Hazards, heritage protection and disasters resilience

Competence, Liability and Culpability. Who's the blame?

by Claudio Cimino

Looking back at the past seventy or so years, it is hard to remember of a time when culture and cultural heritage have been more threatened. The third most important economic resource in Europe is seriously threatened in spite of the increased efforts made to protect it. Responsibility, Liability and Culpability. Who's the blame?

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND TOURISM, A SOMETIMES UNCOMFORTABLE LIAISON

Tourism is today considered the third most important sector in the European economy. During the last decades, tourism confirmed to be a a strong source of employment giving a significant contribution to the generation of the overall EU GDP. The sector kept growing significantly in Europe also during the severe economic conditions suffered as a result of the financial crisis started in 2007. Tourism, directly and indirectly generates over 17 million jobs in the EU with operators engaged in a broad range of economic areas.

Based on the current trends, tourism worldwide is expected to further grow during the coming decades, although under a variety of geographic, socio-economic, cultural, etc. declinations, which are also connected to travellers age range, social access and economic status.

In 2012 the tourist expenditure in the EU registered an increase reaching 291 € billions (EU 28) compared to the 265 € billions of the prior period (EU 27)[1]. The UNWTO[2] reported a similar general tendency with international tourism breaking for the first time in history the one billion tourists in 2012 with a worldwide growth rate ranging between 3-5% yearly during the same period, although several regions of the world registered an even better overall performance.

During the last few decades, the World Bank group and international donors' programmes accompanied the positive trend focusing on tourism as a catalyst to promote socio-economic development for the improvement of living conditions and social stability of local communities. A process that involved and still involves public and private investors and stakeholders with the participation of big investment groups but also small ones, often including little individual investors who are able to detect very interesting investment opportunities. Such a composite investors' portfolio is the main reason why any estimate provided about the effective investment made in this sector risks to underscore the actual figures.

To meet the needs of the very articulated tourist market, several countries adopted specific policies making significant investments to develop and innovate structures and infrastructures to preserve and promote their natural and cultural heritage acknowledging the immense intrinsic values and high economic potentials of these non-renewable resources.

TOURISM, CLIMATE CHANGE & GLOBAL WARMING, URBAN DEVELOPMENT, NEGLIGENCE, CONFLICTS AND OTHER THREATS. CULTURAL HERITAGE IS AT RISK!

However, in spite of the several recommendations issued by UNESCO, UNWTO, ICCROM and other specialised organisations, often investments on tourism development programmes neglect to introduce mechanisms for the protection of natural and cultural heritage sites from all sort of hazards, including those posed by the same visitors. Considered the current large numbers of tourists and those expected in the near future, it is imperative that stricter regulatory policies and DRR plans are introduced to help mitigate the impact of the heavy anthropic action on natural and cultural sites aware that tourism represents just one of the sources of threat for natural and cultural heritage.

Actually, major natural and man-made disasters in the past were relatively sporadic if compared to the current dynamics. We assist today to natural events marked by unprecedented violence and frequency that are often associated to global warming and climate change. Not less violent are the events caused by terrorism, armed conflicts, neglect and/or mismanagement. Combinations of major natural and anthropogenic events with a domino effect like in the dramatic disaster of Fukushima are also frequent.

Although a few political leaders deny the evidence, the hazards posed by global warming and climate change are acknowledged by most world leaders, especially considering that 170 over a total of 197 States Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ratified

2015 Paris Agreement, confirming that significant policies are necessary worldwide to attempt reduce the trend[3].

Meanwhile, projections issued by the United Nations in 2014 estimate that the world urban population will sensibly grow passing from 54% in 2013 to 66% in 2050[4]. An increased consumption of territory should be expected as a result in most regions of the world while the highest concentrations of population will be reached in Europe, the USA and Asia where over 80% of the population will be settled in densely inhabited cities while the remaining 20% will be living in a practically emptied countryside. For opposite reasons, this split human settlement model introduces new factors of threat on both rural and urban heritage.

In fact, in areas characterised by a low density of population the risks are associated to a reduced territorial control including for the protection of natural and cultural heritage, resulting in lower security conditions and relatively limited capacity to manage major events such as fires, landslides, erosion, earthquakes, floods, etc. according to a sadly well known pattern.

