
Heritage as a Concept through the Prism of Time

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ABSTRACT

The present article focuses on the notion of 'time' and its definition. The notions of time and time-management are treated in terms of various concepts such as 'continuity', 'momentum', 'cultural heritage', 'history', etc. The author tries to analyze how time, as a concept and in practical terms, is identified, named and measured. The idea is to study the notion of time with respect to the cultural heritage concept shaped by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The author suggests that the necessity of heritage preservation and the ways to achieve this goal are both defined by the social actors via time-sensitive values. The 'fabrication' of tangible heritage is a complex process consisting in 'locking the moment in a stone', which breaks the continuity of time, creates a measuring unit that would make sense on a human lifetime scale but barely makes sense when considering history itself.

This paper suggests that the evolution of technologies helps to focus on the question: How to save the past, leaving continuity untouched? It is now a foreseen future: the past¹ is being converted into present. The paper also suggests that the cultural heritage list prepared and published by UNESCO is an important Foucauldian mechanism ('dispositif') where the consensus regarding the selection process itself is nonexistent: the process is aiming at identifying a 'golden list' of objects deserving to be saved in priority alongside with attempts to save the largest number of sites possible.

Here we must emphasize the influence of several areas of social science that have advanced the understanding of such concepts as 'time' and 'heritage' in recent years.

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First of all, as the concept of 'time' refers to a wide range of meanings, it is necessary for us to examine its various definitions. The sociological aspects of time, where Durkheim, Schütz, Sorokin, Merton, and several others, are the important contributors, are essential in this project. The issues of time perspective and time orientation, time reckoning, evolution of social consciousness of time, social change and time, time perception (Bluedorn 2002), are covering the major areas of sociology but also its allied disciplines: economics, cultural anthropology, and history. The central focus of this research is the role of time in the heritage production by UNESCO. Thus, the cultural conventions of the Organization are studied in detail.

Second, we consider the ethnographic works on heritage conservation, in particular, Jean-Louis Tornatore's multiple works on socio-political anthropology and the 'relationship to the past' (heritage, memory, and culture) that apprehends a pragmatist perspective (Tornatore 2007, 2011), Thomas Hylland Eriksen's study of the concepts of culture relativity (borrowed from Levi-Strauss) and cultural diversity, Chiara Bortolotto and Alessandra Broccolini's work on the intangible cultural heritage and various heritage regimes (Bortolotto 2011; Broccolini 2012), Pierre-Marie Tricaud's study of conservation and transformation of living heritage (Tricaud 2010), Marc Askew and Diana Zachariason analysis of the list's credibility (Askew 2010), David Berliner but also Thomas Hylland Eriksen on the politics of culture and rights (Berliner 2012; Alghasi, Eriksen, and Ghorashi 2009), and many others. We note the importance of multiple analysis devoted to the cultural heritage of the insiders from UNESCO and ICOMOS: Koïchiro Matsuura (Matsuura 2009), Mechtild Rosler and Christina Cameron (Cameron and Rosler 2013),² Sarah Titchen (Titchen 1996),³ Jacques Georgel and Cherif Khaznadar (Georgel, Khaznadar, and Grund 1985). Much has been written on the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972) that was established in order to preserve the world tangible heritage. The appeal to the global ethic and the privilege of cultural diversity has attracted many social anthropologists who focused their works on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention (2003) (Arantes 2007; Brown 2004; Brumann 2009; Hafstein 2009; Schmitt 2008, 2009).

The additional analysis performed in cultural sociology is also the key for my analysis. The semiotic dimensions of cultures themselves are also an object in the present research. The works of Pierre Bourdieu focusing on the symbolic dimensions of sociological processes (Bourdieu 1985; 2001) are also very important in this context.

Since Aristotle (with his *mythos* and *plot*) much has already been written on the concept of theatricality, notably, in the international policy-making. Samuel Weber from Northwestern University in particular has been working on the complex relationships between theatre, ethics and philosophy.⁴ However, the concept of 'heritage theatricalisation' is not studied well and in detail enough by social sciences to date. The analyses of multitude of audio-visual practices/messages used, primarily, to convince and/or argue, or educate, as well as to observe, to exchange with the audience, collect important information about the world and, thus, adjust the projects (Rosental 2011) (such as the production of heritage analyzed in the present article) is an important part of the research. Here Jean Baudrillard's articles devoted to the threat of conversion of originals to the artificial products and digital substitutes attract our special attention (Baudrillard 1981).

DEFINING THE NOTION OF TIME

The notion of 'time' and its measuring units have been a recurring mystery since the early ages and therefore, time does not have any universal definition – it has been changing throughout history and cultures. It does seem fundamental to understand the nature of time and hence, the reality itself, as the perception of time influences the 'reality'. These issues can be addressed from various approaches, as the understanding of time has evolved across disciplines since the ancient times: physics, biology, philosophy, psychology, *etc.*⁵

One of the current notions of 'time' is a measure of continuity – a pure social construct.⁶ Continuity is broken into pieces by adjusting the measuring unit to humans' lifetimes. This unit is, at this scale, focused on the historical events or on significant moments. As a result, the concept of heritage is being shaped through this specific angle, while the heritage logic is mostly driven by time itself.

