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Phd Research in Design Driven Processes for the Valorisation of Cultural Heritage

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“Talking about Cultural Heritage , it involves various competences: experts of art and history, economy, management, lawyers. This segmentation of approaches has led to a recent complication and opacity of specialities and languages” (Settis, 2005).

Cultural heritage is a system of complex definition: it is ruled and protected by law, but is time by time considered in different ways depending on the specialist who is called to work with it. Does design play a role in this system?

In this research, focused only on the valorisation process of the Cultural Heritage, we suggest a different approach from the historiographic method and the one oriented to the economic management, that is a design driven approach. One of the objective of the work in fact, was to develop a common comprehension platform of the cultural heritage system representing it with a model suitable for design intervention. This design approach, that we define Cultural Design, allows to understand new typologies of cultural goods (i.e. immaterial goods), and to develop a more contemporary and dynamic concept of Cultural Heritage, where the valorisation actions are directed to enable sustainable culture fruition and experience by persons. As final result we expect to improve the awareness of the strategic importance of Cultural Heritage within the Soft Economy, based on knowledge, innovation, creativity and quality: “an economy that connects social cohesion and competitiveness, and able to learn from communities and territories” (Cianciullo, Realacci , 2005).

The research used initially a phenomenological approach, due to the not formal contribution of design in cultural heritage valorisation. In fact, since a systematic theoretical back ground is missing, the analysis was mainly based upon the collection of paradigmatic examples of design projects in cultural heritage valorisation, in order to produce a reference frame of best practices. The result is that design acts traditionally in three directions: as horizontal dimension is the strategic regie of processes of valorisation, as vertical dimension it owns specific competences in valorisation (i.e. exhibition design, light design), and as cross dimension it is the communication of these processes. In other words, in this field there are traditional design competences that



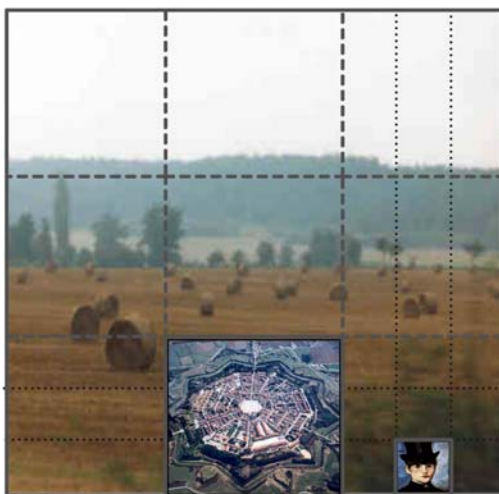
use codified knowledge and operate in explicit way (i.e. project like exhibitions, itineraries, corporate image and cultural events or technologies for the study of the cultural patrimony like 3D relief or virtual simulation), and skills that are not codified and collectively shared and recognized, like strategies of management and services for cultural goods.

Then, in order to define a standard for a design oriented process of valorisation, we started to consider the valorisation of Cultural Heritage as a process of relations: it changed the conventional concept of Cultural Heritage itself, extended the possible design interventions and made easier to understand the strategic role that design can play.

To present the evolution of the cultural system in the research has often been used the method of conceptual visualisation: in fact design has the creative skill to represent complex system in conceptual models as the main tool to describe and analyse the phenomena where is going to work. In this research the multidimensional phenomenon of Cultural Heritage valorisation has been extremely synthesized in a enriched conceptual and “visual” model useful to make easier the processes of information definition and identification of the project actions for the achievement of the goal. We started to test the effectiveness of the model practicing a kind of action-research: operating some simulations of reality alteration we built a grid of virtuous actions suitable to be replaced by steps in the real context. Finally the model is an effective knowledge sharing system between the work team and an universal language of communication of this work achievements.

Cultural Heritage as a complex *relational* system

The Cultural heritage has exemplar qualities: even if often is isolable in single items, is multidimensional in terms of extension and scale. It can be individual and diffuse (i. e. a painting and a collection), and of different typologies: from the artistic object to the monument, the city and the territory. Using the computer folder metaphor, we can say that each cultural good is placed in different layers, and each layers is held in others.



Img. 1: The Multifolder Metaphor of Cultural Heritage



Cultural Heritage is both material and immaterial too: each material goods owns an immaterial value that is related to the collective meaning and significance built from the experiences that people has of it, and there are specific cultural goods like activities, events or traditions (i.e. language) that haven't a physical form.