In cities exposed rapidly growing population and higher density, instead, the fast urban development or/and the regeneration of the built stocks available, leaves room for typical speculative models, often imposed by groups of (financial) interest pressing on regional and local authorities, resulting in interventions that involve heavy land use, soil erosion, destruction of historic townscapes, gentrification and loss of authenticity, directly and indirectly exposing heritage at risk from a variety of threats that jeopardise the whole conservation of historic cities, archaeological sites and their surrounding cultural landscapes and natural environment. Heavy land use, promotion of intensive urban development and lack of proper regional planning instruments leave always visible signs of their impact on heritage and environment. That is why a proper planning and monitoring of these activities should be methodically conducted starting with a making Impact Assessment. The introduction of this instrument would be extremely useful to inform the whole chain of decisions making in urban and regional planning, however, unfortunately it is not sufficiently widespread yet.

There is an increased institutional awareness today of the widespread contingent situations threatening natural and cultural heritage wherever located in urban or open rural areas and of the need to adopt appropriate disaster risk reduction measures to prevent, mitigate and respond to every sort of threat. Several EU H2020 DRS research projects are currently studying the problems connected to urban and rural heritage protection in areas affected by climate change, global warming and subject to natural and anthropogenic events.

However, cultural heritage today is also increasingly exposed to the risk from the effects of social unrest, symmetric and asymmetric armed conflicts, terrorism, sacking, looting, illicit trafficking, and other threats of anthropogenic nature that are frequently reported within the daily news.

The 2016 edition of the Conflict Barometer states that 226 violent conflicts occurred in 2015 and during the same period 38 conflicts were classified as highly violent[5]. Millions of civilians are forced out of their endangered homes every year and most of them leave their countries in search for safer environments bringing with them only fragments of their often rich cultural legacies.

It is evident that natural and cultural heritage worldwide are exposed to all sorts of threat. Phenomena of huge magnitude that severely hit vast portions of territory, causing disastrous effects on structures, infrastructures as well as on heritage, clearly jeopardising the chances of a socio-economic benefit in return from the public and private investments made.

The concerned specialised community worldwide search for alternative and more advanced solutions for different types of threats, a better understanding of the causes of threats and to propose alternative methods to improve the level of protection of natural and cultural heritage at risk.

Several international and national Agencies and Research Centres developed studies and applied with important investments to help the concerned authorities protect cultural heritage with adequate measure in response to the multiple hazards threatening its resilience.

In the attempt to contribute find scientific and technological solutions, since several years the EU launched a series of calls for proposals for research projects especially but not solely within the EU Framework Programme and some relevant research projects are currently ongoing within the Horizon 2020 and the JPI CH programmes.

On December 7, 2016, the EU DG RTD organised an experts meeting held in Brussels (B) with the participation of several international agencies and experts of various disciplines engaged in the protection of cultural heritage worldwide. A number of queries were posed for the development of a comprehensive European approach and find possible solutions for the implementation of concrete measures to protect threatened natural and cultural heritage[6].

It is expected that further research and international cooperation projects will be promoted through all the available instruments within the EU 2014-2020 programmes and given the complexity of the problematic to be addressed, probably also the next seven years and innovation for the period 2021-2027 will promote research and innovation for the concrete development of cultural heritage protection policy.

The need to protect cultural heritage at risk has been lately addressed also within the Council of Europe Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property (Nicosia, 19/05/2017 Treaty No. 221). The Convention aims to prevent and combat the illicit trafficking and destruction of cultural property, in the framework of the Organisation's action to fight terrorism and organised crime. A very necessary convention keeping in mind that the European zone is considered one of the regions of the world most affected by international art crime.

STATE OF THE ART IN CH PROTECTION AND INPUTS NEEDED

As mentioned, several international organisations and state agencies are currently working at the definition of strategies and models to respond in case of major natural and man-made events however, so far only few countries have been able to develop properly designed progressive plans for the protection of natural and cultural heritage. In spite of their commitment to the UNESCO Conventions, in case of major events States Parties are often caught unprepared as they lack of adequate Disasters Risk Reduction (DRR) policies and adequate measures to secure heritage resilience.

Apart from a few exceptions, state agencies and local authorities are aggravated in their ordinary of maintenance, monitoring and conservation tasks and most cultural heritage sites lack of properly designed management plans (if any) while based on international conventions they are expected to also deploy proper risk preparedness plans providing also measures to reduce the effects and, respond to all sort of extreme events cultural heritage.

Budget restrictions, lack of trained personnel and means, absence of emergency plans, weak or no cooperation between national agencies. These are usually claimed to be the main reasons for failure vis-à-vis events that find the concerned authorities widely unprepared to protect natural and cultural heritage when major events happen. The consequences are under our eyes.

