GOVERNING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

COMMON GOODS, SHARED EXPERIENCES, SPACES FOR EXCHANGE

by RICCARDO POZZO* and VANIA VIRGILI**

1. Introduction

The declaration unanimously adopted by the ministers of culture of 180 countries during the International Conference of Culture Ministers of 31 July-4 August 2015 organised by the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Cultural Activities and of Tourism at Expo in Milan states that «Cultural heritage is the mirror of history, civilization and of the society which is expected to protect it. Cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is also the essence of identity, the memory of peoples and their past and present civilizations. It expresses, at the same time, universally recognized values of tolerance, dialogue and mutual understanding…the work of man and his extraordinary talent must be protected and preserved for the benefit of future generations» (MiBACT, 2015). In fact, knowledge conservation, protection and use trigger integration policies; they also promote cultural, economic and social growth. We are talking of areas such as (a) knowledge and in-situ protection of cultural contexts and artefacts; (b) post war archaeology; (c) virtual reality; (d) sustainable museography[1], whose impact implies making cultural heritage instrumental for science and cultural diplomacy; protecting and promoting cultural diversity; and documenting, conserving, monitoring, using and protecting from environmental and anthropic threats of cultural heritage in the Middle East and in North Africa.

With migration flows in and alongside the Mediterranean among the key issues at the top of public and academic agendas worldwide, a reconsideration is urgent of the migrant practices of transfer of organizing principles and conditions for developing competences to act in multicultural settings, because ideas – wrote Arthur O. Loveyoy – «are the most migratory things in the world» (Lovejoy, 1990: 2).

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The *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (UNESCO, 2001) recognizes cultural diversity as a «common heritage of mankind» and considers its preservation as a concrete and ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity. This Declaration was reinforced in 2005 by the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, which also talks of «the goal of fostering interculturality in order to develop cultural interaction in the spirit of building bridges between peoples» (UNESCO, 2005). In Europe, the European Commission's decision to make 2008 the Year of Intercultural Dialogue established the political and normative importance of recognizing cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, which was followed in 2010 by the decision of the Ministers of Culture of the Member States to make intercultural dialogue a priority of the work plan for culture for the period 2011-2013. The Council of Europe emphasized the political actions needed for intercultural dialogue to advance through its white paper on intercultural dialogue *Living together as Equals in Dignity* (COE, 2008). Finally, the *Faro Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* (UNESCO, 2007) encourages reflection on the role of citizens in the process of defining, creating and managing a cultural environment, in which communities create and evolve.

Growing diversity in Europe is a cultural reality, which should be taken into account and addressed at the individual and collective level (EAC, 2014: 5). The democratic governance of cultural diversity should be «adapted in many aspects, democratic citizenship and participation should be strengthened, intercultural skills should be taught and learned, spaces for intercultural dialogue should be created, and intercultural dialogue should be taken to the international level» (EAC, 2014: 9). At stake is the promotion of social cohesion (ESF, 2004; Grant, 2008; Cai, 2010). The objective of this paper is to reflect on the governance of cultural diversity on the basis of *common goods, shared experiences and spaces for exchange.*

2. Common Goods

«The idea of multiculturalism as a social and political project appears, at first sight, to be a latecomer to both public debate and the social sciences.» (Baumann and Vertovec, 2011: 1). Imagine a second-generation Chinese immigrant who attends high school in Italy. At a certain point, he or she might be asked to read a text by Plato, e.g., the *Apology of Socrates*, which he shall first do in Italian and later perhaps also in the Greek original or in Marsilio Ficino's Latin rendering. The point is that the student shall be given the chance of accessing the same text also in Chinese, for he or she ought to be able to start in his or her Chinese-speaking family a discussion on Socrates. Inversely, schoolmates might seize the opportunity for appropriating, e.g., the *Analects* of Confucius on the basis of the references indicated by our student and start

thinking together on *dong* (movement), *jing* (rest), *renji* (human being), *ren* (humaneness, benevolence) and eventually come to grasp at least the motto of Neo-Confucianism: «Restoring the Heavenly Principle and diminishing human desires» (Wang, 2005: 320). Apparent affinities in the traditions notwithstanding, the students agree that «metaphysics is bound up with ethics», so that reality determines what is ethical (Sim, 2015: 616).