The Cultural Heritage notion has only been relatively recently formulated by UNESCO. The Organization re-introduced the con-

cept to the world using international legislation and guidelines. The international community has now a new codified responsibility: the universal common heritage protection. And this responsibility is now legal in addition to being moral.

UNESCO IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

UNESCO is a supranational organization designed as a forum where the countries-members participate in defining the organization's priorities. The central role of UNESCO is to 'contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations'. UNESCO pursues its objectives through five major programs: education, natural sciences, social sciences and human sciences, culture, communication and information. The headquarters is situated in Paris.

The General Conference is composed of representatives of all Member States of the Organization. It meets every two years, with the participation of Member States and Associate Members. The General Conference determines the policies and the main lines of UNESCO, it adopts a program and budget of UNESCO for the next two years, elects the Executive Board and appoints, every four years, the Director General.

The Executive Council is, somehow, the Board of UNESCO. It prepares the work of the General Conference and to ensure that its decisions are properly executed. Its 58 members are elected by the General Conference.

The focus of the present study falls on the UNESCO cultural programs. UNESCO has adopted twenty-two international conventions including the six cultural conventions⁷ and has also issued a range of recommendations and declarations over almost seventy years. Conventions are legally binding, unlike the recommendations and declarations that are usually adopted unanimously and usually set out general guidelines that states members of the UNESCO are expected to strive to implement.

Two cultural conventions define the lists of heritage, namely: World Heritage Convention (1972) and Convention of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003). Lists are decided during the annual Committees' Sessions.

The World Heritage (WH) Convention thus produces two different lists: the list of world heritage (including cultural and natural items) and the list of heritage in danger.⁸ The twenty one members of the WH Convention's Committee vote on the dossiers presented by the member-countries. There are several consultative bodies assessing the strong points and merits of each dossier according to the *ten* official and quite technical criteria⁹ of the Convention; their recommendations are important but not ultimately decisive.

The Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Convention inherited its main mechanism from the WH Convention – international listing. The ICH Convention forms three different lists: representative list (the listing of the intangible cultural heritage sites), the list of urgent safeguarding (the equivalent of the ‘cultural heritage list in danger’), and the list of best practices (‘programs, projects and activities that best reflect the principles and the objectives of the Convention’.¹⁰ The register of good safeguarding practices was launched by the Intergovernmental Committee of Intangible Cultural Heritage at its fourth session in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates in 2009).¹¹ There is a subsidiary body appointed by the committee. It examines the files nominated only for the list of urgent safeguarding (during the 8th Committee's session in Baku it was agreed that the subsidiary body will also be examining the representative list's items according to the identified *five* key criteria). The Convention leaves to the Committee to make the representative list as there is no provision for any expert advice. The idea of creating an advisory body was discussed at the last ICH Committee in Baku in December 2013 for the sake of reinforcing and emphasizing the credibility of the decisions taken.

The intangible (living) heritage is a relatively new concept codified by UNESCO in 2003 that includes

the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage,

transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity (Article 2.1 of the ICH Convention).

Hence, today cultural heritage does not only represent the 'stones', monuments and landscapes but it is also defined in a dynamic view of culture as a living heritage.¹²

What does the protection of cultural heritage mean? What are the mechanisms of the heritage safeguarding? Is the site placed on the UNESCO list because of its importance for the local community, is it placed on the *list for the sake of its survival*, or is it there *for some commercial purposes*? These questions are systematically asked by scholars, states, civil society, those questions are also widely discussed in media.¹³ 'L'art de la table' or the 'art of French cuisine' runs through its transformation and from being a common practice becomes a worldwide brand. From the little I know from living in France, just like everywhere the households look for cheaper ways to consume and the fine dining notion is not a benchmark for an average French family. Evolution dictates new habits, replacing the 'living heritage' of the past with the new habits of a globalized world. So the 'eating-fast-habit' takes over. The art of French table that was placed in the intangible cultural heritage list by UNESCO can hardly claim to be a part of the living heritage nowadays. The fine dining ways, worldwide famous chefs, superior quality products together with the French food markets are not only known across the planet but also meant to be the parts of French identities. While the consumption of the junk food in France keeps its pace and today France is one of the biggest consumers of fast-food restaurants in the world.¹⁴ Why is such a contradiction even possible? What is the input of the time and time perception in defining the world intangible cultural heritage?

HERITAGE AS DEFINED BY TIME?

There are several dimensions of heritage that are directly associated with the notion of time (and even more if we consider the indirect links).

A single tangible heritage item can be considered as an encapsulated moment of time, of the past. Various specialists (archeologists, historians, anthropologists, and others) mark the heritage date by assigning it to a certain historical era, a period in the past, thereby breaking the continuity of time into pieces. The heritage as a 'caught time' is well illustrated by the museum example: each epoch is re-created/illustrated in a separate room, the continuity of space is broken by the walls of the museum, thereby defining for the viewers the discontinuity of time as presented – each moment is caught in its limited space.¹⁵ A UNESCO-protected site is, in a way, a 'room' of a museum that encapsulates a moment of time. Time is implied in a tangible site not only as an indicator of the site's affiliation with a time but also as a value in itself.

