RE-designing Access to Cultural Heritage
for a wider participation in preservation, (re-)use and management of European Culture

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REACH CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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The notion of cultural heritage has become an essential part of the social sciences and humanities discourse in the past few decades. Researchers such as Vera Lazzaretti claim that the current (third) cultural heritage regime offers a more complex notion of cultural heritage and moves from a conservation- or object-oriented approach to one that is value- or subject-oriented.[1] According to Gábor Sonkoly, heritage, in this new paradigm, is defined by continuous time, by continuous spatial categories, and by the perception of its local community. The new paradigm has relativised the role of authenticity while facilitating the emergence of new concepts to be involved in heritage discourses.[2] As a result, the REACH project has established three pillars:

- milieu
- resilience
- participation

A more consensual European identity and a truly diverse European heritage should also acknowledge and comprise its peripheral and often oppressed elements.

1.1 THE TERRITORIAL ASPECT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

The notion of cultural landscape entered heritage discourses, initially with the recognition of the 1992 World Heritage Cultural Landscape categories, then with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Protected Landscapes and thirdly, with the 2005 merging of cultural and natural criteria for World Heritage purposes. Thus, it is clear that over the past few decades, the inseparable links between culture and nature have been increasingly recognised.[3] The reason why the notion of landscape is highly relevant in analysing participatory approaches and heritage-management models, is the role of personal identification with space, as part of the heritage experience.[4] In other words, cultural landscapes represent links between nature and culture, tangible and intangible heritage, biological and cultural diversity and therefore they enable acknowledgment of the close connection between local communities and their heritage, humankind and its natural environment.

[1] Lazzaretti 2012:

[2] Sonkoly 2017:

[3] Taylor-Lennon 2011: 537-554.

[4] Sonkoly-Vahtikari 2018: 29.

1.2 THE PERCEPTION OF TIME OF CULTURAL HERITAGE: RESILIENT CULTURAL HERITAGE AND COMMUNITIES IN EUROPE

Resilience has become a central concept of cultural heritage discourses since the early 2000s. It is not a coincidence that the dialogue on vulnerability and resilience has intensified over the past few years. From a disaster-based approaches related to tangible cultural heritage, the resilience concept has been recently extended to comprise slower, but no less serious types of disturbance. This is clearly reflected in the Venice Declaration of 2012[5] which emphasised the role of cultural heritage in community resilience. From here, the extension of the adaptive cycle to the whole of culture is just a small step, both in its tangible and intangible aspects. In this context, cultural heritage appears, not only as a value to be preserved, but also as a tool that gives communities the opportunity to create a reserve that increases their resilience and renewal capabilities. This model aims to link the theory of resilience with the themes of preservation, (re-)use and management of cultural heritage. To create a bridge between the two concepts, participatory approaches are the most suitable.

1.2.1 RESILIENCE IN NATURAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Today, ever more sciences have encountered the concept of resilience. Although there are many reasons for this popularity, its various interpretations and complexity should be highlighted. The concept began its scientific career in physical and engineering sciences, where it describes the behaviour of certain materials related to shocks, defines the limit, where the material does not break, but flexibly adapts to the external effect. In the social sciences, the concept has appeared strongly in psychology, more specifically in the fields of developmental and pedagogical psychology, nursing psychology, family therapy and neurology. These fields began to deal with the behaviour of children who, despite difficult living conditions or shocking events, surprisingly performed well in different areas of life.[6]

In the field of environmental biology, the beginning of the institutionalisation of the concept started with the study, *Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems* (1973) written by C. S. Holling, a Canadian ecologist. Over the next four decades, resilience has captured the interest of economists, social scientists, mathematicians and archaeologists. Holling gave the first ecological definition of resilience: 'a measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables.'[7] The most widespread definition of this concept was created in the 2000s: 'the ability of a system to absorb disturbances and still retain its basic function and structure.'[8] A definition in 2010 shows how the concept can be used for social or cultural systems: 'the capacity to change in order to maintain the same identity'[9].

[5] Venice declaration on building resilience at the local level towards protected cultural heritage and climate change adaptation strategies, 20 March 2012, https://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/publications/32399

[6] Békés 2002: 218-220.

[7] Holling 1973: 14.

[8] Walker-Salt 2006: XIII.

[9] Folke et al. 2010.

The theory transforms social and institutional hierarchies from fixed static structures into dynamic, adaptive entities. Three properties shape the pattern of change in a cycle:

- **potential** determines the number of options for the future
- **connectedness** determines the degree to which a system can control its destiny
- **resilience** determines how vulnerable a system is to unexpected disturbances that can exceed its control.