The Chinese student and his schoolmates are a practical example of both theory and practice of intercultural philosophy (Mall, 2000: xi). What the students are doing is nothing more and nothing less than rethinking *common goods* within an intercultural framework. «The term interculturality stands for an attitude, for the conviction that no culture is the culture for the whole of humankind…. The spirit of interculturalism approves of pluralism as a value without undermining a personal commitment to one's own position. It is not monolithic and discriminatory, although it is preferential and discriminating» (Mall, 2000: 9).

3. Shared Experiences

In the last decade, has argued Steven Vertovec, «the proliferation and mutually conditioning effects of additional variables shows that it is not enough to see diversity only in terms of ethnicity, as is regularly the case both in social science and in the wider public sphere. Such additional variables include differential immigration statuses and their concomitant entitlements and restrictions of rights, divergent labour market experiences, discrete gender and age profiles, patterns of spatial distribution, and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents…. The interplay of these factors is what is meant…in summary fashion, by the notion of 'super-diversity'» (Vertovec, 2010: 66).

The way Immanuel Kant had put it with regard to the interplay of concepts and intuitions – «thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind» (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A51/B76) – one might say that «intercultural dialogue cannot exist without the recognition of cultural diversity, while cultural diversity can exist without giving rise to intercultural dialogue» (EAC, 2014: 9). «Cultural diversity» implies the existence of common characteristics of a «group» of people, such as language, religion, lifestyle, artistic expressions, relations between men and women, young and old, etc. All cultures are hybrid, mixed, infused (EAC, 2014: 10).

Intercultural competencies relate to the following forms of shared experiences: (a) communication in foreign languages, (b) social and civic competences, and (c) cultural awareness and expression (EAC, 2014: 16). Wished for is a «broader concept of commitment to social inclusion through the arts» (EAC, 2014: 23). Because it is «people», living in a complex society and speaking with their languages, customs and beliefs,

which hold dialogues. It is not a just dialogue of cultures. «Intercultural» means «questioning the content of what one transmits; it means questioning what one calls art, heritage and self-expression» (EAC, 2014: 10).

Rémi Brague has noted that the Arabic term for dictionary quamus is a translation of the name of the Titan of Greek mythology Okeanós, in the original literal sense of a liquid extension that embraces all emerged lands, permitting navigation and hence communication (Brague, 2004). An Egyptian deity, Thóth, was credited with the invention of hieroglyphs during the axial age (from 800 to 200 BC), when similar ways of thinking appeared at the same time but independently in Persia, India, China, and the Western World, which in the case of writing meant the birth of alphabets and ideograms. Today, intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean gives rebirth to the cultural melting pot spoken about by Plato in the *Timaeus* (23c) with regard to the translation of the art of writing from Egypt to Greece, thus prefiguring – as Tullio Gregory has put it – «the dynamics of the great Mediterranean cultural circle made of translation and tradition of philosophical, religious, and medical texts from Greek and Hebrew into Arabic, Latin, and all vernacular languages» (Gregory 2012: 12).

4. Spaces for Exchange

In fact, «there is no audience in intercultural dialogue – intercultural work means a process of co-creation» (EAC, 2014: 42). Access, participation and co-creation are preconditions for achieving intercultural dialogue in practice (EAC, 2014: 91). As a matter of fact, «it may be very difficult to attract an audience with a different profile from the usual. The issue of access and participation seems to resolve much more about demand than about supply» (EAC, 2014: 52). Spaces for exchange are portals, websites, e-libraries (EAC, 2014: 62). Intercultural competencies are about awareness-raising (EAC 2014: 79).

