

## HERITAGE INTERPRETATION: A TOOL FOR CONSERVATION, PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

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### Abstract

During the post-earthquake reconstruction process of the territory of L'Aquila, amongst the various initiatives aimed at re-launching the area from a social, economic and cultural point of view, in March 2015 the University of L'Aquila, the Institute of Construction Technologies of the Italian National Research Council, Federparchi, the Roffredo Caetani Onlus Foundation and the Pangea Onlus Institute signed an agreement to promote and develop education and research activities in the field of Environmental and Cultural Heritage Interpretation. The principles of this new discipline have been adopted by ICOMOS in 2008 (Charter on the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites). The Interpretation represents a current methodological tool for conservation purposes, the preservation and management of cultural heritage and environment as well as for local communities, to manage investments aimed at developing sustainable tourism..

### Keywords

Cultural Heritage, Environmental Heritage, Heritage Interpretation.

### 1. Foreword

During the post-earthquake reconstruction process of the territory of L'Aquila, as part of the many initiatives aimed at re-launching the area socially, economically and culturally, on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2015, at the Department of Humanities at the University of L'Aquila, the Institute of Construction Technologies of the National Research Council, together with Federparchi Italia, the Roffredo Caetani Onlus Foundation, the Pangea Onlus Institute and the Athenaeum of L'Aquila signed an agreement for the "Promotion and Development of Educational Activities for the Interpretation of the Environmental and Cultural Heritage (Heritage Interpretation)", subscribing to the project named "Profession future".

The principles of this agreement are based on knowledge and quality training, research, the use of experimental new educative techniques and methodological innovation which represent the best ways to achieve the objectives of conservation, valorisation and informed management of our cultural and environmental heritage.

Amongst the instruments identified for the achievement of these objectives is Heritage Interpretation, a discipline born in the USA in the 1950s<sup>1</sup> and, even if today still considered an extraordinarily efficient instrument for the management of natural and cultural resources, it was only used in Europe in relatively recent times, and in particular extensively and efficiently at the English Heritage and the Scottish National Heritage.

The European adoption of the discipline furthermore extended the scope of its application from strictly naturalist and environmental themes to those relating to the cultural and historical heritage. The environment and cultural fields are strictly inter-linked and these links need to be strategically strengthened<sup>2</sup>. In Italy the concepts of the Heritage Interpretation have been introduced later than in the general European context, but its strongly multidisciplinary

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<sup>1</sup> The first to announce the principles of the discipline was Freeman Tilden, in 1957 with its *Interpreting our Heritage*.

<sup>2</sup> As stated by ICOMOS in 2011 in the Paris Declaration (on heritage as a driver for development), available on <http://www.icomos.org/en/charters-and-texts> (last consultation: March 2017).

characteristics present opportunities for a rapid diffusion.



**Fig. 1:** The logo of the “Professione Future” project, on the basis of the agreement signed in L’Aquila in 2015 (concept and design by M. Cipparone).

## 2. *Origins, meanings and objectives of Heritage Interpretation*

The Heritage Interpretation was born at the end of the nineteenth century with John Muir and Enos Mills, but put into theory in the middle of the 1950s by Freeman Tilden in the framework of his work at the American National Park Service<sup>3</sup>. His thoughts, detailed through the six principles<sup>4</sup> outlined in his volume *“Interpreting our Heritage”*, even today are still applicable, have trained generations of interpreters and can be summarised in the expression: *“Through interpretation, understanding: through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection”*<sup>5</sup>.

In Europe Heritage Interpretation started only in 1975, with the foundation of the English Society for the Interpretation of Patrimony and, definitively in 2010 with the foundation of Interpret Europe, the European Association of

Heritage Interpretation. The association has more than 300 members from around 40 countries and has as its mission the development of the discipline in Europe and international cooperation for the development of competencies and capabilities for the conservation and valorisation of the Cultural and Environmental Heritage.

According to the definition provided by Interpret Europe<sup>6</sup>, Heritage Interpretation represents a structured format for informal learning aimed at communicating to visitors the ideas and meanings of places. In particular, the task of interpreting is that of involving the users of a cultural or naturalistic site through appropriate presentations and communication (storytelling, leaflets, signs, multimedia) and to stimulate interest through an experience that involves the users through connections (the background) with each one. The importance of Interpretation, to be effective, lies not only with making known a site, a historical centre or works to the general public, but also by developing a “sense of identity” of a community through knowing its Cultural Heritage and thereby an awareness towards its appropriate management and conservation.

## 3. *Heritage Interpretation and the current European and Italian context*

On the basis that Heritage Interpretation represents an instrument to increase awareness towards patrimony, and consequently create a sense of it belonging to citizens and forming part of their identity, with the aim of protecting and conserving sites and a knowledgeable development of tourism, the ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) in 2008 ratified the Ename Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites<sup>7</sup>. According to the ICOMOS, the transmission of Heritage by its conservation as an act of communication by which: “From the vast range of surviving material remains and intangible values of past communities and civilisations, the choice of what to preserve, how to preserve it, and how it is to be presented to the public are all elements of site interpretation. They represent every generation’s vision of what is

<sup>3</sup> See: Tilkin G, cit, p.11

<sup>4</sup> 1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.

2. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.

3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.

4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.

6. Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.

<sup>5</sup> Tilden F., cit, p.38.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.interpret-europe.net>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.enamecharter.org/> (last consultation: March 2017).

significant, what is important, and why material remains from the past should be passed on to generations yet to come”<sup>8</sup>.

Based on this consideration the Ename Charter, with its seven principles<sup>9</sup>, aims at defining, rationalising and standardising the concepts at the basis of the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites, together with technologies, research and education, and has as a primary objective that of promoting and diffusing knowledge on cultural patrimonial sites. To underline the importance that the ICOMOS gives to the role of Interpretation, the Ename Charter followed up, in 2011, with the Paris Declaration on “Patrimony as a motor for development”, in which it is hoped “to put authenticity at the heart of the development of cultural tourism and the growth of interpretation and communication strategies” and, in 2014 the Florence Declaration<sup>10</sup>, adopted at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Venice Charter. Precisely in this last declaration, already in its first point, states: “Share and experiment the identities of communities through tourism and interpretation”<sup>11</sup>. In the midst of this dense international scenario<sup>12</sup>, in Italy Interpretation appeared in 1983, during a course given by the Office of the Parks of Lazio to promote work in the field of tourism in protected regional areas and, in 1985, the same office, in association with the Latina Tourism Agency, organised the first training course for “guides” about to start work in the National Circeo Park<sup>13</sup>. In this park, in 1992, the Pangea Onlus Institute<sup>14</sup> was founded with the specific purpose of environmental training and education, which organised the first course for

Naturalistic Interpreters of the State Forestry Body. From 1992 until the present day, Environmental Interpretation has been applied in many national and regional protected areas, with courses for the official “Park Guide” title, for the creation of “Interpretation Plans”, and for the planning of structures, equipped paths, exhibitions and other media. These educational activities, with time, have also occasionally been used in university courses of various levels and recently also by the CURSA (University Consortium for Socioeconomic and Environmental Research)<sup>15</sup> which has adopted as its own the objectives of the “Profession Future” project and promoting a strategy called “Custodian of the Patrimony-Heritage Stewardship” aimed at qualifying, as interpreters, Environmental and Excursionist Guides members of the national professional association for the category (AIGAE).

From the nineties to the present day, the Heritage Interpretation in Italy has extended its scope from purely naturalistic and environmental themes to those concerning historical and cultural Heritage. To underline this expansion, in December 2015, the Directorate General for Education and Research of the Ministry for patrimony, cultural activities and tourism, in agreement with the Superior Council for Cultural Patrimony and Landscapes, published the first National Plan for Education of the Cultural Heritage<sup>16</sup>. The complexity of Education of the Cultural Heritage adopted by the Plan is well demonstrated already in a report edited in 2006 upon request of the European Council by Copeland<sup>17</sup>, which defined Education of the Heritage as a global education, interdisciplinary and based on active and participative methods, involving as much operators in the formal education system (schools, universities), as those operating in the framework of informal learning of the cultural heritage. From this it is evident that education of the Heritage calls for the participation of trained professionals who “adopt the cultural patrimony as an object for research and interpretation”<sup>18</sup> and that these “training and

<sup>8</sup> From the preamble of the Ename Charter, p.1.

<sup>9</sup> Which are, respectively: “1. Access and understanding; 2. Sources of information; 3. Attention to the context and the surrounding places; 4. Conservation of the authenticity; 5. Planning for sustainability; Attention to participation; 7. Importance of research, training and evaluation.

<sup>10</sup> Declaration of the principles and the declarations on the values of Cultural Heritage and Landscape and the creation of peaceful and democratic society. See

<http://www.icomos.org/en/charters-and-texts> (last consultation: March 2017).

<sup>11</sup> The Florence Declaration, p.3.

<sup>12</sup> In which there is also UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) with its Florence Declaration of the 4th October 2014 “Culture, creativity and sustainable development. Research, innovation, opportunity”, third UNESCO Global Forum on culture and cultural industries.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. Cipparone M., Trizio I., cit.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.istpangea.it/> (last consultation: March 2017)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.cursa.it/ecms/it/> (last consultation: March 2017).

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<http://www.dger.beniculturali.it/index.php?it/21/news/6/piano-nazionale-per-leducazione-al-patrimonio-culturale> (last consultation: March 2017).

<sup>17</sup> Copeland T., cit.

