Cultural Heritage in the Discourse of European Institutions

Maria Cristina Paganoni

Abstract

"A common heritage" is a recurrent catchphrase in several conventions, declarations, guidelines and policy documents produced at the supranational European level by a number of institutional actors. The concept draws inspiration from UNESCO's worldwide celebration of the "outstanding universal value" of great heritage sites, whose property is seen to transcend national boundaries and belong to all humankind. However, as contemporary Europe has many histories, the discursive construction of a common heritage, which implies the reinvention of the past for present political uses, is understandably at odds with the shared experience of European citizenship as multifarious, when not divisive. Against the background of the most significant institutional milestones in Europe's identity-building narratives, the study moves on to investigate a selection of official documents and cultural programmes in which heritage is promoted as a tool for European integration. With the help of Critical Discourse Analysis and heritage studies, the aim is to retrace the conceivable developments of an instrumental concept that has become a strategic presence in the cultural policy of the European Union and is now identified as a key economic driver.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, cultural heritage, European Union, heritage studies, identity.

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1. Introduction

When speaking of cultural heritage in relation to a shared European identity today, it is difficult to avoid thinking that the notion sounds more like a paradox than a viable political agenda [1]. Citizens of a medley Union that

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[1] This paradox is eloquently voiced by the two philosophers Edgar Morin and Mauro Ceruti when they claim that "l'héritage que nous avons en commun, ce sont nos inimitiés réciproques" (2014).

gathers twenty-eight member states, 'we' Europeans are still fully involved with the painful and divisive commemoration of the First World War – the tragic beginning of what Eric Hobsbawm (1994) termed "the short twentieth century". While riddled with an upsurge of defiant nationalistic feelings and the geopolitical uncertainties of globalisation that require new historiographic perspectives (Gruzinski 2015), we are experiencing an epochal migratory flow from Mediterranean countries with majority Muslim populations that will affect the identities of European societies for years to come in ways we can hardly foresee.

True, the eradication of conflict between members was the urgency behind the EU project: "the European Union was conceived as a peace project after World War Two – a vision that was renewed after the removal of the Iron Curtain" (Wodak 2009, 64). In 2015, however, the remembrance of a divisive past nourished by a plurality of memories still challenges the abstract rhetoric of goodwill and the formality of official discourse, showing that, in the contested terrain of contemporary Europe, identity and heritage remain dynamic concepts to be constantly redefined and adjusted to political needs and the urgency of events (Krzyżanowski 2010). If we turn to a living embodiment of multiple belongings, philosopher Julia Kristeva, we read in her latest thoughts on European identity (2015) that, "though Europe resorted in the past to barbaric behavior (something to be remembered and analyzed incessantly), the fact that it has analyzed this behavior better than others perhaps allows it to bring to the world a conception and practice of identity as a questioning inquietude".

In tune with Kristeva's above assumption that self-questioning is the genuine core of the ethos of Europe, the following analysis claims that any attempts to describe the meaning of heritage for cultural and political uses should keep this reflexive attitude vividly in mind. The title of a recent policy review reminds us that European identity, particularly in the sense of identification with Europe, is "unfinished business" (European Commission 2012), a recurrent refrain in EU scholarly studies that are frequently led to criticise the fallacy of metaphors such as "cultural mosaics", "unity in diversity" and "family of cultures" (Sassatelli 2002; Shore 2006, 7; Calligaro 2013a).

This situation inevitably affects the set of cultural actions through which heritage is selected and promoted[2]. Though the self-legitimising

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[2] A brief mention should be made here of UNESCO's role in the definition and protection of natural and cultural heritage. Aiming to safeguard the past and the built environment in particular, as was typical of the post-war period, the 1972 World Heritage

discourse that has been aptly defined "Authorised Heritage Discourse" (AHD) (Smith 2006) and reflects the views of political hierarchies and professional disciplines tends to become mainstream, the concept of heritage remains "dissonant" (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996), fraught with ideological implications, involved with power politics and affected by conflict. Not unsurprisingly, a dominant heritage narrative struggles to get established in the mobile political context of Europe, in which the formation and stabilisation of a collective identity are often contested[3].

