



**International Conference on “Museums and World Cultural Heritage”
Catania 16-18 October 2015**

Some considerations by ICOM Italy

UNESCO and cultural landscapes

“Cultural landscape” as designated by the 1972 UNESCO Convention concerning the protection of World Heritage, whose reputation and authority are widely acknowledged, has increasingly gained widespread approval becoming an international key term.

The 1972 Convention defined “sites” as “works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites”, thus underlining their “outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view”.

In 1992 the *World Heritage Committee* identified three categories of cultural landscapes: landscapes deliberately "shaped" by man by means of a wide range of combined "works", up to landscapes which are less evidently "shaped" by man (still highly valued).

Lastly, the 2005 *Operational Guidelines* identified the following three categories:

- (1) a "clearly defined landscape designed and created intentionally by man";
- (2) a "organically evolved landscape", either "a relict (or fossil) landscape" or a "continuing landscape";
- (3) an "associative cultural landscape" by virtue of "the powerful religious, artistic or cultural associations of the natural element".

The cited passages suffice to highlight UNESCO’s endeavour towards a broad definition of the term on one hand, and its application to landscapes characterized by an “outstanding universal value” only, on the other hand.

In Europe, it is fundamental to compare UNESCO’s definition of cultural landscape to the one proposed by the European Landscape Convention, which took place in Florence in 2000.

As known, the European Convention defined landscape as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” not only suggesting a different definition, but also a different conception of landscape.

In Italy, the legal definition of landscape is contained in the Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape of 2004, inspired by the two Bottai Laws of 1939, the Galasso Law of 1985 and Article 9 of the Constitution. Its version, amended between 2006 and 2008, also embraces the principles of the European Landscape Convention, ratified by Italy in 2006. Its complex nature of a palimpsest of historically different views on landscapes, although not providing a homogenous reflection on the issue, successfully conveys its complexity and richness.

The Code, unlike the preceding laws, introduces a positive connection between restrictions and prescriptions. Article 2 overtly cites the Constitution when it refers to cultural and landscape assets as ‘cultural heritage’. Article 131 intends landscape as “a territory expressing identity, whose distinctive character comes from the actions of natural and human factors and from

their interconnections”, and “safeguards landscape in relation to aspects and characters which constitute a material and evident representation of national identity, being an expression of cultural values”.

Articles 136 and 142 identify the assets that shall be subjected to protection by virtue of their notable public interest. In particular, Article 135 suggests, by means of ‘landscape plans’, measures and prescriptions for the recognition and interpretation of the aspects and characteristics of the areas.

The landscape plan defines “the conservation of the constitutive elements and morphologies of the safeguarded landscape heritages”, the “redevelopment of damaged and decayed areas”, the “safeguarding of landscape characteristics of the other territorial spheres ensuring, at the same time, the less possible wear of the territory”, and lastly, the “identification of town planning and building development lines, in terms of their compatibility with the different recognized and safeguarded landscape values, with particular attention to the rural landscapes and of the sites inserted in UNESCO’s list of world heritage”.

Landscape plans, jointly adopted by the State and Regions, thus seem to embrace landscape ‘protection’ and ‘safeguard’, suggesting measures aimed at the maintenance of landscape characteristics in their evolution.

The first purpose of Catania Conference will be to compare the view and policies adopted by UNESCO with the ones suggested by the European Convention and the Code of Cultural Heritage in order to make UNESCO’s definition of “cultural landscapes” a benchmark for museums, regardless of the more or less evident universal value of the landscape surrounding them.

UNESCO Sites and territory

One of most common critique to UNESCO’s activity is the fact that, by creating a “superior” category of cultural heritage, it has reintroduced an elitist logic of distinction among cultural heritage assets at the very moment when the idea of their equal value, by virtue of their being “testimonies of civilization”, was being asserted, and the criterion of the “highest value”, as exposed in early 1900s Italian legislation, put aside.

Such a critical attitude can be overcome by taking into account the context of globalization we live in, which urges us to widen our national (or local/regional) perspective and embrace a supranational view of cultural landscapes; by including cultural heritage safeguard (generally intended as “care”) policies (be it local, regional, national) in more inclusive safeguard systems. This might transform UNESCO sites management into a model for the combined management of cultural assets and the surrounding territories, so that larger geographical and cultural areas can benefit from their significance and attractiveness.

