being always caught surprised and left behind during one's exasperated search of happiness through the fulfilment of the sole tangible values.

It is the triumph of the liquid-modern society in which "... the situations where men act change before their ways of acting have been consolidated into habits and procedures. The liquid life, as the liquid

society is unable to maintain its own shape, or to hold the course for a long time" (Bauman, 2005).

Bauman, while reporting the decay of the Occident, its exaggerated sense of competitiveness and its wild liberalism declares optimistic and believes that now there is space for a revolution in which sociology will take a central role again, that of who drives those looking for a new morality. Starting exactly from the individualism, the community that pursues the worship of ego might be able to develop a new awareness.

But the globalized world, based on the exasperated individualism leading man to increasing states of anxiety, uncertainty and alienation, not satisfying the intangible needs, has also supplied us a knowledge not conceivable until few years ago.

And knowledge by itself is freedom.

The fragmentation of today's reality has therefore a creative power of considerable magnitude. Therefore, the myth of change and speed which has also provoked an unprecedented crisis of values, involves the antibodies that will allow to recompose the world in order to find an ethic based on solidarity and to understand that we all play an irreplaceable role.

"It is thus necessary to work in order to allow more participation to the construction of an ethics adapted to the post-industrial world and to our technologically advanced society. From this point of view, an educative effort based upon humanism and 'know how' has to become the preponderant factor for the reconquest of our heritage." (Genovese, 2007a, 177).

For Leon Battista Alberti, who pursued the Renaissance ideal of harmony, beauty was closely linked to the balance between the parties. To that end, the centrality of the individual becomes a resource.

Happiness is not, therefore, to run and suddenly stop but to know how to keep still, to progress slowly and consciously.

"And it is precisely considering the concept of welfare that we find the need to understand whether and how the evidences of history, art and civilization of the past must be preserved and protected; to understand and recognize the importance this heritage holds for the human survival itself, to ensure, in other words, the true welfare for the man, whose only and true wealth (as Ruskin wrote) is life." (Di Stefano, 1990, 118-119).

The modern culture has understood that the values deliberately induced, imposed by tourism, culture industry, exploitation of the built, foment in men misunderstandings and confusions leaving unfulfilled spiritual needs; therefore, the primary aim of preserving the cultural heritage must not only be to protect the monuments but what in these monuments has value for the mental and spiritual life.

The conservation of the cultural property may therefore become an essential part of the revolution that will replace man and his environment at the centre of the society and allow him to find again the awareness of his main purpose that is to protect the tangible and intangible values inside our heritage, the *spirit of place*, thus satisfying the three requests (historical, aesthetic, psychological).

In a recent essay I had the occasion to note how the crisis of the contemporary values leads increasingly to live bathed in ugliness, surrounded by a sort of permanent mental intoxication, surrounded as we are by waste products.

From the point of view of the urban environment, we have made several steps towards the ugly and the immoral, leaving the road or rather the travel of individuals from one point to another, prevailing to the square considered as a platform of public affairs where the shared beauty and the spirit of aggregation were deep-rooted. (Zoja, 2007)

"Awaiting to *overcome the night* it is important, therefore, to strive to find again the main road of education to beauty that has refined for centuries the human soul in order to restore an indivisible system of values, as it occurred in the Greek and Renaissance world, namely the link between ethics and aesthetics, the harmonious relationship between the values of justice and the values of beauty.

The defence of nature, the ecology, the fight against all forms of pollution, the search for a more human urban environment, can bring man again to the responsible control of the technologic process as a tool that allows him to live in symbiosis with his own natural habitat " (Genovese, 2007b).

And then, perhaps, as Roberto Di Stefano recalls, we can solve all together the central question of any sociality, which is to live together in places that define and contain in their human (natural and urban) environment those elements that enable every man to prove the *joie de vivre*'. "(Di Stefano, 1984).

