

Intangible Cultural Heritage: Poetics of the Ephemeral in the Land of Abruzzo

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Abstract. The representation of the Italian intangible cultural heritage, to prevent its loss, is the general topic of this contribution. This study is the latest result of a research on the poetics of the ephemeral in architecture, here interpreted with respect to some projects expressed by the culture of Abruzzo, with the aim of contributing to represent their historical identity. In this stage of the research – shared by some professors and researchers of the Department of Architecture of the University “G. d’Annunzio” of Chieti Pescara – the several ephemeral creativities of the architectural-cultural landscape of the Abruzzo region have been summarized according to 5 representative macro-poetics: *Festivals and rituals; Abandoned villages and memory; Fragments and ruins; Maps and drawings; Photography and film.* These are “delicate” creativities, often events that need to be experienced in a live space-time setting, sometimes representations that have not been historicised yet, therefore they cannot always be handed down. “Forgettable” projects, then, that need further study and in-depth analysis in order to update the historicization processes in the international context of *Intangible Cultural Heritage*.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage · Ephemeral architecture · Representation · Memory · Abruzzo

1 Introduction

This study is the latest result of a long, and still ongoing, research on the poetics of the ephemeral in architecture¹, here interpreted with respect to some past and modern projects expressed by the culture of Abruzzo.

The main aim of this stage of the research – shared by some *Drawing* professors and researchers of the Department of Architecture of the University “G. d’Annunzio” of Chieti and Pescara, working on parallel and synergic studies – is to trigger representation processes of the “poetics of the ephemeral in the land of Abruzzo”, with the goal of contributing to the documentation of some aesthetic-elaborative forms, representing their historical identity and prevent their disappearance.

¹ This work is part of a long research path on the theme of the poetics of the ephemeral in architecture and design, performed by the author, whose main results are presented in the following publications (cf. www.lineamenta.it): [1–7].

The empathic perception of the varied architectural-cultural landscape of the Abruzzo region finds a strong sense of identity in its ephemeral creativities and original project that contribute, combining tradition and innovation, to enhance the idea of “Made in Italy” in the world.

However, as it often happens when studying the so-called Intangible Cultural Heritage, these creativities are “delicate”, some of them are not historicised yet – sometimes subject to commodification due to the globalization and not always appropriately represented by the Internet and mass media –, so it is not always possible to “hand them down”; others need to be experienced live and understood in connection with the memory of the local traditions.

Overall, they appear as experiences that risk being “forgotten”, thus needing further study and in-depth analysis in order to update the historicization processes in the international context of *Intangible Cultural Heritage*, as appropriately defined by UNESCO.

2 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

Before illustrating the research, among the international documents used as reference for the process of safeguarding the ephemeral architectural heritage [2], it is important to remember the meaning of *Cultural Heritage* and the main goals defined by the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, adopted in 2003 by the General Conference of UNESCO.

With respect to the topic of this research, it is important to point out that the Convention provides a broad interpretation of intangible heritage, which can be adapted – as appropriate – to the ephemeral projects that are the subject of our disciplines.

Other interesting ideas can be deduced from the main goals defined by the Convention, in order to both provide a historical framework of the phenomenon and to make it relevant with respect to the contemporary cultural situation, represented as “liquid modernity” by Zygmunt Bauman.

The first article of the Convention defines the purpose of the document:

To safeguard intangible cultural heritage; to ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned; to raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof; to provide for international cooperation and assistance.

The definition of “intangible cultural heritage” is provided by article two:

«The “intangible cultural heritage” means 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.

For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development».

In order to provide a better context for this research, here are the five sector where, according to the 2003 Convention (art. 2.2), we can find “intangible cultural heritage”:

- (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- (b) performing arts;
- (c) social practices, rituals and festive events;
- (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- (e) traditional craftsmanship.

3 Five Macro-Poetics of the Ephemeral in the Land of Abruzzo

In this stage of the research, the several ephemeral creativities of the architectural-cultural landscape of the Abruzzo region have been summarized according to 5 representative macro-poetics that include, combining tradition and innovation, various interdisciplinary projects (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10):

- Festivals and rituals;
- Abandoned villages and memory;
- Fragments and ruins;
- Maps and drawings;
- Photography and film.

The first three keywords directly refer to poetics and aesthetics found during the classification process, while the other two mainly focus on the *medium* used for representation, always considered as a conformity tool.

