Knowledge approaches for the recovery of built heritage

“Architecture begins where two stones are superimposed accurately.”
(Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe)

The periodical meeting of the Ar.Tec Association - called Colloqui.ATe - is an important debate opportunity for professors and researchers in the field of Technical Architecture and in relation with the entire national scientific community. This issue of the journal collects the scientific dissertations discussed at the conference held in Matera in 2016, focusing on the issues of Building Performance, Building Design and Techniques, Building Heritage. The discussions had a special focus on “MATER(i)A” (Materials, Architecture, Technology, Energy/Environment, Reuse, Interdisciplinarity, Adaptability), meant as the modality to characterize the above mentioned subjects and to define innovative research areas in the field of refurbishment and enhancement of the existing building heritage, with particular reference to the technical and technological innovations.

Indeed, the set of problems related to the renovation of the existing building assets is nowadays one of the central knots of the human transformation of the territory.

The first focus is pointed towards the exploration of the possibilities of intervention and transformation, by identifying and defining the interrelations, and of the complexity of the relationships between the buildings and the environmental system. At a later time - through the determination of the constraint conditions imposed by the object and the environment, and the degrees of freedom allowed by the shared conservation principles - it is possible to set the intervention as a balanced synthesis of the complex problem.
relationship between conservation, transformation, enhancement and fruition. This is the reason why it is necessary to develop more specific design and operational orientations to support the definition of the possibilities of intervention, by designing the restoration of the buildings as a system in which the technical and cultural variables constitute a well-balanced framework between decisions and subsequent tangible processes of conservation and transformation.

In this design project, the ability to identify and recognize the buildings’ values shows its importance. This building heritage, indeed, exactly expresses - with different manners and meanings - the culture that has generated it: the research and definition of values and aims (and consequent definition of a scale of priorities) is an indispensable requirement for man’s life. It allows him to overcome the dichotomous relationship between the decisions and consequent behaviours and the needs associated with the use of goods.

The precise knowledge of values in the renovation process of the existing building is therefore essential, since the conservation, assuring the fulfillment of a basic collective need, finds its justification in the importance attributed to the architectural heritage, according to a scale of priorities defined according to the personal knowledge of the good. In this way, the attribution of a value becomes a process of enhancement (meaning as the highlighting of the building heritage’s own values, and not as an added value).

It follows that the renovation project can and must be elaborated on the basis of a in-depth technical and scientific knowledge of the object of intervention as a whole and of its constituent elements, on the analysis of the values that they possess, in order to relate them with the potentiality that they develop to fulfil the functional, performance and usability needs requested by the user.

Only in this perspective the restoration process becomes a cultural process which - before being a technical process -, starting from the “limitations” imposed by the existent stock (in terms of both material and formal), comes to the satisfaction of users’ needs in a way “suitable” with the substantial nature of the existing buildings. This is how the conservation of a resource releases itself from the chimeric tonality of “pure conservation” to evolve into the more rational “controlled transformation”, a less schematic but more appropriate and flexible process to bring the architectural heritage close to the users’ needs.
It follows, then, that any intervention should aim to hand down to posterity a
heritage not minor than what we have received from the past; a heritage where
the value of conservation necessarily passes through the value of knowledge,
enhancement and, finally, of the revitalization of all of which the existing
building is holder.

Antonello Pagliuca

Editor