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Portada interior: **GRUTAS DE YUNGANG**. Shanxi (China). Detalle. *Imagen: Aída Gómez Robles*

What is modern conservation?
*Some thoughts about the evolution of modern conservation policies ***

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Abstract

The modern approach to the identification and safeguarding of heritage has had a major development from the second half of the 20th century. Starting from the definition of the work of art and monuments in the aftermath of the Second World War, the notions have broadened into creative cultural expression and cultural landscape. At the same time, increasing attention has been given to heritage in its widest dimension, involving local communities in the conservation and management, respecting human rights, and taking into account the social and economic factors. This implies that heritage cannot be seen or preserved in isolation. Nor can it be the sole responsibility of the authority. Understanding heritage, cultural and natural, in its context is a learning process that has become a fundamental part of modern conservation practice.

Keywords: Heritage conservation - significance - cultural expression - cultural diversity - international doctrine.

Recognition of heritage

In 1963, the publication of the *Teoria del restauro* by Cesare Brandi anticipated the 2nd International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, which met in Venice from May 25th to 31st 1964. In his *Theory*, Brandi referred to the text by John Dewey in his *Art as experience*:

> *A work of art, no matter how old or Classic, is actually and not just potentially a work of art when it lives in some individualized experience. As a piece of parchment, of marble, of canvas, it remains (subject, however, to the ravages of time) self-identical throughout the ages. But as a work of art, it is recreated every time it is aesthetically experienced.* (Dewey, 1934, quoted as Dewey, 1951: 130 in Brandi 1963)

Brandi noted that once this statement was accepted, it was not surprising that it would lead to the following corollary: "*any way of acting in relation to the work of art, including restoration treatment, depends on its being recognized as a work of art*" (Brandi, 2005: 48). Such a recognition makes the restoration of a work of art different compared to the general understanding of restoration of other types of products that did not have recognized artistic or heritage qualities. Brandi starts the first chapter of his *Theory*: "*Restoration is generally understood to mean any intervention that permits a product of human activity to recover its function*" (Brandi, 2005: 45). In relation to works of art, instead, Brandi concludes: "*Restoration consists of the methodological moment in which the work of art is recognized in its physical being and in its dual aesthetic and historical nature, in view of its transmission to the future.*" (Brandi, 2005: 48). So, the question remains: what can be considered a work of art?

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In 1972, the same year when the *World Heritage Convention* was adopted, Brandi was one of the principal protagonists in the preparation of the Italian *Carta del Restauro*.[1] In the preface, the charter declares:

> *La coscienza che le opere d'arte, intese nell'accezione più vasta che va dall'ambiente urbano ai monumenti architettonici a quelli di pittura e scultura, e dal reperto paleolitico alle espressioni figurative delle culture popolari, debbano essere tutelate in modo organico e paritetico, porta necessariamente alla elaborazione di norme tecnico-giuridiche che sanciscano i limiti entro i quali va intesa la conservazione, sia come salvaguardia e prevenzione, sia come intervento di restauro propriamente detto.[2]*

If we look at the International *Charter for the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites*, the *Venice Charter*, adopted in 1964, we can note that the principal subject of conservation is here defined generally as monument:

> *(Art. 1) The concept of a historic monument embraces not only the single architectural work but also the urban or rural setting in which is found the evidence of a particular civilisation, a significant development or a historic event. This applies not only to great works of art but also to more modest works of the past which have acquired cultural significance with the passing of time.*

To take these notions a step further, the 1976 UNESCO *Recommendation concerning the safeguarding and contemporary role of historic areas* declares:

> *(Art. 3) Every historic area and its surroundings should be considered in their totality as a coherent whole whose balance and specific nature depend on the*

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[1] The Ministry of Education diffused this Charter of Restoration 1972 (*Carta del Restauro*) with a circular letter n. 117 of 6 April 1972 to all Superintendence offices and heads of autonomous institutions in Italy with the obligation to follow the instructions in a scrupulous manner in the restoration of any works of art.