Finally, it is important to remember that there are infinite classification possibilities due to the vastness and interdisciplinary nature of the subject, thus the research can only be open and experimental.



Fig. 1–10. Conceptual map of the 5 poetics for the representation of the *Intangible Cultural Heritage* of the Abruzzo region (Italy), identified in this research. *First line, Festivals and rituals:* Figs. 1, 2. Year-end torchlight procession in Civitella Alfedena (L’Aquila), photo by L. Le Donne, 2012. *Second line, Abandoned villages and memory:* Figs. 3, 4. View of village of Corvara (PE) and detail of the facade on the central square, photo by G. Caffio, 2017. *Third line, Fragments and ruins:* Fig. 5. Toyo Ito, *Huge Wine Glass*, Pescara 2008 (removed in 2013), photo by G. Marino; Fig. 6. The uninhabited historic center of Navelli (AQ), photo by G. Marino, 2017; Fig. 7. The “red area” inside the village of Collefracido (AQ) on the days following the 2009 earthquake, photo by G. Marino, 2009. *Fourth line, Maps and drawings:* Fig. 8. Cover of *Drawing Pescara*, M. Unali (2015), Roma: Gangemi. *Fifth line, Photography and film:* Fig. 9. Rocca Calascio castle (AQ), photo by G. Marino, 2017; Fig. 10. Pier of Marina di San Vito Chietino and port of Ortona, photo by G. Marino, 2013.

4 Festivals and Rituals

In this macro-poetics for the representation of intangible cultural heritage, we have tried to register the ancient ritual for the setting up of the “La grande festa” (big festival), as it was called in the title of a very significant book written by the anthropologist Lanternari [8].

These are projects to be “experienced at fixed term”, feeding many intangible aspects of our existence as they are related to the social sphere, religion, ethnography, cultural anthropology, customs, memory, etc.

Abruzzo is very rich in traditions and ancient rituals that can be useful for studying the different ways to stage the space-time of the “festival”, also with respect to the “daily” space-time.

There are many examples [9, 10] (Figs. 1, 2): from the “San Domenico dei Serpenti” festival of Cocullo, a small mountain village in the province of L’Aquila, to the fires for “Sant’Antonio Abate” with the lighting of the large *farchie* (typical bundles of reed) in Fara Filiorum Petri in the province of Chieti, and the “Giostra Cavalleresca” (joust) of Sulmona (province of L’Aquila).

Some works by Francesco Paolo Michetti, an educated interpreter of the culture of Abruzzo, wonderfully represent the deep and welcoming nature of these ritual festivals, recalling them as endearing memories and thus pointing out some poetics of the ephemeral included in them. In particular, it is important to mention *Le Serpi* [11] – a large horizontal tempera painting (380 × 970 cm) displayed at the Universal Expo of Paris in 1900 (and now on display in the Michetti Museum of Francavilla) – for its ability to create a powerful visual interface, that allows the viewer to virtually dive into the space-time of the traditional procession for San Domenico in Cocullo.

Finally, always in the framework of the empathic representation of the poetics of the ephemeral, it is worth mentioning also the ancient rural Abruzzo coming out from the collection of tales “Novelle della Pescara” (1902) by Gabriele d’Annunzio.

5 Abandoned Villages and Memory

The relationships between the phenomenon of depopulation of some Italian villages and the need for triggering processes for the regeneration of the cultural heritage present important issues that, at different levels, relate to everyone, as well as to architecture.

Also in this sector of cultural heritage, the representation of the memory of the places is one of first actions for the safeguarding of the cultural heritage against the risk of loss, with the aim of contributing to the enhancement and revitalization of territories that would be destined to decay and disappear.

In this research, this topic was particularly dealt with by Giovanni Caffio, who represents what remains of the historical memory of some of the villages of Abruzzo that, over the last decades, have been characterized by a seemingly unstoppable phenomenon of depopulation and abandonment.

In this first stage of the research, a case study was particularly analysed in depth – the village of Corvara (in the province of Pescara) (Figs. 3, 4), set on top of mount

Aquileio, which has been gradually abandoned –, as a place to experiment the methods and tools for representation used to contribute to expand the knowledge and the processes for recovery and enhancement.

The representation of the village was performed through a surveying system summarized in classification data sheets related to three main topics: research of cartographic documents (highlighting the buildings' footprint on the ground in order to show the typically mountainous urban structure); representation of the main statistical data referred to 2016 (demographic evolution between 1861 and 2016, population pyramid sorted by age group and gender, presence of immigrants, seniority index, indicators of the Demographic Malaise Status, presence/absence of the main services, etc.); photographic documentation on the themes of the study.

