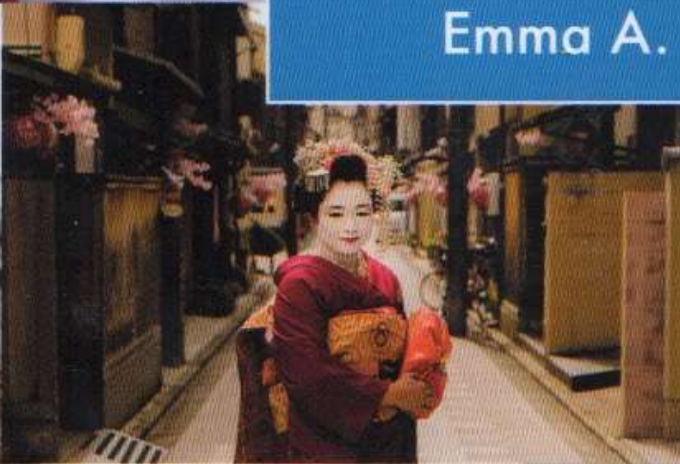# CULTURAL HERITAGE AND IDENTITY ACROSS EAST AND WEST

Italy, China, Japan, South Africa between Law and History

edited by
Emma A. Imparato

CULTURAL HERITAGE
AND IDENTITY
ACROSS EAST AND WEST

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Editoriale Scientifica
NAPOLI

Proprietà letteraria riservata

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CULTURAL HERITAGE: PERCEPTION, CONSERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Francesca Fariello

1. *Identity and intercultural context in the process of forming cultural identities*

In contemporary societies the concept of collective identity is fundamental to the general perception of cultural heritage, even more so when it is necessary to deal with a community made up of different cultural and social groups living together in the same local context.

Cultural identity is a value that is reflected in the legacy constituted by cultural heritage. Within the constitutive substratum of cultural identity there is a sedimentation of the historical memory of civilisations which provides the background for the set of moral values of a collective identity.

Continuing to consider the concept of cultural identity, it could be said that the repositories of a given cultural identity can be individuals or even communities, those communities that feel represented by common values that have settled within the history shared by a social group. In fact, cultural identity refers to identification with (or sense of belonging to) a particular group based on various cultural categories, including nationality, ethnicity, race, gender and religion.

Cultural identity is constructed and maintained through the process of sharing collective knowledge such as traditions, heritage, language, aesthetics, norms and customs. As individuals typically affiliate with more than one cultural group, cultural identity is complex and multifaceted. Initially, scholars claimed that cultural identity had to be considered as something obvious and stable, while today most of them usually consider cultural identity as contextual and dependent upon temporal and spatial changes. In the globalised world – especially with the increasing number of intercultural encounters – cultur-

al identity is continuously being enacted, negotiated, maintained, and challenged through communicative practices[1].

By analysing the etymology of the term "identity", *identitas* derived from *idem*, identical, it is possible to examine in even more detail what is implicit in the term "identity". This is also a process of recognition of what belongs to the individual and what makes them identical and that also renders possible the interconnection of subjects. At the same time, inside the substratum of the definition of identity there is some sort of distinction between what is different, what is not identical, who is the other: there is a cognitive encounter of otherness.

It is precisely in the context of discussing the concept of identity, which in itself is to be considered as something plural and not individual, that it is fundamental to consider identity as not monolithic. Identity is acceptable as something plural, even if it stems from analysing the individual.

The characteristics of identity and identity traits change according to location and context. There are no prevailing identity traits, but these identity traits may appear prominently in a given historical period. What is known about the self and what is known about the other play a special role in the construction of identity.

Collective identity is defined by modern sociologists as an "individual's cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relationship, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity"[2].

It is in any case important to remember, whether an individual or collective identity, that identity concerns the recognition of the other in their full humanity.

According to this definition of collective identity, it could also be affirmed that observing a collective experience of emotional connection with cultural heritage, researchers are detecting a double impact

[1] V. H. -H. Chen, (2014), Cultural Identity, *Key Concepts in Intercultural Dialogue*, 22.<https://centerforinterculturaldialogue.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/key-concept-cultural-identity.pdf>.

[2] F. Polletta, J. M. Jasper (2001), "Collective Identity and Social Movements", in *Annual Review of Sociology*. Columbia University, p. 27.

on modern society in the recognition process of the collective values and of the interconnection between different cultures.

