

Introduction

Heritage is a complex idea. It is an ambiguous term to translate with its multiple meanings and layer integrating elements referring to the past, culture, memory, identity, conservation and also, regrettably, conflict. Although heritage refers to the past, not everything from our past may enter into our heritage. Heritage is made only of what we want to remember. And what we do want others and future generations to remember about us. In this way, memories become the legacy, at times stylized, and for the most part selected and embellished. If we think about traditional cuisine as an intangible heritage, we do not want to eat everything that was consumed in the past, but only what in the food of the past we believe is worthy of being eaten. As regards physical heritage, we do not celebrate the narrow alleys full of mud and sewage of our historic urban centres, nor the smell, but we want to preserve just the houses and their walls, as if they were the shells of a different life. If heritage is selective, one of the big questions about heritage is the role of mediators. You can have a heritage from below or you need to have someone to help you understand what is important to pass on to your children about that past. Which institutions, then, must take on the role of creation/preservation of the heritage, and on what scale must they operate? What is the role of geo-parks, museums and eco-museums, and what is the relationship between conservation activities, local institutions and society? Eventually, is it possible to talk about heritage from below?

But heritage is not only selective; it can be controversial too, and even disputed. It is not just a question of culture, conservation and patrimonialization. It is an issue of power. "He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past". This is not just a brilliant quote from George Orwell's 1984. It is also a way for underlining the role of power

in relation to the making of heritage. Because, he who controls the present, he also controls the heritage. Because of its political relevance, heritage can be built in a way that promotes a message of peace. Or, it may suggest feelings of hatred and claims of revenge.

The management of controversial places of memory and heritage therefore has an important political meaning. Geographical names can also celebrate a past that you want to impose. Or forget. In some cases, there is a double toponymy, which on the one hand celebrates the unity of the nation-state and of the majority population, on the other hand recalls the cultural specificity of the territory. In others, there are names in two or three different languages. Yet in other places, tourism erases the traditional toponymy and imposes its own, more in tune with the happy image that you want to promote. For this reason, a thematic conference on the "geographies of the heritage" opens a broad debate, which can involve many of the voices that the IGU commissions may put together.

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