ACCESSIBILITY AND ENJOYMENT OF CLASSIC THEATRES: THE MUSEALIZATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RUINS

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Abstract

Intervention on archaeological sites requires a *multicriteria* approach. One should not lose sight of the problem regarding what to conserve and why in favour of how to conserve. Furthermore, we have to consider that the initiatives of "accessibility and enjoyment of cultural heritage" are created in order to heighten the public's satisfaction in visiting cultural heritage sites. In this context, the Cultural Accessibility must be interpreted as the amount of information that the public could receive from cultural heritage. A number of possible communication strategies of archaeology will be set out and applied to the case of classical theatres.

Keywords

Theatre ruins, Outdoor communication, Archaeological musealization.

Introduction

The classical theatre is a peremptory monument, a work with a symbolic architectural plan, with rigorous geometric canons, faithful to both its image and its transposable functionality. Unlike many other monuments, which are more vulnerable and often subject to function variations, the theatre boasts over two millennia of activity, but almost always consistent with its nature as a building intended for representations. Probably, also thanks to the sacred charisma and the possibility of representing ancient theatre literature in those 'same places', this continuity of use, not only related to the enactment of classical texts, has allowed these buildings to be preserved with more easiness and that around them a greater awareness of their extraordinary value had matured.

It must be borne in mind that the 'actualization' of classical theatres brings with it the problem of the public's heavy load, which, certainly due to a wearing effect, is generally attracted more by the event than by the context in which it takes place. It is equally clear that performances within the ancient theatres necessarily imply a transformation of this sensitive and non-renewable heritage. The risk of compromising the archaeological material and its surrounding context is amplified by the need for providing safety, implementing new technologies, realizing both lighting systems, seats and toilets as well as what is necessary for the comfort of the public. Naturally, it is possible to avoid this risk if in choosing the types of events it is used greater caution (Ruggieri, 2006, pp. 306-333).

It is no coincidence that in the cultural and scientific sphere the implicit generality of 'communication' is discussed, which is well expressed in the questions about 'how' to be able to transmit to an unskilled and heterogeneous public both the interpretation of an ancient context and its history and the results of the archaeological research carried out in it (David, 1999, pp. 463-469). Therefore, having tackled the conservation problems and assessed the priorities of the case, the 'mass media' project that follows must have the 'culture' as a strategy (Robin, 1996, pp. 11-15), but to be understood as something that arises from the desires and emotions of a community and that passes through an intervention of 'musealization' able to involve and attract this heterogeneous public, but also to redeem a memory with identity dynamics (Luxen, 2000).

Without forgetting the primary measures of protection, nouvelle muséologie and nouvelle archaeology nowadays agree in emphasizing the need to evoke archaeological pre-existences and exhort to look for a more appropriate language and symbolism, especially when the intervention of ruins musealization takes place in the channels of absolute expressive modernity and great technological evolution. Therefore, reaffirming the concept, even the archaeological museography of our time, in the light of restoration theory and of museological theory too, has understood the importance of promoting interpretation, narration and contextualization to a greater extent than in the past (Accardi, 2014, pp. 183-192).

In this context, the fundamental objective of the museographic discipline, applied to archaeological contexts, is the specific exploration of the tools available to professionals to 'communicate' the meaning of the sites. Realizing that it is not possible to intervene on an outdoor ruin as it happens in an indoor museum, it remains to understand what this ruin represents and how it must be narrated. It is, therefore, a matter of 'communication', to which to give solutions both through the typical 'tools of architecture, and through the ability to devise more properly 'museographic tools' (Accardi, 2012, p. 8).

According to the mind of the Writer, the possibilities of attracting the public and activating economic processes should go in parallel with a more desired cultural impact, to be achieved even with targeted design interventions. A well-conceived coverage, an appropriate reintegration, a well-designed closure or to equip the archaeological sites with a 'site-museum' (i.e. one of the most didactic structures), can certainly contribute to improving the interpretation of an archaeological site. However, the reality of our days shows that it is not uncommon to watch the polemic attack against choices of intervention on archaeological pre-existences, although they are determined by a not trivial cultural labour, but instead it is ready to undergo every form of neglect and abandonment of the same pre-existence.

