

Cultural Heritage and the Value of Preserving the Past

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Abstract: *In a historical context where contemporary world struggles for technological advancement, economic and political imposition, which one is the place of cultural heritage? Its role in society, in technological developments, in political and economic decisions? Without having the opportunity to reconstruct fairly, reliably and securely a series of data, facts and evidence of the past, we will not even attain to solve the concrete problems of the present or to build a complete and sustainable future. In this context, seems necessary an analysis of contemporary processes and tools that are directly related to the conservation, valorization and management of cultural heritage. These three words seem to be placed on the triptych of sustainable development of today's culture.*

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Management of Cultural Heritage, Historical Memory, Values of Cultural Heritage

1. The value of preserving the past in the present

The "landscape" of cultural heritage is, today, more complex than ever. On one hand, we have finally and fully accepted its cultural and social importance, and since the 1990s, also the economic one, but on the other hand new factors have been included in this scenario. The acceleration of contemporary reality itself, makes it difficult to fully or properly, incorporate the past. So, in a historical context where contemporary world struggles for technological advancement, economic and political imposition, which one is the place of cultural heritage? Its role in society, in the technological developments, in the political and economic decisions?

Today cultural heritage, as much as the value of traditions, and consequently the conservation and preservation of the past, have become sacraments of a civil religion of the aesthetization of cultural works [1].

"Why do we want to preserve every sign of a past which on its side had not much respect for the past that had preceded it? Why does the present invade and often take on every form of change, but on the other hand, requires honoring cultural heritage?". These questions emerged in the context of a significant essay on the conservation of cultural heritage in the present days, entitled *"The democracy of aesthetics"* by Bruno Pedretti, in which he underlines the inability of the contemporary world to celebrate itself with the mere strength of the current instruments. He describes the current world as a structure which "shows off" through technological advancements, but at the same time is also culturally frail, that cannot be kept alive without the historical works [2].

And that because without having the opportunity to rebuild a fair, reliable and secure series of data, facts and evidence of the past, we will never manage to solve concrete problems of the present or to build a full and sustainable future.

In this context, an analysis of contemporary tools and processes directly related to the conservation, valorization and management of cultural heritage seems necessary. These

three words seem to be placed on the triptych of sustainable development of today's culture.

The legacy of each country is a part of the country's history, which also reflects and enriches the history of the different ways of life and the country's behavior. Heritage enables society to learn the truth better and chronologically records their cultural history. However, heritage is threatened by many significant social, environmental and economic pressures. Due to the fact that heritage is a non-renewable source, its conservation, valorization and management should be as efficient as possible.

In this sense to conserve becomes a form of consolidating the origin points, from where the structures that answer to the needs of the present, takes route [3].

The role and importance of preserving the cultural heritage in the technological, economic and political spheres, passes through the main values of heritage [4].

Recognizing the value of cultural heritage for the promotion of a democratic and cohesive society means not only *"Recognizing the need to put people and human values at the center of an enlarged and cross-disciplinary concept of cultural heritage"* [5], but also to activate public policies that support the respect and promotion of the right to take part in cultural life. The full expression of the potential value of the cultural heritage, that is its relationship with a "community of values" that recognizes it and identifies itself within it, is linked, to the degree to which this value is known and shared by the largest number of people.

There are many values and the interactions between them can be extremely complex. Every description of the values connected to the cultural heritage clashes with a conceptual and practical difficulty, which arise from the different articulations of heritage values (cultural, economic, social, etc.) [6]

We must consider that the values are relative and change over time and space. The creation of a typology of values can facilitate the understanding of the different evaluation processes that come into play in the preservation process of

the cultural heritage and in a later phase allow to carry out comparative evaluations of the different patrimonial projects. [7]

1.1 Cultural values

As they were analyzed in the ICCROM *Guidelines for the Management of World Heritage* in 1993, its second edition realized in collaboration with UNESCO and ICOMOS of 1998[8], The Getty Conservation Institute Report of 2002 [9] and also among others by D. Throsby in his *Economics and Culture* of 2001 [10], the cultural heritage values could be divided in two major categories of typological values: socio-cultural values and economic values.

Sociocultural values are at the traditional core of conservation—values attached to an object, building, or place because it holds meaning for people or social groups due to its age, beauty, artistry, or association with a significant person or event or (otherwise) contributes to processes of cultural affiliation [11]. In this category are included:

a) Historical value

Historical values are at the root of the very notion of heritage. The capacity of a site to convey, embody, or stimulate a relation or reaction to the past is part of the fundamental nature and meaning of heritage objects. Historical value can accrue in several ways: from the heritage material's age, from its association with people or events, from its rarity and/or uniqueness, from its technological qualities, or from its archival/documentary potential [12].

b) Symbolic and cultural value

The interpretation of the value and symbolic functions of the cultural heritage is to be found in the historical analysis of their formation, as they constantly depend on the social and political processes that produced them [13].

