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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The role of knowledge enhancement for protecting the Alpine Cultural Heritage: insights from emergency management in the CHEERS project.

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One of the main features of the Alpine Region are its outstanding natural and cultural resources. The morphological and geographical characteristics of this territorial area and the natural environment have shaped the life and the economy of the local communities over the hundred years. Due to a number of quite easy natural passages through the mountains, the alpine region is also peculiar for the transnational relationships and exchanges built up by the alpine populations in different countries. These dynamics produced, in many cases, similar economic activities, architectures, pieces of arts, handicrafts and communities' traditions.

From the one hand, the Alpine Macroregion is recognized by the European Commission, as in ESPON, EUSALP and Interreg Alpine Space Program as a system of territories with common characteristics and a history connecting them. It becomes, therefore, object of common policies. On the other hand, it is important to highlight and valorize the different development paths, as well as diversified are the current images of the Alpine areas in terms of quality and characteristics of individual socio-economic systems.

We then speak of places characterized in a strong and substantial way by being Alpine in a "plural" sense and, consequently, characterized in various ways and shapes by that series of elements and dynamics that many studies have now helped to highlight as "specific ". Here the reference is to the increasingly solid and widespread literature on the subject produced as the result of many seasons of European investments in theoretical and applied research projects on the most diverse themes within, among others, the Interreg Alpine Space Program.

Assuming the UNESCO perspective as a reference for more precisely focusing the cultural heritage as the target of the CHEERS project, common characteristics can be envisaged in alpine territories, both tangible and intangible. Values are related to individual elements as well as to the cultural heritage system as a whole. The alpine traditional way of life, production and consumption models, history, culture and the outstanding natural environment and landscapes can be well perceived in the different typologies of tangible and intangible cultural heritage spread around and, in some cases, in very isolated locations:

- Historical mobility and accessibility infrastructures, like the UNESCO Heritage Bernina line, a rail line which connects Italy and Switzerland through a passage in a glacier and over ancient bridges;
- Monuments and votive chapels along the mountain trails, built in the past to provide a place for a little rest during the transhumance or protecting the people travelling for work or commercial purposes;

- Churches and other religious buildings and sites, telling the story and living conditions of the alpine people and families. For instance, it is quite easy to find frescos on the external wall of churches all along the Alps with the image of Saint Christophe, protector of the pilgrims which used to cross the Alpine passes over the centuries;
- Museums, collections and archives, that bear witness of the history, culture, arts, crafts and knowledge of the alpine people;
- Decorated ancient palaces and villas enriched with furniture, furnishing and pieces of arts and handicrafts, where wealthy families used to exhibit their well-being;
- Fortresses, military buildings and other traces from the wars which took place along the Alps, a cultural heritage which is more and more recognized at the international level, as demonstrates the so called Walk of Peace from the Alps to the Adriatic, which is in the tentative list of UNESCO;
- Production sites, like early hydropower plants or mines, like the UNESCO Heritage of Mercury which includes the mines of Idrija, in Slovenia;
- Prehistoric sites and rock engravings, like the UNESCO Heritage Rock Engravings National Park of Naquane in Italy
- Urban and rural traditional buildings and historical centers.

This means that from a territorial and sustainable development point of view such heritage and the related system of territorial assets can be recognized as a crucial territorial resource for many reasons, ranging from a heritage representing the origins and the roots of local communities, to their history, traditional arts and crafts, and source of economic revenues through productions and tourism activities, thus producing long term positive externalities and flows of values.

Because of the specificities of the Alps according to their geographical localization, geomorphology and characteristics of the environment, that gave birth to the alpine cultural heritage itself, the heritage resources are often undermined by a wide range of risks and natural hazards, such as floods, earthquakes, fires and avalanches. Positive externalities therefore can also be recognized in the protection of such endowments, which embody high values for local and over-local communities, and in the enhancement of the local capabilities and skills to deal with emergencies which threaten the system of territorial heritage assets.