[2] *(All works of art, in their broadest meaning - from the urban environment to architectural monuments, paintings and sculptures, and from Palaeolithic remains to figurative expressions of folk cultures, need to be safeguarded in an organized and unbiased manner. This recognition necessarily leads to the preparation of technical-juridical norms that establish the limits within which conservation should be intended, whether as safeguard and prevention or restoration proper).* (Translation by the author).

fusion of the parts of which it is composed and which include human activities as much as the buildings, the spatial organization and the surroundings. All valid elements, including human activities, however modest, thus have a significance in relation to the whole which must not be disregarded.

At the same time, the cultural references for heritage were gradually further expanding. In November 1994, in the context of the *World Heritage Convention*, an expert meeting took place in Nara (Japan), and adopted the *Nara Document on Authenticity*. The main issue that came out from this meeting was perhaps not so much the clearer definition of "authenticity" (i.e. truthfulness), but rather the recognition of cultural diversity and heritage diversity.

(Art. 5) The diversity of cultures and heritage in our world is an irreplaceable source of spiritual and intellectual richness for all humankind. (…)

(Art. 7) All cultures and societies are rooted in the particular forms and means of tangible and intangible expression which constitute their heritage, and these should be respected.

The identification of something as a work of art depends on the recognition by an individual. As we have seen in the Italian *Charter of 1972*, the notion of work of art can however be associated with many types of resources, which are not necessarily considered 'works of art' in the common understanding. Indeed, instead of work of art, we could update this concept and speak of cultural expressions, as it has been defined by UNESCO in the Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions, adopted in Paris at the 33rd session of the General Conference of UNESCO in 2005. This convention declares in its introduction:

Affirming that cultural diversity is a defining characteristic of humanity,

Conscious that cultural diversity forms a common heritage of humanity and should be cherished and preserved for the benefit of all,

Being aware that cultural diversity creates a rich and varied world, which increases the range of choices and nurtures human capacities and values, and therefore is a mainspring for sustainable development for communities, peoples and nations, (…)

Taking into account that culture takes diverse forms across time and space and that this diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities and cultural expressions of the peoples and societies making up humanity, (…)

Being convinced that cultural activities, goods and services have both an economic and a cultural nature, because they convey identities, values and meanings, and must therefore not be treated as solely having commercial value, (…)

Furthermore, the *2005 Convention* also includes various principles that need to be taken into account in modern conservation, such as the respect of human rights, and the principle of complementarity of economic and cultural aspects of development. What is heritage today is the result of a process of recognition, based on the communication between local communities and the international framework. It is in such context that each individual community will recognize what they consider their heritage, cultural and natural, as well as tangible and intangible.

The international conservation doctrine proposes guiding principles that should be applicable in the different cultures. Indeed, the concept of universality is a fundamental precondition for all international conservation doctrine. Such doctrine is the result of consultation processes at the international level. At the same time, nevertheless, as has been recognized in the 1994 *Nara Document on Authenticity* and in the *UNESCO 2005 Convention*, each heritage resource has its specific character and qualities. Therefore, modern conservation is necessarily based on the application of some universal principles, on the one hand, and on the recognition of the specific heritage significance at the local level, on the other hand. These are all issues that form part of the notion of modern conservation as already stated in the preface of the *Venice Charter*.

> *It is essential that the principles guiding the preservation and restoration of ancient buildings should be agreed and be laid down on an international basis, with each country being responsible for applying the plan within the framework of its own culture and traditions.*

These two dimensions of the modern conservation are only apparently in contrast with each other. However, perhaps it is due to this apparent contrast that there are often different and even conflicting value judgements in specific cases.

Values and Significance

It is indeed in the second half of the 20th century that modern conservation has become more fully recognized by the international community. This is best seen in the number of States that have ratified the *1972 World Heritage Convention*, rising to 190 by 23 November 2011, when Palestine ratified. This is a lot compared to the 195 Member States of UNESCO.[3] Thus, nearly the entire world has recognized that heritage in all its diversity is valuable and that it is important to take measures for its protection and conservation.

What is then a value? Indeed, this is not a small question. Value theory or axiology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of value and with what kinds of things have value (Audi, 1995). We can note that values can be seen as the result of recognition and consequent association of qualities to things, a recognition that is, at the same time, the result of comparison with other things with similar qualities. There are certainly many types of values, which vary subject to local customs and traditions, as well as (today) due to the impact of increasing globalisation, which tends to contaminate authentic cultural traditions.