<sup>18</sup> National Plan for the training of Cultural Patrimony, p. 15.

promotional needs are not fully satisfied by current university programmes.”<sup>19</sup> It is true that “various degree courses contain didactic elements relating to the management of museums, insofar as cultural patrimony training is concerned, and some Masters have been created dedicated to education of the Heritage. However, by way of example, the reorganisation (2006) of the specialist schools for the protection, management and valorisation of the cultural heritage, did not foresee education of the patrimony, as also at the Doctorate Research schools there is no tradition of studies and research in the field of education of the patrimony”<sup>20</sup>. Given these considerations, the Plan promotes the creation of formal and informal training schemes.



**Fig. 2:** The ruins of the church of Sant'Agostino of Amatrice, Rieti, after the earthquake of the 24<sup>th</sup> August 2016 (photo: C. Mutignani, March 2017).

#### 4. *Heritage Interpretation in the local context*

On the basis of these considerations, the agreement signed at L'Aquila in 2015 foresees the design and creation of research activities and high-level specific educational activities in Heritage Interpretation in the framework of degree courses in different departments, the activation of master's degrees and level II international master.

The five participating entities, furthermore, are committed to activate the agreement through a series of activities carried out by operative conventions from the Agreement's Steering Committee<sup>21</sup>.

The first activity, planned by the Committee, is to establish a Higher Education and Research Pole in Heritage Interpretation. In this Pole has been programmed, for the academic year 2017-2018, an International Summer School in: "Heritage Interpretation: new knowledge, competencies and capabilities for the interpreting, managing and valorising the Natural and Cultural patrimony" and an interdisciplinary level II master in "Interpretation of Cultural and Environmental Heritage: from knowledge to valorization for conservation".

This Pole is the first one of its kind to be held in Italy and proposes to develop an innovative approach to a new high-profile training aimed at increasing: the ability to communicate and transmit, to individuals, material and immaterial values of the Heritage through reception activities and address of the public; the ability to plan, design and manage systems and ways of sustainable use of areas, sites, visitors facilities; the ability to plan innovative and multimedia communication activities and tools; the assessment of the qualities and capacities needed for the human resources involved in the management of the Heritage. The Pole will be built within the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga National Park, an ideal scenario, rich in environmental and cultural excellence, whose

<sup>21</sup> The Agreement's Steering Committee is composed of two representatives from the University of L'Aquila, respectively Professor Fabio Redi, Chairman, and Professor Romolo Continenza (dec. rett. N. 40248 of the 13/12/2016), one representative of the CNR, Doctor Ilaria Trizio (nomination protocol n. 0078836 of the 19/11/2015); a representative of the Federparchi, Professor Oliviero Olivieri; a representative of the Caetani Onlus Foundation, Doctor Maurilio Cipparone and a representative nominated by the Pangea Institute, Doctor Giulia Sirgiovanni.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

exploitation could become a source of skilled employment, especially youthful, and revitalize the local tourist offer. The Pole will also provide the opportunity the involvement and participation of social actors having the responsibility to “govern” and manage the Patrimony during a delicate time for Abruzzo, recently touched by natural events that have seriously modified its structure, economically, socially and culturally.

The main objective of the Pole, in the words from the already cited National Plan for the education of the Cultural Patrimony, is to “make possible the process of recognition and attribution of values of material and immaterial remains with which daily our paths cross, where only if they are recognised as cultural assets acquire significance and value. The cultural heritage exists only when it is recognised as such”<sup>22</sup>. The ability to implement this needs to be explored through the development of an educative and research pathway, both in theory and in practice, at the end of which the participants will be able to both perfect and enrich their professional profile in the various fields of application of the Heritage Interpretation (such as territorial planning, the development of sustainable tourism, multimedia communication, hospitality services, continuous training), and to move towards the profession of Cultural and

Environmental Interpreter in its classical form, acquiring basic knowledge and competencies in order to successively enhance and enrich their professional qualifications and increase the possibilities of finding occupation.

## 5. Conclusions

Information and Education for the Cultural Heritage represent, as demonstrated at international and national level, a *conditio sine qua non* for the success of strategies for the conservation and valorisation of cultural and naturalistic assets, and, in this sense, also for connected activities such as the promotion of tourism and services for the public.

Furthermore, and currently topical, is also the research activity and the debate around the question of vulnerability and the risk of losing the immense environmental and cultural patrimony in Italy and how this needs to be brought to the centre of attention both politically and in the private sector, being one of the most important factors upon which to re-launch the economy of the country. It is felt therefore, that the Agreement signed at L’Aquila, described in this text, represents a first step in this direction.



**Fig. 3:** The ruins of the Cistercian grange of Santa Maria of Mount Paganica, on the Gran Sasso, one of the sites selected for the activities (photo: F. Redi, June 2003).

<sup>22</sup> National Plan for the training of Cultural Patrimony, p. 20.

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## WEB SOURCES

- <http://www.enamecharter.org/index.html>
- <http://www.icomositalia.com/carte-e-convenzioni>
- <http://www.icomos.org/en/>
- <http://www.dger.beniculturali.it/index.php?it/21/news/6/piano-nazionale-per-leducazione-al-patrimonio-culturale>
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