However, waiting for the development of scientific and technological research and innovation to be available and facilitate their tasks, a preventive heritage conservation and protection is possible by adopting an integrated regional management approach within an inter-agency cooperation framework. An approach that would permit to maximise the use of financial, structural and human resources available for the development of early detection strategies to identify different sources of threat and for the deployment of preventive DRR measures designed for the protection of natural and cultural heritage an evident beneficial effect also for the local communities.

Innovative, efficient and operative cooperation agreements between agencies are necessary and could be sufficient to deploy and implement proper risk preparedness plans at a territorial scale. However, inter-agency cooperation in most cases is still far from becoming a widespread reality often due to guilty neglect or worse to internal political hostility between parties in constant competition. It is a global phenomenon that affects several countries and confirms a tendency to breach the Sendai Framework[7].

There are however, a few countries where promising experiences of inter-agency cooperation are implemented for the protection of cultural heritage and DRR policies are set with the direct involvement of concerned public and private stakeholders. For the time being these cases represent an exception rather that a common practice.

I like to mention here the case of the War Free World Heritage Listed Cities, a 46 months project completed in December 2013 thanks to an EU grant within the ENPI CIUDAD programme. The project was coordinated by WATCH[8] in partnership with the Council of the United Municipalities of Byblos (Lebanon) and the Municipality of Mtskheta (Georgia) in Association with NEREA (Italy) and FOCUH (Turkey), with backstopping from UNESCO, ICCROM, IIHL, ICOM and the Austrian Army and with the participation of international experts of various disciplines from ICOMOS ICORP, Securcomp and several other organisations (info in: www.warfreeheritage.net).

Main objective of the project was to develop models of good urban Governance by planning and implementing comprehensive Risk Preparedness Plans for the Enhanced Protection of two world heritage sites according to the Second Protocol to the UNESCO 1954 Convention of The Hague (Convention)[9].

Thanks to the multidisciplinary, inter-sectorial approach adopted in the project a methodology was established for the implementation of the Convention with an urban and regional planning approach looking at cultural heritage risk management as a matter of Good Governance at territorial level taking into account all types of threats.

The methodology was tested in Georgia and Lebanon and apart from achieving the set objectives, the sustainability of the action was confirmed when, after two more years of cooperation between, a draft dossier for the nomination of the Historical Monuments of Mtskheta and the surrounding protection zone prepared within the project framework was further developed and finally submitted in March 2015 by the Government of Georgia to UNESCO for approval by the

International Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

The dossier was finally approved in December 2016 and Enhanced Protection was granted to the Historic Monuments of Mtskheta that became the 11th heritage site listed in this list, and now the site is placed under the highest level of protection possible according to international law.

A conclusion sealing an experience and a track record of achievements that can now be replicated in support to any other State Party of the Convention and UN Member States at large. This especially based on art. 20 of the UN Resolution 2347 (2017) adopted by the Security Council at its 7907th meeting, on 24 March 2017 calling 'upon UNESCO, UNODC, INTERPOL, WCO and other relevant international organizations, as appropriate and within their existing mandates, to assist Member States in their efforts to prevent and counter destruction, looting and trafficking of cultural property in all forms'.

However, in spite of being an important achievement Enhanced Protection actually represents the beginning of an itinerary. In fact, like in any other UNESCO Conventions, State Parties are requested to maintain, continuously improve and update the level of site management described in the nomination dossier and to abide also with the recommendations received from UNESCO to ensure the respect of the prescribed conditions.

COMPETENCE, LIABILITY AND CULPABILITY. WHO'S THE BLAME?

Is there a chance to turn threats to natural and cultural heritage into opportunities for a good regional Governance? The experience made so far demonstrated that costs associated to design and concretely deploy dynamic risk preparedness measures on the territory to prevent/mitigate the impact of major events on natural and cultural heritage can be relatively contained. As mentioned, this is possible thanks to the maximisation and harmonised use of resources normally available under countries under various declinations (e.g. State agencies, Civil protection, Fire departments, Police, Army, ICRC, Specialised Civil Society Organisations, Universities and Research centres) resulting in the optimization of the institutional efforts needed.