So Cultural Heritage is the result of situation factors which connect it to the context and the other elements and is always related to other cultural items, the territory where is settled and people. In his *Joyless Economy*, Scitovsky (1967) introduces the concept of *relational goods*, characterized by identity, reciprocity and gratuitousness. Cultural Heritage can be considered a relational good because it grants in the same time comfort (immediate satisfaction) and creativity (the well-being increases with the use during the time).

Relatively to the context and the other goods, the research called "Design for the valorisation of cultural Heritage", currently undergoing within the Dip. Indaco of Politecnico of Milano, in partnership with other Italian Universities (in which the author is involved), identifies different forms of relations: a polar model is focused on a single good or a system of goods (i.e. a museum or a collection), a linear model connects these single goods with an itinerary, a territorial model derives on the capacity of a territory to express itself as an homogeneous system of cultural resources, a reticular model tries to connect the cultural goods by functions or organisation.

Relatively to people, Cultural Heritage corresponds to an original expression of the habits system and significance production of subjective experiences, located in a specific time and space. In this sense, the definition of Cultural Heritage includes all those goods produced by man or nature whose value satisfies an aesthetical need or a historical and social memory necessity. The experience of culture is an interpretative relation between the cultural good and the subject of the fruition, and evolves in a transformation relation: Cultural Heritage allows the practice of identity, and design, as discipline focused on man and his needs and relations in society, can be the medium of this participative and symbolic process, to enable the creation of new innovative values, meanings and uses.

"Consumption processes laicize and democratize the cultural heritage, without compromising its nature and knowledge because they allow a large number of different and not simplified approaching. Consumption doesn't waste Cultural Heritage because what consumes is not the cultural good itself but the pleasure of it"(Purini, 2002).

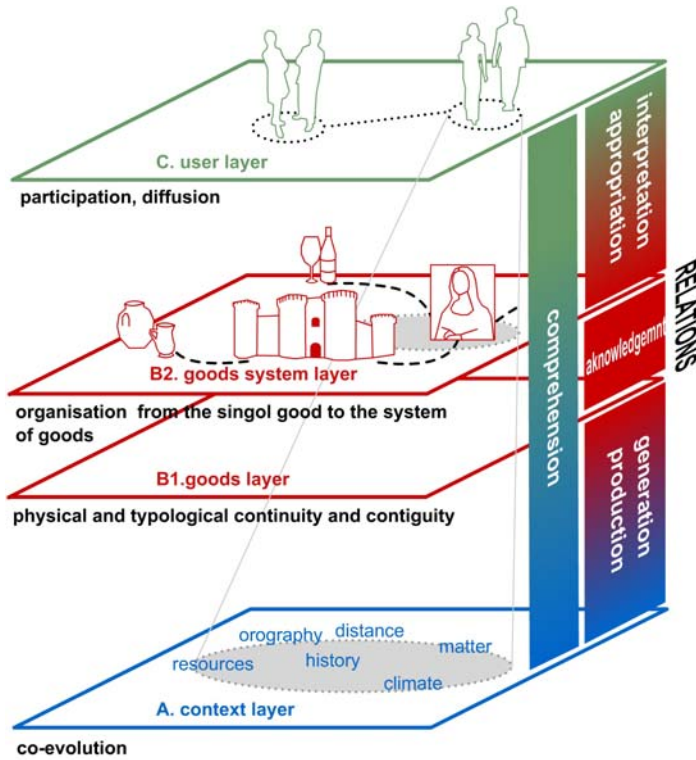
The relation is the good (Nussbaum, 1986) and the *locus* where to design new processes and creative forms of valorisation and fruition.

The relational model of Cultural Heritage

The model here presented, is specifically settled in Italy where the Cultural Heritage presents a *continuum* that links together cities, territory and inhabitants through an age-old culture of tutelage and valorisation (Settis, 2005).



This model is a work in progress tool useful not only to represent the relational concept of cultural Heritage but also to specify and understand the phases of the valorisation process that design can project.



Img. 2: The Relational Model of Cultural Heritage

Cultural Heritage can be represented like four layers placed and related one upon the others. The inferior layer is the context, including all the physical and conceptual elements like geographical, historical and climatic characteristics, that can be considered typical of a context. Within this layer exist naturally determined processes of development and co-evolution. The upper level contains the goods that the context produces with its physical and immaterial resources: they are related by physical and typological continuity and contiguity.

Between this two layers we locate the *productive dimension* of Cultural Heritage. This relation is based upon a process of *in-formation* that translates in shapes (or meta-shapes like models) the matter (Flusser, 2003): in fact the form of Cultural Heritage is both material and immaterial.