To connect people with heritage it is necessary to create knowledge. After the exploration of this statement, a necessary consequence was the discussion and comparison of the meaning of two terms that can be considered essential to understand the different approaches from an anthropological point of view (especially in the context of contemporary and intercultural societies on a global scale): multiculturalism and interculturalism.

In the context of the discussion on the meanings and impacts of the different approaches adopted by multiculturalism and interculturalism, it seemed necessary to examine in depth the discourse on otherness, and Todorov's studies could not fail to display a manifesto of the empathic understanding and of the necessity to embrace diversity. The aim of this discussion was to briefly review the extensive output of the literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov, who in his studies on the "other" and on the concepts of civilisation and on the relations among different cultures, reconsidered the concept of the barbarian as one who does not consider other humans as being at the same level[3].

The barbarian does not treat others as human beings. It is necessary to insist on the point that what should really guide us in the intercultural relationship can absolutely be traced back to what has been defined in the history of thought as absolute values, in other words, those intrinsic values in human beings, pre-existing in human nature, and the most typical of these absolute values in human beings is "art". Art is the ultimate expression of the concept of gratuitousness; for human beings it is necessary to create beauty for pure enjoyment.

In this regard, Josefová states that "Intercultural communication means the social interaction of different cultures. These cultures can be represented by both individuals and organizations, social groups, schools, associations, societies and even states. Culture is a set of factors giving a sense and value to human coexistence in a society. It includes religion, social and cultural values, art, education and science. Culture and social development influence each other. However, people often have a lot of prejudices and stereotypes"[4].

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[3] T. Todorov, (2009), *La paura dei barbari. Oltre lo scontro delle civiltà*, Garzanti: Milan.
[4] A. Josefová, (2014), *The cultural diversity as a phenomenon of the multicultural society*, Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences.

2. *The discussions on interculturalism*

In the multiculturalist meta-critique, interculturalism is at best "a version of multiculturalism rather than... an alternative paradigm"[5]. For Modood, interculturalism helps multiculturalism to correct some of its weaknesses, making it more true to itself in the process, as non-essentialist and dialogue-oriented as its presumed opponent and itself a centre-building rather than centre-fleeing "multicultural nationalism". In summary, interculturalism and multiculturalism are "critical friends", not "alternatives"[6].

The discussions on interculturalism have given rise to a new trend in the reconsideration of history and above all in its appropriate modes of narration from the point of view of respect for different civilisations, protagonists on the same level in the study of history. However, even more important was the different orientation of cultures on an equal level due to the change of perspective of historical narratives. The reconsideration on an equal footing of different cultures gave rise to a greater openness towards diversity, which was better suited to the construction of the new global realities of the third millennium.

A new essential question that echoed in the new global reality was superimposed on the outdated colonialist conceptions that had politicised not only the vision of past history, but that had simultaneously created fractures on the human and social level in the construction of future history, in the context of political hierarchies that were unjustly broken down in racial confrontation. In this regard, for Todorov the concept of absolute relativism was necessary to face the Eurocentric point of view; it was necessary to unhinge this phenomenon that had been affecting society for a long time.

The absolute judgement was, therefore, a mere preconception, it went beyond reasoning, flattening and if on a multicultural level relativism, it acted positively, in our global, intercultural realities. Absolute relativism became the key element for a more inclusive attitude

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[5] T. Modood, (2017), "Intercultural Public Intellectual Engagement", in F. Mansouri (eds.), *Interculturalism at the Crossroads*, UNESCO Publishing: Paris.

[6] T. Modood, (2016), "Interculturalism, Multiculturalism and the Majority", in N. Meer, T. Modood, R. Zapata-Barrero (eds.), *Multiculturalism and Interculturalism: debating the dividing lines*, Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh.

in favour of a more peaceful coexistence and the survival of different cultures.

At the crossroads of intercultural reality, it is absolutely necessary to find a third discourse to adapt to the transversality of cultures. "The elsewhere" is the kingdom of anthropology. It is necessary to apply the discourse of cultural relativism to direct the logical and empathic sense. Especially in our contemporary intercultural society, there is a greater need to create a dialogue between different cultures: echoing Kant, what makes the difference between individuals and cultures is the individual enthusiasm, the direction, the horizon of civilisations.

