

Cagliari document on Conservation and restoration of the archaeological heritage’*’*

1. The Charters are unavoidable landmarks. As syntheses of the thought of the times in which they were written, they are effective and have a high cultural profile. They are an unrepeatable testimony of an equilibrium that is very difficult to reach today.

The Venice Charter (1964) in particular is a document of great historical value, a monument to the thought on conservation that can not be amended or updated. It includes illuminating orientation and anticipatory formulations on the conservation of the architectural, and particularly the archaeological, heritage, especially where it asserts:

- a. That its interest is not only the monument itself, but also and especially its context, both in the cultural and anthropological sense and from the territorial and landscape point of view, with the result of privileging the conservation in situ of the finds and their decorative finish.
- b. The distinction, as part of a consistent strategy of transmission of the archaeological heritage to future generations, of different moments and degrees of intervention in the conservation project, the multidisciplinary nature of the knowledge that contributes to conservation strategies, where maintenance must have absolute priority as a code of practice.
- c. The awareness of the destructive character of archaeological excavations and of their determining incidence on the degradation processes of the finds; this leads us to recommend the observation of the directives of the New Delhi UNESCO Charter (1956), while in particular avoiding privileging certain specific historical or cultural phases at the expense of others, and providing for the protection of the area and the finds at the end of the excavation works.

2. The difficulties and challenges to face in the conservation of the archaeological heritage with a view to transmitting it to future generations for some

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aspects appear as the result of delays and resistance in applying the indications and recommendations contained in the Venice Charter and analogous documents, such as the Charter of Athens (1931), of New Delhi (1956), Malta, Burra, *etc.*

While for other aspects, we are dealing with problems that emerge in relation to deeply changed cultural and economic-social contexts:

- On principle there is a stronger and more explicit acknowledgement by public powers and political authorities than in the past of the role of the cultural heritage in modern society. This acknowledgement is related to maintaining the identity of local and national communities, to maintaining social cohesion, to the value of diversity in the inter-ethnic and inter-cultural dialogue, and as an essential element in sustainable development thanks also to its capacity to create new qualified jobs. This is particularly true of the archaeological finds, as archetypes of civilisation and culture that testify to the history of man on the planet: moreover, archaeological finds have very close links with the land and landscape, both the visible and the submerged;
- This acknowledgement contributes to change an opposite, negative tendency that has produced serious, and at times irreparable, damage; so far we have dealt with a ratifying development without quality of the traditional settlement system, at the expense of the pre-existing archaeological and monumental heritage. Even the large infrastructures have often been localised on the territory without previously assessing their possible impact on buried archaeological remains, and have been designed without respecting the quality of the landscape context;
- Mass tourism, which is a resource and a positive value for local development, is not sufficiently managed, and often causes negative impacts, such as the abandonment of sites untouched by the currents of organised visits, or excessive pressure on areas privileged by the international circuits, leading to the irreparable risk of physical degradation and degradation of the cultural significance of a non-reproducible good.

3. Besides these processes, which refer to the cultural, economic, and social context, and have a large incidence on the protection policy of an archaeological site, other changes have occurred in a more localised sphere:

- In archaeology especially the tools of site and land reading and analysis have become more and more sophisticated, while the attention to conservation has not developed as rapidly;
- Preventive research, to reduce the risk "from archaeology" (that is, to define the localisation of works in areas at a smaller risk of archaeological findings) and the risk "to archaeology" (that is the risk of losing information, of having to move findings away from the sites, *etc.*) is still not sufficiently practised, though it is the only effective form of preventive conservation.

In the light of this experience, and aware of the ongoing processes of deep change, we do not believe it appropriate to introduce amendments to the Venice Charter, but rather to formulate the following **integrative recommendations**:

1. The archaeologists, both from within and without the institutions competent in the protection, research, and conservation of the archaeological heritage, should concentrate their utmost attention not only on the individual find, but on the diachronic reading of the set of signs on the territory, in order to preserve the cultural and architectural, as well as the landscape and physical environment around the site or monument, and to reduce as far as possible the destructive aspects of the excavation site.
2. We recommend that the protection of the ruins discovered with each excavation campaign should be a must, and that the practice of backfilling, especially in archaeological remains that are difficult to preserve or present to the public, or that are a serious obstacle to the construction of important public buildings, or in cases where the building plans cannot be changed, should be taken into serious consideration.
3. We recommend that in order to reduce the archaeological risk (both that of losing information and findings, and that of the unwanted impact of public works on remains of archaeological interest):
 - The protection and research institutions should commit themselves more to collect and manage all the information available, resorting to modern tools of information technology integrated in specialised databanks and a Geographic Information System (GIS).
 - At the same time the local and national authorities responsible for land changes should support preventive archaeological research with adequate means and take into account the data on archaeological risk when establishing the localisation of works and construction jobs.
 - That also the international institutions and bodies should ensure a greater technical support to the above.
4. We very strongly wish to draw the general attention on the need to apply the principle of "minimum useful intervention" in conservation strategies, by using preventive measures and non-invasive treatment to the utmost and assigning maintenance a priority role, as a golden rule and code of good practice. More particularly:
 - To re-evaluate the role of traditional products and pre-modern techniques within the project and its contextualisation, by carrying out preventive feasibility and compatibility assessments when highly innovative technologies and materials used;
 - To plan and make available all the means of protection and maintenance of ancient ruins (weeding, diversion and removal of rainwater, seasonal cover,

improvement of ancient walls and decoration systems in situ, reconstruction of the ridges of the walls, *etc.*), and only if these actions were not be sufficient, then supply architectural protection and cover, while carefully assessing its durability, effectiveness, and visual impact; to avoid invasive and unnatural ways of presenting and reconstructing archaeological ruins, by assigning a more important role to light and/or virtual IT techniques.

5. We recommend that the enhancement of the heritage as a resource and the commitment to improve its accessibility should not cause a negative impact on the landscape and its context, and should redress the balance between conservation and enhancement; this can be implemented with a better design quality, a greater care for compatible works on the archaeological site, and the resort to management methods.
6. We point out the importance of investing in the qualification of fundamental professional figures and in particular the need for specific training in conservation and management for archaeologists.
7. We point out the decisive role of protection and integrated enhancement strategies, both at the territorial and social level, so as to facilitate repossession and identification processes, and raise the level of awareness and involvement of the local communities and of their political leaders. More particularly we suggest that:
 - Awareness raising campaigns should be planned and undertaken with this in mind, and that they should be considered part and parcel of the initiatives to protect the archaeological site more effectively.
 - Pilot projects and support programs should be undertaken to integrate the archaeological site in the local development plans, by contributing to the creation of new development and new employment.
8. We finally point out that the legislation on public bids on safety and risk reduction, both as regards procedures and types of intervention, should recognise the specificity and diversity of the works of conservation and restoration of the historical and archaeological heritage, and should avoid assigning delicate and highly specialised works to building contractors who do not have the necessary quality and competence requisites, thus ensuring a more qualified commitment.

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