After the diachronic survey of the institutional milestones that support the formation of a European cultural policy – from the 1954 European Cultural Convention to this day – and their recognition of culture as central to the construction of the imagined European Community (Shore 2000; Sassatelli 2002), this study reflects on the linguistic strategies, discursive perspectives and ideological implications of heritage discourse and its recent developments with regard to the potential of cultural heritage for society and the economy. Despite the indisputable interest of a multilingual comparative analysis, only the English language version of documents has been here taken into account. The insights thus retrieved are nonetheless meant to embrace – ideally at least – the entire polyphonic debate over EU cultural heritage. The main methodological backbone for textual analysis has been provided by the insights of Critical Discourse Analysis (Wodak 2009; Krzyżanowski 2010) and heritage studies (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996; Smith 2006; Auclair and Fairclough 2015).

Convention elevated national symbols into items of "outstanding universal value" that are property of all humankind, corroborating an essentialist view of the past which remains debatable and problematic, in Europe as elsewhere. Meanwhile, the meaning of heritage has expanded from the protection of buildings and monuments towards a more general understanding of the wider historic context and preservation of intangible cultural forms. This approach was ratified in the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which draws attention to "forms of intangible cultural heritage including oral traditions and expressions; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices; and traditional craftsmanship" (Nic Craith 2012, 12).

[3] *Europe, a common heritage* was the name of the public awareness campaign run from September 1999 to September 2000 by the Council of Europe. Since 1999 it has become the permanent slogan of the European Heritage Days, a joint action of the Council of Europe and the European Commission that takes place during a weekend of September each year.

2. Retracing the heritage trail in the discourse of European institutions

Like the concepts of identity and culture with which heritage is constantly put in relation, a diachronic survey of the uses of heritage in foundational documents does not fail to show that the interpretation of the term is instrumental to its political uses, which in turn are subject to change. The supranational heritage narrative can be traced back to 1954, the year of the European Cultural Convention, "the first official agreement on cultural issues at a European level" (Calligaro 2013b, 82) and "the starting point for the Council of Europe's policy of cultural cooperation" (Pickard 2003, 11) [4]. The preamble of the Convention states that

> the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose, among others, of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their *common heritage*. (CoE 1954, 2; my emphasis)

The subsequent articles reinforce the normative core of the Convention, placing cultural heritage at the centre of the European symbolic repertoire, in its tangible ("objects", art. 5) but especially intangible formulations.

> Article 1
> Each Contracting Party shall take appropriate measures to safeguard and to encourage the development of its national contribution to the *common cultural heritage* of Europe. (CoE 1954, 2; my emphasis)

> Article 5
> Each Contracting Party shall regard the objects of European cultural value placed under its control as integral parts of the *common cultural heritage* of Europe, shall take appropriate measures to safeguard them and shall ensure reasonable access thereto. (CoE 1954, 3; my emphasis)

With an ideologically expedient rhetorical move that has become a characterising strategy in EU identity narratives, the Convention adopts a contested phrase like a "common cultural heritage", which should be the outcome of wide-ranging policies, and constructs it as a "transcendental historical given" (Shore 2006, 20).

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[4] The Council of Europe was created in 1949 in the aftermath of the Second World War by ten European countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The Council of Europe predates the EU's predecessor bodies while remaining separate.

Signed in Copenhagen in 1973 by the nine member states of the then European Community [5], the *Declaration on European Identity* is inflected in more explicit political terms, owing to the problematic context in which it saw the light, i.e. the World Oil Crisis and the accession of new members with strong transatlantic relations. However, "the ideas and visions expressed in the Declaration were accompanied by a set of arguments on European values, the meaning of European civilisation, and other aspects of the spiritual construction of Europe which allegedly underlay the dynamics of European identity" (Krzyżanowski 2010, 9).

