

THE MATTER OF FUTURE HERITAGE

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Alissa Diesch
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Valentina Gianfrate
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Coordinator of XXXII PhD Program in Architecture and Design Culture,
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Cultural Heritage Gets Political

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In 2018, for the first time, the University of Bologna's Board of PhD in Architecture and Design Culture assigned second-year PhD students the task of developing and managing an international conference and publishing its works. The organisers of the first edition of this initiative – Giacomo Corda, Pamela Lama, Viviana Lorenzo, Sara Maldina, Lia Marchi, Martina Massari and Giulia Custodi – have chosen to leverage the solid relationship between the Department of Architecture and the Municipality of Bologna to publish a call having to do with the *European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018*, in which the Municipality was involved. The theme chosen for the call, *The Matter of Future Heritage*, set itself the ambitious goal of questioning the future of a field of research – Cultural Heritage (CH) – that is constantly being

redefined. A work that was made particularly complex in Europe by the development of the H2020 programme, where the topic entered, surprisingly, not as a protagonist but rather as an articulation of other subjects that in the vision of the programme seemed evidently more urgent and, one might say, dominant. The resulting tensions have been considerable and with both negative and positive implications, all the more evident if we refer to the issues that are closest to us – I am referring to the doctorate that I represent here – namely the city and the landscape.

The most obvious negative aspect is CH's subordination to a financial logic during the H2020 programme's design phase, seeing heritage as a cost – in a logic of patronage or public investment – instead of as a possible trigger for beneficial economic processes, both for the financial economy and above all for the social economy. The prevailing desire to make CH actions attractive to the business world has also, on the one hand, attributed to the development of CH-related technologies a predominantly non-instrumental role but rather of guiding cultural programmes, and on the other hand, has too often converted cultural policies on the city and the territory to marketing. A return to the market that, at the end of the programme does not seem to be winning and seems to have led the European Union to a reorientation of the topic, as we shall now discuss.

However, it cannot be denied that there has also been a process of redefinition of the CH field, not determined by a central direction but instead a result of the projects implemented and supported by the H2020 programme, and that, while there is inevitably still no articulated final conclusion, has led to the spread of practices and experiments that are also highly innovative.

This text, which started as an autonomous effort but based on the seminar discussion of 2018, well reflects and testifies to the state of fibrillation of the Cultural Heritage “field” (après Bourdieu) today on the threshold of the new Horizon 2021-2027 programme. In this programme, the topic seems to be able to play a more definite role from the outset judging from an evolution that started with the aforementioned

European Year of Cultural Heritage, taken up again with initiatives such as the *Horizons for Heritage Research - Towards a Cluster on Cultural Heritage* held in Brussels in March 2019, and finally to define, for the first time, the presence of a cluster entitled *Culture, creativity and inclusive society* where CH seems able to play a lead role. The addition of culture to a series focused equally on creativity and social inclusion was significant. Without getting into an analysis of how this initiative is developing, it must be said that the works that follow clearly convey how the link between the three terms characterising the future cluster is, today, a “matter of future heritage”.

Indeed, only the essay by Kun Li places and exemplifies the question of CH in the key of an action that is frankly and traditionally conservative, referring, it must be said, to a nation that, after a period of violent economic development, still has a strict need for basic conservative policies.

All in all, fewer focused their proposed methodology – in all essays the methodology is presented along with concrete cases – on digital techniques, techniques that dominated the CH field in the H2020 programme. Again, however – referring to the essays by Federica Maietti with Elena Dorato and Valeria Croce with Isabel Martinez-Espejo Zaragoza – the authors’ efforts seem to be aimed at undoing the centrality given to digital skills and innovations understood as a field of research for its own sake – one of the critical issues highlighted by the development of the H2020 programme – to reconfigure digital as a tool for addressing topics that are not necessarily technological, accessibility and disaster management in the case of the authors just mentioned.