In the area of heritage perception, it is important to consider how individual and collective identity overlap and interact. Individual identity contributes to the formation of collective identity and, at the same time, comes into continuous contact with it: it influences and it is influenced in the process of forming new identities. But even more important is to observe how within the multitude of individual identities of the same subject there can be a plurality of identities that influences the definition and the creation of an increasing number of political, social and cultural identities. In this case it is increasingly important to bear in mind that this plurality of identities of the individual lives and manifests itself through cultural identity.

Cultural identity can be considered as something that is in perennial osmosis, in transformation and in movement. Individual and collective identities come into play, especially in the process of the subjectivisation of cultures.

After the fall of the "bipolar system", and in particular after the Twin Towers attack (9/11), the ideological oppositions – that had consolidated into the two political factions referred to as the world powers – disappeared: the dissolution of the Soviet Union occurred and was accompanied by a relative dissolution of that "Old World" that was divided in two politically. The opposition was even clearer with NATO: the USA and Europe. The United States of America on one side and, on the other side of the dichotomy, the countries of the Soviet orbit, Russia and satellite countries, together with China. However, the Third World countries, often with a colonial past, remained outside, subject to the bipolar system of the NATO and Soviet countries.

The political approach that had also generated the ideological division of the citizens of the world who considered themselves subjects, individuals, oriented in agreement with or in opposition to the country to which they belonged, was beginning to crumble.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the division of the political and ideological world in two was symbolically eliminated to move towards unity, towards the global world, but perhaps the opportunity of being "two" might also imply the possibility of being "other". With globalisation, sometimes, we perceive a lack of being able to be something alternative, something else. The subject remains alone in the choice of their own individuality.

This way of thinking has undergone reached important turning point since the loss of the dualism. The struggles of the contemporary world recently have been based on individual rights. The importance of the Warsaw Pact and NATO induced the individual to adopt an identity-based approach that remained limited within two macro-systems. With the advent of globalisation, the individual has access to an unlimited amount of information which, however, can cause destabilisation and confusion and undermine individual critical thinking.

The benefits of this contemporary historical age could be seen through the possibility to witness a greater predisposition to cultural openness but there is also a great difficulty in the process of elaboration. Individual identity is more complex, but, at the same time, it is also more fragile, because, perhaps, it no longer has the time to assimilate the information that is introduced by the global system at the extreme speed of the new digital technologies. It is for this reason that the world of anthropology has begun to become more and more interested in the collapse generated by the breakdown of the bipolar system, to take a concrete interest in what happens in the passage of the most extreme individualism.

Collective identity is in a phase of great crisis; there is, however, a really important cultural hybridisation in contemporary intercultural societies, in the context of which new bearer identities of benevolent tendencies towards cultural hybridisations are being formed, generating new identities that are influenced by cultural exchanges and that are increasingly sensitive to the consideration and perception of diversity as an element of wealth.

The new global citizens are increasingly oriented towards the protection and promotion of the global cultural heritage and also tend to consider it an important element of identity value. These are specifically the culturally cosmopolitan and interconnected *élites* who speak a *lingua franca* (usually English) and have the same habits. The formation of these *élites* appeals much more naturally to their culture than

to their nature. In this regard, it can be firmly stated that it is precisely the movable characteristic of culture that fights the immobility of radicalism; cultural identities, in fact, are never pure, never immovable[7].

Cultivating art, literature, knowledge of the global cultural heritage, the legacy of different cultures and civilisations, leads to the peculiar cultural propensity that makes us develop a strong sense of empathy and curiosity for the other, orienting individuals to respect different cultures, to embrace diversity, in order to create a peaceful coexistence in intercultural societies. This happens in a global space that eliminates distances, especially in those spaces that are generally defined as the "non-places" of globalisation.

The answer to the changes of this 20-year period of the new millennium, which have not always had positive implications, is to seize the opportunities offered by globalisation. It is well known that there are greater possibilities for interconnection between geographically distant and culturally different subjects. However, there is still a subtle repression of differences, due to what has been defined as a sort of tendency towards individual homologation, which is rampant and it finds an answer in many forms of radicalisation.

Radicalism is, in fact, an extreme response to the homologation trend that has been inherited from the system that "globalises"; it is a sort of negative acculturation, it takes place on the reverse side, to combat the imposition of a new system and the formation of a new homologated identity.

The need to regulate the plurality of identity arises from contemporary intercultural realities, because it is often not peaceful and develops in contexts of inequality. If there is a guaranteed cultural plan, there are no problems with a multidirectional vision of history. In his criticism of the political scientist Samuel Phillips Huntington on his 1996 work *The Clash of Civilizations*, Todorov himself states that, in times of great conflicts, regulation can generate further tensions and contradictions and, therefore, there is a need to find models that encourage intermingling and hybridisation[8].

