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Il ruolo del patrimonio religioso nelle aree rurali e marginali

The role of religious heritage in rural and marginal areas

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Il saggio affronta alcune questioni teoriche e metodologiche che stanno all'origine, ma costituiscono anche gli obiettivi, del Progetto Interreg REliHE, Religious Heritage in Rural Areas, che coordino, insieme a Irene Ruiz Bazán e a Riccardo Palma. In primo luogo, il patrimonio culturale religioso è assunto senza alcuna preclusione, aprendosi a potenzialmente tutte le manifestazioni religiose che culture e tradizioni diverse hanno elaborato, riconoscendo l'importanza delle differenze. Il ragionamento si sposta poi a analizzare il tema dell'intervento di co-funzionalizzazione o rifunzionalizzazione degli edifici religiosi sotto due punti di vista: quello della cosa e quello relativo agli intrecci che la cosa intrattiene con le altre e con il territorio di appartenenza.

The essay discusses some theoretical and methodological issues that lie at the origin and constitute the objectives of the Interreg Project REliHE, Religious Heritage in Rural Areas, which I coordinate together with Irene Ruiz Bazán and Riccardo Palma. Firstly, religious cultural heritage is taken on without any preclusion, opening up to potentially all the religious manifestations that different cultures and traditions have elaborated, recognising the importance of differences. The reasoning then shifts to analysing the theme of the co-functionalisation or repurposing of religious buildings from two points of view: that of the thing and that of the interweavings that the thing has with others and with the territory to which it belongs.

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Introduction[1]

The essay discusses some theoretical and methodological issues that lie at the origin and constitute the objectives of the Interreg Project REliHE, Religious Heritage in Rural Areas. Along with Irene Ruiz Bazán and Riccardo Palma, I coordinate this Project and together we act as Lead and Advisory Partners.

The Project involves the Overijssel Province (The Netherlands), the Zaragoza Province (Spain), the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship (Poland), the Upper Palatinate District (Germany), the South Bohemia Province (Czech Republic) and the Zemgale Province (Latvia). It aims to identify and strengthen policy instruments aimed at a culturally and architecturally sustainable repurposing of underused or abandoned rural religious heritage.

In recent years, the themes of the co-functionalisation and repurposing of religious heritage have been widely addressed, and there is a vast scientific bibliography of reference in Italy, Europe and beyond[2].

By way of example, the activity that the CEI carries out in Italy is of considerable importance. It promotes knowledge of the assets and their census and georeferencing. It organises conferences and sharing of experiences related to repurposing projects and shared or mixed use. At international level, the association Future for Religious Heritage (FRH) is also very active.

The large number of interventions carried out to date now make it possible to make critical considerations on issues related to management and on those related to choices made within projects, both on the scale of the individual artefact and of the territorial network.

Overall, this research and the implementation of actions for the conservation and repurposing of the religious cultural heritage demonstrate the importance of these assets and their breadth and strategic nature, especially in a vision that seeks to assign a central role to social policies for integration and territorial development strategies.

Religious cultural heritage

Use of the term "religious cultural heritage" here and in the REliHE project does not refer exclusively to the tangible and intangible expressions of the Catholic Church, but instead to the potential to open up to the religious manifestations that different cultures and traditions have developed in Europe and throughout the world, recognising the importance of difference.

If it is true, therefore, that even a secularised society seeks space for the sacred and is aware of how to recognise its value, if it is true that our cultural heritage reflects multiple identities, if it is true that even the most codified religions (just like identities) are not exempt from transformation, we are faced with a complex scenario that calls for interdisciplinary knowledge and a direct and sincere relationship with the communities that enter into a dialogue with these things, as sanctioned by the Faro Convention.

No other type of heritage clarifies so clearly the relationship that exists between tangible objects and intangible spirituality, or (which is what interests me here specifically) the relationship between architecture as spatiality and the stratified deposit of cultural and artistic expressions and symbolic representation: all elements that determine, as Remo Bodei would remind us, the passage from 'object' to 'thing': "Invested with affections, concepts and symbols that individuals, society and history project onto them, objects become things"[3].

