



FRAMEWORK CONVENTION
ON THE VALUE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE
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People – Places – Stories: a workable three-part model for post-disaster heritage revitalisation?

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While the intensity and breadth of the discussions make it difficult to provide a comprehensive summary of the Fontecchio gathering, the event also afforded an opportunity to compare and contrast experiences and work towards a meeting of minds, based not so much on the idea of achieving consensus as on sharing and interchange, which are – or should be – major drivers of both action and research. In the course of this article, therefore, I plan to explore the “People – Places – Stories” trio, with the focus on gaining a better understanding

understanding of how the human element fits into this three-part model, and hence how the Faro Convention can be a driver of engagement. I will start from three concepts – identity, community and communication – and endeavour, in each instance, to establish what makes Fontecchio’s situation unique and to what extent it could serve as a “model” that would be transferable to other settings. Of particular relevance here is the notion of multiple identity, and the actors’ intrinsic diversity as a resource:

“Each individual’s identity is made up of a number of elements and these are clearly not restricted to the particulars set down in the official records. Of course, for the great majority these factors include allegiance to a religious tradition, to a nationality – sometimes two, to an ethnic or linguistic group, to a family, or extended family, to a profession, an institution, or a particular social milieu. But the list is much longer than that; it is virtually unlimited. A person may feel a more or less strong attachment to a province, a village, a neighbourhood, a clan, a professional team or one connected with sport, a group of friends, a union, a company, a party, an association, a parish [...].” (Maalouf, 1998: 16-17)

In many respects, the issue of identity ran through all the discussions, formal and informal, often without the word being uttered as such. It is striking to note, however, to what extent the identities of the individuals encountered are multiple identities, and how this comes across in the stories they tell. As Maalouf describes, such identity is “virtually unlimited”. It has to be recognised, however, that in the case of Fontecchio and its people, certain aspects predominate and have a common meaning in terms of how they relate to the village, memory and heritage. It seems to me that this multiple memory has the potential to become a driver of action, but that for that to happen, a major factor must be taken into account, one that is linked to a specific aspect of the Fontecchio case but which could also apply in other post-disaster situations. Maalouf writes that “It can happen that some incident, a fortunate or unfortunate accident, [...] influences our sense of identity more strongly than any ancient affiliation.” (1998: 17). In the case of Fontecchio, the earthquake that occurred in 2009 weighs heavily on Fontecchianis’ sense of identity, not only through the trauma that it inflicted and through the inhabitants’ memory of it, but also through the need now to deal with the lingering pain¹ in order to move beyond it.

I think it is important, then, to include this notion of “pain management” as a cross-cutting element in the “People – Places – Stories” model as not only does it become necessary in order to safeguard dignity but it is also a common thread in storytelling. The traumatic aspect needs to be expressed as a personal and collective narrative, but the co-operation and solidarity narratives are no less important. In a process of pooling and sharing, all this storytelling can provide a means to integrate myriad facets of what is now a defining element of identity in order to then transcend it and turn it into a common resource for the reappropriation and co-construction of heritage and its meaning.

In order for that to work, initiatives such as the gathering organised by the Council of Europe and Fontecchio are essential in that they allow



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local and non-local viewpoints to be compared and discussed, through conversations both formal and informal. It is equally important, however, that workshops be held on a smaller scale, so that the inhabitants themselves have an opportunity to express themselves and tell their stories. Mediation by outsiders can be beneficial, but it is not compulsory. What is essential, however, is a dynamic, participatory approach so that the discussion does not become merely a series of personal accounts – which may be equally necessary but is not the purpose here – and so it can be determined among a number of people what makes sense and what the potential resources for action are.

1 Sabrina Ciancone, mayor of Fontecchio, talked about the need for “pain management” (11/10/2017).

The complex resonance of the community

"The illusion begins with the word itself which refers to very different types of units. [...] To use the same term to denote individuals who have something "in common" is to create an illusory entity, to mistake one's desires for reality, to postulate that a set of presumed relationships create a bond, one that is strong yet indeterminate." (Augé, 2010: 21)

To avoid making an "illusory community" of the sort described by Marc Augé out of the concept or term "community", it seems to me that a number of questions need to be considered in terms of research and action. As regards research, and in line with the Convention, some discussion is in order regarding the very meaning of the word "community" today, taking into account inter alia the cultural and linguistic disparities that sometimes lie behind this much-used term. It seems to me that a cross-disciplinary comparison of ideas and experiences, combining various usages - academic, professional and common - is now required in order to clarify this term, which encompasses a wide range of realities, and make it "workable". In terms of action, as part of a participatory process aimed at determining what makes sense in terms of memory and heritage, for a particular group of individuals, I think that the history of the people of Fontecchio raises questions about what is meant by "local community". What does that community actually consist of? People who stayed? People who left? People who have returned? Each of these groups - to mention only three - has a specific relationship with the

village's history, memory and heritage; each has a story or stories to tell, which may all be plausible narratives, not only about the village but also about the earthquake and its aftermath.

