

Habilitation thesis

**TOWARDS THE INCORPOREAL BEING OF BUILT HERITAGE
FOR A REFINED CULTURAL EVALUATION PROCESS**

Abstract

In a synthetic perspective, the concern for the different types of relationships that may define a heritage item and, consequently, be part of its incorporeal being – by connecting existing material components to missing ones, by bonding various tangible parts, by linking diverse design concepts that brought it to life and / or by tying it to its broader nonmaterial context – is a contribution to a facet of built legacy that is ultimately vital but often neglected in favour of other issues, in the past eight years especially by the intangible cultural heritage as defined by the UNESCO Convention from 2003. Explicitly mentioned only in the Washington Charter from 1987, namely as those between buildings and green or open areas, these sorts of relationships step aside already in the same ICOMOS document to make room for those between the heritage item and its physical setting. This last topic is reassumed by the Principles for the recording of monuments, groups of buildings and sites in 1996 and by the Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage from 1999 and will climax by the Xi'an Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas from 2005, that also states that the setting enjoys both tangible and intangible dimensions – but not the heritage item itself. Only, as the 16th General Assembly of ICOMOS announced, through the Québec Declaration from 2008, that it considers “the adoption of a new charter dedicated specifically to the intangible heritage of monuments and sites” (paragraph 2), the research direction adopted since the beginning of the professional career proves to be correct and fruitful and the already accumulated experience meets the necessity “to assist in defining and building up appropriate standards and criteria suitable to meet the specific cultural and technical requirements in each community and region.” (ICOMOS Guidelines on Education and Training in the Conservation of Monuments, Ensembles and Sites, 1993, paragraph 5).

The (working hypo)thesis regarding the significance of the above considered types of relationships is, ultimately and intimately, linked to the issue of identity. As expected, the field of preservation of the cultural heritage approaches the issue of “identity” rather in connection with individuals and / or communities and it is not its role to define the concept

(better than psychology or sociology) than in the sense of an “own” one of the heritage item. Only, as long as one accepts the fact that identity is also the result of a historic evolution and as long as at least some crucial points of this are documented in order to indicate a single major interpretation, a building, a coherent group of edifices, a portion of an urban or of a rural settlement or even whole towns or villages do have an intrinsic identity that, to a certain extent, does not depend on any meanings constructions and / or any kind of contemporary perception. On the other hand the newly introduced notion “spirit of place” (Québec Declaration, 2008) opens the discussion regarding this “own identity” of heritage items, seen (probably) in the philosophical sense of the term and as (partly) relative over time. If this hypothesis is correct, (again) the process of cultural evaluation may be sharpened by any instrument able to find this intrinsic identity (in order to interpret and to present it for a more accurate perception and thus contemporary confirmation).

Last but not least, the interest for additional refined cultural evaluation instruments and methods, manifested through a higher concentration on the incorporeal being of built heritage, did aim to provide more advanced building regulations meant to conduct contemporary actions on given items, single edifices, ensembles, sites or protected areas. In this respect, along with a superior standard both of the substantiation studies and of the hereby resulted intervention rules system, the major contribution consists in providing the main concept for the methodology regarding urban planning technical documentations for protected areas and for protection areas (of historic monuments).

Although explicitly mentioned only towards the end of the thesis, all three major research directions – regarding the incorporeal being of built heritage as defined by various types of relationships it is involved in, referring to an own, intrinsic identity of the same and related to optimum intervention regulations ... units – are based upon the postulate according to which (historic) process and evolving phenomena are as relevant as “static” facts, data and stages.