6 Fragments and Ruins

In continuity with the general aim of the research – documenting the Italian intangible cultural heritage against the risk of its loss – the fragments and ruins produced by today's technical-cultural space-time and by “nature” present the scholar with some important keys for representing the contemporary cultural scene (Figs. 5, 6, 7)

The memory and identity of the cultural heritage of a community, that lives with it, is the result of the interpretation and value that such group gives to some historical concepts in which it identifies and recognises itself, such as the symbols included in the idea of fragments and ruins.

Well-known topics, keywords in the history of architecture of many representations, theories, studies and extensive research.

As a mere example, it is worth remembering the writings and theories by John Ruskin (*The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 1849), Georg Simmel (*Die Ruine*, 1911), Walter Benjamin (*Angelus Novus*), Cesare Brandi (*Carta del Restauro*, 1972), Alberto Savinio (*Ascolto il tuo cuore città*, 1984), Francesco Venezia (*Frammento*, 1981), Aldo Rossi (*Frammenti*, 1987), Vittorio Gregotti (*Il frammento*, 2000), Marc Augé (*Rovine e macerie*, 2004), Franco Purini (*Il frammento*, 2006), etc.

As regards the history of representation, it is worth mentioning the drawings by Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), Claude Lorraine (1600-1682), Giovanni Paolo Pannini (1691-1765), Canaletto (1697-1768), Bernardo Bellotto (1721-1780), Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778), Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796-1875), Thomas Cole (1801-1884), etc.

The research deals with these topics by interpreting them in accordance with the architectural-landscape scene of Abruzzo.

Therefore, four themed sub-sections have been identified as a testimony of the models of representation of the phenomenon.

– *Representing the natural disasters.*

In the land of Abruzzo this mainly means representing the dramatic experience of earthquakes.

With respect to photographic representation, it is worth mentioning, as an example, a work by Massimo Siragusa – *Twentyninseconds, Onna (Abruzzo), 2009* –, displayed in the exhibition “La forza delle rovine” (The strength of ruins) (Palazzo Altems, Rome 2015–16) [12].

– *Representing artificial disasters.*

The disasters caused by men, from wars to environmental damages.

For example, the ruins created by the bombings during World War II, such as those suffered by Pescara.

– *Representing the fragments of history.*

From the traces of the past to the “totems” of today, the exercise of recognising the traces of memory helps understand some themes of the *Intangible Cultural Heritage*.

– *Representing the landscapes of ruins.*

From the classic historical ruins to the “things” that appear in our memory, the landscapes of ruins involve every person.

The relationship between ruins and tourism, such as the case of the “*albergo diffuso*” (an accommodation facility consisting of several rooms scattered throughout the whole village).

Finally, the theme also refers to a sort of “zero degree” – freely taken from the lesson by Bruno Zevi –, where a crisis, if it can actually be considered as such, is optimistically processed as a value.

7 Maps and Drawings

After introducing the three main semantic keywords found in the classification process of the *Intangible Cultural Heritage* of the architectural landscape of Abruzzo – *Festivals and rituals, Abandoned villages and memory, Fragments and ruins* – here is the first of the two macro-subjects that mainly analyse the role played by the *medium* of representation in the configuration of the images and their documentation in a historical context: *maps and drawings* (Fig. 8).

In short, this is a well-known representation model that refers to the historical ability of men, between science and art, to process maps and drawings.

Even focusing only on the architectural-cultural framework of Abruzzo, the examples, methods and aims of the representations are numerous.

In the sector of *maps*, the historical cartographies that can be used to analyse the current representation of the Abruzzo region range from the *Tabula Peutingeriana* – a copy dating back to the 12th and 13th centuries of a Roman map of the road itineraries, probably dating back to the 4th century – to the *Atlante geografico d'Italia* (Italy’s geographical atlas) by Giovanni Antonio Magini (1555–1617), and to *Abruzzo Ulteriore e Citeriore*, from the work by Giovanni Antonio Bartolomeo Rizzi Zannoni (1736–1814), printed in 1783 by Antonio Zatta.