Augé proposes that we "try to imagine how individuals are encouraged, from a very early age, to recognise and cross boundaries, and also to construct them. These boundaries are subtle, in the same way that a fragrance is said to be subtle because it travels beyond its point of origin or an idea is said to be subtle because it continues to resonate and provoke, when we think we have grasped its immediate meaning." (2010: 22). Everyone, therefore, must be able to choose for themselves whether to include or leave out certain elements of their history so that their narrative resonates with that of the "community" and thus forms part of it. This choice cannot be made from outside, but it is nevertheless important to create conditions for the expression of each of these narratives in order to capture their diversity and to see where intersections emerge that can make sense for a particular group of people.

Quite apart from the performative potential of words, bearing witness and dialogue are drivers of interaction

*"Somehow for the umpteenth time I was present at one of those typical post-December 1991 meetings of Western intellectuals with their counterparts from the East. The conversation was about the resolution of many, as it seemed to them, extremely important things – about the "fall of the Wall and culture without borders", about the "coming together and opposition of mentalities", about "new nationalisms in old garments", [...]. The discussions were not very lively [...]. But here and there minor differences surfaced, little stumbling blocks. [...] Thus, in an atmosphere of mutual intimidation, somewhat fruitful discussions unfolded, and everything ended, as a rule, with reconciliation: from the moderators a saving idea emerged regarding terminological ambiguity, the inaccuracies of simultaneous interpretation, the need to communicate in bad English [...]."*²

(Andrukhovych, 2004: 28-31)

Although the anecdote told by Yuri Andrukhovych describes an academic gathering, it does nevertheless prompt us to reflect on the experience of the Fontecchio gathering. As I see it, two issues warrant particular attention, and are ultimately of relevance to any gathering where individuals grapple with complex topics: the performativity of the words or expressions used and the effects of multiple translation. In my view, there is a need not only to get away from slick, buzzword-laden language that creates words and concepts without any means of translating them into action,³ but also – and particularly in the case of multilingual gatherings – to beware the smoothing effects of translation. Being able to discuss how everyone perceives the words used, the meaning that is assigned to them and what they express both explicitly and implicitly, is a prerequisite for any dialogue, but also, even more so, for any process of co-construction, whether conceptual or operational. It is important to create these opportunities for interaction where everyone has time to express their understanding of the

word being discussed. It is only after this talk time, and necessary time for reflection, that each participant is able to discern, for themselves and others, what they can do to translate these words into actions. I also believe that first-hand accounts have an important role to play in the process of revitalising heritage after a disaster, especially if the intention is to involve the "community" or "communities". Here again, everyone must have the opportunity to express themselves, to tell their story and to put their experiences into words so that, as explained above, they can then move on. As pointed out by Paul Ricoeur, however, narrative "can genuinely mediate between description and prescription only if the broadening of the practical field and the anticipation of ethical considerations are implied in the very structure of the act of narrating" (1990: 139). It is a matter, therefore, of being aware of the multiple facets of this speaking and narrating, and of the numerous implications that they can have for those who are doing the talking and giving others the opportunity to do so.

² In this highly abbreviated extract, Andrukhovych describes a conversation between what he calls "representatives of happy societies", meaning western European intellectuals, and "representatives of unhappy societies", meaning eastern European intellectuals, thus highlighting two understandings of the relationship with history.

³ For example: "European heritage", "community", "best practice", etc

Conclusion

What if the Faro Convention and its three-part model “People – Places – Stories” were ultimately an invitation to us to get back to the true meaning of communication, as a process of pooling, participation and communion (Winkin, 2001)? It struck me, in the course of the discussions, that ultimately, what was needed was a return to a people-centred approach, with the focus on both individuals and the group. In other words, a greater awareness needs to be fostered among inhabitants and local stakeholders of their own worth and capacity for action. The solution does not necessarily have to come from outside, although interaction and contact with the outside world is essential to avoid taking too narrow a view of the situation. In order for this dual awareness-raising to take place, however, two key principles must be established: dignity and expertise. It being understood that dignity means accepting in individuals for what they are, with their experiences

stories and perceptions, while expertise means taking the position that everyone can be an expert in their own sphere of activity, in terms of how they understand the history of their village, in terms of how they build their relationships with others, etc. In my view, the Fontecchio experience provided an opportunity to address these four aspects not only in terms of reflection but also as human factors to be taken into account as resources which are available and, at the same time, need to be developed. This applies in the context of Fontecchio but it can also apply in any situation where the trauma of disaster – whether natural or man-made, such as war, even though the issues involved and the narratives are different – needs to be expressed so that both individuals and the group can make sense of it, and so that it can then drive individuals to become actively involved in the collective process of building a vision for the future, not least where heritage is concerned.

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