The Circular Character of Building Tradition: Which Challenges for the HUL Approach

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Abstract

The lifespan of buildings **ČiĆ**and open spaces can be radically longer than of other goods. That is certainly one of the reasons why historic buildings have been traditionally associated with heritage value, and thus maintained and protected as part of the future of cities. However, particularly in the current world, buildings and cities are under constant challenge and pressure of changing needs, lifestyles, services of society. Hence, any consideration of circular economy within built environment requires approaches and models that refer to continuity, adaptability, resilience and quality, features that often characterize traditional historic built environments. In the past, urban centers were normally built using sustainable techniques and resources. They were constantly maintained with the intention to make the best use of available materials, by reusing what was possible and thus reducing waste. Consequently, the use of local materials, techniques, crafts and competences has shaped the built environment for centuries, generating testimonies of local cultural identity and authenticity in different forms. Such local culture that characterizes each place has been evolving by being resilient and strictly connected to its environmental context. Indeed, considering the historic urban landscape as an approach to urban conservation and planning through development, we refer to the city in its capacity to represent its development in time, to put in common different urban "facts" in time, as well as the resulting genius loci that made it different from others, but breaking the concepts of identity.

Theoretical framework: circular economy and urban growth

The rise of circular economy as reference in upcoming development strategies reveals a shared urgency to overcome present models that are evidently impotent to tackle the complexity and the "concrete universality" of certain problems, even at local level. The pressure of climate change, environmental needs, global migration phenomena, as well as the need of common financial regulations, is revealing the global, common and shared

demand to overcome the linear development paths based on extraction, production and waste. In other words, what chairs over our global productive scenario of depleting local resources to the benefit of a global market is not the figure of the return proper of the cyclical notion of time as dictated by nature, but the figure of target, the problem of how to reach linearly and efficiently the goal. In fact, our western time, at least in terms of production, traditionally addresses linearly the future and not the past. This evidently puts in close relationship the availability of means with the goals to be achieved: when the aims are too far, also the means risk being ineffective. In this perspective, we might say that our time is not simply linear but rather "project oriented". We eject our arrow (the model, something that does not exist yet) straight into the future. We are future oriented, we simulate future through a project or a model, trying so to give a shape to a "simple" potential: we project (extrude and/or forecast), we pro-eject, we eject in a linear way forward.

In urban contexts though, dealing with heritage and historic places means dealing with the past, in a circular perspective with respect to the cyclical notion of time; in fact, in the cyclical notion of time the future is at the same time the recovery and the revision of the past, which our present calls and demands to reiterate.

Noticeably, in urban historic contexts (and European cities and towns have all the historic dimension), the circular process of reinventing, regenerating, reinterpreting, respecting the past has to be aligned with the linear time of the project: maybe it is exactly the opposite. Like in seasons, that belong to the cyclical behaviour of nature that perpetuates winning regeneration processes, in traditions the transmission is driven by circular reiteration of knowledge, believes and habits: in local traditions time has already revealed its multiple dimension of care and maintenance that challenges the production imperative of the project and its linear development model.

In the traditional, pre-modern world, the community lived in close contact with the environment. Over generations, the choices of economy in a community were based on the human creative capacity to find the most appropriate ways to meet the needs within available resources. While the needs of the society were subject to gradual change over time, it was necessary to develop a habitat that could absorb the desired new requirements without undermining its basic typological characteristics and thus preferring sustainability over radical change. The result was a built environment where components

were based on typological variations that together formed a cultural territory, joining urban ensembles with the surrounding rural territories. Due to human creative capacity, such cultural territories had a great diversity, coming to represent the entire humanity over its millennial evolution. Consequently, in such a cultural territory endured the memory of humanity, characterized by elements that represented the cultural-historical authenticity of its local territorial identity. With the modern industrial development, the pre-modern way of living came to face drastic changes. Due to progress in science and technology, as well as better understanding the requirements of healthy living, populations started growing. Partly, this also resulted from an improved management of agricultural activities, and the consequent migration of a part of rural population to towns and cities.