The number of authors involved increases slightly for the second term of the future cluster *Culture, creativity and inclusive society*. Giulia Favaretto, who also has some background in the more traditional discipline of Italian restoration, shifts her attention to the ordinary rather than the monumental, to the actions of re-meaning rather than Brandian conservation, supporting the proposed methodology with cases where the action of remembrance or even change of memorial is entrusted to artistic practices unrelated to the history of the

architectural object they apply to. The essay by Emanuele Sommariva, urban planner by training, is not methodologically dissimilar, presenting an experiment in the field of territorial branding thanks to which, operating on a large scale, the field of CH is defined in terms of a fabric of intangible identity values aimed at representing a cultural landscape whose purpose is stimulation of new project visions in a strategic key more than conservation. To counter the confluence of the traditional disciplines of architecture and creative industries in the field of CH – certainly more fertile than others in a time of decline – the essay by Elena Vai moves from communication to interpret the urban event not as an ephemeral happening but as a tool to clarify city identities and trigger urban innovations.

What is most striking, however, is the numerical consistency of the essays focused on the third element that defines the triad of the new cluster shaped by the H 2021-2027 programme, namely “inclusive society”. In fact, if we force the definition a little, as hopefully will also happen in the development of the programme, and think in terms of the political role of culture, we see how all the essays not yet mentioned, starting with specific disciplines, manage to intertwine not so much in the key of an interdisciplinary approach as in the perspective of using differentiated skills – which need not refer to codified disciplinary areas – to address and offer solutions on complex issues of a political nature. This is the case in the essay by Gianni Lobosco, where the topic of climate change is more closely related to the subject of policies and cultural tools offered to policymakers than to necessary technological strategies, and similarly in the essay by Saverio Massaro that raises the issue of the circular reuse of urban waste bringing it into the context of the common good and therefore into the field of CH. Other authors – Alissa Diesch and Pooya Zargaran – explicitly state that CH’s field of action is political, and based on this assumption consolidated cultural positions of various disciplines retake the stage in the other essays, the need for politically motivated action – apparently imposed by the entry of CH onto the scene – leading to juxtapositions and fusions of great interest. By way of example: the use of

the term “patina” applied to the city in the essay by Riccarda Cappeller, the reinterpretation of a quality architecture in a communal key in the essay by Giorgia Di Cintio, adapting reuse as implemented by Chiara Mariotti and Saveria O.M. Boulanger, and finishing with the situationist imprint of the essay by Valentina Gianfrate, Amir Djalali and Francesco Volta who, moving from the unexpected role assumed by a work of sculpture in the Bolognese student movements of the late 1970s and the events that followed, weaves together conservation policies, the social and political role of public art, the complexity of the processes of recognition and innovation of the creative results deriving from the transformation of the city.

The close connection between heritage-related action and political action that emerges from the volume, particularly relevant since the text is mainly the work of starting researchers, shifts the topic of culture from a marginal accessory back to an essential component of the primary political action of local governments. After all, if we reverse its past perspective, Cultural Heritage is nothing more than the physical and testimonial persistence of the policies implemented over time. In the processes that drive and govern their constant transformation, the city, regions and landscapes are, in a circular fashion, producers and products of cultures, actions of confirmation or contrast of consolidated, recognised, institutionalised values, but also unexpected, random, disturbing materialisations. Cultural Heritage is generated in the non-unique process of a multiform appearance of cultures and is consolidated by subjecting itself to subsequent acts of recognition or disregard, conservation or cancellation. Culture, if seen as a constant action of production of common values and assets in the modification of the man-made space by each of its actors, is not just another policy, much less a set of ancillary actions to be supported according to budget availability, but rather a primary political act connected with the generative process of organised space. Working to monitor cultural transformations as they happen, be it the restoration of a valuable building or the construction of a peripheral road, shifts the focus of actions onto

Cultural Heritage, away from the mere economic restoration of excellence – which is always and in any case deserving of unmatched support – and instead to the construction of a widespread Cultural Heritage, the result of public and private actions that are constantly being updated and that may offer more solid foundations of sustainability, greater potential for common well-being and opportunities for new creative entrepreneurship.