

**From  
Vernacular  
to World  
Heritage**

*edited by*  
LETIZIA DIPASQUALE  
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


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# From Vernacular to World Heritage

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Stampato su carta di pura cellulosa *Fedrigoni Arcore*




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## Introduction



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## PROTECTING AND VALUING CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Mariana Correia  
Gilberto Duarte Carlos  
Escola Superior Gallécia

### Introduction

Cultural Heritage has long been established as a fundamental asset of the European civilisation. The progressive recognition of its value for communities and society was established by the Faro Convention (2005), as states agreed to protect cultural heritage and the rights of citizens to access and experience this heritage. The need for its safeguarding became fundamental, which was foreseen by the increase of published legislation dedicated to protect and preserve cultural heritage. The recent publication of the European Quality Principles (2020) becomes a step forward strengthening conservation principles and standards for the comprehensive adoption of quality measures for intervention in cultural heritage.

Until recently, preservation was focused on the authenticity of the cultural asset itself, on the development of interventions, and on the intervention methods which would assure its continuity. Fundamental questions emerged from a historical and technological dilemma, as from other professionals: the main concern was to establish a balance point for physical intervention. The tendency for action over cultural heritage, following international charters and European and international conventions, resulted, in more recent years, in a general concern for a minimal intervention impact, with a maximum preservation concern, adopting less-intrusive measures. However, some economical groups have a different approach, more focused only on preserving the building exterior walls, and creating a new and contemporary building core.

### Intervention in cultural heritage

The creation of national institutions specifically in charge of heritage protection and preservation, empowered by the state's official administration and supported by state resources and technical experts, constituted the usual strategic approach towards the benefit of cultural heritage. With the rising increase of interventions in cultural heritage, national heritage institutions had to face a rising challenge of lack of resources, and an increasing number of obsolete and vacant buildings degrading rapidly. These institutions turned to opportunities proposed by economical groups, resulted in more political involvement and less technical work, and brought an evident disruption between the heritage legacy and the local communities' involvement.

The rising cost of construction and rehabilitation became integrated in capitalised markets, resulting in an approach totally disengaged from traditional technology, and from local building cultures. Lo-

*opposite page*  
Drone survey equipment,  
Chazhashi, Ushguli, Svaneti,  
Georgia (© G. Duarte Carlos,  
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4  
Earthen architecture workshop  
at Escola Superior Gallaecia  
(© M. Mourão, Ci-ESG, 2011)

Stone construction workshop  
at Escola Superior Gallaecia  
(© T. Correia, Ci-ESG, 2017)

cal communities did not manage to compete with new and expensive building systems, dominated by industrial materials and components with a non-sustainable approach. As a consequence, there have been processes of disinterest and disinvestment towards inhabited heritage, whose survival tended to depend almost exclusively on public initiative. This resulted in an increasing difficult access for communities to improve their quality of life.

The 'dehumanisation', but also the abandonment of several buildings in European historical centres is, perhaps, one of the best examples of this phenomenon, where companies address extensive interventions for high-class economical groups, which collides with the individual needs for the local inhabitants. The delicate standing of this issue, the dynamic of the actual society, and the rapidly changing economic paradigm, constitutes an enormous pressure on communities who inhabit these relevant historical centres comprised of traditional dwellings, with tangible and intangible sources of local building cultures.

#### The way to go forward

Due to the lack of possibilities from the State to help addressing heritage intervention actions, such as conservation or rehabilitation, and to avoid celling to economical funds or groups that would alter the heritage authenticity of the cultural asset, some home-owners prefer not to act than to contribute to incorrect interventions. For home-owners to address pro-active solutions it is fundamental that the State develops and implements instruments, resources, and financial support, that will prevent cultural heritage from degradation and abandonment. It is also absolutely mandatory, to engage the local communities and home-owners in the process.

The wide diversity related to the different types of heritage is likely assumed as an intrinsic benefit of the cultural richness of the European region, but it also constitutes a true dilemma when implementing transversal actions and measures for the benefit of communities that live in this threatened heritage. The Hangzhou Declaration (2013) refers that cultural heritage should be repositioned as a reference for social and economic strategies, in which the benefit for the local community is crucial, and the political involvement is determinant.



4  
Wooden architecture workshop  
at Escola Superior Gallaecia  
(© T. Correia, 2017)

The European Agenda for Culture, adopted by the European Commission in 2007, introduced an orientation towards an integrated approach, seeking to reinforce cultural heritage as a common asset of shared responsibility, throughout a significant contribution in three main objectives: (i) The promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; (ii) The promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity; and (iii) The promotion of culture as a vital element of the Union's international dimension. This contributed to an open and inclusive approach with a holistic vision of culture and heritage.

The New European Agenda for Culture (2018) addresses the positive and unique contribution that culture brings to Europe's society, its economy and international relations. The New Agenda consists of embracing culture in three strategic areas: The Social dimension regarding its social cohesion and well-being; the Economic dimension based in education and innovation for jobs and growth; and the External dimension through international cultural relations. As a result, each member state will need to define priorities for cultural policy, integrated in Working Plans.