Time is also expressed in terms other than years, month, days and hours. It is also a key-underlying assumption in the concepts of past, present, and future. Thus, it becomes key to analyze the process of 'heritagization' (Walsh 1992)¹⁶ that bestows value on a practice or a heritage good, the process that judges the past in present terms by applying the present's values as criteria to judge the objects/practices of the past. The whole process of the UNESCO world heritage list elaboration can be viewed as a 'heritagization': as we mentioned above, in order to be listed the site has to fit certain criteria recently established by UNESCO.

But can any expert take the responsibility to define what in the common heritage deserves to be singled out and inscribed on the List, what site has more value compared to others?

In the attempt to answer this very question, as noted by Nicolas Adell, Michel Guisembert was insisting that 'one has to develop "good habits" of conservation: On one hand, one should not assume that what is heritage in the present will be the heritage of future generations; and on the other hand, one has to live in the awareness that "every day that passes is a historic day"' (Adell 2012). Is it relevant to apply the present values to the things from the past or extrapolate the present value to the future? Following this idea, would it even be fair to ask whether it is, thus, relevant to form any List at all? On the other hand, to our view the 'list' itself remains an important 'dispositif' that plays a crucial role in international policy-making and will probably be used for much longer as a mechanism of allocating powers on the international arena.

As defined by the Convention, the experts from three professional organizations (ICOMOS, IUCN and ICCROM), as well as UNESCO's World Heritage Center together with the World Heritage Committee members are constantly working together to define the cultural heritage, also by finding a compromise on the list of criteria that suits all the actors and fairly define the Outstanding Universal Value of the heritage items. By accepting the result of these long discussions – the official lists of criteria – UNESCO refers to the ‘universal values’. How did various actors agree on truly universal definitions? In this regard, an important challenge for the Organization is to find these universal definitions, while taking care of the interests of the multiple internal and external stakeholders. UNESCO then needs to communicate its decisions to various groups with different interests and this message has to be handled with care. One of the main questions here is how various actors with different interests decide on these common values and these common priorities?

These universal criteria are the products of long discussions, negotiations and exchanges. UNESCO has no choice but to apply these criteria which are the products of the compromises to the items that represent cultural heritage but also embody the national particularities. Also these criteria are agreed in the present, thus, the past is judged by contemporary notions of universality. Does it limit the past? Do these criteria really encourage the cultural diversity or do they limit it? How can UNESCO be sure that what it identifies as important today will be seen the same way in the future or simply on another continent and within another culture? Can UNESCO be sure that it does not miss anything that was considered important in the past but seems to be unimportant today or does not correspond to the universal values elaborated and institutionalized by the experts today? Is the goal of World Heritage Convention (1972) to protect the cultural diversity or to protect the compromising cultures by appealing to currently agreed universal values? Is the goal of the World Heritage Convention to protect the past reality or to protect what we think was important by applying contemporary values, thereby implying today's values are ‘forever universal’?

In this context, the question becomes: how is UNESCO defining cultural heritage by using the notion of Time? In other words,

we are trying to understand the role of time in shaping the concepts of heritage.

THE NOTION OF TIME: DISCRETE VS. CONTINUOUS

UNESCO's cultural conventions aim at protecting the world's cultural and natural heritage by providing a unique global platform for international cooperation. UNESCO is shaping the concept of world heritage which today includes items as diverse as ancient archaeological sites, intangible and underwater heritage, museum collections, oral traditions and other forms of heritage, but also biodiversity, as well as geodiversity.

The living dynamic heritage is a relatively new concept. With the creation of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention in 2003 and the introduction of the 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' concept itself, UNESCO basically created new standards for cultural heritage selection. 'Cultural heritage must, from now on, be defined in a dynamic view of culture' (Leblon 2013).

Living heritage cannot be protected if it is placed in the museum. Museum means death for it. Living heritage should be practiced, otherwise, it disappears. To stay 'living' these practices, expressions, representations, skills, and cultural spaces associated with it, have to be recognized by the communities and individuals as part of their cultural heritage. The interesting question is to understand how the implied notions of time define the living heritage. Are these practices, expressions, representations, and skills not *the moments of the past that repeat over time*? Though this past is not frozen – the time implied in the intangible cultural heritage does not represent an encapsulated moment of time anymore. These practices, representations, skills are constantly adjusting to the new context – it is the continuity that is in focus. The evolving technologies change the human environment on a continuous basis, bringing enhancement, but also, and mostly, permanent changes. While candles are replaced by light bulbs and electricity, it does not only change the landscape and the homes, but it also changes fundamentally the ecosystem in which humans live and evolve. This evolution impacts culture and its preservation thereof both directly and indirectly. Such an influence of the technological progress does not kill the heritage, it does not freeze it in a moment, but on the contrary, the evolution allows the heritage to live, helping to create the con-

cept of a living heritage. Contrary to all the discussions opposing development and preservation, the concept of living heritage aims at proving the possible simultaneous coexistence of both preservation and development, where the preservation is not considered as a frozen moment but as a mechanism of continuity.