What has been discussed above is related to the recognition of particular qualities in something that we recognize as our heritage - and thus worthy of conservation. Often, values are seen in two categories, ones associated with the thing itself, an object worth for its own sake, i.e. intrinsic, and others associated with the object as a means to obtain something else, i.e. instrumental. We could see that an ancient monument, such as the Parthenon in Athens, has intrinsic value as a celebrated historic-artistic object; it has instrumental value being capable of generating economic return through various types of activities, such as cultural tourism. Values can also be identified under two main headings (Feilden and Jokilehto, 1998: 18-20):

a) **Cultural values**: *Identity value (based on recognition),* Relative artistic or technical value (based on research), and Rarity value (based on statistics), as well as

b) **Contemporary socio-economic values**: Economic value, Functional value, Educational value, Social value, Political value.

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[3] In March 2015, the number of States that have ratified the convention is 191.

By now, this relationship has already been recognized by economists who claim that cultural heritage can be a lever for economic and social development (Greffe, n.d.). Sometimes, this is interpreted in the restricted form of cultural tourism and cultural industries. However, it can also be seen in a broader sense. In its etymology, the word economy derives from: *"οἴκος"* (house) and *"νέμω"* (manage; distribute). Therefore: *"οἰκονομία"* means "household management". It is the system established by a community to provide the desired quality of life, a system within which a community arranges its resource management over time. The etymology of the word culture, instead, can be referred to the Latin word: *"colere"* (*colo*), which means: cultivate, take care, pay respect to. The meanings of culture range from cultivation and agriculture to maintenance and learning, as well as to worship and cult. Culture is the intrinsic driving force for establishing and improving the quality of life of a community. Culture generates the economic framework in a community, and then also becomes the necessary reference for further cultural development over time. Therefore there is a close interaction between culture and economy. Culture is the generator and a product of development within the evolving framework of the economy of a community (Jokilehto, 2012: 58-67).

When the World Heritage Global Strategy Expert Meeting was held in Amsterdam in 1998, the question of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) was one of the topics that were discussed, and resulted in the following definition:

> *The requirement of outstanding universal value characterising cultural and natural heritage should be interpreted as an outstanding response to issues of universal nature common to or addressed by all human cultures. In relation to natural heritage, such issues are seen in bio-geographical diversity; in relation to culture in human creativity and resulting cultural diversity* (UNESCO, 1998: 15).

This means that there must be some themes that are common to or shared by all human cultures, and that define what a particular property signifies. This question is obviously associated with the economy that characterises a particular site or property, and the cultural specificity that reflects human creative capacity. The question was taken up by ICOMOS dealing with the analysis of the World Heritage List (ICOMOS). This study resulted in the identification of three general frameworks: a) Typological Framework, b) Chronological Framework, and c) Thematic Framework. Of these the Thematic Framework was directly associated with the Amsterdam definition of OUV, and could be taken as the starting point for understanding what should be protected and conserved in each case. The Thematic Framework was articulated under six main themes, which could have different subheadings (ICOMOS, 2005: 73-80).

- **Expressions of Society** (such as interacting and communicating; cultural associations; developing knowledge)

- **Creative Responses and Continuity** (articulation of the different types of functions generating and developing monuments, groups of buildings, and sites)

- **Spiritual responses** (ancient and indigenous belief systems and religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam)

- **Utilising natural resources** (agriculture, mining, manufacturing)

- **Movement of peoples** (migration, colonisation, nomadism; cultural routes, transport)

- **Developing technologies** (converting and utilising energy; processing information, technology of urban community)

The next question therefore is: what are the different elements or issues that represent a particular theme or significance? This question is directly referred to the **integrity** of the property that is recognized as heritage, and what are consequently the elements that together contribute to its significance. In the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, the definition of the Outstanding Universal Value of a particular property requires the respect of the condition of integrity, defined as "*a measure of the wholeness and intactness of the natural and/or cultural heritage and its attributes*". (UNESCO, 2012a: 23). It is further noted that:

