

Theme 2: Cultural Heritage

Keynote speech

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Cultural Heritage (CH)

I. What is CH?

The concept of CH belongs to a **set of concepts** that are typical of contemporary tendencies to define and mobilize current social, cultural and even spiritual attachments to a given community as well as to its place in a **functional, inclusive and non-conflictual** manner. To a certain extent, CH is replacing (1) and/or institutionalizing (2) the other fuzzy concepts of the presentist set, since CH is the only presentist concept that has a legally and administratively comprehensive origin (“heritage or patrimony”):

(1) CH is replacing **“culture”**, a term that was too academic (i.e. elitist, top-down) and was definitely put into plural (“cultureS”) (i) by the various emancipatory movements from the late 1960s onwards, (ii) by the academic recognition of these movements from the 1970s onwards, and (iii) by the institutionalized notion of “cultural diversity” from the 1990s onwards. CH is also replacing **“identity”**, the catchword of postmodern Academia (1970s-2000s), of supranational politico-economic formations such as the EU, and of subnational community self-expressions such as multicultural urban neighbourhoods. Given these multiple uses, the notion of “identity” has become too vast and hollow for practical purposes. Moreover, both “culture” and “identity” inherited some conflictual and exclusive connotations from their very inception.

(2) From the 1970s, **“memory”** (belonging to the individual, to a community or to a group) has been challenging the time-honored identity construction of SSH. Remembering at all levels of the society (local, regional, national and global) has become a wide-spread social practice and form of expression. Its diverse manifestations have been exploited by political actors belonging to all the different levels of society to propose a new festive and inclusive character through the multiplication of the events of **“commemoration”**. The CH of a community can be considered as the institutionalized aggregate of the community’s selected pieces of memory and those of the memory-bearers. CH is not just a bottom-up form of identity-construction, but it can also include its marketing and branding procedures both for the inner and for the outer communities. These implementing acts of identity often take the form of commemorations.

CH is the administrative response to the social and cultural novelties of identity constructions, what SSH were trying to understand and interpret within their own conceptual framework. Therefore, CH (Studies) is still lacking an overall academic definition. The first and the most influential institutionalization of CH has been taking place at UNESCO, which has had an impact on the concept of CH at national, regional and continental levels, including the concept of CH as it is used by the EU.

The evolution of the concept of CH at UNESCO reflects the juridico-theoretical attempts of defining the ever-expanding nature of CH, which gradually incorporates monuments, neighbourhoods/zones, cities, natural landscapes, all kinds of species, cultural landscapes, social and

cultural activities and groups. This integrative process yields the **conceptual twins of tangible/intangible heritages**. They linguistically suggest a unity of two (otherwise) significantly different approaches to CH:

(1) tangible CH is a successor of the monumental approach of the static conception of cultural and natural heritage (from the 1970s); whereas

(2) intangible CH stems from the critique of tangible CH (from the 1990s) and it is used to safeguard social and cultural practices dynamically.

The construction of **European CH** follows a similar logic to UNESCO's, first by defining CH in various standard-setting documents of the Council of Europe as Architectural CH (1975, 1985) and Archaeological CH (1992) in harmony with the European tradition of monumental protection; then, by offering a broader definition of CH as "a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time" (Faro Convention, 2005). This broad definition that includes social and cultural practices is instrumentalised in the Horizon 2020 work programme for 2014-2015 of Societal Challenge 6. Herein, CH appears for the first time to this extent as a key concept incorporating the role of culture as one of the main pillars of sustainability as well as the new conceptual bridge between society and nature expressed in the European Landscape Convention in 2000.

The **academic institutionalization of CH** has started rather late because of the term's administrative nature. There is still some bewilderment concerning the meaning of CH. For instance, it can refer to any process of knowledge transmission in history or, following the rules of conceptual history, it can also be analysed as a concept that appeared in the late 1960s to indicate new social and cultural realities. In addition, different disciplines feel the need to reflect on CH when its continuous expansion reaches their domain. During the previous decades of the rise of CH, two types of institutional intrusion have taken place:

(1) sciences and academic fields directly linked to the conservation of those past objects that represent a historical identity, which have gradually been referred to as "tangible heritage", were often regrouped under the label of heritage, as in the case of the establishment of the *Institut national du patrimoine* in France in 2001;

(2) CH studies departments appeared in Faculties of SSH, which often baffled other academics who were not certain whether this new discipline aims to describe new social realities created by cultural heritage or to assist in the creation of new identities expressed through cultural heritage.

