

Chapter 2

The Concept of Heritage

Francesco Selicato

Abstract The concept of heritage is constantly on the cultural and politic agenda of contemporary society. The reflections in this chapter move away from legal and legislative references toward the meaning the capital has assumed within the disciplines that study territory, landscape, and architecture. Describing the many ways in which the term is used reveals the gradual expansion of the concept of heritage as well as the growing importance that heritage plays in spatial planning.

Keywords Cultural heritage • Sustainable development • Urban planning

Introduction

The term “heritage” is currently used to express key concepts of contemporary society, and it has a multiplicity of meanings that are as different as disciplines in which the term is used i.e., from economics to jurisprudence, from social sciences to historical ones, from engineering to territory, landscape, and architecture sciences. It’s to these disciplines that the meanings and concepts considered here are referred from the etymology of the term. “Heritage” derives from the Latin *patri-monium*, which is the union of two terms: *pater* (father) and *munus* (duty). The literal meaning is “the duty of the father” and, more extensively, the term can be translated as “things belonging to his father,” that is, the goods that belong to the father are evocative of value and sense. That breakdown still leads us to the conclusion, in a larger sense understood in an intergenerational key, that heritage is a set of goods that we have inherited from our fathers and that can be passed on to future generations. This definition inevitably places attention on the role that

F. Selicato (✉)

Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture, Polytechnic University of Bari (Italy), Via Orabona, 4, 70125 Bari, Italy
e-mail: francoselicato@yahoo.com

heritage must fulfill, a role that varies continuously between the passive deposit of historical memory or cultural identity and the powerful stimulus for creativity available for the present as well as for building the future (Settis 2010; 2012).

The Legislative Domain

The heritage to which we refer—in terms of territory, landscape, and architecture sciences—has undergone significant conceptual legislative evolution, which has the most authoritative legitimacy in the UNESCO conventions. The most well-known international instrument of UNESCO, aimed at the promotion of cultural and natural heritage—whether “material” or “tangible”—for the benefit of collective enjoyment as well public interest is the Convention of 1972,¹ which has been ratified by almost all countries in the world. In this convention, both cultural² heritage and natural³ heritage are considered in context of their exceptionality. However, in the late 1970s many believed that there was a need to support a similar device for the protection of “intangible” riches of heritage constituting, as it were, “intangible assets” for humanity. After a long journey of researching studies and making proposals, this belief led to the new Convention of 2003,⁴ which completes that of 1972. There is no doubt that the protection of “material” heritage, e.g., monuments, environments, and landscapes, is rendered meaningless without the conservation of the cultures and social expressions that helped bring them to life, ensured their maintenance, and preserved decorum. Summarizing the conceptual evolution gained within this relevant international organization, it can be assumed that starting from the 2003 Convention, in addition to having attached particular importance to local communities regarding the definition of “heritage” and the role that they must play in the protection and enhancement of such, the deep interdependence between intangible heritage and material heritage is highlighted: this underscores the need for an integrated approach to the protection and enhancement of both tangible and intangible heritages for the benefit of settled communities (Van Oers and Haraguchi 2010).

Even before the European Landscape Convention was signed in Florence in 2000, the link between tangible and intangible heritage and settled communities had been affirmed. The convention arose, however, in terms of a deep rupture with the past as well as the extension of the concept of landscape to mean the whole

¹The Convention on the “Protection on the world’s cultural and natural heritage” was signed on 11.16.1972.

²Consists of monuments, sites, and settlements agglomerates formed by man such as archaeological sites.

³Consists of natural monuments including physical and biological formations, geological and physiographical formations, and natural sites.

⁴The Convention for the “Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage” was approved by the General Conference of UNESCO on 17.10.2003.

territory. The landscape is no longer just the foreshortened or panoramic view of a beautiful “postcard.” Rather it coincides precisely with the whole territory and is therefore inclusive of the built and natural heritage, both material and immaterial, and its deep meanings are intertwined with the experience of settled communities. With the European Convention, the landscape itself is the heritage and becomes at the same time an economic and cultural asset; finally, landscape has a legal status that can be extended virtually to the entire territory.

The Cultural Debate

In the legislative sense, heritage refers to documents that have their legitimacy in the international field; in the cultural sense, reflections on heritage move away from scientific debate, which matured within the literature of the field.

The conception of heritage in the thinking of Françoise Choay (1992), is highly innovative for having undermined the idea that heritage resides exclusively in items of historical value defined in time and space and divorced from a relationship with settled communities. His idea of heritage as “allegory of memory” is based on the origin of the term “monument,” which comes from the Latin “monumentum,” which itself is derived from the verb “monere,” meaning “alert” or “remember” (Choay 1992). The monument challenges memory, calls into question the real criterion for the selection of the elements related to the cultural heritage of a settled community. Thus, the monument can be considered a cultural universe related to the characteristics of the context in which it resides that support the community’s ability to recognize and understand its value.