> The Nine European States might have been pushed towards disunity by their history and by selfishly defending misjudged interests. But they have overcome their past enmities and have decided that unity is a basic European necessity to ensure the survival of the civilization which they have in common. (EC 1973, 2)

The text, which discursively posits the diversity of national cultures in Europe, makes two references to a "common heritage", i.e. within the Community and in relation with the United States, the ally on which Western Europe relied during the Cold War:

> Defining the European Identity involves reviewing the *common heritage*, interests and special obligations of the Nine, as well as the degree of unity so far achieved within the Community. (EC 1973, 2; my emphasis)

> The close ties between the United States and the Europe of Nine – we share values and aspirations based on a *common heritage*. (EC 1973, 2; my emphasis)

Again, the presupposition of the existence of a common heritage, transcending the diversity of cultures, makes of the Declaration an "example of a simplistic appeal to a singular notion of Civilization, based on common values that have somehow survived the divisions of history" (Delanty 2010, 7).

The *Solemn Declaration on European Union*, signed in Stuttgart in 1983, advocates closer co-operation between member states "on cultural matters, in order to affirm the awareness of a common cultural heritage as an element of the European identity. Regarding cultural co-operation, it proposes exploring 'joint action to protect, promote and safeguard the cultural heritage' (European Communities 1983)" (Nic Craith 2012, 16). That same year witnesses the ideation of the European Capital of Culture

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[5] On January 1, 1973 three new member states, Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom, joined the six founding member states, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg.

programme that was activated two years later in 1985 [6], a cultural action that Sassatelli (2002) describes as poised between the two opposing poles of universalism and particularism which make up such a consistent part of the EU identity discourse.

Signed in Maastricht in 1992, the Treaty on European Union (TEU) is the first to enlist culture "as a recognised area of European Community competence" (Shore 2006, 12) and to associate the assumed common cultural heritage with "national and regional diversity".

> 1. The Community shall contribute to *the flowering of the cultures* of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time *bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore*. (ECC 1992, art. 128, 48; my emphasis)

The 2007 Treaty of Lisbon, which amends the 1957 Treaty establishing the European Community and the Treaty of Maastricht that led to the foundation of the European Union in 1993, nonetheless defends the principle that "member states shall respect rich cultural and linguistic diversity and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced" (EU 2007, art. 3.3) and rewrites art. 128 almost verbatim.

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As Calligaro claims (2013b, 88), "it is only with the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 that the EU cultural action obtained a legal basis". It is from this framework that the most recent developments in cultural heritage promotion will be discussed.

3. The potential of cultural heritage for Europe's society and economy

Over the last few years the redrawing of the map of Europe has required the scope of work in the heritage field to change from being heavily expert-dominated to considering issues of a more societal nature, a stance which

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[6] Besides the European Capital of Culture scheme, several actions have been implemented over the years with the aim of experimenting with a notion of heritage that overcomes national boundaries: Cultural Routes, European Heritage Days, the European Heritage Network, the 1999-2000 campaign *Europe a Common Heritage* and the *European Heritage Label*, to name the best-known ones.

was reflected in the Council of Europe's 2005 Warsaw Declaration and its support of pan-European heritage. In the light of Europe's "new challenges and threats which require concerted and effective responses", the Declaration renews the Council's "commitment to the common values and principles which are rooted in Europe's cultural, religious and humanistic heritage – a heritage both shared and rich in its diversity" (CoE 2005a, preamble).

> Article 6
> We shall foster European identity and unity, based on shared fundamental values, respect for our common heritage and cultural diversity. We are resolved to ensure that our diversity becomes a source of mutual enrichment. (CoE 2005a)

In the context of the 50th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention, it is in particular the Council of Europe's Faro Convention on the Value of Heritage for Society in 2005 that articulates a wider perspective on the issue of cultural heritage[7]. This perspective is well conveyed by the title of the CoE's brochure advertising it, *Action for a Changing Society*, where the focus is placed on societal impact from the start. Though it is in dialogue with the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression of October 2005, the Faro Convention does not intend to replicate UNESCO's action and provides, instead, an original contribution to the issues related to quality of life, community living and civic contexts. In particular, the concept of intangible heritage is seen as an instrument for citizenry and integration in society, while the notion of the 'common heritage of Europe' becomes closely associated with human rights and the fundamental freedoms for which the Council remains one of the historic guardians. The knowledge and use of heritage form part of the citizen's rights to participate in cultural life as defined in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR). Moreover, the Faro Convention is the first to offer a comprehensive definition of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

A common European heritage, which is "consistent with the sense of cultural 'pluri-affiliation'" (CoE 2009, 10), develops the idea of a Europe in

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[7] This following description of the changed European context borrows the words of Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe: "European societies, being transformed under the combined effects of the economic crisis, energy transition, demographic or migration factors and a reduction in resources, call for new development models driven by greater democracy, strengthened citizen participation and better governance based on more open, reactive and transparent institutions" (CoE n.d.).

which diversity represents a source of strength and heritage is more than simply memories of the past but acts as the foundation for a better future.