1 I would like to thank Mary Ann Mcintosh for re-reading the text and for suggesting linguistic corrections.

2 I would like to recall here some texts on the subject, which may be useful for further study: Carla Bartolozzi (ed.), *Patrimonio architettonico religioso. Nuove funzioni e processi di trasformazione*, Gangemi, Roma 2016; Fabrizio Capanni (ed.), *Dio non abita più qui? Dismissioni di luoghi di culto e gestione integrata di beni culturali ecclesiastici / Doesn't God dwell here anymore? Decommissioning places of worship and integrated management of ecclesiastical cultural heritage*, Artemide, Roma 2020; Olimpia Niglio (ed.), *Regenerating Cultural Religious Heritage. Intercultural Dialogue on Places of Religion and Rituals*, Springer, Berlin 2022; Todd Weir, Lieke Wijnia (eds), *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Heritage in Contemporary Europe*, Bloomsbury Open Access, Religious Studies, London 2023. Among the reviews, see *Il futuro degli edifici di culto. Temi*, in «InBo. Ricerche e progetti per il territorio, la città e l'architettura», vol. 10, dicembre 2016; *La casa comune / The Common House*, in «InBo. Ricerche e progetti per il territorio, la città e l'architettura», vol. 12, n. 6 (numero speciale), 2021; *Sacra didattica / Sacred Pedagogy*, in «InBo. Ricerche e progetti per il territorio, la città e l'architettura», vol. 13, n. 17, 2022.

3 Remo Bodei, *La vita delle cose*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2009, p. 22.

The religious heritage can be studied in the particularity and specificity of its individual manifestations but can also be grasped in its relationship with the territory which surrounds it and with other things, so much so as to allow us to erase the recent administrative boundaries, redrawing our space, not only geographically, but mentally.
Before addressing these two ways of looking in greater depth, I would like to add a few considerations on the great theme of dialogue or conversation, which is an attitude of disposition to listen to and understand the other, and is the foundation of every theory and practice of possible intercultural and interreligious relationships.
It is precisely this attitude that I consider essential in the field of restoration: a relationship between the designer (also understood as a set of multidisciplinary stances) on the one hand and, on the other, the client (also understood in terms of a community, or a society), the culture (understood in an extensive sense, from politics to the expressions of art, thought, science, etc.), the prescriptive/regulatory framework and the thing, i.e. the heritage, which is the reason for and the protagonist of our work.
Precisely because of this parallelism, it seems to me useful at this point, instead of going back to the debate that goes from Schleiermacher to Dilthey, from Heidegger to Gadamer and then again to Ricoeur, who have also long wondered about the relationship between dialogue, explanation and knowledge[4], to refer rather to the interesting positions that the American theologian David Tracy has developed. As Maurizio Pagano reminds us, in fact, rather than on the level of philosophical reflection,

> the question of the relationship between cultures has become evident first of all on the religious terrain, in the confrontation between the great traditions of humanity, which on the horizon of globalisation have come into closer contact and have brought the now urgent questions on the relationship between Christianity and the other paths of religious experience to the attention of theologians[5].

I am particularly interested in the concept of difference in relation to that of analogy: «analogies do not cancel out real differences. They clarify them»[6], he argues, introducing the idea of "analogical imagination". This idea was developed in the late 1970s, just as Ricoeur, with whom Tracy maintains a dialogue, was elaborating his own study on metaphor[7]. It is obvious that, for Tracy, this topic is part of the work carried out within the more general framework of what is called Public Theology[8] and has as its objective the study of the modalities of inter-religious dialogue and its possibilities. Every tradition, Tracy argues, contains multiple strands within it and is therefore never unitary; the understanding we can have of ourselves inevitably passes through confrontation with others; confrontation allows us to highlight, in a system of differences, some similar aspects, thus enabling the initiation of a mutual transformation, which, however, never means homologation: differences cannot be erased[9]. What I find of great relevance in Tracy's work, due to the work I have been doing for some time on the theme of the restoration project, is his attempt to define a relational system of fragments that never aspires to totality. In an interview he states, «The ideal is certainly the whole, but not the whole as totality, but as infinite, dynamic, open»[10].
In another paper of mine, I reflected on the concept of potential unity derived from Cesare Brandi's notion that surplus makes it possible to identify in a work of art (meant in the broadest sense), an open, relational unity, which is the key to both recognition and to a restoration project. Again, in that same paper, the focus is on metaphor as a

4 Chiara L.M. Occelli, *Spiegare. Descrivibilità, trasmissibilità e qualità nel progetto di restauro*, in Stefano Della Torre, Valentina Russo (ed.), *Restauro dell'architettura. Per un progetto di qualità,* vol. 6. *Integrazione, accessibilità e valorizzazione*, Edizioni Quasar, Roma 2024, pages 1069-1076.
5 Maurizio Pagano, *Differenze nell'universalità. Questioni filosofiche nell'orizzonte della globalizzazione*, in «Annuario Filosofico», n. 22, Mursia, Milano 2007, pages 61-79.
6 David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1987, p. 450.
7 Paul Ricoeur, *La metafora viva. Dalla retorica alla poetica: per un linguaggio di rivelazione*, Jaca Book, Milano 1976.
8 On this topic, see Marco Dal Corso, Brunetto Salvarani, *Teologia pubblica: una criteriologia*, in «Studi Ecumenici», anno XXXVIII, n. 1-2, January-June 2020, pages 359-387.
9 Cfr. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, Crossroad, New York 1981.
10 Kenneth L. Woodward, *Em homenagem aos fragmentos. Entervista com David Tracy*, Instituto Humanitas Unisinos, https://ihu.unisinos.br/?catid=592974&id=592974:em-homenagem-aos-fragmentos-entrevista-com-david-tracy (consulted September 2024).