As a matter of fact, realizing the necessity to keep sound and coherent relationship with the past while envisaging the future, is one of the key aspects of the present co-design processes with local stakeholders and citizens, and experts are often impressed by the need of stakeholders to consider past as a circular return of their history which calls to be reactivated again and again. Any lack of the circular dimension of time might indeed return as an ambiguous feature of unreceptivity and hostility that local identity might produce if relationship with the past has not been activated. It is exactly in this effort to balance the linear time of project, with the ticking of circular-cyclic time that nature or tradition impose, that the future projects and production scenarios are called to perform.

Understanding the notion of "circular economy" as an economic system aimed at minimising waste and making the most of resources, we can appreciate that there is similarity with the objectives of integrated urban conservation. The processes that had been traditionally dominant in the pre-modern period, were challenged with the introduction of the strategies of linear economy, namely the mechanization of transport and production, developed so as to eliminate limits in the building sector. The absence of barriers in many senses changed the previous rules and slowly imposed new models for urban regeneration, which included new materials, new technologies, new skills, new competences, and became more and more globalized. The treatments of historic buildings and the development of the built environment were slowly standardized at different scales. Often this resulted in the loss of construction details and of the identity of the place that were an expression of past human creativity and of the genius loci.

The recent trends that have put circular economy at the core of discussions on sustainability are moving in favor of the preservation of historic cities, opening interesting economic and cultural scenarios that will not let "preservation" being considered as a burden. Suddenly, local qualities and resilience are again becoming important and there is a run in giving back to the built environment its partly (or even fully) lost integrity and authenticity. Even tourism is contributing to this trend by developing new models based on experience, balanced judgment and taste.

The historic urban development and the sudden change

As a result of the various developments, cities started growing generating a building industry that also profited from the existing natural resources. Starting from Western European countries, this development rapidly expanded to other parts of the world, partly also due to the colonization of lands in different continents. It seemed that the resources would never finish, and consequently, traditional sustainability came under threat. Particularly in growing cities, the traditional urban fabric was subject to change and the constructing of ever taller buildings. At the same time, the traditional rural landscape started changing, and in many cases, there developed a new form of industrial landscape. In the first part of the 20th century, urban planning was too often aimed at renovation and replacement rather than maintenance. It was proposed that the modern architecture was a "machine", which would have a limited usefulness over time. Thus, it needed to be replaced or drastically renovated about every fifty years. In the same line, modern industrial household products were only designed to last a limited time to be replaced periodically. As a result, also the building aligned to the with the principles of the "linear economy", i.e. economy based on industrial products, which needed periodic replacement, in all types of artefacts.

Modern urban planning developed particularly in the post-WW2 period, i.e. in the 1950s and 1960s, when there was great need of new habitat and when industrial development was diffused into all continents. As a result of the destruction of familiar habitat associated with local identity, people started becoming aware also of the need to reconsider planning policies. In 1945, the Constitution of UNESCO stated that 'culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man'. Indeed, one of the principal scopes of UNESCO is to 'Maintain, increase and diffuse knowledge:

By assuring the conservation and protection of the world's inheritance of books, works of art and monuments of history and science'. UNESCO became the principal world organisation to promote this task, resulting in the adoption of international recommendations and conventions to guide the Member States, as well as establishing international organisations to assist in this process, including ICCROM and ICOMOS for culture and IUCN for nature. The number of international conferences and workshops have since been organised, including the First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments took place in Paris, in 1957, and the Second Congress was in Venice in 1964, both under the auspices of UNESCO. The Venice Congress adopted the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, which become known as the founding stone for the development of an international doctrine in the conservation of the built heritage.

The question of truthfulness of evidence when dealing with archaeological sites and historic buildings was already established with the development modernity in the 18th and 19th centuries. In the **Venice Charter**, in fact, authenticity was taken as "known", not requiring further definition. The preface of the Charter was written by Paul Philippot, at the time deputy of ICCROM: 'Imbued with a message from the past, the historic monuments of generations of people remain to the present day as living witnesses of their age-old traditions. People are becoming more and more conscious of the unity of human values and regard ancient monuments as a common heritage. The common responsibility to safeguard them for future generations is recognized. It is our duty to hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity.' With the diffusion of modern conservation policies to the different cultural regions, it was understood that there was need for further discussion about the significance of the notion of authenticity. The opportunity was offered by Japan, in collaboration with UNESCO, ICCROM and ICOMOS, to organize an international conference in Nara in 1994. This was anticipated by a small working group meeting in Bergen at the beginning of the same year.