Libraries in multiple languages have proven to be effective spaces for exchange (EAC, 2014: 11). Let us think first of schools and libraries. We are now in the twenty-first century, however, and we can do so much better than we used to do. We rely already on hypertexts, which will provide metadata-rich and fully interoperable sources, translations, bibliographies, indexes, lexica and encyclopedias. Users begin at the top level by perusing general narratives, from where they follow the links to details of critical editions, their translations in a number of languages, articles, indices and monographs. In sum, spaces for exchange are most importantly research infrastructures that make it possible for users across the Mediterranean to engage in access, participation and co-creation. E-corpora and research infrastructures serve as hubs in so far as they facilitate all services of virtual and instrumental access to data, simulations and best practices as well as government led activities for the Mediterranean community[2].

Finally, an inclusive identity is needed to foster social cohesion in a highly diverse Europe. Defined this way, the Horizon 2020 topic of *Reflective Societies* (See *Societal Challenge 6: Europe in a Changing World: Inclusive, Innovative, Reflective Societies*) is supposed to cover a vast array of social sciences and humanities dealing with the past and the present from history to geopolitics through cultural heritage studies and practically all imaginable fields of the humanities. A closer scrutiny of the term reveals that it is strongly inspired by philosophers – first and foremost Jürgen Habermas – about the crucial role of enlightened deliberative communication of citizens in a modern public sphere aiming at mutual understanding. As a matter of fact, Jürgen Habermas has applied to society what his precursor G.W.F. Hegel had elaborated as the passage from the surface of being to the ground of essence, a passage that takes place, literally, by reflecting into the thing – like reflected light that illuminates something previously invisible, or creates a pattern not previously existing. The current migrant crisis has made it clear with terrific effectiveness that a most urgent objective is working towards Euro-Mediterranean societies that are inclusive, reflective and attentive to the impact migrations are having on social and cultural innovation, security and health, environment and biodiversity.

5. Conclusion

The phenomenon of migration in and alongside the Mediterranean ought not to be reduced to the emigration or immigration processes of populations or ethnical groups. Its scope is much larger, for it accompanies the whole history of civilizations, while involving continuous relations and reciprocal exchanges among diverse cultures, and thus translations from the one to the other linguistic, economic, political and cultural context. This also appears with full evidence, if we take the more restricted perspective of Mediterranean and European cultures. In a globalized world we need to make mutual enrichment possible, while countering xenophobic attitudes. In relation to the current migrant crisis, measures for the democratic governance of cultural diversity at the national, regional and local levels ought to be swiftly adapted: intercultural common goods should be taught and learned, democratic citizenship and shared experiences should be strengthened, spaces for exchange should be created. Finally, intercultural dialogue should be taken to the international level, which is exactly what we did at the meeting in Palermo, ten years after October 20, 2005.

Notes

[1] E.g. satellites and topographical techniques, drones and sensors for heritage protection

in wide areas; advanced diagnostic systems; nano-materials and nano-technologies for conservation; 3D for the enhancement of cognitive access in historic and archaeological contexts; methodologies and protocols for 3D rendering in hazardous contexts; monitoring artefacts/context interaction; advanced exhibition systems: smart showcases.

² See: *Common Language Resources and Technology Infrastructure* (www.clarin.eu), *Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and the Humanities* (www.dariah.eu), *European Research Infrastructure for Heritage Science* (www.e-rihs.eu), *European Cultural Heritage* Online (www.echo.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de), *Europeana* (www.europeana.eu), *World Digital Library* (www.wdl.org).

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Summary

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Common goods, shared experiences, spaces for exchange
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The paper considers cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue as political facts that need to be addressed as objects multi-level governance. The phenomenon of migration in and alongside the Mediterranean ought not to be reduced to the emigration or immigration processes of populations or ethnical groups. Its scope is much larger, for it accompanies the whole history of civilizations, while involving continuous relations and reciprocal exchanges among diverse cultures, and thus translations from the one to the other linguistic, economic, political and cultural context. At stake is the promotion of social cohesion. The objective of this paper is to reflect on the governance of cultural diversity on the basis of common goods, shared experiences and spaces for exchange. The current migrant crisis has made it clear with terrific effectiveness that a most urgent objective is working towards Euro-Mediterranean societies that are inclusive, reflective and attentive to the impact of migration on social and cultural innovation, security and health, environment and biodiversity.

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