The tangible cultural heritage notion is rather ‘classic’ and embraces a number of ‘objects’ such as buildings, monuments, landscapes, works of art, *etc.* Despite the digital acquisition techniques (3D camera, unlimited data, and even 3D printers) that today can provide a technological solution for reproductions, the physical contact with a specific heritage item gives people a point of literally ‘touching’ the past. This psychological phenomenon demonstrates the recognition of the necessity of the past – the things that tell its story. Memories are testified by these preserved objects that become the evidence of the past, this actuality of the object, as opposed to a reproduction, gives the impression of touching the past.

The concept of tangible heritage is interesting in this discussion about Time for a very clear reason. Any cultural heritage site *represents the time in itself*: ‘The monument encapsulated a moment in time, solidifying an event or an era’ (Adell 2012: 180). The monuments keep the past moments untouched and unchanged – they *embody the intangible time into the tangible ‘stone’*. In opposition to the living heritage described above, the tangible heritage is not adjusting to its changing environment.

Any natural landscape is the result of evolution, the result of natural processes such as volcano eruptions, floods, earthquakes, but also of human development. The natural heritage site represents a constant adaptation and evolution.

People, in return, break the history into moments, dating the events and measuring continuity. The perception of time by ‘moment’ can be viewed as a social construct that we create ourselves. In a way, any *cultural item* on the World Heritage List automatically represents a historical event or corresponds to a certain *moment/time* in history. In contrast, any *natural site* on the list represents *continuity* as nature is not determined by the experts and simply people living today, we are only witnesses.

‘What any group of people think about time ends up being a result of them interacting with each other and socialization processes’, says Allen Bluedorn (2002). Humanity indeed creates the measur-

ing unit via the social interactions; it is recontextualising the environment by arbitrarily deciding of the analysis and understanding framework. In particular when it relates to time, the 'origin', the 'coordinate 0.0' is entirely a human decision with no absolute or natural meaning.

The same interactions define our understanding of the World Cultural Heritage and the past where the monuments were witnessing history.¹⁷

With focus only on France, let us take any of the UNESCO Cultural sites like Notre-Dame, Nord-Pas de Calais Mining Basin or Mont Saint-Michel: each of them *re-creates the past in the present*; it catches us in its loop and makes us belong to a certain era. Each of them has encapsulated a moment (often together with its lifestyle and its infrastructure) of the past. And today it is assessed (and even defined) in present-day terms. Humans 'play God' by breaking the continuity of time, encapsulating past moments, and therefore, defining the notion of heritage.

By contrast, as discussed earlier, continuity is embodied in the natural sites inscribed on the list – humans stay rather passive. UNESCO's attitude towards natural sites is an attitude of reception but also of definition of it: UNESCO representatives, member-states of the Convention, experts and independent researches authorize themselves to define, for example, the notion of natural beauty and to apply those criteria to the sites.¹⁸

The nature lasts and a time-management God-game is *a priori* a failure for a human being when playing against nature. Time and continuity shape a 'heritage good'. Though, is the continuity implied in any way in the 'cultural heritage objects'? The value of certain tangible cultural sites was reinforced by their modification that was the result of the adjustment to its context. Numerous sites have lived through various modifications over their lifetimes. When Notre Dame in Paris or Notre Dame in Reims is being renovated using new materials, is it still the 'real' Notre Dame? That becomes an important question given the existing notion of authenticity¹⁹ that was recently introduced to UNESCO. In this regard, to what extent the evolution and development create the continuity and to what extent the same development destroys the cultural heritage as an institutionalized category? This problem could become an independent study.

As such, the recent notion of Intangible Cultural Heritage confuses these two concepts. It is a dynamic heritage where humans no longer keep a passive role but become the only creators and the only receptors of the heritage. The heritage disappears as it is defined in the Convention by the moment it loses its relation with the present, when it no longer involves the active participation of the communities concerned in the preservation.²⁰ A practice that has a long history (that is where the notion of time is coming back) has a higher value and is defined as an important characteristic in shaping a certain identity (Article 2 of the Convention 2003). The continuity reins but this time humans (not nature) are in charge of it, as a group and as a community.

By defining the cultural heritage site as encapsulated moments of time, UNESCO, nevertheless, invents another mechanism in order to re-create the lost continuity. The experts tried to offset the effect of the time loss by the space: the new restored continuity is rather spatial and not temporal. UNESCO creates a concept of 'buffer zone' which represents

an area surrounding the nominated property which has complementary legal and/or customary restrictions placed on its use and development to give an added layer of protection to the property. This should include the immediate setting of the nominated property, important views and other areas or attributes that are functionally important as a support to the property and its protection. The area constituting the buffer zone should be determined in each case through appropriate mechanisms. Details on the size, characteristics and authorized uses of a buffer zone, as well as a map indicating the precise boundaries of the property and its buffer zone, should be provided in the nomination.²¹

Moreover, such re-creation of continuity through space is not captured only by the Convention. The current trends of the IT development demonstrate significant achievements in the fields of mapping and 'on-line travelling'. Google's ambitious projects, but also many others (OpenStreetMap is an example) are eliminating the physical borders that we experience in real life and recreate the continuity in the virtual space.