> The Parties agree to promote an understanding of the common heritage of Europe, which consists of:
> a. all forms of cultural heritage in Europe which together constitute a shared source of remembrance, understanding, identity, cohesion and creativity, and
> b. the ideals, principles and values, derived from the experience gained through progress and past conflicts, which foster the development of a peaceful and stable society, founded on respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. (CoE 2005b, art. 3)

One of the dimensions of the common European heritage, cultural heritage is represented as a resource for human amelioration, the enhancement of cultural diversity and the promotion of intercultural dialogue, and as part of an economic development model based on the principles of sustainable resource use.

> Cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, *independently of ownership*, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time. (CoE 2005b, art. 2; my emphasis)

Inherited, esteemed or valued by different communities as intrinsically meaningful, cultural heritage is independent of ownership, which means that, while the right to heritage may be considered as a kind of ownership right that can be exercised alone or in association with others, "it remains outside the scope of private ownership" (CoE 2009, 63). This way the right of ownership extends to include the common heritage of humankind through community and national heritages. With the aim of emphasising the voluntary nature of participation in cultural activities, the framework convention also introduces the notion of "heritage communities", sharing common values, objectives and commitment to specific heritages.

> A heritage community consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations. (CoE 2005, art. 2b)

In partnership with public authorities, civil society is therefore called on to take part in each stage of the process of heritage preservation, from identification to interpretation. The involvement of civil society is seen as an essential aspect of the diversity and plurality of cultural heritage and the democratisation of access to it through education and new technologies

(CoE 2009, 45) [8]. Individual and collective responsibility is also invoked as the only real guarantee of the survival, diversity and vitality of cultural heritage (Schofield 2014).

In Article 10 of the Faro Convention, "Cultural heritage and economic activity", an explicit mention is made of "the economic potential of the cultural heritage as a fact of sustainable economic development". Besides, "economic policies" should "respect the integrity of the cultural heritage without compromising its inherent values".

This position anticipates the current strategic uses of heritage to enhance contemporary creativity and foster economic dynamism. In actual fact, today there is widespread agreement on the contribution of heritage to cultural capital in EU policy documents, for example for the achievement of the Europe 2020 strategy, the EU's mid-term plan to foster smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (EENC 2013).

> Cultural heritage is a significant force for 21st century Europe. Not only is it at the heart of what it means to be European, it is being discovered by both governments and citizens as a means of improving economic performance, people's lives and living environments. [...] The economic benefits of cultural heritage have most commonly been seen in terms of tourism, but it is now also seen as an innovative stimulant for growth and employment in a wide range of traditional and new industries. It is also to be recognised as major contributor to social cohesion and engagement as a way of bringing together communities and stimulating young people to engage with their environment. (EENC 2015, 5)

At the same time, there is also a sobering awareness of (1) the political implications of heritage in an age of revamped nationalisms and, therefore, the need for inventing inclusive narratives while safeguarding local identities; (2) the actual difficulty to combine heritage preservation and valorisation with economic development in a period of severe budget cuts in the public sector; (3) the limited impact of traditional tourism marketing strategies in rekindling entrepreneurship at a local level and in participatory ways.