Before looking at resilience beyond the natural sciences, it is necessary to outline the main principles and characteristics of the theory:

- **dual nature of the concept**: it is used both as a **capacity** and as a **process** that, of course, are closely linked to each other
- **complexity:** the model promotes a holistic approach
- **contextuality**: in the context of resilience there is a unique combination of internal capacities and external effects
- **system-based thinking**: the basic unit of the theory is system
- **equilibrium**: it is relative equilibrium, not static
- **self-organising ability**: due to its complexity, the reorganisation of the system cannot be controlled even if certain functions can be enhanced.

These features are common and seem to be perceived as unproblematic in nature and natural sciences. With regard to society and culture these concepts appear much more challenging and pose several issues to applicability.

The first appearance of resilience in social sciences was system-based theories in the 1970s and 1980s and, at that time, it was mainly related to ecosystem researches. In the 1990s the aforementioned, exclusively ecological interpretation, expands to society by using the concept to understand complex socio-economic systems. Due to this shift of focus, resilience has become part of political discourse, especially in development policy.[10] It subsequently evolved into an interdisciplinary research direction in which ecology seemed to lose its leader position as researchers started to talk about nested socio-ecological systems.[11]

Beyond its extended research areas, the novelty, which social sciences brought to the theory, is in switching scales among the examined systems. Psychology, which first introduced the concept among social sciences, foremost examined the individual, then gradually extended to families and later to communities. By applying the concept to understand change in systems such as communities, it was not long before this concept became part of the cultural heritage discourses.

[10] The inclusion to the political discourse is made by the declaration before the Rio+20 conference. United Nations Secretary-General's high-level panel on global sustainability 2012: *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A future worth choosing*. United Nations, New York.
[11] Westley et al. 2002: 119.

1.2.2 RESILIENT CULTURAL HERITAGE AND COMMUNITIES

The third cultural heritage regime offers a more complex definition of cultural heritage, which relativises the role of authenticity. The continuous recreation of heritage is defined through the lens of sustainability and resilience. The fear of loss of past is transforming into the fear of loss of identity. The main question is change in preserving identity. How the community relates itself to change? How it manages change? How it adapts to change? The model explains how social systems engage in forward-looking behaviour and what types of institutions are developed to deal with anticipated uncertainties.
Resilience is crucial, since it reveals the capacity of the community to renew and reorganise itself after disturbance. It offers mitigation of risk and insurance strategies for the management of change and for social and economic development.

According to David E. Beel: "In the context of community heritage, the notion of resilience as human agency is useful in two ways. One, it gives an appropriate understanding as to how different cultural repertoires have been maintained and passed through subsequent generations. Two, it neatly describes a set of relationships and connections that continue to maintain those cultural repertoires in the present day, especially as practices move towards digital forms."[12] Thus, in the case of resilient communities, their activity to maintain their heritage is represented by the concept of 'heritage from below' meaning a manifestation of counter hegemonic practises'. Therefore, these community heritage projects do not conform to a top down narrative, but aim to represent the 'ordinary' lives and practices of the local community.

1.3 COMMUNITY OF HERITAGE

1.3.1 EUROPEAN IDENTIFICATION

Although European identification is an extremely complex topic, within this context, it is worthwhile highlighting some of the more pertinent aspects.

As Graham and Howard claim, the complex and constructed notion of **identity** can be envisaged as a set of 'markers such as: heritage, language, religion, ethnicity, nationalism and shared interpretations of the past used to establish narratives of inclusion and exclusion' and construct communities. Identity is also about sameness and group membership which helps to conceptualise the discourse of 'otherness', which is necessary to create self-identity.[13] This is a complex dynamic that involves not just the reinforcement of self-identity, but also the creation of distancing and exclusionary strategies to keep the 'others' on the outside of a group or community. Both factors are crucial to understand how identity works. In trying to define **European identity**, it seems that scholars turn to a political conceptualisation. According to Furio Cerutti, it is only possible to tackle the question as a strictly political scientific concept, which does not try to either cancel national identities or to replace Europe's cultural diversity.[14]

[12] Beel 2017: 460.
[13] Graham-Howard 2008: 6.
[14] Cerutti-Lucarelli 2008: 3.

Therefore, identity at the European level provides a sense of belonging to some **larger political unit**, especially as developed in the analysis of nationalism and national identity. Naturally, the notion of European identity is strictly linked to the question whether and to what extent the existence of the European Union means the identification of its citizens and the creation of a real political and cultural community. When analysing mass identification, it is possible to look at top-down and **bottom-up** perspectives. This latter seems more pertinent in this context, because it relies on citizens' own perception on their identification and therefore, it may be directly linked to the examination of participatory practices.[15].