Therefore, Catania Conference will provide the opportunity for a call for strategies and examples supporting them. In particular, the speakers of the sessions devoted to Sicilian, Italian, European and Mediterranean Sites will be invited not to describe the sites, but to identify the connections between them and the surrounding territories, in order to underline all the measures adopted or urge for them to be adopted.

Management plans and bodies in charge

A second critique, or better, a common situation, is that very often, as soon as UNESCO’s logo has been granted, sites are abandoned to their destiny. For this purpose, UNESCO has introduced the obligation to implement the Management Plans adopted during the nomination proposal.

Yet, this measure will not suffice unless the compliance with permanent requirements (the institutional, management, scientific and cultural standards adopted for the nomination proposal) is ensured by the supervision of the Body in charge.

What are the international and national tendencies concerned? What solutions are they suggesting? What cases can be identified as national, or maybe European, best practices? What monitoring and supporting measures in the management of Italian sites are implemented by Ministry of cultural thins and activities and tourism? And what appens in others Countries?

Museums and UNESCO sites

This is the key theme of the Conference and takes into account not only the fact that museums cannot be inscribed on the List, an understandable position, but also their marginal role.

UNESCO website states that: "Museum contents can prompt visitors to learn more about the history of a region and the traditions or social customs of the peoples concerned, stimulating curiosity, openness and tolerance towards different cultures and respect for other traditions. Site museums can bring visitors into contact with local communities, acting as showcases for local communities' cultures and traditions as well as enhancing the understanding of living cultures, including local crafts, culinary traditions, beliefs and customs".

At the same time, UNESCO's position concerning museum is quite disapproving: "Yet, many site-related museums and interpretation centres as they currently stand, lack the capacity - whether little room for interpretation. Programmes linking World Heritage sites and museums, such as the one initiated with a pilot phase funded by the Japanese government, aims to accompany and assist this process of revitalisation for these cultural institutions".

The first UNESCO measures aimed at ameliorating the interconnection between museums and sites are very recent: they date back to 2011-2013 and have only concerned Japan, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia so far.

ICOM Italy is evidently willing to appoint museums as managing bodies, knowing that museums to which we are not necessarily those existing, but the museums that - in line with the Charter of Siena and the reflection on the relations between museums and territory of Italian museology - constitute one side of the "regional offices of active protection" and, secondly, assume the role of "centers of interpretation" of the cultural heritage and landscape.

The Catania Conference for ICOM Italy is an opportunity to propose this nomination to all the institutions that have agreed with the proposal to dedicate the conference to the theme of the relationship between museums and World Heritage Sites. It is an opportunity to confront their views and the opinions of the speakers invited to receive proposals and guidances on ways and forms through which museums present within the sites may provide a more effective relationship with the sites themselves, assuming in their specific mission the function of "centers of interpretation" of sites, both in general of "centers of active protection " performing a function of active protection and promotion of cultural heritage and cultural landscapes.

What role do the museums in the sites inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Heritage? This role can be enhanced? If so, under what conditions and in what relation with the management bodies of the sites themselves? Which function within the Management Plans? By referring to the Charter of Siena on "Museums and Cultural landscapes" such proposals, suggestions can come from different experiences of management of UNESCO sites present in Catania?

For museums to assume responsibility for the cultural landscape means to extend her mission to the territory, helping to identify new models and new forms of protection and interpretation of cultural heritage, open a dialogue with their communities in a perspective of sustainable development.

The Conference aims to answer three questions in particular:

1. By what means the «outstanding universal value» of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites can be a factor of development extended to the all surrounding territory?
2. How much and how the models and forms of their management can take a leading role in the safeguard, interpretation and communication of cultural heritage as a whole?
3. Under what conditions museums can play an active function within the sites and participate in their interpretation and communication?

We hope that the answers to these questions can be converted into a Charter which, as *Siena Charter* on «Museums and cultural landscapes», aims to be the contribution of Italian museology to the debate of the 24th General Conference of ICOM in Milan in 2016.

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