The ambiguous notion of **CH management**, indicating that cultural heritage is also linked to political and financial realities, could mean both or neither.

2. Why is CH successful?

CH is a contemporary concept to express contemporary social and cultural practices and identity constructions that are:

(1) much more based on the **present** and on the **management of change** than on modernist

projects aiming at the future;

(2) not founded on great (19th and early 20th century) theories and **ideologies** explaining or expecting social development;

(3) rather **critical of SSH** and even of urban planning, which have undergone a set of paradigm shifts commonly labelled as “turns” leading to a certain credibility loss;

(4) closely linked to the **democratization** processes expressed by participatory legislation and, later on, by the concepts of social and cultural inclusion;

(5) open to the **multiplication of identities** and to the permeability between different levels of societies;

The logics of CH to define and to interpret the **components of social and cultural appropriation** is unusual from the modernist point of view because:

(1) its **territory** is not divided between “the old” (prestigious, historical, protected) and “the new” (constantly developing), but is instead delineated by the use and by the interpretation of the concerned communities, which can select their significant places by their current practice from a space conceived as **continuity**;

(2) its **community** gradually gives up the modern division between **public and private spheres**, (which was determined in the early modern centuries in Europe) and places itself on the edge of this division to promote, to market and to brand itself and to satisfy the double (theoretically contradictory) expectation of (local) knowledge transfer towards its own future generations as well as towards the greater public including tourists;¹

(3) its relationship to **time** is based on the prevention of loss, i.e. the future is conceived as a probable scene for an ecological, natural, demographic, social and economic catastrophe that must be managed with precaution. The present of CH absorbs the past and extends itself in order to avoid the unknown future under the label of **sustainable development**.

3. How to handle CH?

CH is a novelty in the academia, therefore its **methodology** needs to be developed. Out of several possible models of analysis, it is worth starting with the following three to establish an analytical framework:

(1) The model of Regimes of Historicity² shows why the present aspect of time has replaced the future-based modernism in the last third of the 20th century and what the consequences of this newly-born **presentism** on politics and on SSH are;

(2) Michel Foucault’s theory of the biopower explains how the new mechanisms of power had started working in the dawn of modernization and lead to **security-based societies**. One of the great advantages of this model is its permeability to our contemporary societies where “cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity for nature”.³ In this context, the changing role of culture can be understood through the evolution of the notion of CH.

(3) The inner conceptual conflicts of World CH lead to the unsolved problem of **Authenticity**, which is inherent to the interpretation of CH by its different stakeholders. The model of Regimes

1 As the Faro Convention states, “a heritage community consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations”. (Article 2.b.)

2 It was developed by François Hartog and inspired by Reinhart Koselleck.

3 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, 2005.

of Authenticity⁴ can contribute to the comprehension of contradictory recognitions of the elements of CH by the concerned members of society.

The academic institutionalization of CH Studies has started in various ways across countries and disciplinary backgrounds. Since CH tends to be the new conceptual framework of a desired European identity, the institutionalization of **European CH Studies** should be coordinated for the following reasons:

- (1) a network of comparable, **similarly structured CH Departments** could promote the new EU concept of cultural and social appropriations;
- (2) CH as a participatory means of identity construction could be the academic instrument of **social and cultural inclusion**;
- (3) the exceptionally **rich tradition of European SSH** could be mustered for the **interdisciplinary** organization of European CH Departments.

Though the interpretation of “built”, “natural” and “intangible” CHs differs from one discipline to another, all disciplines agree that CH determines the relationship between **Place and People** or Culture(-bearers) and Environment. Through the coordinated establishment of CH Departments, this essential relationship could be analysed not only according to new methodologies that surpass those of traditional national sciences and area studies, but also by linking SSH to Natural Sciences through CH sites and communities.