mechanism of the project, and on this theme I assert that the process of identifying the similar in the dissimilar is, in reality, not an observation but a true construction (not exempt, by the way, from possible errors): the analogical or, for me more usefully, the metaphorical imagination is an important key to understanding and to dialogue, that the carrying out of a restoration project establishes with the thing[11].

Gaze mode 1: the thing

To frame a restoration project that intends to set an architecture, in this case a religious architecture, as its field of application I would like to start from Bodei's work mentioned above. His reflection that all objects can become things, but that all things can, for their part, also become objects again is a useful one: only by removing the obviousness from the way we look at what is around us (that change of questioning, of seeing, which Heidegger also mentioned[12]), only by activating curiosity (and therefore the necessary research and study) with respect to objects, only by investing them with 'affects, concepts and symbols' can they become things; but in the same way things, abandoned, orphaned, deprived of our attention, can become objects again, obstacles to be avoided and, if anything, eliminated.
Looking at things differently, therefore, means learning to unlearn, to eliminate all automatic behaviour, giving things back their excess, their surplus of sense and meaning; it means recognising that particularity and singularity that should be of interest to the restoration architect if it is true that "Restoration is the methodological moment of recognising the work of art..." as Brandi tells us. It means embracing the invitation Rigotti extends:

> to intensely turn our attention to the things that surround us, to grasp their usual and unusual aspects, congruent or not with the stereotype we have of them, beyond their use value, beyond their usefulness and above all their commercial estimation, in a dimension of perfect gratuitousness where the strictly economic relationship, of purchase, use, exploitation and possession, is for once seen as irrelevant[13].

This does not mean we should not reason in terms of use in economic terms, but we should not start from these aspects alone, and not only consider these aspects our aims: the religious cultural heritage we are dealing with is located in rural areas, but sometimes also in marginal areas, i.e. places off the beaten track, whether these be in settlements or in tourism, infrastructures or in economic investments in general.
Bodei once more urges us to consider that "understanding the life of things requires as much acumen as understanding the life of people"[14]: and here we return again to that necessary, imperative dialogic relationship, on which I dwelled briefly at the beginning of this essay, in which the thing is understood as an agent and not simply as something inert. Within this framework, one inevitably refers to the "biography of things" and the studies of Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff[15], researchers who are considered the main exponents of a broad strand which embraces various disciplines, and which has at its centre an interest in "things". Among these studies, the work of the archaeologist Ian Hodder[16] is of great interest: Hodder, following the studies of Bruno Latour[17], Nicole Boivin[18] and Colin Renfrew[19], moves away from the one-sidedness of utilitarian or semiotic visions, to investigate the relationship of mutual intertwining between humans and things «from the point of view of things»[20]. The main concept around which Hodder's reflection revolves

11 Chiara L.M. Occelli, *La metafora e il progetto*, in Chiara L.M Occeli, Irene Ruiz Bazán (ed.), *La parola e la cosa. Doppi sguardi sul progetto di Restauro*, Alinea, Firenze 2023, pages 13-47.
12 Martin Heidegger, *La questione della cosa* (a cura di V. Vitiello), Mimesis, Milano 2011.
13 Francesca Rigotti, *Il pensiero delle cose*, Maggioli, Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna 2015, p. 22.
14 Bodei, *La vita* cit., p. 56.
15 See Arjun Appadurai (edited by), *The social life of things. Commodities in cultural perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986.
16 Ian Hodder, *Entangled. An archaeology of the relationship between humans and things*, John Wiley and Sons Inc., Chichester 2012, p. 10.
17 Bruno Latour, *Non siamo mai stati moderni. Saggio di antropologia simmetrica,* Eléuthera, Milano 1995.
18 Nicole Boivin, *Material Cultures. Material Minds*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008.
19 Colin Renfrew, *Towards a theory of material engagement*, in E. Demarrais, C. Gosden, C. Renfrew (eds), *Rethinking Materiality*, McDonald Archaeological Institute, Cambridge 2004, pages 23–32.
20 Hodder, *Entangled* cit., p. 10.

