

## **Initial considerations on orthodox and heterodox theories of heritage conservation**

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This paper aims to make an initial reflection on the differences between the different theories of cultural heritage conservation. Seeking thus to contribute to the analysis of contemporary challenges of planning built heritage conservation in Brazil, by recognizing the *dichotomy* between *orthodox* and *heterodox* theories of conservation (meaning of Lixinsky and taken over by Wells, 2015).

In the heritage conservation management field as well as in the academic field of research on heritage preservation in Brazil, difficulties in the application of the principles and assumptions of the property cards and other official documents of which Brazil is a signatory, as UNESCO's Conventions, for example, are often criticized. The basic law of preservation of the Brazilian national heritage (Decree-Law N° 25/1937) and conservation practices are based on a theoretical framework of European origin, whose same premises date back to the pioneering efforts of heritage conservation of the Renaissance in Italian *Quattrocento* (Choay, 2001). Far from denying the importance of the trajectory of heritage preservation in Brazil, which saved numerous monuments of destruction in its heroic phase (Fonseca, 2005), it must be recognized that today, in the face of intense social and urban changes in globalized cities, we face with huge technical, social, cultural, political and economic challenges in the field of heritage conservation.

What we believe is behind such challenges are the difficulties of understanding the ideological conflicts underlying the relations between actors and decision-making processes relating to the planning of heritage conservation. Doglioni (2008) says that there is not only one definition or restoration *idea*. We can also say that there are several ideas of conservation and restoration, always linked to different cultural contexts. Therefore, conservation and restoration do not exist in *itself*. Several authors

argue that conservation and restoration should be questioned, at the risk of remaining entrenched in the academic field or hidden behind the "bureaucratic shields" and regulations.

We believe that the conservation project, including restoration, in fact, happens in a much broader extent, in a field which, in practice, extrapolates the formal and technical document. The designers seek to establish their discourses in widespread restoration theories, institutionalized by governments: those characterized as orthodox and that experts and managers of conservation are required to put into practice, according to Wells, 2015. We believe that much of what constitutes the project conservation in a broader sense, takes place within the flows of decision-making. In other words, we think the conservation project as construction of knowledge about cultural property is actually produced by all stakeholders, including not only professionals from the private sector, public officials, managers as well by users of listed buildings, which may often diverge and / or not appropriate the initial theoretical assumptions of the project, or understand them totally differently.

We believe it is necessary then to overcome models usual academic interpretation, demystifying the idea that traditional theoretical principles of conservation and restoration have been interpreted improperly and systematically misapplied by all the stakeholders involved in the implementation of conservation policies. The aim is decolonize the thought and try to seek alternative ways to better understand the multiple interpretations of observable relations between the theoretical assumptions, the methods specified and those actually implemented in different ways to conserve and restore. For that, we need to somehow recognize the consequences of perspectives solely focused on the listed object or restorations whose planning are restricted only to the expertise and specialists professionals. Among the challenging consequences, we have: the lack of participation of interested communities who should be directly involved in the planning of the conservation of historic areas they inhabit and the "revitalization" of these central areas and its consequent gentrification processes.

The reflections and studies on the differences between the orthodox and heterodox theories of conservation, the work of authors such as Lixinsky, Muñoz Viñas,

Wells, Carsalade, can help us better understand the relationship between cultural heritage and society. How are shaped the decision-making processes in the field of conservation? How do it relate agents / individuals involved and what are their different motivations in decision-making related to conservation planning? For what and for whom is the cultural heritage being conserved?

It is also worth questioning how the assumptions of the theories and its methods are in fact re-appropriated and reinvented. And how, in the space of restoration, these assumptions and their corollaries are tested. It is very questionable that nowadays, the official theories are our unique "lens" or explanatory frameworks for the study of cultural heritage conservation in Brazil. Based on the recognition of the semantic, conceptual, operational difficulties that a Eurocentric view of conservation imposes, what new possibilities and perspectives can be opened?

Several of us who operate in the field of conservation have noticed that many of the heritage conservation charters cannot be considered universal: sometimes they just do not make sense in some specific situations and certain cultural contexts. Wells (2007) studied the cultural meanings of the heritage conservation charters and shows how some of their 'truths' come from concepts of objectivity and rationality that have been historically constituted as a perspective that excluded many other ways of thinking. From there, this work seeks to recognize the *conflict* (Miraftab, 2004; Vainer et al, 2013) underlying the different conservation ideas. From this new perspective we could at least glimpse the perception of something still very difficult to be carried out, according to Wells (2015): make social sciences and heritage conservation worlds talk to each other and connect.

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