A GIFT FROM THE PAST

UNESCO decides in the present what is considered to have been important in the past. The past is often judged by the values that are accepted today, and, thus, part of the heritage that should be protected is decided by UNESCO today too in accordance to the criteria that were officially fixed quite recently. The actors involved into heritagization process decide today on the ‘beauty’ or ‘value’ of items that were created a long time ago, in a different context and environment, on the importance of traditions that used to be respected for centuries. Though, in a way, a coefficient, a time value in some respect, is being applied today in order to judge the ultimate – or even ‘absolute’ – value of some items, mostly assuming today's values are ‘absolute’.

Interestingly, this is very similar to the central concept of finance theory – the time value of money – which stands for the growing purchasing power of money in the future. With that in mind, let us look at the text of the Operational Guidelines for the UNESCO World Heritage Convention 1972: it is clear that the time value of a site is highly esteemed (II.A, art.2/47). The time value of a site would take account of risks over a given period of time, but it is also clear that there is an implicit psychological value to anything defined in terms of ‘ancient’, ‘old’, ‘disappearing’, which adds more value. ‘Old wines’, ‘old cheese’, ‘old furniture’, ‘old recipe’ – regardless of the terminology, the message is clear: they are better ‘old’.²² The implicit value of ‘ancient’ is not only implied in the Convention itself (under one of the ten criteria that define a heritage object). This question was developed in the philosophical literature. For example, Riegl,²³ speaking about the heritage value distinguishes its three different types. He clearly points that one of the most important values of the heritage is its ‘valeur d’ancienneté’ (Alterswert), supposing that the ancient things are ‘more original’ compared to the recent ones.

UNESCO decides the content of the lists of Cultural Heritage based partly on the judgements of experts. Some time ago Hanna Arendt rightly pointed that ‘when talking about culture it is not the truth and the knowledge that are important, but the judgement and the decision’²⁴ (Arendt 1972). By applying the present values to the past, its meaning is changed. Certain things from the past that do not seem to have a high value today used to be probably very im-

portant then. Though, today, humanity chooses what was supposedly important for the previous generations by measuring the past in present terms: the traditions with the high assigned values are being promoted and, thus, put in focus; it also means that some traditions are being put in the shade as the focus is moved on others.

One can hardly deny the fact that the Heritage and its representations often become a 'project of ideology'²⁵ (Kuutma 2007). 'Its conceptualization depends on modernity's sense that the present needs to re-forged links with a past that appears to be severed and lost in the changing world'. But it also means that the past becomes selective – the ideology and the heritage regime²⁶ (national but also international) control the history. As we know and what has become popular in a quote attributed to Churchill: History is written by the 'winners'.

So the past is judged by the present. But what if that is the best the living generation can do? What if a better way to preserve items has just not been discovered yet? Present is all we (speaking on behalf of the living generation) have, all we can apprehend with limited and non-compounded uncertainties.

The protection of cultural diversity is one of the UNESCO major focuses. While the term 'diversity' is in linguistic opposition with the term 'universality', UNESCO's main mechanism of the heritage protection is focused on the elaboration of common criteria and universal values that are suitable for all cultures. It is not the goal of this paper to argue on the relevance of such criteria. The analysis only tries to put the *a priori* accepted contradictions (oppositions) of the heritage preserving mechanism in evidence.

Thus, there is a need to admit that the past is not only judged with the present value as discussed above, but a particular unique heritage object is judged also in terms of universality. A priori-incomparable things are compared basing on the elaborated list of 'the' defined universal criteria. UNESCO applies the so-called universal values (the values that represent a certain consensus achieved between the member-states during the organisation's sessions) to particular cultural heritage objects. By doing that, UNESCO destroys the real value of the site as its real implied value from thousand years ago was probably very different from what we identify nowadays. In the end, the object, even if being preserved, is

often, at best, protected because of the ‘wrong’ (*i.e.*, not the reasons of the past) reason and, at worst, not protected at all.

The international community has suddenly realized, over the past 40 years – a nanosecond compared to the history of Humanity, – the need to preserve the heritage of Outstanding Universal Value (UNESCO World Heritage Convention 1972). It has also recently realised that there is no item that can be saved forever: neither tangible, not intangible. This is evolution. Which brings the question: what does ‘forever’ mean?

PRESERVING FOREVER: MISSION POSSIBLE?

Does ‘Forever’ have an end? The question may seem a *litotes*. One of the global goals of UNESCO – to protect the World Heritage (tangible, intangible, cultural, natural, and underwater) *forever*, – sounds too ambitious and potentially impossible. Though, the same evolution that leads to destruction of certain heritage items today creates the tools that enable to protect them for much longer than the generation will live. Here I mean the evolution of technologies.