> *Examining the conditions of integrity, therefore requires <u>assessing the extent to which</u> the property: a) includes all elements necessary to express its Outstanding Universal Value; b) is of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the features and processes which convey the property's significance; c) suffers from adverse effects of development and/or neglect.* (UNESCO, 2012a: 23)

The notion of integrity can be referred to several different aspects of the heritage resource. The **social-functional integrity** of a place is referred to the identification of the elements and issues that represent the functions and processes on which the establishment and development of a place has been based. The above ICOMOS study can be taken as a guideline for their identification. The spatial identification of the elements that document such functions and processes and their state of conservation helps to define the **historical-structural integrity** of the place. This can refer to what has survived from past evolution as well as identifying the current situation. These elements provide testimony to the creative response and continuity in building the structures and give sense to the spatial-environmental integrity of the area. The notion of **visual integrity**, instead, is not only a question of aesthetics. Rather, it means the definition of the overall visual result of developments related to a particular function and historical behaviour that characterises a place. In the end, in any case, all these aspects of integrity should be taken as part of the overall assessment of the place in relation to the recognized significance. It is also against this background that one can then assess the impact of changes that are consistent with the chosen theme, or that result in conflict with the same.

Modern Conservation

What is then modern conservation? The simple answer is: modern conservation refers to the policies and strategies of conservation and development of heritage sites that characterise the present-day heritage attitudes of the society. As a matter of fact, however, the question is complex and it can have many references. Conservation of cultural heritage is a learning process. We can identify several creative moments in this process during the second half of the 20th century. The first moment certainly is in the period immediately following the Second World War, which also marks the real beginnings of international collaboration in the protection of heritage. While the *Venice Charter* still reflects the notions of "*monuments and sites*", various speakers at the same Venice meeting already anticipated the need to start taking care of historic urban areas.

The second moment is in the 1970s, when these issues come up more forcefully because the post-war urban development trends threatened to destroy historic urban centres. This topic is discussed in numerous conferences during the European Architectural Heritage Year of 1975, when the Council of Europe adopted first a *Charter on European Architectural Heritage*, and then the *Declaration of Amsterdam* at the concluding conference in Amsterdam.

These recommendations proposed the notion of **integrated conservation,** implying that protection should not be limited to sole monuments, but should also take into account larger historic areas. In the same line, the following year, UNESCO adopted the *Recommendation concerning the safeguarding and contemporary role of historic areas* (1976).

The requirement of integrated conservation of historic areas has continued to be in the focus of international debate, and an increasing number of ever larger historic areas have been inscribed on the World Heritage List. At the same time, the regional differences started coming a point of focus. Already in 1979, the Australian ICOMOS had adopted the first version of the *Burra Charter,* the Australia ICOMOS *Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance* (ICOMOS Australia, 1999), as an attempt to adopt the *Venice Charter* to the more specifically Australian situation. This *Charter* has become popular particularly outside Europe, and in 2000, the Chinese ICOMOS promoted the preparation of the *Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China* in collaboration with the Getty Conservation Institute and the State Administration of Cultural Heritage of China (SACH) (Agnew and Demas, 2002). It was adopted in 2002.

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In July 1987, the first Brazilian seminar about the preservation and revitalization of historic centres adopted a set of basic principles in the *Carta de Petropolis* (ICOMOS Brasil, 1987). This charter stressed that "*Urban historical sites are part of a wider totality, comprising the natural and the built environment and the everyday living experience of their dwellers as well*", and that such sites are "*permanently undergoing a dynamic process of successive transformations*," where new urban spaces may be considered as "*environmental evidences in their formative stages*".

In 2000, the Japanese National Committee of ICOMOS adopted the *Machinami Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Settlements of Japan*. Here, the Japanese word *machinami* refers to historic areas in relation to their surrounding natural and cultural environment. It applies to buildings as well as people, to tangible and intangible, physical and spiritual aspects in a kind of spiritual bond or relationship.

In 2004, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, INTACH, adopted the *Charter for the conservation of unprotected architectural heritage and sites in India*. It is noted that the majority of India's architectural heritage remains unprotected. Indeed, most protection is focused on archaeological sites that are under the care of the Archaeological Survey of India, ASI. The *INTACH Charter* stresses that the objective of conservation is to maintain the significance of the heritage, and that significance is constituted in both tangible and intangible forms. The *Charter* emphasizes the importance of traditional knowledge systems, which are represented for example in crafts traditions, and the need to take into account the specific character and qualities of each region and cultural landscape.