Alois Riegl (1903) in the early twentieth century questioned the uniqueness of the historical dimension as an award criterion of place value. In fact, among the categories of value, Riegl introduced the value of “ancient,” i.e., a “sentimental” value reported to be a feeling held by the community. In this concept, heritage as a value is no longer exclusive (e.g., the value ascribed by lovers of ancient art) or specialized (e.g., the historical value ascribed by scholars); rather it is an inedited value primarily determined by social consensus and thus has ethical and political implications.

A place being marked among people, activities, and places is what, according Maciocco (1991a,b), leads to the meaning and significance of the territory and determines the conditions under which it can assume environmental value. The basic hypothesis is to say that there may be elements of correspondence between the interest of the population for a place and the environmental value of the place itself. The environment can indeed be considered as the outcome of a process of stratification, the physical signs of which are the result of the complex interaction between man and nature. In each period, the environmental structure expresses a dense network of relationship through which a company is located in a particular physical context. The environment, therefore, is meant to be intimately known and

cannot be read in its temporality. Its nature, its essence, can be understood only through the path of its history (Azzena 2011).

Attention must therefore be paid to grasping the recurring meanings of the deep relationship between population, activities, and places; the unifying meanings of landscape and environment and its deep structure; and the quality of the differences of its structural meanings (Sanna 2011). In this conception, heritage is configured as a set of significant points. These points, however, are not specific, unique, and unrepeatable, but they carry with them in a specific, unique, and unrepeatable way the meanings of other places in accordance with the “perspective,” the “mores,” and the “general will,” i.e., the unwritten laws that govern a particular society (Azzena 2011).

However, the concept of heritage perhaps has its most fertile application to territory in the thought of Alberto Magnaghi (2003; 2005) in overriding the same distinction of UNESCO between cultural and natural heritage, both tangible and intangible, to arrive at an original, potentially fruitful theory of local development planning, in which is possible to include and develop the concept of a territorial local cultural system.

According to Magnaghi (2007), in a conventional topographic map representing the territory, the rules of descriptive geometry are followed, thus downplaying in the meaning of heritage the true identity of places and representing at most their functions and quantities, items well away from the content of knowledge, to show the identifying characteristics of the territory. In the territorialist approach (Magnaghi 2003), those places “forgotten” by the topography functionalist, i.e., their interactions and the interaction between settlement and environment, become the protagonists of a new representation. The territorialist approach gets closer to the “physical, metaphysical and cosmological supremacy that the place had in the ancient world” (Magnaghi 2010). Because the territorialist approach considers only the specific qualities of a place based on the energies of the local society and the specific style of self-sustainable development, it is obvious that the interpretation, description, and representation of these qualities become the central theme of the map. Through the interpretation of the identity of places, which is the outcome of a long-term historical process, the map can in fact already provide many design guidelines.

Magnaghi (2010) identifies an effective tool called an “atlas of the assets” In the territorialist meaning, territorial heritage is a system of synergistic relationships between special qualities of the physical environment, the built environment, and the anthropic environment. It is necessary, therefore, to represent and interpret in integrated form the three aspects of the same heritage. Atlases of heritage, compared with traditional atlases, have selective and interpretive information contained in a spatial cognitive framework because they represent complex elements. The interpretative representation relates therefore to three atlases: the environmental heritage, the territorial/landscape heritage, and the socioeconomic heritage. The three atlases, according Magnaghi, are determined “through a plurality of techniques and skills: cartography or visual representations, text products, archives, synoptics paintings or multimedia hypertext” (Magnaghi 2007; 2010). The need to verify representations through a communicative exchange with settled communities

imposes an organization of those presentations that makes possible, with simplicity, determination of the public traffic, interrogation, decomposition, integration, and correction of the produced results.

The territorial heritage, as defined and shared with the community, becomes for Magnaghi (2003; 2007) fertile ground for action, a living system on which to act to enhance the environmental and cultural peculiarities which are understood as part of the broader cultural territorial and local system.

The concept of systemic heritage brought Maurizio Carta (1999) to assume assets as being the identity matrix of the cultural armor of the territory. To understand the territorial structure of this cultural system, it is necessary to organize a system of multidisciplinary knowledge, within which each discipline revises its investigation methods to make them comparable with those of other congruent disciplines (Carta 1999). According to Carta (1999), it is therefore essential to organize a “cognitive territorial armor,” which contains, organizes, and renders communicable all elements of the complex territorial space. Once again, knowledge assumes the land to be a resource and a place of condensation of local thought and attention to the contexts, the differences, and the identities that communities have expressed in their evolution.