Above the good layers is placed the layers where the goods are organized in a system (relatively to the model of organization they are already been presented in the previous paragraph: the polar, territorial, reticular ones). To pass to this level the goods must necessary undergo through a process of collective acknowledgement.



This is called *social recognition dimension* of Cultural Heritage. This relation allows to relocate the existent goods within a value system of a specific society, in terms of tradition or rarity.

The last layer is the users layer, characterized by relations of participation and diffusion. This layer and the goods system layer are correlated by the *interpretation dimension* of Cultural Heritage, evident in all the processes of reconfiguration of cultural goods in order to facilitate the individual appropriation. These are processes culturally determined.

Grefe (2005) introduces the concept of life cycle of Cultural Heritage, talking about the obsolescence produced by cultural consumption; in our model is possible to propose a complete cycle for the cultural goods that has only a symbolic consumption: in the context layer they are potential goods, in the goods layer we have forms of goods which become explicit and collective in the good system layer, and suitable of experience in the users layer.

The valorisation of cultural heritage as a design driven process

Using empirically the model we proposed a hierarchy and some standards for the valorisation process. Originally design worked on the social recognition dimension, organising goods through socially shared meanings: a clear example are all the museography projects that arrange object following typological analogies, chronological orders, geographical origins, like the master piece of Scarpa in Castelvecchio exhibition project. Now design links the organisation of cultural goods to territorial and local development aims, projecting also the infrastructure and the services for the area surrounding the good.



Img. 3: Scarpa Project at Castelvecchio

The second step design moved in is the *interpretation dimension*, projecting the experience of the user. The first result has been an improvement of the accessibility and understanding of goods by the user: booking services, guides for disable users or multimedia communication system to explain and give information about the goods



in a direct or indirect way (in presence of the good or at distance). Then design developed more creative experiences, reproducing the original context or copies suitable for a complete sensorial fruition. In this dimension the border for design is to transform culture in a participatory and creation action (Berger,1992), enabling social and collective acknowledgment processes, where the user is the producer of culture: this is possible operating a *profanation action*, to eliminate the “impossibility of use” and deactivate the conventional uses and behaviours (Agamben, 2005). An example in Italy is the creation of a contemporary art gallery within a shopping centre (Supermercati Coop) , in order to underline the new daily and familiar dimension of Cultural Heritage.



Img.4: Art Gallery in the Coop Supermarket

Relatively to the *productive dimension* of Cultural Heritage, which involves historically determined processes, has design the possibility to introduce controlled actions of culture in-formation? We hypothesize a *technology of culture* able to produce both physical goods and practices that explicit and codify a latent value, leading to a new good in terms of meaning. In *The production of national past* , Diller and Scofidio (1994) describe how the experience can generate memory, independently from authenticity. Some modalities are the *time re-played* technique, used in the philological reconstruction of the Plymouth Rock pilgrims village, that generates a living history, and the *geography re-placed* technique, used to move the monumental London Bridge in Arizona.



Img.5: Plymouth Rock pilgrims village



Each technique works when is provided the adequate and expected narrative context: consequently the project should concentrate in the definition of the value system necessary to enable the narration of the experience. In this sense, the imagine and the communication that design produces for a monuments or a museums becomes agent of authentication and reference for the forthcoming interpretations. This is clearly expressed through the idea of postcard that builds abroad the collective imaginary of a site or a city and that we expect to recognize visiting the place.

Design facilitates the processes of construction of reference and sense integrating the different levels of human actions (like the technical, productive and social ones) and this capability can contribute, in the valorisation of Cultural Heritage, to the creation of new cultural values and cultural goods.

Some conclusions about the process of valorisation design oriented

This phd research is still undergoing: one year more is needed to complete the work. At the end of the second year is only possible to hypothesize some conclusions. Design can work on cultural heritage focusing not on the project of the goods but on the processes and relations that shape them: design, even if is slowly moving towards more innovative and experimental actions, has until now developed specific competences in the valorisation and management of Cultural Heritage, and should collaborate with the other specialists for actions that include restoration, catalogue and laws. Moreover, each project that has to manage Cultural Heritage, like the projects for territorial development, should be developed thinking about the specific context, adapting some standard actions to the specific situation, because Cultural Heritage is the result of local knowledge, memory and identity: this means that there is not a unique way to design Cultural Heritage valorisation, and each project has this ethical component to manage.

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