

A Stone above the Other The Chairman's Note

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1. In Venice, I have been very impressed by the International Conference on *Cultural Heritage. Scenarios 2015*. I appreciated the formula of the organizers and of the Scientific Committee to actively engage local actors and I appreciated an *excipit* equally focused on the protagonists of the Venetian heritage. The formula envisions a sandwich, in which the two pieces of bread are the stakeholders, or even the agencies of the “civil society” (to use the Gramsci language) in the host city. The associations, the “Scuole Grandi”, the civil corporations and artisans’ confederations, the artisans, the Arsenal, the universities, the Pro Loco, the world of the gondolas all were part of the sandwich, also the associations that are engaged in tourism, all are committed to the safeguard of CH. In between, we had the academics, the scholars of international law, and their UNESCO interlocutors, but also the cultural anthropologists, the historians, the scholars on the war, post-conflict and peace, and the protection of common goods. The Conference was organized and delivered for those who really cares and are affected, to produce some concrete results from the meeting and to stimulate immediately a feedback on what is in progress about CH. Then, it has to be appreciated also the intent to close the Conference underlining the urgent needs, giving to scholars a sense of usefulness and responsibility. From the formula of the Conference in Venice, I have drawn several advantages, and I think it will be useful to remake this formula, also to remind to the scientific community that it is useless if it does not dialogue with the world of practical workers. I enjoyed seeing the cultural anthropology being included into an interdisciplinary Conference, a Conference where maybe I did not understand all the issues raised; but the things I learnt and the climate I lived have been all new. And I live in a climate that is not anymore defined by the internal academic conflicts, but is made by the living knowledge and relationship in a more transparent way. I learnt a lot in Venice: both from the world of practice and from the theories and the interpretations offered.

2. The choice to name the sessions by using active verbs about the CH, that

were therefore catalogued as fire / soul / condensation / is transmitted to the heart and to the hands or dies/ has been right and original. In these titles, heritage becomes a 'transcendent subject' which operates through people who make and refer to it. The heritage therefore does not have the nature of the transcendence of the 'bad power' in which it is often identified (the power that embalms, falsifies, crystallizes), but it has the nature of the immanence of being in life, or even in civil society. So if it burns, it is because it is on fire, or because it produces pain, distress, not-fulfilled passions. It is engaging anyway, as well as when it animates or gives life to actions, even to conflicts. Then heritage becomes a 'condensation' because it always captures the subject in order to concretely manifesting it, it captures the interest of participants to transmit it, otherwise the CH will die. If heritage becomes transmitted (in a way that keeps ambiguity between a moral imperative and a reflective form), this happens through a practical knowledge. It happens through the hands (about handcrafts was written "with the mind in the hands"), and out of strength and passion, located in the heart, with no public or private action that favour it or impose it.

Sometimes during the Conference it was told that "the burning side of the heritage" prevailed also in the other sessions, because of the topics of complaint (the absence of the role of the public administration, etc.), underestimating that when something burns means that it is placed in public scenarios, means that it animates people, means that it favours processes against solitude. Therefore, the initial and final interventions of civil society have made me thinking and writing that the heritage is as if each person were there to put his stone and to build something together. Personally, as a chairman of a session devoted to the theme of heritage (a session full of action of cultural commitment on the high productivity of the world's heritage), I saw alive the theme of the most recent book written by James Clifford, *Returns. Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-first Century* (2013). J. Clifford is a well known American anthropologist with important studies of museums and heritage. In Italy this theme can be defined as follows: after having marginalised the skills and social forms of the past, the Italian society, as largely post-industrial, now 'returns' to the local heritage, interpreting the skills and the cultural diversity as a possible resource against the crisis, due to an excess of 'liquid standardization'. Be indigenous in the twenty-first century means in my opinion creating communities through a new sense of differences and of cultural resources, it means playing and valorizing the local tradition as a resource for the future.

3. It is quite impressive that jurists look at the UNESCO international law as a positive fact, a response to the war in which culture and heritage are factors of resistance to destruction, are a response to what is divided and aims to the unity, are the activation of new rights from below.

They criticize the 2003 UNESCO Convention because of its potential in recognizing new rights of participation to the people; and the creation of community-recognition is still not applicable. The international norms on historical, artistic, architectural and anthropological heritage are often seen as forms of power aimed at imposing taxes and conditioning world processes. Undoubtedly, the UNESCO policies emerge through the State parties' policies, and these policies are often not aimed at promoting and realizing the public interest. But it is also true that this happens at every level of the political and institutional life. So, if the criticism is not coming from a total anarchy, maybe this suspicion (or hostility) hides a popular disappointment because a 'community' can finally decide by itself, and so can escape from the power of technicians. It is quite common to hear that the community does not understand anything without the experts, that they reflect the system and the consumerism. Leninists and Trotskyists seem to confront new forms of heritage. Facing the debates about heritage and about rights, the imagination related to the experiences of radical democracy dating back to 1900, from the Paris Commune to the factory councils, re-appears. In that time, anthropologists and art historians, also architects and planners, were Jacobins and firmly believed that 'the party' born from above would be able to guide the masses. In similar way, today the UNESCO deceives communities that for their own well being could instead rely on intellectuals. As social and political philosophers, we can say that there is an ICH UNESCO à la Foucault which is an agency of the intangible force that shapes the people, or à la De Certeau that instead recognizes in ICH UNESCO a way where communities can redefine management tactics of social space to their own advantage, through a motto like: "the immaterial is ours and we can manage it". This motto seems well attested in the work made by the Lombardia Region on the inventories, of which there was some echo in Venice.

4. Between the 2003 UNESCO Convention and the Faro Convention, there are interesting adjustments, small disputes, declarations of affection. The Venetian jurists love the Faro Convention more than the 2003 UNESCO Convention. Perhaps it seems but is not really like this, maybe the jurists look for an integrate use of the two Conventions. Both are soft laws if compared to national laws, and may not be applied, but are expected to be applied once the States have ratified them. Italy waited many years to sign the two Conventions, but once done, Italy was expected to use them more than it does. What is the problem? If I understand well, it is quite clear that the 2003 UNESCO Convention 'provides awards' based on a universal value of CH to the community/individuals, that are rich of knowledge, arts, skills, etc. Faro instead recognizes subjects as 'agency of civil society'. The ICH community can also be a singing group, traditional, as long as active. While the Faro Convention recognizes as a heritage community a

group of people which is characterized by an activity called 'heritage' by themselves: a group of people claiming public recognition from various places and through various sources, also virtual. We can say that UNESCO recognizes certain communities based on certain qualities, while Faro indicates only the mode of their formation in the public sphere. It could even be said that UNESCO gives an 'award', while Faro opens to the possibility of a collective activity. So Faro is closer to a political culture that can raise from the local civil society, or be raised by civil society in general. I could say that a HC could act as a superintendence that is not appointed from above and is not made up by experts, but is made up by people who wish to value practices, and to protect these worthy practices through the ways offered by the Convention. So Faro is closer to the utopia that the citizens decide about their heritage and protect it, and it is a sort of Paris Commune of CH. Or perhaps, in a more utopian way, a sort of institutional Minister of Cultural Assets, set up by the Council of Representatives of the HCs. In a meeting where the windows overlook the Grand Canal, like in a painting by Canaletto, obviously it is possible to dream.