English

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Heritage as a driver of culture-led local development Pier luigi sacco

It is a widely held belief that heritage is essentially about the past. People tend to think of heritage as the selective legacy of the past course of our societies and cultures, in its many forms: built artefacts, objects, documents, ideas, traditions, and so on. However, if we seriously think of it, heritage is as much about the future as it is about the past, and primarily because heritage is nothing but what we make of it, not only in terms of conservation and preservation, but also in terms of cultural focus, social relevance, and capacity to entertain a lively dialogue with our current interests and concerns.

We also have to be aware that we are currently at a turning point about the role that heritage will have in our future societies. As a consequence of the digital revolution, we are currently producing an unprecedented amount of content of any kind. To make a simple example, the volume of photographic content we are producing every year is growing exponentially, and soon the whole stock of images that was created before the digital revolution will become a tiny, negligible fraction of the total. And despite that most of these images are probably of little interest from the point of view of their cultural significance, if only a small fraction of them instead is, this will change completely the way in which we will have to approach

heritage from every possible point of view: conservation, indexing, curation, diffusion, and so on. In the gigantic dataspace that is currently being generated, the capacity to index and navigate content will be crucial to the development of any meaningful vision of our culture, and this will crucially have to do with metadata and not just with data, and with massive deployment of advanced technologies such as AI-driven ones. And this has to do not only with the sheer volume of data and documents, but also with the way we approach the most traditional and conventional forms of heritage from the past. Think for instance of the conservation of built heritage, where digital scanning and monitoring, also in view of the new challenges brought about by global climate change, will be crucial, as testified by the development of ambitious, large scale projects such as the Europe Time Machine.

Therefore, the heritage of our close future will be about a cutting edge exploration of, and experimentation with, advanced technologies in ways that will also crucially contribute to define our standards for the digital experience economy of the next decades. In this respect, we should consider heritage as one of the crucial areas of R&D for the use of state-of-the-art digital technologies in the construction of the hybrid physical-digital spaces of the future – a trend that is likely to be strongly accelerated by the post-pandemic scenario we are about to enter into. This shift of focus has clear consequences for our notion of heritage. If we reason in terms of the

so-called Culture 3.0 conceptual framework, we notice that each regime of cultural production brings with it a specific idea of heritage. To the Culture 1.0 patronage regime there corresponds a Heritage 1.0 notion which is mainly focused on conversation and access to heritage according to the logic and rules defined by the experts and specialists. In this context, audiences are essentially a threat: ideally, heritage should be protected from any intermission to be transmitted to future generations. As it is impossible to keep people away from it, access should be considered as a necessary liability, but controlled as much as possible. To the Culture 2.0 cultural and creative industries regime corresponds instead a rather opposite view of Heritage 2.0 as a sort of entertainment machine, as it is sometimes tragically illustrated by the impact that the socio-economic dynamics of over-tourism have on most art and heritage cities worldwide. Here, access to heritage by people becomes desirable and even craved as a source of positive economic impact, but with the real risk of endangering its physical and social sustainability and even to dissolve its own cultural codes of meaning. Finally, to the Culture 3.0 open platforms regime there corresponds a Heritage 3.0 idea that is best captured by the notion of heritage communities as defined by the Faro Convention. In this new context, people are seen neither as a threat nor merely as paying customers, but first and foremost as the social constituency that ensures both the preservation

and development of heritage's sustainability, cultural significance, engagement with current social challenges, and development of the individual and social skills that are needed to enable the whole process.

In this respect, heritage can be seen from at least three different angles in its capacity to establish a fruitful dialogue with the local communities and with cultural and creative production. Heritage is, to begin with, a formidable archive of ideas, contents, and aesthetic codes. It is an incredibly rich repository of sources and inspiration for contemporary creative production, and once again the best way to unleash such potential is to navigate it by making a smart use of advanced digital technologies – in the last few years, we are witnessing a remarkable growth of visionary projects and experimentations that pave the way to this possibility, championed by institutions such as metaLAB (at) Harvard, KAIST, Ars Electronica and ZKM, among others. Moreover, heritage is a powerful social narrative, that is, a resource to collectively make sense of our own shared history and social development, not just in terms of establishment of local identity and pride, but also as a very fruitful way to create place-based value perception and at the same time to favor creation of social capital and community-based collaboration. Finally, heritage can be seen as a crucial public space that functions as a backbone for the social cohesion of the community. The spatial dimension of heritage, not only physically but also digitally (with the future

development of heritage-based digital infospheres) may become a crucial venue for the community to meet and develop shared discourses about issues of primary public interest as it was for the central city squares in our long-term European traditions.

The real challenge is to connect all these dimensions in a whole, eco-systemic view of heritage and in particular of its transformational potential in contemporary societies. The value of heritage as a creative asset for our emerging cultural and creative economies is a consequence of its social rooting and of its capacity to inform our social discourse and to foster a truly inclusive participation. This in turn requires a serious investment in skills development that enables all citizens to be active participants of this ecosystem. From the point of view of cultural and creative industries, we must think of heritage, as already emphasized, as a crucial asset for R&D: from the point of view of content mining and deployment, from the point of view of technological development and testing, and from the point of view of the development of new experience concepts and formats. Whereas in other spheres of the cultural and creative sectors (for instance, on purely technological grounds) Europe may be lagging behind other geo-cultural areas of the world, in giving value to this unique combination of history, content and technology in new, unexpected ways it could have a major competitive advantage. This also includes the possibility of involving not only young digital natives, but also families and elderly

citizens in new ways of contributing to the collective creation, curation and diffusion of heritage-related content, with the important side effect of favoring good social practices such as social inclusion and active ageing.

In this particular respect, Prague is perfectly qualified to position itself as a major European hub of this development process, also in view of the Czech Republic's primary role in the development of new models of digitally driven manufacturing and of creative integration of traditional and digitally driven production processes, often related to areas of great importance in heritage terms such as traditional crafts. Prague can also exploit its strategic location in the heart of Europe to become, literally speaking, a center of gravity of a new wave of creative innovation that builds on the combination of developing a full-fledged heritage community, becoming one of the innovation leaders in heritage-driven technological development, and becoming a new laboratory of a heritage-focused new experience economy, that recruits not only the tourism industry but also involves cultural and creative professionals, citizens and the civil society, the social services system, and ideally all constituencies of the local economy.

The Prague Cultural Forum represents an idea platform to empower this vision and to launch a new cycle of culture-driven development.