Cultural and symbolic value refers to those common meanings linked with heritage, which are not only historical but also political, ethnical or also linked with other aspects of living together [14].

c) Social value

The concept of social value closely follows the notion of "social capital", a concept widely used in science and the development of social fields. Social heritage values enable and facilitate social ties, networks, and other relationships in a broad sense that are not necessarily related to the central historical heritage values [15]

d) Spiritual/Religious Value

Heritage sites are sometimes associated or imbued with religious or other sacred meaning. These spiritual values can emanate from the beliefs and teachings of organized religion, but they can also encompass secular experiences of wonder, awe, and so on, which can be provoked by visiting heritage places [16]

e) Aesthetic values

The aesthetic value is widely agreed to be a category of social-cultural value, though it refers to a wide range of qualities. Mostly, the aesthetic value refers to the visual quality of

cultural heritage [17].

The cultural heritage values also can be closely linked with that of economics. For if we consider the economy as anything that allows us to develop our material well-being and culture as everything that instead increases our spiritual well-being, we understand that they are indispensable to each other. The culture of a person or a country is also given by the economy of the same, from health and everything that forms and completes the identity; vice versa, the economy can and must use culture for its own development and the social growth of territories and citizens [18].

Economic assessment is one of the most powerful ways in which society identifies, values and decides on the relative value of things. Economic values overlap as a great deal with the socio-cultural values (historical, social, aesthetic, and so on) described above, and they are more distinct because they are measured and evaluated by economic analysis [19].

2. Cultural heritage management and new models of preserving and evaluating it

Obviously, the cultural capital must be valued with appropriate policies, otherwise it does not bear fruit, neither of a symbolic and identity type, nor of an economic type. In many cases it is the result of the revitalization of resources left idle, of not-modernized museums, of archaeological excavations abandoned to neglect, of badly managed theatres, etc., [20]. These are some of the examples of contemporary neglect of the past in general and of culture in particular.

Throughout history, there have been different approaches to the principles of conservation and management of cultural heritage with relative developments. Based on previous research, conservation is often defined only as a physical inheritance interference and does not consider the entire cultural, social, physical, and economic aspect of the conservation process. However, recent literature considers the broader aspects of conservation and adopts a more complete and detailed definition. Since 1970, with a special emphasis on the principle of sustainability, a new approach has been implemented, called "Cultural Heritage Management". The purpose of the new approach is to preserve and develop heritage and to support the values of its importance by giving the Heritage a convenient use. According to ICOMOS, cultural heritage is an expression of lifestyles developed by a community and passed from generation to generation, including practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and their values. Since 1970, Cultural Heritage Management has become an important issue in Europe and since then has been researched and discussed by many sector professionals and not just of them. The issue of sustainability began to be considered in terms of cultural heritage management later on and on, it was first used by ICAHM (ICOMOS International Committee for the Management of Archaeological Heritage) [21].

Formally, this was the ICOMOS Charter for the Protection and Management of Cultural Heritage and it addresses the principles of Archaeological Heritage Management. The

first ICOMOS guidelines and the cultural division of the UNESCO Guidelines for the Management of World Cultural Heritage Sites were written in 1992. Some years later, in 2000, this topic was internationally accepted and implemented in the framework of various projects in Europe. In the same year, the principle of sustainability was of great importance for heritage conservation and in 2001 it was the subject of an international symposium from USA / ICOMOS under the theme "MANAGING CHANGE: Sustainable approaches to the Conservation of the Built Environment" [22].

According to the 4th International Symposium USA / ICOMOS report, "*sustainability emphasizes the need for long term goals. If conservation is development as a productive strategy then the economic dimension should be addressed, while community education at local level is key to preserving conservation initiatives*" [23]. Cultural Heritage Management is a profession and practice of cultural heritage management, which is a branch of cultural resources management, although it is also based on conservation, restoration, museology, archeology, history, and architecture. Cultural Heritage Management has traditionally been about identifying, interpreting, and preserving the important both tangible and intangible heritage. It is an expression of lifestyles developed by a community and passed from generation to generation, including behaviors, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values. [24].

In most cases, cultural goods are not able to support their conservation through direct income management. Likewise, management of cultural heritage and related activities is not able to repay at a reasonable time the proper investment for the maintenance of structures. And this is a very important issue that needs to be assessed and considered in cultural policies and their support from the state itself.

