

Cultural Heritage (CH)

I. What is CH?

The concept of CH belongs to a **set of concepts**, which is typical of contemporary tendencies to define and to mobilize current social, cultural and even spiritual attachments to a given community as well as to its place in a **functional, inclusive and non-conflictual** manner. In certain extent, CH is replacing (1) and/or institutionalizing (2) the other fuzzy concepts of the presentist set, since CH is the only presentist concept having a legally and administratively comprehensive origin (“heritage or patrimony”):

(1) CH is replacing **“culture”**, which was too academic (i.e. elitist, top-down) and, which was definitely put into plural (“cultureS”) (i) by the various emancipatory movements from the late 1960s onwards, (ii) by their academic recognition from the 1970s onwards, and (iii) by the institutionalized notion of “cultural diversity” from the 1990s onwards. CH is also replacing **“identity”**, which has been the catchword in postmodern Academia (1970s-2000s) as well as in supranational politico-economic formations like the EU and in subnational community self-expressions like multicultural urban neighbourhoods, and, accordingly, has become too vast and hollow for practical purposes. Moreover, both “culture” and “identity” inherited some conflictual and exclusive connotations from their inception.

(2) From the 1970s, **“memory”** (belonging to the individual, to a community or to any group) has been challenging the time-honored identity construction of SSH. As remembering of all levels of the society (local, regional, national and global) has become a wide-spread social practice and form of expression, its diverse manifestations have been exploited by political actors of all the different levels of the society to propose a new festive and inclusive character through the multiplication of the events of **“commemoration”**. The CH of a community can be considered as the institutionalized aggregate of the community’s selected pieces of memory and those of the memory-bearers. CH is not just a bottom-up form of identity-construction, but it can also include its marketing and branding procedures both for the inner and for the outer communities. These implementing acts of identity often take the form of commemorations.

CH is the administrative response to the social and cultural novelties of identity constructions, what SSH were trying to understand and interpret within their own conceptual framework. Therefore, CH (Studies) is still lacking an overall academic definition. The first and the most influential institutionalization of CH has been taking place at UNESCO, which has had an impact on the concept of CH at national, regional and continental levels, including the concept of CH of the EU.

The evolution of the concept of CH at UNESCO reflects the juridico-theoretical attempts of defining the ever-expanding nature of CH, which gradually incorporates monuments, neighbourhoods/zones, cities, natural landscapes, all kinds of species, cultural landscapes, social and cultural activities and groups. This process results the **conceptual twins of tangible/intangible heritages**. They linguistically suggest a unity of two (otherwise) significantly different approaches to CH:

(1) tangible CH is a successor of the monumental approach of the static conception of cultural and natural heritage (from the 1970s); whereas
(2) intangible CH stems from the critique of tangible CH (from the 1990s) and it is used to safeguard social and cultural practices dynamically.

The construction of **European CH** follows a similar logic to UNESCO by (1) first defining CH in various standard-setting documents as Architectural (1975, 1985) CH and Archeological CH (1992) in harmony with the European tradition of monumental protection; then, (2) by offering a broader definition of CH as “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”, as it is stated in the Faro Convention in 2005. This broad definition, including social and cultural practices, is instrumentalized in the Horizon 2020 WP, in which CH, first time in this extent, appears as a key concept incorporating the role of culture as the fourth, or, rather the first, pillar of sustainability, and being the new conceptual bridge between society and nature expressed in the European Landscape Convention in 2000.

The **academic institutionalization of CH** has started belatedly because of the term’s administrative nature. There is still some bewilderment concerning the meaning of CH, which can refer to (1) any process of knowledge transmission in history, or, following the rules of conceptual history;(2) it is analyzed as a concept, which appeared in the late 1960s indicating new social and cultural realities. Different disciplines feel the necessity to reflect on CH, when its continuous expansion reaches their domain. During the previous decades of the rise of CH, two types of institutional intrusion have taken place:

(1) sciences and academic fields directly linked to the conservation of those past objects that represent a historical identity, which have gradually been referred to as “tangible heritage”, were often regrouped under the label of heritage (as in the case of the establishment of the *Institut national du patrimoine* in France in 2001);
(2) CH studies departments appeared in Faculties of SSH, which often baffled other academics, who were not certain whether this new discipline aims to describe new social realities created by cultural heritage or to assist in the creation of new identities expressed through cultural heritage.

The ambiguous notion of **CH management**, indicating that cultural heritage is also linked to political and financial realities, could mean both or neither.