The development of new technologies, the digitization of the world, the ability to keep information inventory virtually forever, destroys the countable/measurable side of the notion of time – the significant acceleration of the timeline has an impact on our perception of evolution (in terms of its inevitable character but also its speed). It also has an impact on the heritage preservation as the goals are more ambitious today – UNESCO aims at protecting the heritage for as long as possible and, taking into account the new technologies, it will probably be able to do so very soon if not already now. Technology allows each of us to travel in the past, present and even future. Each image is in a way a caught/frozen²⁷ moment of time that is at the same time movable and dynamic. No 3D installation breaks the continuity. Virtual museums have no walls but also do not have the same consequences on the living cultural heritage, it does not kill it but allows to live. The world heritage is promoted and passed onto the future generation by existing virtually forever in the digital space where time is no more the same and has a different meaning. Taking into account the development of technologies it often feels that the heritage conservation process becomes easier as the marginal cost of copy, storage and access is in constant decline (a trend recently illustrated by the deep decrease in

prices for online/cloud storage by the like of Box, Google, Microsoft, Dropbox, *etc.*²⁸). In the virtual world, the digital copy of all monuments, buildings but also cultures and behaviour is stored and accessible potentially forever (dependent on the ability of technologies to last forever, which is a discussion in itself). Considering that for most of humanity the sole and unique interaction with this heritage is the virtual access (video, photos, *etc.*), would it even matter then if the ‘real’ thing was not preserved anymore? What would be then the concept of heritage?

The humanity does not need to make a choice among the *a priori* incomparable things, and even in the ‘era of cultural encounters’ it would not seek for the firm cultural frontiers but acknowledge ‘the cultural continuum’ (Burke 2009). The heritage items could still be destroyed but their memory – ironically the memory of items of memory – will last forever. However, how this preserved heritage will be valued without a ‘risk’ of disappearing when the certainty of perpetual presence is there, is unknown and this is a potential new risk that has never been assessed yet.

In 2012, UNESCO held its first international conference under the title ‘Memory of the World in the Digital Age: Digitization and Preservation’.²⁹ The discussion was mainly around the various difficulties related to the long-term preservation of digital information. As a result, the need to establish a roadmap with solutions, technologies, and policies ensuring a long-term access and preservation was established³⁰ because digital information is actually much more difficult to preserve over long periods of time than most people think. According to the conference members, the risk that future hardware and software will fail to process old data is real, bringing forward the risk for information to exist forever but potentially not accessible. The archives, museums and libraries need some help coming from governments and from technological companies in order to innovate in this field and create solutions for this obvious problem. The follow up meeting was held in the Hague on 5 and 6 December 2013 (it was initiated by UNESCO, IFLA, ICA, Koninklijke Bibliotheek and DEN Foundation) and according to UNESCO, ‘this discussion between such diverging stakeholders showed that there was insufficient awareness between industry and heritage institutions about the relative concerns of the

other and that there needed to be a platform to discuss digital preservation'.³¹

The question of digital preservation is thus not straightforward as many writers and researchers (Hedstrom 1998: 199; Tarrant, Wilson, and McGuinness 2013; Portico n.d., *etc.*) may see it – the development of technologies is not necessarily making the act of preservation cheaper and easier. Total digitalisation exposes the preserved information to a new danger, as the risk of the loss is as big as the risk not to win in a zero sum game (by 'totally digitalising', the system tries to preserve 'everything' with the simultaneous risk of losing 'everything'). The data loss can be very expensive as it does not only include the data restoration, but it also includes the cost of continuing without the data (just an example – the Web crash of 2007). No proper assessment of the risks of such a loss has been made yet – it can indeed have a very severe consequences.

UNESCO will soon celebrate its 70th anniversary, which accompanied the birth of 'mass media' and the use of technology in the promotion and protection of culture and of the world heritage. Though with the maturation of Web 2.0, the generalization of 'Big Data', the growing importance of algorithms in day-to-day lives and in reducing the choices with respect to comfort, the main issue for the years to come may be not the preservation and promotion of heritage forever but rather the preservation of the notion of incomparability for objects, locations, concepts, ... which by essence cannot be compared. It is the notion of Heritage on the human evolution scale that needs to be revised today. It is the 'selection' that poses the problem and breaks the continuity (the Cultural Heritage) into the moments (the Lists).

What if the utopian concept could be achieved due to the problem-solving potential of Internet, communication networks, artificial intelligence and technologies – what if we can digitalize and thus, in a way, protect everything virtually forever? Humanity would easily be able to re-create any context and any culture. We then will no longer be forced to choose between the most valuable objects and create the UNESCO List. But wait... What about brands? Would brands soon be gone? And more generally, when everything can be accessed at any time in the digital world, what happens to the value of the 'real' underlying item? Would the 'real' world lose value if its existence is no more necessary? And

probably even more disturbing, if everything is preserved and available, what would be the impact of the overflow of available information on the relation to heritage?