"The conservation of cultural heritage is an essential part of the revolution that will bring man and his environment at the heart of the society again, providing him with the essential elements for the survival of his mind and his body, in that inseparable unity of needs that is the essence itself of that human being always explored and yet still unknown, which is man. [...] The only hope of salvation is, therefore, to assert a true culture of Conservation allowing to define, in all civilized countries, new ways of life, namely new policies really able to integrate cultural social and economic needs." (Di Stefano, 1996, 97, 115).

The most profound aim of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention is the conservation of the historic memory of humanity.

Today, however, throughout the world, the UNESCO symbol is increasingly becoming a trademark to put on show and profit from, a

powerful weapon in the hands of the construction or tourism pundits, a wealth generator.

“It has been illusory, in fact, to think that the pride associated with the management of a site on behalf of the world community would be enough in itself to foster virtuous conduct.

Such a delicate process of transformation presupposes the passion, the participation, the involvement, of the local community; widespread learning, public education, *savoir-faire*, specialist technical training, the regulation of professional practice, respect for roles.

It is necessary, furthermore, for the principles and the culture of preservation to be an integral part of the training of “conservationists” and “restorers”, a training which will form that political conscience and technical expertise essential to guarantee the protection of cultural heritage, aware that they contribute to satisfying the material and non-material needs of mankind.” (Genovese, 2008b).

Concerning the conservation of the cultural heritage at risk, we must recall that the Venice Charter - stating in articles 9 and 15, the limits of restoration and reconstruction – defining for the first time the historic centre as a monument, has marked a basic moment of consideration upon these problems, contributing to clear up the misunderstandings occurred in Europe during the post-war “in style” reconstructions, also due to the divulgation of a wrong concept of conservation.

During the following years, an increasingly wide consciousness has led to understand the necessity to preserve the cultural heritage which has to be extended from the specific disciplinary field to the action developed by governmental and non-governmental organization.

“In the very moment when a territory is upset or lacerated by natural disasters, which result in partial or total loss of its cultural heritage, the problem arises immediately, among others: how to operate for the restoration and conservation of what remains. The questions coming out are various and all related to the peculiarity of the problem; then, in order to give solutions and directions, it is necessary to work with an inductive methodology which, starting from the accurate analysis of the specific realities, allows to bring the ample case histories back to a general level of theoretic formulations” (Genovese, 2008a).

As a result of these natural disasters or caused by the different types of wars, we must act promptly, to save the destroyed monuments and to hand down to the future generations the tangible and intangible values they bear. Only by considering conservation and restoration in this way, we can preserve the identity of a population.

The international non governmental Organizations operating in this field, having the possibility to act in a rapid, independent and

effective way, substituting or supporting the Nations which have sometimes difficulties to intervene at the right moment, can ensure timely many actions of preservation and protection of this heritage in these situations at risk.

With regards to this, we underline the importance of the “Heritage at Risk” programme (adopted by ICOMOS members during the General Assembly in Mexico in 1999) and of the publication with the same title gathering, from 2000, the national and regional studies on monuments and sites at risk, in order to plead for the attention on the threats of risks impending over the universal cultural heritage. (Bumbaru et al., 2003, Truscott et al., 2005).

The ICOMOS Scientific Council, convened in Pretoria in October 2007, has adopted a resolution to launch a programme of interdisciplinary research on the effects of climate change on world heritage stressing that "The heritage of global climate changes is that of the loss and the significance of this loss should be stressed. The interpretation of climate changes must point out the permanent impact of climate on human culture and the changes taking place today. Clear priorities must be established to identify sites to be protected from the effects of climate changes. The effectiveness of conservation may be increased through multidisciplinary cooperation. Both the expertise and the local interest must be taken into account when establishing conservation priorities. (ICOMOS, 2007).

The essential requirement will be to promote a culture of the conservation of the heritage and the prevention of the (natural and not natural) disasters, to encourage the international coordination between Governments, the United Nations Bodies, non-governmental international, regional and local Organizations, the ICBS, in order to take decisive measures to reduce losses of human lives and of social, economic, natural and cultural property, through adequate strategies, policies, programmes and investments for a policy of life and for a more human future, based on the fulfilment of tangible and intangible values of the cultural heritage too.

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