It is worth highlighting the possibility of a reciprocal link between conservation strategies and evaluation / use strategies in the context of an economy not only of cultural heritage but for the cultural heritage [25]. Cultural tourism is no longer proposed as an engine of an economy focused solely on the use of cultural resources, but as the engine of a dynamic process in which the economic advantage achieved by the use of the source "cultural heritage" becomes a means of preserving and feeding that source, with a positive relationship spirit of the interrelated dialogue between local and global, between the present and the future [26].

a) Engaging the private sector in cultural investment

The private sector and culture are two realities that are coming closer and closer to each other. Culture and investment in the field of culture represent for many private firms the opportunity to invest in research and innovation, whose values directly fall into the firm's activities by bringing concrete developments into the core business of the firm. The development of the cultural and educational scene in this regard of cultural heritage becomes a tool that through creativity can stimulate the game of new synergy between cultural entities and the production system. These synergies give life to the social and economic development of the territory [27].

b) Public Private Partnership (PPP)

Recent years have seen a marked increase in public-private partnership (PPP) in the management of cultural heritage and historic cities.

The administration of cultural heritage monuments and urban landscape has emerged as a key theme, which has as its ultimate goal to move towards a major change in the meaning of "Cultural Heritage" at the global level, and in the sustainable management of cities / heritage monuments and urban landscapes.

This increasingly controlled action towards urban conservation management with its emphasis on participatory planning and multi-sectoral treatment in recent times requires a greater public-private co-operation. Such PPP deals are the result of several factors, including the need for diversified financial resources, as well as efforts to increase public policy effectiveness and accelerate knowledge transfer. As a summary we can say that the importance of PPP lies in the fact that this type of report encourages:

- Creativity and ideas
- Entrepreneurial spirit and initiatives
- Mutual trust between public authorities and citizens
- Responsibility and understanding of the monitoring report on these cultural objects

As a result, it enables the realization of projects that improve the quality of cultural life, innovate the values of cultural heritage and the economy directly related to it.

2.1 Preservation of cultural heritage through digital media

As a result of historical metamorphoses and the impact of human activities, many cultural objects have suffered a time degradation and human-induced damage, and nearly all these objects need protection. The destruction of every element of the past is equivalent to a precious knowledge loss. Above us, therefore, is a great responsibility for considering cultural heritage as a treasure and as a source of information that we must learn to read, interpret, preserve and transfer to future generations. Cultural heritage sites around the world are at risk due to tourism, aggressive urbanization, speculative developments, conflicts and unforgettable neglect. For this reason, the protection and conservation of cultural heritage generally requires the adaptation of an ethics based on a series of bold labels from the principle of collective responsibility of all "actors" of the territory. Traditional management methods have been met in recent years with new elements of digital or other media. Individual researchers, professional associations, museums, universities and governments have embraced computer modelling and visualization to create virtual reconstructions and the basics of living data of threatened or lost cultural heritage sites [28].

The unmatched character of digital technologies places them in the first place for the representation, management, and dissemination of cultural heritage. Digital media are used to create cultural content through scanning, modelling, and archiving; to manage that wealth summary through powerful search engines and database management tools; and to distribute content across the internet for audiences that other-

wise may never be able to access the inheritance archive in that way. However, as any medium used to preserve cultural heritage, digital media is never neutral: This affects the information represented and the way the society interprets them [29].

Digital re-constructions of sites, artifacts, people and their activities help developing new forms of cultural heritage conservation and communication. But as much as many studies and progress are made in this direction, as much time is needed before the experts can unequivocally recommend the new media as a tool to preserve cultural heritage [30].

3. Conclusions

Cultural heritage has a role of a particular importance in the contemporary world, for all the reasons mentioned above.

Its role in our lives is paramount, and the contemporary world has done nothing but has allowed us new tools to underline this importance further. The combination of different fields in the protection of the cultural heritage has to do with a whole new concept of inheritance dimension. Maintaining the latter is a difficult and complex process in which to keep the balance between use and concomitance other than between private and public interest is more than difficult. Conservative and user-friendly cultural and leisure activities require special treatment for discipline strengthening and coordination with other disciplines. There is a need for sectoral interaction between both the private and the community or organizations for a joint contribution. A network-based coordination between governments, individuals, non-profit organizations (NGOs) and various governmental and non-governmental organizations to strengthen activities and monitoring. Local and regional entities need to be guaranteed more economic means as well as funding opportunities, laws and principles that are accepted to facilitate its work and its continuity in the future.

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