To achieve this, we need a historicized and multilevel knowledge base, i.e., a knowledge of the evolutionary process of the territory, that investigates all of the elements that constitute the complexity of the place in question, i.e., the components of landscapes and natural anthropogenic ones both productive and cultural. The complexity of the results of natural and anthropic territory requires a set of knowledge that acts on the envelope of relationships that the territorial components maintain among themselves and with each other; a knowledge that is not superficial or customary and limited to a system of sectoral analysis; a knowledge across sectors that extract interpretations, which is able to listen and translate into understandable and useful forms for decision making the many stories contained by the territory that are told through the scattered signs of its natural and cultural heritage and through local knowledge.

It should therefore also reflect on codes of training, learning, and communication of common knowledge, namely, widespread knowledge and common sense. Besio (2002) states that common-sense knowledge, unlike scientific knowledge, which is relevant to explanation and prediction, is aimed at action. Common sense has codes and languages of transmission that are almost always behavioral; it does not need to be encoded from documents or rules; it has a practical reason and spreads through interpersonal relationships; and people learn it through models of collective behavior transmitted through the bonds of belonging to a community. This knowledge, being face-to-face with action, is the result of an immediate vision and a summary that comes from repeated practice with places and things, but it is rarely explicitly transmitted. It is only valid in individual local situations; its recognition allows people to understand the deeper meaning of each place, but it does not have universal value and cannot be generalized (Besio 2002). The images of the landscape, made by the knowledge of common sense, return a structured and

comprehensive view of the territory that goes beyond the evidence of individual phenomenal aspects (Besio 1999).

Only through a deep understanding what is written here is it ultimately possible to attribute meaning and significance to heritage in all its forms, in its unity, but also in its many branches held together by complex systems of relations between landscape, architecture, art, traditions, and quality of life (Carta 1999).

References

- Azzena G (2011) History for places. In: Maciocco G, Sanna G, Serreli S (eds) *The urban potential of external territories, Metodi del Territorio*. Franco Angeli, Milano
- Besio M (1999) Le tecnologie GIS nel trasferimento dal progetto di conoscenza al progetto di piano. In: Besio M, Monti C (eds) *Dal canocchiale alle stelle: strumenti per il nuovo piano*. Franco Angeli, Milano
- Besio M (2002) *Il vino del mare: gli spazi del paesaggio tra i tempi della tradizione e i tempi della conoscenza*. Marsilio, Venezia
- Carta M (1999) *L'armatura culturale del territorio. Il patrimonio culturale come matrice di identità e strumento di sviluppo*. Franco Angeli, Milano
- Choay F (1992) *L'allégorie du patri moine*. Éditions du seuil, Paris
- Maciocco G (ed) (1991a) *La pianificazione ambientale del paesaggio*. Franco Angeli, Milano
- Maciocco G (ed) (1991b) *Le dimensioni ambientali della pianificazione urbana*. Franco Angeli, Milano
- Magnaghi A (2003) *Projetlocal*. Pierre Mardaga éditeur, Sprimont (Belgique)
- Magnaghi A (ed.) (2005) *The urban village. A charter for democracy and local self-sustainable development*. Zed Books Ltd, London
- Magnaghi A (ed.) (2007) *Scenari strategici. Visioni identitarie per il progetto di territorio*. Alinea, Firenze
- Magnaghi A (2010) *Il progetto locale. Verso la coscienza di luogo*. Bollati Boringhieri, Torino
- Riegl A (1903) *Der modern Denkmalkultus*. Wien und Leipzig
- Sanna G (2011) Territory, representation, project. In: Maciocco G, Sanna G, Serreli S (eds) *The Urban Potential of External Territories, Metodi del Territorio*. Franco Angeli, Milano
- Settis S (2010) *Paesaggio. Costituzione. Cemento. La battaglia per l'ambiente contro il degrado civile*. Giulio Einaudi Editore, Torino
- Settis S (2012) Perché gli italiani sono diventati nemici dell'arte. *Il giornale dell'Arte*, n. 324, ottobre 2012, Umberto Allemandi & C., Torino
- Van Oers R, Haraguchi S (eds) (2010) *Managing historic cities = Gérer les villes historiques*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Paris

Cultural Territorial Systems

Landscape and Cultural Heritage as a Key to
Sustainable and Local Development in Eastern Europe

Rotondo, F.; Selicato, F.; Marin, V.; Lopez Galdeano, J.
(Eds.)

2016, XIV, 386 p. 177 illus., 31 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-20752-0