#### The potential of cultural heritage

When addressing cultural heritage, specifically historical sites and heritage buildings, the actual concept is based on the fact that its contribution to the economic and social sector is still very far from its true potential. According to the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2018), the tourism sector contributed to 5% of Europe's total GDP-Gross Domestic Product in 2010; but in 2018, it increased to 10% of EU total GDP. According to the European Construction Industry Federation (BPIE, 2016), the European Building Sector had 27.5% of its activity dedicated to rehabilitation and maintenance of buildings in 2013. Adding these values to the increasing number of visitors to places, where cultural heritage is a key-factor for tourist destination, it is clear that many of the possibilities for heritage to be developed as an asset are still ignored or are undervalued.

The culture and creative sectors are often seen as an unexplored field, of great potential to the sustainable development of a region, which can offer diversity and can complement the visitor's experience. Nevertheless, it is always vital to refer that no matter the scale of the contribution, and the implication of the creative sector, in general, the cultural sector does not jeopardise heritage authenticity, and it should not compromise expected conservation interventions or, at least, it should not overlap its sustainable capacity.

#### Cultural heritage enhancement through digital technology

Creative actions related to cultural heritage have an effective contribution to the local communities' prosperity, without compromising its identity, which constitutes a true challenge, according to main conventional approaches. 3DPAST project was based on the perspective that digital technologies could be used as a creative tool to value cultural heritage.

As stated by the Norms of Quito (1967), when addressing the protection of sites, heritage has a great potential regarding economic and social values. Digital technologies have the same potential, allowing for the enhancement of heritage concerning cultural awareness, in an innovative way and without physical intervention. Digital reconstructions can therefore be developed, in parallel with heritage maintenance and preservation, and without prejudice for scientific operative accuracy, encouraging creativity by the user's interactivity - a scanning component, completely identified in an informed manner.

Some institutions, such as major European Museums, have been successful adopting the digital technology, which have a direct impact on the revenue due to an increase in museum visitors. However, it has not been the same regarding the application of digital technology in inhabited dwellings, which remains sporadic and superficial, as no direct revenue is immediately foreseen. The 3DPAST project based its approach on the rich cultural diversity of vernacular dwellings in World Heritage Sites across Europe, and established a methodological approach, crossing over different vernacular contexts. Furthermore, it valued vernacular heritage best practices, and tangible and intangible know-how, identified in World Heritage properties, which inspired non-classified heritage to reintegrate local traditions and local know-how, therefore contributing to heritage preservation, diversity, and the strength of local identity.

#### Cultural heritage safeguard through awareness and training

The development of awareness activities through workshops, as well as practical training through capacity building courses can contribute to a systematic and consistent approach regarding the rising of consciousness for the importance of traditional cultural heritage among students and citizens. For instance, the development of technical workshops on stone, wood and earth construction, can prepare university students, citizens and even building professionals to be aware of traditional materials potential and value. This is of most importance, when there is a rising increase of lack of expertise, regarding conservation and maintenance of vernacular heritage, but also lack of knowledge on how to work with



◀ Digital mapping workshop, organised at Cuenca by Polytechnic University of Valencia (© M. Correia, 2017)

traditional materials and building systems, and how to intervene using traditional building cultures. Engaging university students, local communities, and interested citizens on learning from craftsmen can be a pro-active approach addressing awareness and safeguarding of traditional building systems and materials, which is possible by organising hands-on practical and technical workshops. Other potential possibility is to organise scientific workshops with a more theoretical approach towards heritage; but also, digital technology workshops, to contribute for capacity building regarding heritage and new technologies. All these potential opportunities of capacity building can be organised by universities, but also by NGOs, as ICOMOS. This was the case of the different workshops developed under 3DPAST framework, by Escola Superior Gallaecia (Portugal), University of Florence (Italy), and Polytechnic University of Valencia (Spain). ICOMOS-Portugal has also been also organising hands-on workshops on how to address maintenance of traditional windows on the World Heritage Historic Centre of Porto, in Portugal.

#### Conclusions

Relevant to mention it is also the mainstreaming of public that this kind of outcomes can reach in the future. This would be possible through the design of activities developed by an interdisciplinary team composed of professionals (such as cultural managers, historians, archaeologists, architects, scientific researchers, etc.), working in key-entities and institutions (such as universities, traditional build-

➔ Drone survey, at the World Heritage site of Upper Swaneti, in Georgia (© G. Duarte Carlos, 2019)



ing ateliers, software companies, three-dimensional modelling companies, interactive technical support companies, etc.). With the contribution of cultural professionals (such as multimedia artists, support services experts, education institutions members, among others), the interdisciplinary team and the key-entities and key-institutions, the implementation of traditional hands-on workshops and digital technology workshops directed at heritage preservation, could benefit in the medium and long term,

local communities, but also local craftsmen, and local traders that still inhabit cultural heritage. This would help to re-position the focus and re-addressing the attention for a people's centre approach regarding cultural heritage and its protection.

The main aim of the project *Living and virtual visiting European World Heritage* was to share the quality of vernacular architecture through a transdisciplinary approach, possible by interconnecting architecture, history and intangible heritage through digitisation, creativity, and communication. This was feasible by reaching different audiences, and fully enhancing the opportunity brought by digital technological tools. This approach connected the cultural and the creative sectors with the need for European heritage awareness. It also contributed to stimulate new possibilities and competences of services and products. The dissemination of the work outcomes enhanced the unique value of vernacular architecture in different European contexts, contributing for the inter-connection of heritage across the continent, and making it widely accessible in the actual digital era.

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