is that of *entanglement* and the consequent relational entrapment between human and human, human and thing, thing and thing.
The rupture, the unravelling, the interruption in some way of the functioning of things causes them to become apparent to us and causes us to be called upon to take care of them, to re-establish that condition of apparent immobility that we need. Thus, the behaviour of things, animals, and plants traps humans into various forms of taking care of them, as well as regulations and disciplines. The double dependence of people on things and of things on people draws people into specific forms of behaviour, which, regarding architecture, we can define through multiple activities such as maintenance, restoration, and conservation.
However, the relationship is not only between things and people but also between things and things and people: all these relat

> There is more to history than a linear account of sequences of events; there is also the material history, the heritage of past acts, the detritus of past millennia that bumps up against us in a non-linear way [...]. It is this material history that continues to play a role in the present[21].

The key concept is that of entanglement, which presupposes a double bond of dependence, a co-movement:

> Entanglements are difficult to understand and control because they are not contained and are difficult to predict because of the strands that seem to spread out everywhere. They are practical and every-day, involving real forces as much as imagined ones. They are in continual movement as events happen unexpectedly and are multiplied in their effects along the complex heterogeneous strings and pathways[22].

What I see as central is the consideration that entanglements do not construct linear histories, let alone teleological ones, even if previous choices can influence contingent possibilities: the material duration of things, the traces they leave behind and their multiple entanglements play a fundamental role in relation to the present and to the future. The relations between things and humans are, however, says Hodder, *unruly* because different temporalities coexist in social life, causing openings and discontinuities in relational networks. These different temporalities generate a mutual movement of things and men that leads to unruly consequences and generates new problems and new movements. We must remember, then, that the networks of entanglements are practical, technical, material, economic, and social, as well as symbolic, spiritual, religious, and conceptual. Entanglements, then, are generated by tensions that relate humans and non-humans in their reciprocity, and always have to do with "ideas, thoughts, words, feelings and senses"[23]. These forces have a character of abstraction making them general and generalisable, i.e. they can be applied to more than one domain: "Their transferability creates a new form of entanglement – one based on ideas, the coherence of logics and philosophies, the use of analogy and metaphor"[24]. Analogies and metaphors are not only relegated to the linguistic realm – they can also be material:

> Because material metaphors are solid and spatial, rather than spoken and transitory, the process of 'reading' them is immediate. There is no need to explicitly name, delimit or identify them. Material metaphors have a quality of density in that every aspect of an artefact contributes continuously to its meanings and is independently significant[25].

And, in my opinion, it is precisely the metaphor that can play a fundamental role in the restoration project, translating itself materially into architecture.
To conclude this part, I would again like to point out that the thing outlined through the limited references used here (limited in comparison

21 *Ibid.*, p. 100.
22 *Ibid.*, p. 110.
23 *Ibid.*, p. 120.
24 *Ibid.*, pages 120-121.
25 Chris Tilley, *Metaphor and Material Culture*, Blackwell, Oxford 1999, p. 264.

to a truly vast bibliography) shows a particular character that is what we could call chimerical. As Lorraine Daston writes:

> Things that talk are often chimeras, composites of different species. The difference in species must be stressed: the composites in question don't just weld together different elements of the same kind (for example, the wood, nails, glue, and paint stuck together to make a chair); they straddle boundaries between kinds. Art and nature, persons and things, objective and subjective are somehow brought together in these things, and the fusions result in considerable blurring of outlines[26].

Further, Daston adds a consideration that allows me to glimpse the practical aspects necessary for a project:

> Thing-making is not bricolage; chimeras are not mere composites. However disparate, fragmentary and even contradictory their parts may appear to be to the analytically minded historian, things worthy of the name must have a physiognomy. It is precisely the tension between their chimerical composition and their unified gestalt that distinguishes the talkative thing from the speechless sort. Talkative things instantiate novel, previously unthinkable combinations. Their thingness lends vivacity and reality to new constellations of experience that break the old molds[27].

This unity in difference, this being one and multiple, is the characteristic that allows the thing its capacity to weave infinite relationships, including those it weaves with us.

It is clear, therefore, that in the case of a restoration project which focuses on a thing with the characteristics of the fragmentary nature and composition of a chimera, the objective that the designer should never set himself is to make it unitary in an absolute sense, erasing the differences.

This means that a restoration project, when it is necessary to add new functions and new stratifications, as happens in the case of a complete or even only partial or temporary repurposing of religious architecture, can operate through a type of dialogue that makes use of metaphor and which knows how to read the similar in the dissimilar. And this can result not only in a transformation but also in showing more clearly what is potentially contained within that which has been metaphorized.