If we compare the situation of 2013 with that of fifty years earlier, i.e. the 1960s, it is easy to observe that there have been major changes in the attitudes. There has been an increasing trend to identify ever larger areas as cultural heritage. This has included particularly the recognition of cultural landscapes, a concept that was adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 1992, and by the Council of Europe in 1995. Indeed, the World Heritage Committee, together with the Advisory Bodies composed by ICOMOS, ICCROM and IUCN, and with the World Heritage Centre of UNESCO have become the guiding force in promoting the recognition of new types of places as heritage and improved forms of protection and management. This has been accompanied by the rapprochement of culture and nature, once fairly far apart, and an increasing interest in the intangible cultural heritage, as defined in the *UNESCO Convention* in 2003.

In the first decade of the 21st century, attention has been drawn to the many problems that are associated with planning and management of heritage sites. Indeed, the requirement of the preparation and implementation of a Management Plan has become an obligation since 2005 for any new properties nominated for World Heritage listing. One of the questions discussed relates to the limits of change in an existing site, particularly in reference to its authenticity and integrity. This problem is often raised due to unsympathetic modern buildings raised either within or just outside World Heritage areas.

Another question is the issue of the limits of reconstruction. A recent example is the case of Bagrati Cathedral, built around 1000, destroyed by an army in late 17th century, and under reconstruction since the 1950s. It was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1994, when it was already in an advanced state of rebuilding. However, when the State Party later proposed to continue the rebuilding, this was not considered acceptable. Indeed, in 2013, the site risks being delisted. At the same time, many ruined structures have been rebuilt and accepted to the World Heritage List. For example, the St. Dormition Cathedral, in Kiev, was accepted to the World Heritage List after its reconstruction, as was the Old Bridge of Mostar.

The question about the meaning and limits of reconstruction is certainly one of the issues that can and should be raised, particularly in relation to the notions of authenticity and integrity. This question has already been raised in China (Qufu Declaration, 2005), where building practitioners are debating on the right to rebuild weathered and damaged ancient temples, as well as in the Baltic countries that are still dealing with the remains of war-damaged monuments (Riga Charter, 2000).

In 2005, an international conference in Vienna discussed the introduction of modern architecture into an historic context, resulting in the *Vienna Memorandum*. This document was later also adopted by the World Heritage Committee, and it became a starting point and reference for the process of drafting the UNESCO *Recommendation on Historic Urban Landscapes*, which was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in November 2011. Rather than proposing another heritage category, this policy document aims at improving the management of the context where heritage resources have been identified. Indeed, it means that conservation has now been integrated into the general planning and management of the built environment, not only in a limited area but as one of the pillars on which modern territorial polices and planning strategies need to be built in the future.

These advancements have not come without problems. While the number of States Parties has increased, and when the World Heritage List, in 2013, is approaching the magic number of 1000, the political pressures are beginning to have an impact, which is not necessarily playing in favour of the credibility of the List.

In November 2012, Japan hosted the Closing Event of the Celebrations of the 40th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention. The conference adopted *The Kyoto Vision*, which noted the achievements of the World Heritage Convention over its four decades of history (UNESCO, 2012b). Attention was given to the role of World Heritage in contributing to a sustainable earth, as well as stressing the fundamental importance of the Role of Community in conservation. Indeed, modern conservation can no more be considered in a lonely ivory tower guarded by specialists. It has become part of the everyday life and everyday reality. As a result, conservation necessarily also has to meet the challenges that life is proposing.

We can say that modern conservation is *in fieri*, i.e. in the course of execution. What it means is that we should all be involved in recognizing our heritage and building together our capacity to take care of it. The challenge, on behalf of the international community, is to make sure that the doctrinal texts and principles are truly universal and capable of being applied in the local contexts. At the same time, it is the responsibility of each place and local community to recognize the specificity of its heritage, and to understand how this should make part of the integrated conservation within the culturally and environmentally sustainable development, avoiding the symptoms and misguided illusions offered by globalisation.

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