How to overcome such a standstill seems to be the undercurrent of recent European guidelines that emphasise the social and economic value of cultural heritage (Dümcke and Gnedovsky 2013) within a renewed

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[8] "The European Commission and the Council of Europe have been working together in developing the European Heritage Network (HEREIN) since 1999. It is an intergovernmental initiative that links up authorities responsible for heritage Europe-wide and provides a common working tool for exploiting advanced information technology resources in relation to cultural heritage policies in Europe" (Pickard 2002, 105).

understanding of the social value of entrepreneurship in cultural under-takings that will not be seen as detrimental to profit generation. Textual analysis shows that this stance is rhetorically constructed by renegotiating the meanings of binomials, such as 'social and economic' but also 'creation-oriented' versus 'growth-oriented' (Utrecht School for the Arts – HKU 2010, 7), that are no longer antithetical but complementary. At the same time, thematic emphasis is repeatedly placed on the importance of citizen-led innovation, grassroots initiatives and networking in the redesign of the Cultural and Creative Sector (CCS) and production of knowledge: cultural heritage is cultural capital.

> Culture has not exclusively been seen from *the traditional point of view of conserving cultural heritage* but more as a means to pursuing a qualitatively higher level of development. This flexible concept has had the merit of link-ing the idea of culture to a series of activities – from fashion, to design and the engineering of computer games – previously considered outside the sphere of cultural policies. (Utrecht School for the Arts – HKU 2010, 74; my emphasis)

These outlines of the mainstream EU policy discourse on the manage-ment of cultural capital may help interpret the success of the Italian city of Matera – first a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1993, now the designated 2019 European Capital of Culture out of six finalists includ-ing Cagliari, Lecce, Perugia/Assisi, Siena and Ravenna, together with the Bulgarian city of Plovdiv. While the European Capitals of Culture scheme celebrates its thirtieth anniversary (1985-2015), the municipality of Matera, whose victory was announced on October 17, 2014, is active in the creative transformation of the city's image, putting the principles of socially-oriented "heritage entrepreneurship" (Pfeilstetter 2015) into prac-tice. The European Commission selection panel's final report following the award praised the city's willingness "to use culture as a propellant for conceiving an open future; strengthen the breadth and diversity of citizens who actively participate in culture; increase Matera's capital of personal relations; engage in a capacity-building programme for socio-cultural operators; build useful and sustainable cultural infrastructure; enhance the city's international visibility and tourism potential and to consolidate its leadership in open-data" (European Commission 2014, 6). In line with EU indications, the bid campaign has been able to reimagine Matera's cultural heritage, as being one of the world's oldest cities, into a viable future-oriented roadmap that succeeds in combining highly creative cultural management with innovative and sustainable forms of entrepreneurship for the twenty-first century (Auclair and Fairclough 2015).

4. Concluding remarks

Central to Europe's dynamic imaginary, cultural heritage has a marked political dimension, as it symbolises the set of ideals, values and histories that should promote European integration through "alternative and decentralized approaches" and "by different actors with varied political agendas" (Calligaro 2013b, 80). The diachronic survey of the most significant documents mentioning the role of culture and heritage in European identity formation that has been here illustrated shows that the principle of a common heritage, established as an identity marker since 1954 and inevitably lacking in conceptual integrity, has been progressively expanded to recognise the economic and social value of cultural heritage for social inclusion and sustainable forms of development. Within the current cultural policy guidelines, European cultural heritage is discursively fashioned as an inclusive though diversified narrative that overcomes previous nationalistic recounts of heritage as a nation-building tool and engages citizens and communities to identify, interpret and protect it by means of multiple narratives, trying to discard top-down forms of control over cultural initiatives.

As Europe has not been able to bounce back to its pre-crisis levels since the 2008 financial crisis, a new culture of entrepreneurship is now invoked at the EU level, which includes cultural heritage as an economic driver for the cultural and creative sectors. A remarkable part of European cultural capital is the potential of cooperation, networking and allying within and between European regions in view of social innovation, as shown by the case of Matera, which has been awarded the title of European Capital of Culture 2019 with the laudatory mention of its strategic use of new media in citizen engagement.

Finally, since the underlying aim of European cultural policy is the construction of Europe, successful actions like the Capital of Culture programme reveal how cultural heritage is being progressively 'Europeanised' in the attempt to invent a new supranational tradition in which a city's past is used to build new synergies between local identities and the European dimension. Such a widespread 'capitalisation' of the city would seem to show that, though the European Union claims to safeguard its highly diverse forms of heritage, the heritage metadiscourse it generates and amplifies tends to be increasingly convergent towards homogeneity.

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