Thus, when particularly original and innovative projects come to the fore it happens that they are received by public opinion without a real awareness of the assumptions that led to their realization and for this reason extreme reactions arise: exaltation or condemnation. Consider in this regard the well-known cases of the Theatre of Sagunto by Giorgio Grassi (Crespi & Dego, 2004) and the project by Rafael Moneo for the Museum of Merida (Dal Co, 1997) which, at an international level, have divided the thinking of the public and the scientific communities. In the face of the most advanced technologies, which allow always safer conservation interventions, there is a wide variety of types of intervention deemed reliable, to be potentially adopted in the ruins enhancement actions.

This variety, which is very complex by itself, becomes more complicated when the archaeological find is integrated into the urban territory, since the formulation of the possible solutions must also take into account the specific needs deriving from entrenched cultural

visions and highly binding contextual limits. Due to these limitations, even the costs would be higher compared to the interventions realized in non-urbanized contexts (Schmidt, 2000, pp. 3-5).

In this sense, a very representative case is the Caesaraugusta Theatre Museum, inaugurated in 2003, designed by Lanik Engineering Group. The theatre, discovered during the construction of a residential building, has acquired its centrality within the urban fabric, thanks to an imposing translucent polycarbonate coverage, that reproduces the plan of the theatre itself, overcoming the limits and disharmonies of a context defined by very high and inappropriate residential buildings.

The Ruins Musealization: A Specific Case Study

Actually, not all theatres are in the 'exploitation' conditions outlined above. Especially for reasons of conservation that have not always protected the theatres 'integrally'. For example, the case of Eraclea Minoa's theatre constitutes in this sense a completely original reality. 'Trapped' since the early 1960s by a Perspex structure which, in addition to obtain a perfect protection, it also had the purpose of accurately reproducing the shapes of the cavea steps and should have been perfectly colourless and transparent (Vivio, 2010). Unfortunately, it has not only turned into an opaque and yellowish surface, but also 'crumbled' the original steps, causing greater damage than the theatre could have received if it had been openly exposed to inclement weather: the oxidation of metal supports, the greenhouse effect caused by the covering itself, the thermal expansion, the action of the water, have heavily degraded the already compromised stone structure (Figure 2).

Preferring not to dwell on a topic that opens up a very extensive question, already supported by a lot of case studies and also investigated deeply by museographic literature, the question of the aforementioned cover that now protects the theatre archaeological remains would deserve much attention. Once the Perspex cladding has been eliminated and the loss of significant portions of material has been verified, today the theatre, once again, has been reviled by a new temporary cover (Figure 1), now become permanent, composed of metal pylons and plexiglass panels, which, despite taking the image of the cavea, it had the effect of precluding the complete view of the bleachers. The looming presence of this structure does not allow us to fully understand the image of the theatre, nor to clearly understand whether such coverage has expressly sought reconfiguration purposes.

Not wishing to investigate whether this protection was successful or not in the protective intent, the fact remains that the roof morphology, its opaque and compact layers, the accidental crushing effect, caused the cancellation of the presence of 'what is protected'; the archaeological coverage plays a leading role, it stands out clearly against the rest of the archaeological site and communicates an image of the places that is not faithful to the original, also because it is placed at an incorrect height derived solely from the need for protection and for this reason, in the eyes of the public generic, is likely to produce the misunderstanding that the theatre originally had a covering of morphology similar to that implanted ex novo.

The writer believes that if the conservation actions had been accompanied by a parallel enhancement project, especially as an outdoor musealization project, the overall outcome could at least remedy the 'interpretation' difficulties of the ruins, preventing visitors from having to untangle themselves between pylons and to deal with a not easy walk in the exploration paths, among other things not supported by an adequate information structure.

From the current conditions observation of the theatre of Eraclea Minoa, and on the basis of the aforementioned international experiences, also considering other musealization practices adopted in different archaeological sites (not strictly connected to classical theatres), it is possible to identify some project proposals, which provide a series of 'minimal and indispensable' communication solutions, precisely aimed at reading and interpreting the remains of the theatre and its historical-social context. A work of this nature cannot obviously disregard the evaluations carried out by a multidisciplinary team, which is the only one able to keep the specific problems of an archaeological site under control and suggest the most appropriate solutions; this can include the aspects related to the accessibility, to the landscape and the indispensable historical-archaeological knowledge.

Figure 1 – The Eraclea Minoa Theatre and its current coverage (Photo: C. Gazzitano).

Figure 2 – The Eraclea Minoa Theatre: view on the degraded steps (Photo: C. Gazzitano).