Speaking in terms of cultural heritage adaptive reuse we should stress that certain circular attitude is, or should be, a common approach within the logic of all intervention phases. In traditional building sites, but also in line with the accredited conservation doctrine that started with the Venice Charter, materials and knowledge are always reused and reconsidered within circular production dynamics. Once, in traditional building sites the

reasons were mainly economic, today they are linked to the material characterization (in sense of the dignity of materials that are usually good in aging) and there are also several doctrinal foundations related to the concepts of Integrity and Authenticity. However, this is to say that circular attitude when dealing with tangible or intangible aspects of Cultural Heritage is (at least should be) a rule and not an exception and cultural heritage adaptive reuse should evolve and go beyond its current role of being one of many preservation models or acting as one of many alternative cultures of design practice.

In cultural heritage adaptive reuse what is there left from the past, is never considered as an inert or passive residual of history available for additional repurposing through many categories of reuse, whether it's recycling, up-cycling, down-cycling. These residuals of past speak to us as active fragments of history that are, as they are, already interrelated among them and with many other tangible or intangible features, that make sense only as ensemble. If their reiteration, whatever will be the cause or the form of reuse, does not lack to consider these fragments as a coherent formal, material or functional system only then the operation of use-reuse will avoid the risky to decline into the abuse.

Integrated Urban Conservation and the HUL Approach

The conservation of historic urban areas became the key issues in the 1975 European Architectural Heritage Year, sponsored by the Council of Europe. During this year, there were a series of conferences organized in different parts of Europe in order to examine the policies and methodologies experimented in each case. As a result, the Council of Europe adopted the *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage*, followed by the *Amsterdam Declaration*, which both brought forward the notion of "integrated urban conservation". This was further discussed by UNESCO, who also adopted an international recommendation concerning the *Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas* (1976). This new planning approach was based on the already existing planning methodology, but with a fundamental difference. While the modern urban planning often was targeting newly built areas, the conservation approach was aimed at the identification of the significance and qualities of an existing urban area. Therefore, while the planning norms for modern areas would be based on new design ideas, the planning of existing historic areas needed to be based on the identification and recognition of all the types of buildings and spaces that together formed the urban ensemble. Furthermore, it was necessary to understand such

traditional historic areas within the environmental context, involving both nature and more recent urbanised areas. Such approach developed recently into the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) as developed by many international actors and organisations, merging the tangible and the intangible components of urban built environments.

This is exactly why HUL is important if connected to circular trends. It is through the eyes of landscape and within the Historic Urban Landscape approach, that classification categories of reuse, considered as potential drivers of the future production scenario, shift towards the identification of those forces that perform and guarantee the integration. When it comes to the preservation project, and in particular to the cultures of adaptive reuse, the driving question becomes: how to embrace the full complexity of historic urban landscape phenomena, beyond the empirical, doctrinal or any other accredited approach? What could be represented as an order that make sense rather than the simple extension of space, land, panorama or territory?

How to find the landscape, the glue, to execute the entire montage of past and future sequences, material and formal expressions of heritage and social practices and outcomes, into the circular business or production dynamics?

Prior to HUL, The Landscape approach considers established ideas of landscape like as morphology, panorama or polity/region, but following European landscape Convention it mainly defines Landscape as an area that people share, value and use; Within this framework, landscape is out of the privileged fieldwork of experts or land owners but it belongs to everyone from users to those that are gratified by its enjoyment, and thus all views should be considered when it comes to its preservation, planning or management. Given that in the landscape approach, tangible and intangible components merge, they relate the individual dimension to the public and collective dimension, as well as solidify the relationships between past and future through the present, enhancing the present responsibilities in relating past and future, both at collective and individual domain. As it is asked for natural "heritage", individuals are responsible to transmit urban peculiarities with all their social and cultural layers to the future, reversing the negative impact of the linear pressure of the global market, which tends to the standardization of daily objects.

So, who owns the landscape? Who can claim property over "wealth" that is not quantifiable or exchangeable as an accumulation of things, but based on the quality of the relationship between people and things on Earth and on the nutrition of the culture of complexity this relationship imposes itself?