I believe it is important to reflect on functional compatibility, not only from a cultural or symbolic perspective, but also from the viewpoint of religious architecture, considering the sensitivities of believers and heritage communities. The architectural point of view is also relevant with respect to a scenario that often considers architectural design as simply placing new content within an existing container, in which the container is simply understood as an inert box.

Gaze mode 2: religious cultural networks

Another way of looking at religious cultural heritage is certainly to understand it as a thing (for which everything I have previously written applies) but, at the same time, to understand it as being immersed in a series of geographic-territorial relationships that allow us to read it not as a single thing, but as a participant in one or more networks, of which it constitutes a node.

In 2016, the CEI National "Office for Pastoral Care in Leisure, Tourism and Sport" published *Il Parco Culturale Ecclesiastico. Idee e linee orientative*. It approved Giovanni Gazzaneo's Ecclesiastical Park proposal

26 Lorrain Daston, *Speechless*, in L. Daston, *Things That Talk. Object Lessons from Art and Science*, Zone Books, New York 2004, p. 21.
27 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

to re-organise and enhance the way in which Church-owned cultural assets are exploited:

> a territorial system that promotes, recovers and valorises, through a coordinated and integrated strategy, the liturgical, historical, artistic, architectural, museum, recreational heritage of one or more particular Churches. It is a system that, if deeply rooted in a territory, becomes capable of connecting parish communities, monasteries, sanctuaries, lay aggregations, such as the Confraternities, rich in traditions (worship, devotions, festivals), and custodians of works and signs born from the faith of our people[28].

Even in this initial document, the term *park* almost immediately gives way to *network*, the term used in the newer Guidelines drafted in 2018[29]. I see this attention to language as quite significant, and, believe that the term "network" rather than "park" is certainly more appropriate. It can be said that a park constitutes a precise sphere, delimited and defined by a boundary, and so an enclosure also determines its own internal rules, which may differ from the external ones. By contrast, a network has no limits. It is open and can overlap with other networks, of which it may or may not be part. (It is interesting to note barricus, from which the Italian term barco (meaning fenced area for animals) originates, and parricus, from which the Italian word parco originates, both indicate an enclosure for the keeping of animals, according to Ottorino Pianigiani's Vocabolario Etimologico della lingua italiana). A network seems a useful way of referring to the systemisation of a religious cultural heritage. Due to its very nature, this type of heritage relates to many things in different ways, precisely because of the co-presence of multiple identities in the things that compose it, and of those who look at it. Any example of religious architecture could belong to a network that identifies the products of the work of a specific architect – and so find itself together with non-religious buildings – but at the same time belong to another network that connects it to other churches, those with a central plan for example. I believe that the flexibility of a network is very useful so that a heritage, especially one which is located in rural or marginal areas, can be included within more than one system and therefore extend its potential. I believe that this idea should be adopted as good practice, beyond purposes strictly related to evangelisation, an objective of an active Church which focuses on caring for its cultural heritage and, through this, for its congregation. The open way in which this project is presented is extremely interesting. It can also be extended to other religious experiences: religious heritage, once it has secured its religious function, is also a cultural asset in a broader sense and is therefore an element of study or a tourist destination, even for non-believers.

The project also has another relevant aspect: the way it views economics. The PCS aims to counteract a society which favours economic productivity with a society that favours conviviality and which promotes «ethics and the realised good»[30] and develops processes of "co-creation of value", a «creative co-creation, i.e. the generation and development of a shared economic value where companies and customers/consumers share, combine and renew resources and skills together to create value through new forms of interaction, service and learning methodologies»[31]. In this project, training is obviously of central importance, and the greatest challenge, on this level, I believe, is to succeed in the ability to interact, to create dialogue, to converse with those who have a different culture, tradition, religion, and to reach a place of mutual understanding.

28 Ufficio Nazionale CEI per la Pastorale del Tempo Libero, Turismo e Sport, *Il parco culturale ecclesiale. Idee e linee orientative*, 2016, p. 4. https://turismo.chiesacattolica.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2016/12/IDEE-E-LINEE-ORIENTATIVE_Lusek_febbr2016.pdf (consulted September 2024).
29 Ufficio Nazionale per la Pastorale del Tempo Libero, Turismo e Sport della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, *Bellezza e Speranza per Tutti. Parchi e Reti Culturali Ecclesiali: quando il Turismo diventa via di vita buona e speranza concreta*, 2018. https://turismo.chiesacattolica.it/6200-2/ (consulted September 2024).
30 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 31.