Some Possible 'Communication' Strategies

Considering accessibility, it is important to keep in mind that communication is also a form of accessibility, if no longer conceived only as 'physical' but 'visual', that is the origin of all 'mental accessibility'. But it is also an accessibility understood as the «quantity of information that is possible to receive from the good [...] with which one comes into contact» (Quagliolo, 2002, p. 14). Even if it seems obvious that there is no obligation to make 'visible' to the communities every shred of their vestiges, however it is useful to make aware of such pre-existences, whether they emerged, or still underground, or that, for some reason, have been lost (Ruggieri, 2007).

In this direction, it is believed that the achievement of this visibility can be achieved through the use of punctual museographic strategies in situ, among other things which are not very invasive, reversible and with non-prohibitive costs:
1) care of the ruins. It is a symbolic recovery technique with a strong didactic communication capacity, already experimented in many European archaeological realities and easily practicable. This museographic practice can be implemented with the simple walls levelling using reclaimed stone, perhaps with some partial completion, with the laying of coloured gravels to identify the original paths, with the integration of missing parts of floors and, where possible, also through the installation of lawns that have the effect of 'highlighting' the material pre-existence;

2) lining-out. In the wake of the symbolic recovery, not strictly directed towards the reconstructive practice, it is possible to use one of the most effective archaeological communication systems, that is the minimal form of memorization constituted by the so-called marking on the ground, or better identified as lining out practice, one of the capable strategies to symbolically represent the planimetric development of the 're-buried', or only identified, walls. A concrete and not abstract intervention category, which follows the geometry of a plant in a slavish way. This intervention would consist in aligning metal, stone or concrete slabs, as well as other materials, which, laid on the ground above re-buried archaeological structures, would reproduce the masonry system, so as to make it intelligible the connections between the theatre, its hidden parts and the rest of the ancient surrounding urban fabric; see, for example, the Archäologischer Park Köngen (Baden-Württemberg), the site of Segedunum Roman Fort and Bath (Wallsend) (Figure 3), Archaeological site of Empúries, (Catalogne), Roman villa of Rockbourne (Hampshire);

Figure 3 - Care of ruins and lining-out practices applied on the
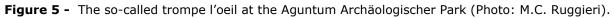Segedunum Roman Fort, Bath (Photo: A.R.D. Accardi).

3) graphic design tools. Taking into consideration the more traditional experiences, the minimum indispensable communication intervention is constituted by the 'signage', whose graphic design, integrating the captions, can offer visitors a partial and total reconfiguration of the various archaeological parts or of the whole, evoking the image of both contexts and people, that is, of those missing people (Ruggieri et al., 2013, pp. 11-51) who created and lived those sites and architectures. It's just the graphic design tool that plays a decisive role in evoking the origin contexts, especially when it is based on the research for a defined atmosphere, when it evokes moments of the so-called 'everyday-life'. The signage can be integrated with models of volumetric reconstruction, which let us grasp the analogy between the current ruins and what was originally there, offering the public tactile experience as well, indispensable above all for those blind users. Speaking about visual disability, even the braille system, if accompanied to the didactic texts, can complete the communication level; interesting to see the graphic design experiences implemented for the Illeta dels Banyets (Campello, Alicante), the archaeological site of Sant Sebastià de la Guarda (Palafrugell, Catalonia), the Brading Roman Villa (Brading, Isle of Wight), and also for the simultaneous presence of reconfiguration models placed in the Roman Villa of Echternach (Echternach, Grevenmacher), Archäologischer Park Cambodunum (Schwaben), the Heidenthor of the Archäologischer Park Carnuntum (Petronell, Niederösterreich) (Figure 4);

Figure 4 - Graphic panels and reconstruction model at the Carnuntum Archäologischer Park (Photo: A. Tricoli).

4) *trompe l'oeil*; at the turn of a signage service and a more refined system of "abstract presentation", the so-called trompe-l'oeil are one of the most successful museographic devices, since they offer a good imaginative solution to recall the entire original buildings volume, but also wider contexts or entire landscapes. This is usually a transparent screen-printed sheet, on which the skeleton of the monument in question volume is represented. Each visitor, positioning on the indicated point, can match the drawing of the building with the emerged masonry layout, according to a game of transparencies and overlaps. This technique, considered by John Stubbs an 'abstract presentation' (Price, 1995, p. 73-90), produces a communicative effect same as a three-dimensional 'ghost structure', but in two-dimensional version. About trompe l'oeil see the site of Gisacum (Eure), the Heidenthor of the Archäologischer Park Carnuntum (Petronell, Niederösterreich), Archäologiepark Belginum (Morbach, Rheinland-Pfalz), the site of Novioregum (Charente-Maritime), the Aguntum Archäologischer Park (Dölsach) (Figure 5);

Figure 5 - The so-called trompe l'oeil at the Aguntum Archäologischer Park (Photo: M.C. Ruggieri).