CONCLUSION

What is time? Is it tomorrow, today, or yesterday? Is it early or late? It is important what it implies: our relation to time or our time-management. The meaning is given through the name: it is the future, it is the present, and it is the past.

What is heritage and how is it preserved (is it even needed at all)? The humans invent Human Heritage by using the notion of time. Each practice and ‘heritage good’ is described in terms of time. Humans present their tangible cultural heritage in separate items by ‘locking the moment in a stone’. By doing this, they break the continuity, creating a measuring unit that would make sense on a human lifetime scale but barely makes sense when considering history itself.

By encapsulating – in effect locking – a moment in the name of tangible heritage, UNESCO nevertheless creates another mechanism to re-create the continuity lost during the heritagization process by moving the focus from time towards space. The re-creation of continuity also happens by introducing the concept of intangible cultural heritage – the ‘living heritage’. Contrary to tangible heritage sites, these intangible heritage practices last in time – they connect the past with the present.

Thus, UNESCO is imitating the continuity, known in nature, via its heritage policies shaped over time by the various Conventions. Continuity in time and space seems to be natural for human beings and, thus, special mechanisms, like ‘buffer zone’, are elaborated by the Organization to re-enact it.

The evolution of technologies helps to focus on more essential things – *how* to save the past, leaving continuity untouched. It is now a foreseen future: humanity gives up on the Past converting it into present, while the selection process aiming at identifying the ‘golden list’ of objects deserving to be saved becomes soon irrelevant. Hence, the past is the heritage, the past stays at present, who knows, maybe forever.

NOTES

¹ ‘The past is a steady process of imaginative reinterpretation and reconstruction; we want it to be meaningful to us in the present’ (Abel 1976: 165).

² Lynn Meskell, Mechtild Rossler, Christina Cameron published some interesting works on the World Cultural Heritage Convention politicization and challenges (Droste, Rössler, and Titchen 1999; Meskell 2013; Cameron and Rossler 2013).

³ Sarah Titchen presented a detailed analysis of the 'universal outstanding value' concept in her PhD thesis that has never been published (Titchen 1996).

⁴ Multiple alternatives to dominant narrative-aesthetic assumptions about the theatrical medium were developed by Shakespeare, Kierkegaard, Kafka, Freud, Benjamin, Artaud ... not counting the major Greek tragedians, and many others.

⁵ For Aristotle, time was not fundamental but only a derived concept from the notion of space and motion; for Galilei, time was an absolute characteristic of space-time; for Einstein, the time was described through General Relativity, as part of space-time which is a dynamical object encoding gravity (Girelli 2009).

⁶ Ian Hacking would disagree on the wording (Hacking 2000).

⁷ Cultural Conventions: Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005); Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003); The Convention for the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001); Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972); Fighting against the illicit trafficking of cultural property (1970); Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954).

⁸ Placing a property on the list of cultural heritage in danger is, unfortunately, seen as a punishment by many of the member-states of the Convention; the US is the only state that actively uses the list in a positive sense by placing their properties on the list and thus attracting the financial help, the tourists' flows and the media coverage.

⁹ World Cultural Heritage Center, The Criteria for Selection. URL: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>.

¹⁰ UNESCO, Lists of intangible cultural heritage and Register of best safeguarding practices. Retrieved, 2008. URL: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00559>.

¹¹ In the authors' opinion, based on the observations and daily interactions with UNESCO's actors, the member-states do not like to be 'assessed' on their cultural heritage nomination files and thus the list of best practices is seen by the author as the least popular one out of the three established by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention.

¹² This is the main message that is used by UNESCO's Division of Public Information in shaping the UNESCO brand: sustainable development of the sites is one of the main goals that were officially stated many times by the Director General and the Organization's representatives.

¹³ 'Quand un label dit que ce patrimoine est l'un des plus beaux de France, c'est ce qui déclenche vraiment le déplacement des touristes. Et si j'ai fait le choix d'installer mon restaurant gastronomique ici, c'est parce qu'il était plus beau village de France. Pour nous, perdre ce label serait dommageable. Cela représenterait environ 30 per cent de chiffres d'affaires en moins. Cela correspond à l'emploi de trois salariés'. URL: <http://www.franceinfo.fr/economie/le-plus-france-info/saint-lizier-futur-ex-plus-beau-village-de-france-1188685-2013-10-25>.

‘...les agressions infligées à la filière vin par l’industrie des spiritueux me pousse à dresser des contre-feux. J’en ai assez que le vin trinque dans les campagnes contre l’alcoolisme’. <http://www.ladepeche.fr/article/2014/02/17/1820198-carcassonne-roland-courteau-veut-classer-le-vin-au-patrimoine-mondial.html>.

