

EDITORIAL

Cultural heritage

The concept of *heritage* has long been associated with the ones of *legacy*, *ancestry*, *inheritance*, *property* or *patrimony* to cover events, processes, practices, artefacts, features such as traditions, languages, buildings “inherited from past generations maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations”¹.

The impressive collocational potential of the term “heritage” with adjectives such as *ecological*, *gastronomic*, *genetic*, *geological*, *industrial*, *local*, *universal natural*, *religious* etc. explains how it continuously enriches its semantic load through meaning expansion and metaphorical transfers (Choay 2014: 34). The transient “life” of some of these combinations is illustrated by the usage of the syntagm *historical heritage*, which dates back to the 1960s. Despite the fact that it replaced *historic monument* used until the end of the mid20th century “to indicate testimonies of the past that were worth preserving” (Vecco 2010: 322), it fell out of use with the advent of the more comprehensive syntagm *cultural heritage*. The motivation lies in the fact that heritage in reference to culture represents a factor of mass education, awareness and social inclusion. In the context of globalisation, it also becomes a key element of identification and differentiation (Ferréol & Jucquois 2005: 530). A community’s cultural identity is a significant component of its larger national identity, with popular culture as one of its key elements (Smith 1991: 14). Important cultural elements include language and literature, religion, customs and traditions, artistic productions, food and drinks, sport, and architecture.

A particular way of understanding culture is by investigating its *tangible* and *intangible heritage*, the category of cultural products and their associated practices symbolizing traditional values associated with these products. Tangible heritage includes culinary, clothing, architectural and household products etc., considered worthy of preservation for the future when associated with central aspects of human existence, especially in tradition-preserving communities.

As proven by the authors of the articles comprised in this issue, traditional, historical or cultural heritage products encompass, maintain and transmit the cultural codes and meanings through generations and are part of a rich living heritage that is unique in the world, thus confirming their

¹ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/cairo/culture/tangible-cultural-heritage/>.

status of cultural icons². Due to their enclosing intrinsic qualities, cultural products allow for investigation through the lens of cultural studies in order to capture their axiological dimension which uncovers spiritual values.

In guise of conclusion, we may refer to Cmeciu's (2017: 175) perspective on the concept under discussion: "*cultural heritage* is not a static concept: it is a concept that must be enriched with new approaches and new investments meant to lead to the economic development of a community (such as, the development of cultural tourism). (...) a concept such as *cultural heritage* is a long-term spatial and temporal process: it is, at the same time, the result of a selection process, of memory and oblivion, by which the community chooses what is, and what is not, worth being preserved and transmitted."

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² *Cultural icons* (Tomaselli & Scott 2009) refer to "persons or things regarded as representative symbols or emblems of a culture, standing for a group or related things and values, endowed with a complex layering of meanings".