It becomes therefore more and more important to identify and implement tools able to increase and ameliorate knowledge coupling the field of natural hazards with the one of cultural heritage in a stable and more effective way. This working on the hazards themselves and the characteristics they develop in these specific environments and according to the specificities of the exposed cultural heritage. The approach also refers to a better understanding of the damaging dynamics produced by different events on different cultural heritage pieces and assets and how to slow down the increasing vulnerability of cultural heritage pieces according to their specificities. Innovation can be found, therefore, also in the need for stabilizing cooperation and knowledge sharing among a system of involved subjects which normally do not share and interact.

The CHEERS project, funded by the European Commission under the program Interreg Alpine Space 2014-2020, aims at contributing to these goals by proposing a series of useful activities to prepare for emergencies involving cultural heritage, through the enhancement itself of knowledge and the development of assessment tools for supporting decision-making processes to be used during the preparation of salvaging activities and during the operational interventions, so to reduce the damage caused by disasters.

One of the central activities in the project has been focused on knowledge building and the development of tools for the dissemination of a concept of "know-how for the rescue of Alpine cultural heritage", the enhancement of the awareness about the need for a stronger and more stable knowledge about the cultural heritage and natural hazards in the areas involved in the project activities, and the offer of assessment tools to be used in "peace time" as a support for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the salvaging activities involving cultural heritage sites, buildings and assets during the emergencies.

The Cheers project concept of knowledge deals therefore also with the increase of the awareness and participation of stakeholders and communities through training activities, strengthening of information about their own cultural heritage and the related characteristics, fragilities and vulnerabilities and the direct involvement in the planning of rescue operations of cultural heritage.

One of the main characteristics of the Cheers project, compared to other research activities in the field of the protection of cultural heritage assets facing natural hazards, is the focus on the emergency phase. When an alarm is given or a natural disaster already took place involving or likely to involve cultural heritage assets, teams constituted by experts in cultural heritage, civil protection and all the other subjects in charge for the management of the crisis at the local and over-local levels have to be organized and make decisions. The decisions are about the identification of the cultural heritage sites where to intervene and how to organize the salvaging on-the-field operations according to the available resources (people, expertise, vehicles, devices, etc.). This under pressure because of timing and safety issues, of the need for updated and accurate information and knowledge and under the strict regulations which characterize the cultural heritage management and handling at any time and conditions in all the Alpine countries.

The question this part of the Cheers project offers an answer to is: if the rescue team has just a little time and not enough resources to salvage all the cultural heritage at risk, what should be recovered first? And, even more difficult, what the rescue teams will have to leave should they not be able to salvage everything? "Tragic decisions" to be taken rapidly and with high responsibilities looking at a so highly valuable heritage. The answer would be: what is most valuable should be saved first. Actually, the project cannot of course discuss cultural heritage values per se as only experts and local and over-local stakeholders and the subjects responsible for the protection of cultural heritage have the roles and competencies for developing what can be called a "priority list for salvaging". Such an assessment embodies many elements, among which, the meaning and importance of a certain cultural heritage element. This not only at the overall level but also for the local communities and the Alpine culture as a whole.

Such an approach offers to the local communities also a different perspective about their heritage, integrating in the "knowledge itself" signals of value, fragility, vulnerability therefore enhancing the awareness of the dangers and of the related potential impacts.

Different tools have been developed in order to make the approach mentioned above become operational. Such tools are the parts of an overall reasoning starting with the methodology ATTACH - EvAluaTion Tool for Alpine Cultural Heritage. ATTACH has been conceived as a support to decision-making, meant to provide a list of priorities for the interventions: where to go first, what to salvage first, according to the assessment of the local cultural heritage values. Values which are the results of an expert and local stakeholder based interaction and assessment process and which are related to a specific use: the increase in the effectiveness of salvaging activities. According to the functioning of the tool, salvaging activities are addressed, among others, by a priority list based on "functional values", that is, those revealed by the assessment process itself. The priority list is obtained as the "matching of value assessments" developed by many experts and stakeholders. This based on local cultural heritage assets characteristics, among which

unicity/rarity, age, constituting materials, historical and artistic relevance, importance for the local communities. The availability of such a list would therefore address cultural heritage salvaging operations and support on-the-field decision makers so to minimize heritage and values losses during emergencies. At the same time, the activity itself becomes an occasion for enhancing the knowledge itself of the local cultural values embodied in the art pieces, buildings and sites and the awareness about their fragility and vulnerability.