Through the eyes of Historic Urban Landscape *owning* cultural heritage is related to the right of <u>use</u>, to the adaptation of reuse which never turns out as appropriation, but only as common use. Thus, the protection, management and planning of common goods, intended not as protection of property, of something external (as opposed) to the individual, whether private or public. This situation additionally challenges traditional economy and approaches to governance by reactivating business models that are driven also by the originality and the creativeness of social initiatives and struggles.

Which circular scenarios then within multiple identities that give their voices within historic urban landscapes? How to overcome the "multiple practices of mutual recognition", of the multiple set of knowledge, values, aspirations or collective will, the more complex participation processes are, and finally advance toward shaping a concrete and shared body of mutual identification. In other words, how to advance towards a shared vision that is at the same time a coherent and readable plan of expression, as for example the project is? Moreover, to which extend it is possible to give form to something like historic urban landscape project, that cannot be captured neither within autographic dimension of experts, nor inside multiple individual expressions of community, being at the same time the result of a circular scenario that blurs the crystalline line between cultures of production and the nature of resources?

It is intuitable that the closed bodies of traditional preservation, planning and management categories have to step back and give place to those approaches that are able to embrace the multiple residuals of history and reactivate them again in a process of reuse, where producing is not separate from learning and co-designing with - rather than against – Nature. This means not only greening, but understanding the "ecosystem" values of each part of heritage. Of course, production with residuals might result as an ambiguous process, as it reactivates something that has been as rule left behind, giving at the same time a new impetus to the established thought bringing out its unexpected possibilities.

The residual exists and operates within the interstitial space of what has been (past) and what is to be (future), allowing the operation to get out of established formats, categories or, in terms of urban morphology, typologies and reconnect again.



Fig. 3: Traditional solutions of reusing materials, residuals, as in the Venetian Terrazzo floor



Fig. 4: The work of reinventing meanings and uses for the residuals, as made by Carlo Scarpa in the Querini Stampalia museum.

If we address HUL under this operational condition, it results as an approach that helps us to recover residuals that are "in common" within the heterogeneous and composite spatial and temporal urban stratigraphy. In other words, the residuals make possible (and visible) the relationship between different terms (models, types, etc.) and opens the possibility of dialogue between them instead of falling back on themselves as separate and inert remaining. This approach also sheds a new light on terms such as "cultural identity" (always if there is any such thing), genius loci, integrity and authenticity, leading us to exit the "identity" perspective, by acting divergently, as a "fruitful waste", that brings out a range of unexpected resources instead of increasing the convergence of identity as the classification of the same.

The practice

Relating urban regeneration to tradition in its tangible and intangible components means recognizing the link of different layers and mostly of different scales. As the theory of typological urban conservation highlights, parts of a building (we may add also its interiors, including handmade furniture) talk about the reasons for a certain type of built environment development in time. As we have seen, authenticity and integrity play a role in this. But what do we mean with authenticity and integrity and how much this extends in urban contexts?

Thirty years after the Venice Conference, the Japanese meeting adopted the Nara Document on Authenticity, which has since been recognised by the World Heritage Committee and included in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. The reason for the organisation of the Nara meeting was to examine the applicability of the notion of "authenticity" in all the world cultures. The question was raised due to some criticism about the European bias in judging authenticity. Indeed, one of the principles established in Nara was referred to the diversity of human creativity: 'The diversity of cultures and heritage in our world is an irreplaceable source of spiritual and intellectual richness for all humankind. The protection and enhancement of cultural and heritage diversity in our world should be actively promoted as an essential aspect of human development.' (art. 5) Consequently, it is stated that understanding the significance of a resource depends on the truthfulness of the sources of information, i.e. authenticity. We need to understand and judge the meaning of heritage properties within its cultural context. Therefore, the critical question is the identification of the relevant information sources in each case. These can be referred to material testimonies as well as to social and cultural belief systems, such as 'design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling.' (art. 13).



Fig. 5: Picture taken in old Gorizia to a traditional local Austro-Hungarian villa's facade



Fig. 6: picture taken in Gorizia to a similar building where no attention is paid in preserving both authenticity and integrity of the façade.