2. Why CH is successful?

CH is a contemporary concept to express contemporary social and cultural practices and identity constructions, which are:

- (1) much more based on the **present** and on the **management of change** than on modernist projects aiming at the future;
- (2) **not founded on great** (19th and early 20th c.) theories and **ideologies** explaining/expecting social development;

- (3) rather **critical to SSH** and even to urban planning, which have undergone a set of paradigm shifts commonly labelled as “turns” leading to certain credibility loss;
- (4) are closely linked to the **democratization** processes expressed by participatory legislation and, later, by the concepts of social and cultural inclusion;
- (5) open to the **multiplication of identities** and to the permeability between different levels of societies;

The logics of CH to define and to interpret the **components of social and cultural appropriation** is unusual from the modernist point of view, since

- (1) its **territory** is not divided between “the old” (prestigious, historic, protected) and “the new” (constantly developing), but by the use and by the interpretation of the concerned communities, which can select their significant places by their current practice from a space conceived as **continuity**;
- (2) its **community** gradually gives up the modern division between **public and private spheres**, (which was determined in the early modern centuries in Europe,) and places itself on the edge of this division to promote, to market and to brand itself and to satisfy the double (theoretically contradictory) expectation of (local) knowledge transfer towards their own future generations as well as towards the greater public including tourists;¹
- (3) its relationship to **time** is based on the prevention of loss, i.e. the future is conceived as a probable scene for a(n) (ecological, natural, demographic, /accelerated/ social and economic) catastrophe, which must be managed with precaution. The CH’s present absorbs the past and it extends to avoid the unknown future under the label of **sustainable development**.

3. How to handle CH?

Since CH is a novelty in Academia, its **methodology** needs to be developed. Out of several possible models of analysis, it is worth starting with the following three to establish an analytical framework:

- (1) The model of Regimes of Historicity² shows why the present aspect of time has replaced the future-based modernism in the last third of the 20th century, and what are the consequences of this newly born **presentism** on politics and on SSH;
- (2) Michel Foucault’s theory of the biopower explains how the new mechanisms of power had started working in the dawn of modernization and lead to **security-based societies**. One of the great advantages of this model is its permeability to our contemporary societies, in which “cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity for nature”.³ In this context, the

¹ As the Faro Convention states: “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”. (Article 2.b.)

² It was developed by François Hartog and inspired by Reinhard Koselleck.

³ UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, 2005.

changing role of culture can be understood through the evolution of the notion of CH.

- (3) The inner conceptual conflicts of World CH lead to the unsolved problem of **Authenticity**, which is inherent to the interpretation of CH by its different stakeholders. The model of Regimes of Authenticity⁴ can contribute to the comprehension of contradictory recognitions of the elements of CH by the concerned members of society.

The academic institutionalization of CH Studies has started in various ways according to countries and disciplinary backgrounds. Since CH tends to be the new conceptual framework of a desired European Identity, the institutionalization of **European CH Studies** should be coordinated for the following reasons:

- (1) a network of comparable, **similarly structured CH Departments** could promote the new EU concept of cultural and social appropriations;
- (2) CH as a participatory means of identity construction could be the academic instrument of **social and cultural inclusion**;
- (3) the exceptionally **rich tradition of European SSH** could be mustered for the **interdisciplinary** organization of European CH Departments.

Though the comprehension of “built”, “natural” and “intangible” CHs differs from one discipline to the other, they all agree that CH determines the relationship between **Place and People**, or, Culture(-bearers) and Environment. Through the coordinated establishment of CH Departments, this essential relationship could be analyzed not only according to new methodologies surpassing those of traditional national sciences and the area studies, but also by linking SSH to Natural Sciences through CH sites and communities.

For any academic, juridical or political conceptualization of European CH, a set of **particular European problems** should also be considered and examined. The list of these problems should be established through the participation of a large scope of stakeholders. There are a few examples of these problems, which could be taken into consideration:

- (1) The notion of CH is the result of an inner (organic) development in France, UK and USA. Hence, while there is a **historical necessity of this concept in French and in English** (which happen to be the “official” languages of EU and UNESCO), CH is a **loanword** in every other language, what warns us that the adaptation of this seemingly international concept does not necessarily reflect the same realities or evolution in the adoptive societies;
- (2) CH in Western Europe was partially canonized to replace pre-world-war national identity constructions by its participatory, inclusive and consensual approach. Several Central and Eastern European societies, however, could not experience the same democratic and multicultural tendencies because of Communist dictatorship and hermetic borders. The return of nationalism since the mid-1990s paired with the mystical (non-critical) aspect of CH can result in identity constructions in the name of **national CH** demonstrating opposite tendencies to the original CH implications;

⁴ This model was developed by Lucie K. Morrisset.

- (3) The contradictory interpretations of CH show clearly the necessity that European CH Studies should not be descriptive (as it can be sometimes seen in the case of World CH Studies), but truly **critical** based on the rich methodological traditions of European SSH;
- (4) The inclusive and participatory nature of CH also requires the establishment of **CH hermeneutics**, which takes into consideration the interpretations and preferences of a the largest scope of concerned stakeholders;
- (5) The past five decades of different stages of monument, nature and CH protection engendered **CH communities**, which are the forerunners and the laboratories of presentist identity constructions. These communities should be **mapped** and compared systematically within the network of European CH Departments.