¹⁴ ‘France – the land of haute cuisine, fine wine and cheese – would be the last place you would expect to find a thriving fast-food market. In a country known for its strong national identity and anti-globalization movement, it seems improbable that McDonald's could have survived the onslaught of French social and political activism... And yet McDonald's, the world's largest fast-food corporation, with a global presence in 119 countries across all six inhabited continents, has turned the home of Le Cordon Bleu cooking academies and the Michelin Guide of world-renowned restaurants into its second-most profitable market in the world...’ – Lucy Fancourt, *Born in the USA, Made in France: How McDonald's Succeeds in the Land of Michelin Stars*, 2012, <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/born-in-the-usa-made-in-france-how-mcdonalds-succeeds-in-the-land-of-michelin-stars/>.

¹⁵ One should notice that not all the museums break their collections between the rooms that are available, in roughly intellectually consistent aggregates. There are other logics to it that fall outside of the concepts developed here.

¹⁶ The word ‘heritagization’ was firstly used by Kevin Walsh, who described it as a ‘historical anesthetization of space, through the exploitation of historical images’ (Walsh 1992).

¹⁷ ‘La preoccupation de conserver les oeuvres d'art, temoins des temps passes, repond donc a un sentiment national’. Tetreau L. 1896. *Legislation relative aux monuments et objets d'art*. Paris: p. 3 (in Poulot 2006: 151).

¹⁸ ‘Mais un patrimoine, par définition lui aussi, est un bien ayant un propriétaire humain, même si ce dernier est l’humanité entière : même le patrimoine naturel n’est patrimoine que pour l’homme. Dans tous les cas, l’attribution d’une valeur est un fait culturel : même le patrimoine naturel peut ainsi être considéré comme un patrimoine culturel’ (Tricaud 2010: 46).

¹⁹ ‘...authentic can be understood as the requirement to be genuine, *i.e.*, the nominated resource should be truly what it is claimed to be. ...this aspect of ‘genuineness’ could have many parameters including, ‘form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors...’ – Summary of ICCROM Position Paper, Amsterdam 1998, Jukka Jokilehto in collaboration with Joseph King (02 February 2000). URL: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/events/443/>.

²⁰ Brazil was preparing an ICH nomination file for the List of Urgent Safeguard regarding a language that was only practiced by 3 people. When, the oldest one (and the only one who used the language as a mother tongue) had passed away – the file was dropped as it did not have any future.

²¹ Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention 1972–2013, II.F Protection and management, article 104, UNESCO Press, 2013.

²² The word ‘old’ can also be defined negatively: the old can be seen as an ‘out of date’ and, thus, less valuable, as, for example, the ‘old shoes’.

‘Il faut noter que c’est souvent le même processus qui conduit d’abord à une amélioration et ensuite à une dégradation, comme une application du vieil adage *corruptio optimi pessima*. C’est une série continue de réactions chimiques (oxydations, fermentations...) qui fait passer un fruit du mûrissement au pourrissement, un vin de la bonification à l’altération. C’est le même mouvement d’usure qui rode une pièce puis la déforme. C’est la même érosion qui arrondit les angles trop vifs des pierres neuves et qui ruine un édifice. C’est la même oxydation qui patine un métal trop brillant et qui le fait tomber en poussière. C’est le même mot qui est à l’origine du rodage et de l’érosion, et un même autre mot à l’origine de l’usage et de l’usure’ (Tricaud 2010: 53).

²³ ‘Au regard de la valeur d’ancienneté, la loi esthétique fondamentale de notre époque peut être formulée de la façon suivante : nous exigeons de la main de l’homme qu’elle produise des œuvres achevées et closes, symboles de la loi de la création. Nous attendons au contraire de l’action de la nature au cours du temps la dissolution de ces œuvres, symbole de la loi également nécessaire de la dégradation’ (Riegl 1984: 66).

²⁴ ‘Ce n’est pas le savoir ou la vérité qui est en jeu, mais plutôt le jugement et la décision’ (Arendt 1972).

²⁵ A project of ideology that is dependent on ambivalent temporal entanglements.

²⁶ We use the concept of regime as it has been developed in international regulatory theory: If the notion of ‘heritage regime’ in classical terms refers to a set of rules and norms regulating the relations between a state-government and society regarding the heritage, international regimes are about negotiations among actors on an international level.

²⁷ ‘Safeguarding intangible heritage calls for its “translation” from oral form into some form of materiality, e.g. archives, inventories, museums and audio or film records. Although this could be regarded as “freezing” intangible heritage in the form of documents, it should be clear that this is only one aspect of safeguarding and that great thoughtfulness and care should be given to choosing the most appropriate methods and materials for the task’ (Bouchenaki 2003).

²⁸ URL: <http://techcrunch.com/2014/03/26/in-response-to-google-amazon-announce-massive-price-cuts-for-s3-ec2-and-rds/>

²⁹ URL: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/events/calendar-of-events/events-websites/the-memory-of-the-world-in-the-digital-age-digitization-and-preservation/>

³⁰ UNESCO/UBC Vancouver Declaration, 26-28 September 2012, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, URL: http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/unesco_abc_vancouver_declaration_en.pdf.

³¹ PERSIST: UNESCO Digital Strategy for Information Sustainability, Article source: URL: <http://en.unesco.org/news/persist-unesco-digital-strategy-information-sustainability#sthash.612U2yD2.dpuf>.

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