Integrity refers to the structural, material, aesthetic whole of an object, namely how much of its initial fullness remains or is left. This may be clearly true for small objects as well as for urban areas and do not address mainly their tangible components, but also their intangible component. Authenticity and integrity are strictly related but do not always come together. In historic buildings, for example, the concept of maintenance was essential and could include actions of replacements of some parts (this is in itself circular, not only because linked to the use of "natural materials" but to the idea of waste and energy reduction, opposed to the present linear process of substitution of the "whole") reducing the material but maintaining the conceptual authenticity of a work (fig. 5 and 6). Important here to stress that authenticity and integrity applies also to modern built heritage, and their weight should be aligned to the heritage intrinsic values.

As we have also noticed above, the concepts of authenticity and integrity are means and represent something to be "transmitted", as the genius loci. Genius Loci refers to the specific creative inputs that is generated by a specific territory (Fig. 7). Historic development associated to climatic conditions create different, peculiar, place oriented human responses for adaptation. This means that the tangible manifestations of human adaptations represent a proof of the history of a territory. This is true in rural contexts as well as in urban ones. Traditional buildings, as well as traditional crafts and knowledge are expressions of the genius loci, of the adaptation of human beings to specific environments, beyond cultural "contaminations" and before globalization trends that might have reproduced the final effect, but not its intrinsic peculiarities that may be related, for example, to the circularity of maintenance (wood similar ceramic tiles achieve almost perfect final appearance as wood planks, but cannot be either repaired or treated as the original).

Genius loci though must be accompanied by the sense of place (that is often considered as the genius loci) although it should be understood with an additional dimension, the social one. The sense of place indeed refers to the present use of the place in line with its genius loci (Fig. 8). The sense of place reflects the historic development, the peculiarities that made a space place for a specific group of individuals in time. Sense of place refers to the use of the space. Traditional buildings and local traditions give the "tangible" contextualisation of the place and their respect, maintenance, contribute to the preservation of this sense. If a traditional architecture may be considered unique or peculiar, the sense of place makes it even more unique. The sense of place contributes to the quality of life as one is relating to his own environment. Genius loci may be visible in architecture, infrastructural solutions, landscaping, crafts and popular rituals and festivities. At the same time, genius loci may be granted in contexts of absence of the "sense of place".



Fig. 7: Venice is a perfect example of genius Loci, displaying numerous solutions of adaptation to local needs and solutions in many of its tangible and intangible components. Pic. From http://events.veneziaunica.it/it/content/ca-farsetti



Fig. 8: Venice though is often referred as a place where the sense of place has been lost for the lack of connection between present use and historic development, determining doubts about its authenticity as a city. Pic. From https://veneziaautentica.com/impact-tourism-venice/

Unfortunately, our ongoing researches within the CLIC project show that the practice so far has not been fully positive in connecting urban preservation with respect of authenticity and integrity and with respect of the genius loci with maintenance of the sense of place, due to numerous factors that could be listed as:

- Lack of knowledge of the preservation theory, namely properly merging heritage preservation, adaptive reuse, urban conservation and regeneration. Such lack belongs both to the political side, the decision makers, that have not been able so far always to design policies or implement tools and practices to make this possible, but it belongs also to the professionals, that have not been either trained properly or capable to achieve the right understanding of the main heritage concepts;
- Lack of awareness by the citizens, the individuals, the traditional heritage owners (important to stress that we are not referring to monuments), who have still difficulties in understanding the importance of their heritage, of their genius loci manifestations, of the sense of place and of their active influence and possible contribution to this.
- The market pressures and logic, that have been both communicating the "better" of new materials and technologies, even when this was not true, and generated a set of

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standardized products easily available in the linear production chain. As for other goods, also built environment has been suffering of the "intermediate and provisional solutions" in the logic of "this may be changed anytime".