Any responsible executive wishing to develop a DRR plan for the protection of natural and/or cultural heritage from the existing intrinsic and territorial hazards should consider to use urban/regional planning approach and models of good Governance, following UNESCO and/or ICCROM recommendations/guidelines for risk assessment, mitigation and response adapted to the heritage context of application. To prevent duplication of efforts and overlapping, before undertaking the endeavour s/he should try to verify the following prerequisites:

1. Is there any DRR Plan to protect your cultural heritage in place?
2. Has an inter-agency risk management committee for the protection of cultural heritage under extreme events been set? Were the respective referent persons identified and were contacts with/between them established?
3. Has a 24/7 early risk management plan been prepared and tested to secure the timely implementation of the set emergency measures within whatever context?
4. How many persons are available and which duties are they assigned? Have they been properly (re)trained, organised and equipped during the last 12 months to

be ready to implement DRR for the protection of the selected heritage site whatever the type of natural/man-made disaster?

5. How many public awareness campaigns on the heritage sites values and policies for their protection were promoted locally/nationally to promote widespread information to various age target groups and stakeholders?

As mentioned Conventions, International Law, Directives and a wealth of Recommendations and Guidelines are there. Some good practice now exist and also a quite widespread literature produced by UNESCO, ICCROM, and several other specialised international organisations are now available.

The responsible officers should take the time to reply to the above and other questions of the type at least twice a year, search for answers to questions that have not an immediate answer. May answers remain pending a proper verification of existing DRR plans should be conducted and, if needed, plans should be further developed and enforced.

The promotion of preventive measures for the protection of heritage sites at risk with an urban / regional planner approach has a positive impact at a territorial level since the risk assessment and DRR measures studied for natural and cultural heritage would would apply also to structures, infrastructures and areas of interest for the whole community of the analysed territory. As said, the all proces of planning and deployment of dynamic DRR measures for the protection of natural and cultural heritage from disasters can be realised at a relatively contained cost by maximising the use of available human resources and budgets, promoting inter-agency cooperation and involving specialised no-profit civil society organisations. An approach repeatedly suggested in several conference, reccommendations and publications (10).

There is a very thin difference in a choice between possible and not possible in the domain of heritage protection and it can be very well linked to the difference between 'will or not' of the responsible executive.

In fact, similarly to any good manager in a SWOT analysis, the competent executive officer should be able to transform a threat into an opportunity and, a weakness into a of strength.

A competent executive officer would also be re-liable and could easily set the most appropriate scenario to initiate, gradually develop and implement an exhaustive risk assessment and early detection plan and deploy the relative DRR measures necessary for the protection of the heritage site and its surrounding area/territory. Any responsible executive unable to set the necessary plan should question whether s/he has got the required competence, and/or in case, consider if appropriate to involve an external supporting expertise. An executive who denies the need of establishing properly designed risk preparedness measures and leaves the site exposed to threats should be considered guilty in case of disaster and should be blamed for any consequences caused to people and heritage site s/he is responsible for.

Notes
1 Source EUROSTAT http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/statistics-illustrated
2 Source UNWTO Highlights, 2013 Edition. http://www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789284415427
3 The Agreement builds on the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Agreement see: http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php
4 United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. World Urbanization Prospects, 2014 revision. https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/
5 Conflict Barometer is published at the Heidelberger Institut für Internationale Konfliktforschung (HIIK). https://www.hiik.de/en/konfliktbarometer/ pdf/ConflictBarometer_2016.pdf
6 Cultural heritage, disaster resilience and climate change: the contribution of EU research and innovation. https://europa.eu/newsroom/events/cultural-heritage-disaster-resilience-and-climate-change-contribution-eu-research-and_en
7 EU priorities in the context of the Sendai Framework: (1) Building risk knowledge in EU policies; (2) An all-of-society approach in disaster risk management; (3) Promoting EU risk informed investments; and (4) Supporting the development of a holistic disaster risk management approach
8 World Association for the Protection of Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage in times of armed conflicts
9 The 1999 Second Protocol to the (1954) UNESCO Convention of The Hague for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed
(10) H. Stovel, 'Risk Preparedness: A Management Manual for World Cultural Heritage' ed. ICCROM et al. in 1998.

Abstract
In ordinary circumstances managing cultural heritage is not any easy, yet, lately it turned into a much more challenging job. During the last few decades we assisted to an increased number of disasters caused by events of unprecedented frequency and dimensions with significant losses of human lives, devastated territories and heritage. This article analyses the reasons why in spite of their commitment to UNESCO Conventions in case of disaster States Parties are often caught unprepared due to lack of concrete Disasters Risk Reduction (DRR) measures to secure heritage resilience.

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Conflict