In this research, the theme of the *maps* was particularly dealt with by Alessia Maiolatesi who, through the analysis of some historical cartographies (including the

ones mentioned above) and some contemporary maps – from the *itineraria picta* to satellite maps – of the territory of Abruzzo, has detected some characteristics of the architectural-cultural landscape, with the main aim of achieving, through the representation tools, a graphic simplification of the observed complexity.

In the sector of *drawings*, as an example, as well as the well-known local artists – Basilio Cascella, Nicola Eugenio D’Antimo, Francesco Paolo Michetti etc. – it is worth mentioning:

- The drawings by the English painter and writer Edward Lear [13], produced during his trips to Abruzzo, between 1843 and 1844, where the real, ideal and “romantic” conformation of the landscape of that time can be seen;
- *Via Paradiso* (oil on canvas) painted by Teofilo Patini in 1884;
- The images, both visual and literary, presented by the English explorer and artist Estella Canziani, included in the book “*Through the Apennines and the Lands of the Abruzzi*”, published in England in 1928, depicting (with illustrations, drawings and reports) her experience in the villages of Castelvecchio, Santo Stefano, Calascio, Castel del Monte, Scanno, Cocullo and L’Aquila;
- The drawings and lithographs by Maurits Cornelis Escher, showing lands capes and villages such as Goriano Sicoli, Scanno, Opi, Anversa degli Abruzzi and Castrovalva;
- Artist Kristian Zahrtmann, who founded a summer art school in Civita d’Antino welcoming many artists from northern Europe, who practised drawing landscapes, rural life scenes, portraits, etc.

8 Photography and Film

The photographic and filmed representations (as well as written or graphic documents and oral testimonies) are the most “valid” testimonies of the *Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Figs. 9, 10).

As everybody knows, static or moving images are an irreplaceable *medium* for the representation of the several ephemeral creativities of the architectural-cultural landscape, allowing scholars to make subsequent critical analyses aimed at the processes for the detection of the *Intangible Cultural Heritage*.

In this research, this topic was particularly dealt with by Antonella Salucci and Giuseppe Marino who, through the analysis of some audio-visual works related to the culture of Abruzzo, have found – using three non-consequential keys: approach, progression and experience – some poetics of the ephemeral related to landscapes, architecture, subjects, identity and memory.

In particular, among the analysed case studies, it is worth mentioning the following three.

In the film *Ladyhawke* (directed by Richard Donner, USA 1985), the expressive potential of the ruins of the Castle of Rocca Calascio (Fig. 9) is revitalized, located at an altitude of 1500 metres on the Gran Sasso massif, which was also the location for other films such as *Amici Miei Atto II* in 1982, *Il nome della rosa* in 1986, *Il Viaggio della sposa* in 1997.

In the commercial *Quit* (directed by Chris Cunningham, UK 2000), filmed for Telecom Italia in the plateau of Campo Imperatore (AQ), the character played by Leonardo di Caprio lives (in a short 56-second clip) in a naturalistically remarkable space, empathically representing one of the main features in the territories of Abruzzo.

The film *The American* (directed by Anton Corbijn, UK, Italy 2010), almost completely shot in Abruzzo (Castel del Monte, Pacentro, Sulmona, Castelvechio Calvisio, Rocca Calascio and Campo Imperatore) shows landscapes, villages, infrastructures, roads, railways and festivals in several different ways.

9 Results and Conclusions

All the above shows the vast and multi-disciplinary nature of the so-called *Intangible Cultural Heritage*, which seems to inherently trigger open and experimental research activities.

Due to the experience in the sector of studies on the history of architectural representation – the main discipline of this research –, this complexity should be interpreted according to several themes, with respect to the specific subject of the observation and activating subsequent studies.

The theoretical study performed by “architects” on the expressions of the *Intangible Cultural Heritage* and the specific results of the analysis of the five macro-poetics for the representation of the several ephemeral creativities of the architectural-cultural landscape of the Abruzzo region allowed to verify that the research intensely involves the evolution of the space-time of cities, architecture and design, expressing themes and creativities equipped with exceptional empathy and synaesthesia, based on the multi-disciplinary values of the cultural diversity.

Considering the uncertainties and contradictions that seem to characterize some choices of the inhabitants of today’s “liquid world”, these statements gain additional meaning, increasing the need for promoting processes for the representation of historical memory, being aware of the value of cultural diversity.

A cosmopolitan premise to the representation of the *Intangible Cultural Heritage*, increasingly more useful to contribute to spreading cultural diversities, conveying identities, roots and values of the different expressions of creativity.

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