5) ghost structures; this communicative practice, in a more innovative and non-myopic vision of intervention, could find a discreet use also for the theatre of Eraclea Minoa, for example integrating a coverage similar to that of the Caesaraugusta theatre, but in which the metallic supports should "reproduce" the walls and the scaenae frons of the theatre, symbolically and communicatively recalling the original shape of the architectural complex, while maintaining a "significant" transparency that allows the reading of the archaeological remains exactly as they were in the past, including the subsequent restoration interventions, they have delivered them to us; see a similar Italian example realised for the early Christian Basilica of Siponto, i.e. a today's evolution of a more remote experimentation, that testifies more "discreet" examples, such as those made for the Temple of Apollo in Veio, the exhibition of Crypt Balbi in Rome and the Roman Fort in Iža (Slovakia) (Figure 6);

Figure 6 - The ghost structure on the ruins of the
Roman Fort Gate of Iža (Photo: A.R.D. Accardi).

6) light design; in addition to the classic "spectacularization" effect, during the night hours, through the use of lights, one could be obtained a complete evocation of the architecture, the outcome of which can be improved if the light design is 'mixed' with those museographic techniques referred to in the previous points.

As all the European archaeological panorama reveals, in situ communication cannot be complete, if it's not integrated by one of the most didactic structures of which every archaeological site should be equipped, namely a site-museum. In this regard, the Antiquarium currently in situ could be transformed into an interpretation centre for tourists, so it could relate the site itself to the rich collection of artifacts found in Eraclea that the Antiquarium itself preserves. In this way this Visitor's centre can be the interpretation medium to face the outdoor visit and offer better tools for deepening the knowledge of the theatre and its surroundings.

The experimentation carried out recently in the field of Enhancement of Cultural Heritage has also introduced new supports for archaeological communication, such as the so-called ICT services, applied to the archaeological patrimony, with which visitors could interact more closely with the entire site of Eraclea Minoa and increase the knowledge of the various topics (Spallazzo, Spagnoli, & Trocchianesi, 2009). The digitalized data system, including historical photos, videos, maps, projects, drawings, 3D reconstructions, explorers' stories (archaeologists, historians, local scholars), editorial publications and much more, would allow the construction and planning of a visit itinerary autonomous, to be carried out, simultaneously, in a 'virtual' and 'real' way throughout the outdoor visit.

Digital technology applied to archaeology makes it possible to locate the visitor precisely on the site, to detect visitor routes, to provide an orientation tool and to ensure a consistent flow of information. Each stage of the itinerary through the ruins would thus be equipped with interactive sensors that, connected to the public, would transmit all the cultural insights from time to time. A system that could also work as a monitoring tool for "appreciation" (collecting comments and suggestions from visitors), as well as monitoring the physical and environmental conditions in which ancient architecture is inserted, as well as prevention and/or reporting of potential vandalism actions.

Conclusion

It should be noticed that the practices described above must be considered only as possible suggestions and not as ideal and universal solutions. Each musealization experience contains both positive and negative implications and it's the individual case to be enhanced that suggest the most appropriate solution, conveniently adapted according to the specific needs. In general, there is a clear lack of homogeneity in the project approaches related to the ruins enhancement, both indoor and outdoor. However, the examination of the opportunities offered by this scientific panorama, entirely in accordance with the principles that led to the contemporary museography, meanwhile, is a good 'cognitive strategy' (Weil, 1990).

Today, in the European 'presentation' experiences deployed for archaeological remains, there is a strong concern to respond to a growing demand for "spectacularization", particularly in outdoor solutions. The exhibition designer ethics must intervene in the control of traditional and innovative narrative procedures, since they, by indulging too much in emphasis and theatricalization techniques, risk becoming the protagonists of the musealization actions and take over on the real historical events or on the construction of the cultural message (Accardi, 2012, pp. 5-6).

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