1.3.2 LOCAL COMMUNITIES

In different European documents or projects, the definition of community may vary in size or scale, according to the purpose of the research. Even though the European project and the integration of different nation states represents a significant weight of research and writing on European identity, the impact of **local communities** and the promotion of **civic participation** is also prominent. Obviously, local communities in a post-national Europe cannot be forced to have a singular identity: their national / regional / territorial / local identity will be necessary a **hybrid**, liminal one, which comprises unstable, mixed, temporal categories. It is believed that the research of participatory and bottom-up approaches will gain greater importance in the case of different **marginalised or minority groups**: especially transnational groups such as the European Roma population, various kind of border populations, international migrants, and people in diaspora situations or those with multiple citizenship.

Local communities may gain benefit from cultural heritage with the enhancement of **social capital**. A community characterised by strong social capital is more likely to have a strong sense of social and personal responsibility and will respect common social values. Therefore, being socially responsible, the community may be resilient towards changes and may enable the sustainability of its local heritage project.[16]

A local community shares a **local culture**, which is also important to note when identifying the eventual difficulties or problems that the community has. This local culture has both backward and forward-looking dimensions with implications for local opportunities.

It is important to emphasise that local communities are not homogeneous and that they consist of different social groups, maintaining their own distinct cultures. In order to establish sustainable and resilient development projects, it is crucial to retain this **heterogeneous structure** and the representation of these groups' cultures.[17]

[15] Bruter 2005: 7.
[16] CFCE report: 72.
[17] Brennan et al 2008: 99.

The importance of local community and local identity in regards to heritage protection became pertinent from the second half of the 1970s. With the mobilisation of local communities to protect their (first mostly) urban heritage, the civil participation and the willing to use heritage as a tool for identity building became more and more widespread.[18] From the 1980s, greater emphasis was put on the attachment to the place of residence and its impact in civic consciousness.

In the 1990s-00s, an important perceptual shift was recognisable, as local participation was no longer considered only as an advisable element, but as a necessary principle.[19] From the moment local communities and bottom-up initiatives gained more importance and power in the preservation of their distinctive cultural traditions and practices, their heterogeneity and multicultural / hybrid aspects also became visible. Thus, the recognition of cultural diversity seems necessary to provide a trustworthy understanding of local heritage protection and civil identity.

1.3.3 CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, listing cultural heritage sites of **"outstanding universal value"** have been criticised for being too Western-, or Europe-centred. Furthermore, as Sofia Labadi puts it: the importance of the Convention [appears] not only as a tool for heritage conservation, but also as an instrument for pursuing noble goals like peace, post-nationalism, social cohesion, cultural diversity and sustainable development.[20] From the beginning of the 2000s, the notion of **cultural diversity** began to replace the concept of universalism, after stating that cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity for nature.[21] In the UNESCO Declaration from 2001, the concept appears as a principle for organising sustainable cultural plurality, both within and across societies. According to the document, cultural diversity, as an inevitable partner of sustainability, is a critical link between the **intangible and the tangible dimensions** of development. From the safeguarding of **linguistic diversity** through the expression in **formal and informal education** to the encouraging of **'digital literacy'**, the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity signs on its importance not only as a tool for heritage conservation, but also as an important change in the role attributed to communities in heritage discourses.[22]

Furthermore, in 2003, UNESCO emphasised the importance of bottom-up interventions in heritage protection and thus, the **involvement of local communities**. According to them, local communities need to have a sense of 'ownership' of their heritage which reaffirms their worth as a community and their appreciation of their own 'culture'.

[18] Sonkoly 2017: 48.
[19] Sonkoly 2017: 48.
[20] Labadi 2013: 1.
[21] Sonkoly 2017: 49.
[22] UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, A document for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 26 August – 4 September 2002

However, when these theories are put into practice, the real linkage between the goals of maintaining cultural diversity, protecting cultural heritage and enforcing **human rights** is still not clearly recognised by many cultural heritage practitioners or by human rights workers. For instance, according to Logan, the **commodification of ethnic minority cultures** through cultural tourism can bring communities a short-term benefit in terms of revenue generation, but may have the risk to transform and lose the cultural distinctiveness of the community. In addition, some local communities may choose to achieve higher standards of living by modernising and rejecting their cultural traditions.[23]

[23] Logan 2008: 439.

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