For any academic, juridical or political conceptualization of European CH, a set of **particular European problems** should also be considered and examined. The list of these problems should be established through the participation of varied stakeholders and could refer, among others, to the following issues:

- (1) The notion of CH is the result of an inner (organic) development in France, the UK and the USA. Hence, while there is a **historical necessity for this concept in French and in English** (which happen to be the two most influential official languages of EU and UNESCO), CH is a **loanword** in every other language. As a result, the borrowing of this seemingly international concept does not necessarily reflect the same realities or follow the same evolution in the adoptive societies;
- (2) CH in Western Europe was partially canonized to replace pre-world-war national identity construction with its participatory, inclusive and consensual approach. Several Central and Eastern European societies, however, could not experience the same democratic and multicultural tendencies because of Communist dictatorship and hermetically closed borders. The return of nationalism since the mid-1990s paired with the mystical (non-critical) aspect of CH can result in identity constructions in the name of **national CH** that end up demonstrating opposite tendencies to the original CH implications;
- (3) The contradictory interpretations of CH clearly indicate that European CH Studies should not be descriptive (as it can be sometimes seen in the case of World CH Studies), but truly **critical** based on the rich methodological traditions of European SSH;
- (4) The inclusive and participatory nature of CH also requires the establishment of **CH hermeneutics**, which takes into consideration the interpretations and preferences of the largest number of stakeholders;
- (5) The past five decades of different stages of monument, nature and CH protection engen-

4 This model was developed by Lucie K. Morrisset.

dered **CH communities**, which are the forerunners and the laboratories of presentist identity constructions. These communities should be **mapped** and compared systematically within the network of European CH Departments.

Discussion

Responding to Mr Sonkoly's keynote, the architect Luca Basso Peressut (Politecnico di Milano, Italy) observed that cultural heritage is a broad ecosystem. It does not lend itself to localization, he asserted, and can indeed reflect a global perspective as evidenced by the British Museum. People may be located in specific places with which they identify, but they may also be understood (and understand themselves) as part of a more global development. He appealed for the creation of cultural "infrastructures" that together could form a network integrating cultural institutions, places and researchers. In this context, Luca Basso Peressut urged the creation of temporary traveling exhibitions to link cultural institutions and places. Such exhibitions, he suggested, could use the same objects to address tough issues such as war that are of interest to all Europeans.

Conclusions of Round Table

The afternoon round-table discussion on cultural heritage yielded clear suggestions on how to approach the topic in a European research context. Among the recommendations:

- Recognize cultural heritage contributions from outside EU
- Devote attention to "local" cultural heritage
- Utilize potential of web-based technologies
- Exploit links to creative industries.

Conclusions from the round table on history, as compiled by the group chair:

- Research should explore new and innovative ways to involve ethnic minorities and recent immigrant communities in the exhibiting and curating of cultural heritage from outside of the EU, in order to facilitate the re-appropriation by such communities of relevant cultural heritage.
- Make 'local' cultural heritage a focus of research and, thereby, give more recognition to the importance of communities that are on the way to creating their own, distinctive types of cultural identity.
- Europe's rich cultural heritage is closely associated with the historical growth of major cities, but this important relationship remains a somewhat neglected research area. Cities are, self-evidently, places of deposit for collections of tangible cultural heritage. They have also been and continue to be repositories of various forms of intangible cultural heritage such as the ideas, influences and practices that have accompanied successive waves of immigrants over the *longue durée*. In this respect, museums and similar institutions may have an integrationist and participatory role to play.
- Research on cultural heritage should fully exploit the opportunities provided by new and emerging web-based technologies by harnessing knowledge that is derived from all forms of social media, citizen science and crowd-sourcing.
- Within the overall domain of SSH research on cultural heritage, disciplinary approaches that are rooted in the humanities should be given equal prominence to those based in the social sciences. Enquiry into the construction of European identity could, for example, examine the historical role of imagination in literature (both fiction and non-fiction) or

the role of creative expression in the visual arts. Similarly, a humanities-based approach to understanding issues related to 'sustainability' is no less important than research that utilises the methodologies of the social sciences.

- Where appropriate, new research projects should seek to build directly on the outcomes of completed EU-funded projects in order to derive maximum benefit from previous research findings.
- To facilitate the creative exchange of ideas and practice, cultural heritage programmes should consider ways to bring together, in new collaborative spaces, researchers as practitioners and practitioners as researchers who share common interests.
- Explicit links between research on cultural heritage and the creative and cultural industries should be encouraged with a view to developing employment opportunities, including more flexible forms of employment, and facilitating knowledge exchange.