- Inorganic development of the built heritage solutions, that have been growing without the traditional, slow, connections, due to the incredible grows of introduction of new materials and technologies, often produced outside the building sector. This is why, for example, installations of the heating or cooling systems are often added and not integrated in the structural whole of buildings.
- Difficulties in accepting that adaptive reuse of heritage and traditional built environment must be intended as a biunivocal adaptation, of buildings to men and of men to buildings. In this respect, linear economy has played a fundamental negative role.
- The misleading idea of private property has generated a general fall of interest by individuals to accept their responsibility in contributing to the public space. As an example, if it is true that an apartment is considered fully private, with the inclusion of all its parts, on the opposite it has an important public dimension that is both tangible, as the prospect of the apartment on the public road or square, and intangible, as the historic layers in the apartments that are not merely related to the private sphere of the previous owners, but on the relationship the apartment and its building have with the rest of the context.

Conclusions

The paper has been trying to highlight in different forms how much the fundamentals of the heritage and urban preservation theory are related to the fundamentals of the circular economy, opening up an interesting scenario to favor HUL. In reality it is not simply a connection, given that traditional knowledge, built environment and cultural sites have been generated on the cyclical processes of the pre-industrial society, thus related to local resources, materials, techniques, competences and habits.

highlighting such connection (historical and theoretical) must Nevertheless, accompanied by a clear overview of the practical synergies between adaptive reuse, urban preservation and tradition, as highlighted in the CLIC project, as:

- Respect of integrity and authenticity promoting maintenance instead of renewal. Restoration must come as an exception, while maintenance as a rule. Maintenance is cost-efficient.
- *Materials recycling and re-scaling* generating virtuous mechanisms that reproduce the historic building site in its practice and results. Creativity is not merely expressed by designing new shapes, but also in upscaling residuals.
- Objects/Finishings/Furniture reuse and re-scaling generating virtuous mechanisms that reproduce the historic building site in its practice and results. Creativity is also expressed in up-scaling residuals.
- *Multifunctionality* giving the urban tissue intensity in use, as in the past where low mobility means were facilitating a full and intense use of the urban environment, during all its daily life. This much refers to the sense of place.
- Generation of economies based on culture and nature new aesthetic or heritage communities are growing, where mutual needs relationships are different than the traditional ones, given the present existence of a virtual sphere and market.
- Resilience as regenerating force the need to refer back to the local knowledge and traditional produces new old-economies and favor both traditions and urban heritage protection
- Retrofitting is not meant anymore as a simply adaptation of buildings tout-court, but as a more complex and protection-oriented approach which involves a mutual adaptation object-man.
- Community/collectivity engagement or simple awareness A clear work of education and awareness raising has to be done to favor the circular economy process in urban regeneration. However such effort is today lighter than some decays ago.

Circular economy in urban context must then act at different levels, not only in the buildings adaptive reuse:

- it is about objects the micro scale (think about the solidarity markets or the repair cafes)
- It is about buildings and their maintenance the meso scale
- It is about urban ecosystems the macro scale

Evidently, this is not an individual action, but a more societal movement:

- More than punctual projects, the importance is given to governance, that is how micromeso and macro are interrelated.
- To reach the micro level awareness raising is needed, as well as acting on the level of commons;
- To reach the meso level awareness raising should be merged to training, given that professionals themselves do not promote the "right thing";
- To reach the macro level, courageous policies should be put in place, recognizing the primary role of culture and nature in the citizens well-being.

Still, even if the conservation movement have been developing the conservation theory for about one century, relying initially on the artistic qualities, lately on the socio-cultural specificities and finally – to convince also the policy makers – on the economic values (we should refer here to the works of Peacock, Throsby, Klamer, etc.), today is the economy itself coming back to help the preservation movement. Although the fundamentals of the circular economy today rely on the environmental and health concerns, they let traditional practice principle re-emerge, together with the need of more sustainable materials, techniques, technologies and procedures.

The real contribution of landscape concept in the EU-CoE Convention and of the Historic Urban Landscape approach in the UNESCO Recommendation has been to re-connect in planning the heritage dimension to the socio-economic dimensions, making the concept of identity not referred to the community, but to the territory. Considering the loss of the traditional concept of community, the territorial identity helps in generating new other communities that are volatile, project oriented and topic focused. The opportunity of European urban context today in terms of tradition and heritage preservation is given by

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the spread of communities of sustainability that acknowledge the importance of circular economy and renew their interest (direct or indirect) toward local resources that are by definition part of the tradition. Never in the history of the preservation theory the modern school of economy has been so close to tradition and heritage.

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