Hence, there is a need to start proposing "a third space", which is a sort of solution outside the two spaces of the conflict to create a neutral cultural space where an extreme hybridisation can take place.

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[7] T. Todorov, (2009), *La paura dei barbari*, cit.
[8] T. Todorov, *Ibidem*.

In this neutral space it would be opportune to find a proper relationship between memory and identity that could be considered a "nonplace", neutral, where it is possible to meet the other and diversity. In this way, the centrality of the individual is established in the migration towards new cultural horizons: on the journey, the individual is at the centre. The journey is a reflection towards the interior, understood as a re-reading of themselves and of what they can discover when they meet the other; during the journey it can be possible to activate that particular process of reflecting the individual in the construction of the other. In Ryszard Kapuscinski's essay The Other, the journey is understood as a discovery of the different, of the other. The image of otherness, during the journey, appears less raw; it is a sort of powerless conflict. The individual is central, is one, is the other, is the individual who is equal to the other, with the same dignity, with the same right to live[9]. The universal person becomes a person who brings difference and the stereotype does not separate individuals, but rather becomes a judgment: pre-judgment becomes pre-knowledge. Contemporary studies on xenophobia investigate the phenomenon to understand its development in the factual context of our times by studying Herodotus. In the Stories of Herodotus, the barbarians are described with a complicit gaze, through a sort of "empty" eye with which it is not possible to completely perceive the differences: it is the distant eye that creates prejudice[10]. On the contrary, the anthropologist Malinowski[11] proposes a "full eye" in the description of the other; it is a participating observation. In his travels in Oceania, the anthropologist dedicates himself to the participatory observation of populations by interviewing them. The other exists and it is necessary to know them.

However, even participatory observation is not able to be effective or even to correspond with reality; there is a tendency to add projections and conjectures that can create violence.

In conclusion, if in our contemporary times mutual knowledge is facilitated by a lingua franca, the knowledge of the other can be a powerful instrument of enrichment thanks to the diversities that contribute to define the identities through the continuous process of com-

[9] R. Kapuscinski, (2015), L'altro, Feltrinelli Editore: Milan.

[10] F. Hartog, (1992), Lo specchio di Erodoto, Il Saggiatore: Milan.

[11] B. Malinowski, (2011), Argonauti del Pacifico occidentale. Riti magici e vita quotidiana nella società primitiva, Bollati Boringhieri: Turin.

parison. Diversities may also make possible the creation of interesting cultural hybridisation that might stimulate a willingness to proceed with research in a more profound way by comparing – on a pluralistic level – all the different civilisations. In addition, the characteristics of identity may change according to places and contexts. There are no prevailing identity traits, but their existence is only possible in a given historical time. What we know about ourselves and what we know about others plays a crucial role in the construction of identity.

3. *Enhancement of cultural heritage in the context of a digital age*

Extending the discourse on the perception of cultural heritage to the sphere of the moral, cognitive, emotional and cultural processes that individuals develop on a social level it could be much easier to understand how the perceptual phenomenon between subjects and cultural objects exist in a continual state of reciprocity.

The link between symbols of identity value and cultural identity is subject to variations in intensity: this peculiar relationship can be strengthened but also loosened according to the interaction between the subjects and the cultural objects, but the variation can also be subject to changes in relation to social transformations.

Culture is hybrid, in constant transformation, mutable, and it also varies according to the changes in language and languages of communication. Therefore, the perception that the individual and the community develop towards the cultural heritage is not to be considered as something immutable in time. In fact, changes in society certainly contribute to continuous redefinitions of the relationship between the community and the cultural heritage and it may also change in terms of degree and intensity.

Thus, the relationship between cultural identity and cultural heritage depends on the recognition by a single subject or community based on an increase or decrease in the feeling of attachment to cultural heritage that subjects are able to develop. It is a process of the recognition of specific shared values – on a collective level – that constantly refers to the selection of peculiar symbols and that it generally develops thanks to a special predilection for certain cultural assets that represent a community in a specific period of time.

Cultural heritage can be understood as a cultural representation of the social community composed of different ethnic groups living together in the same geographical context.

The process of acquisition of cultural heritage as an identity value takes place on an individual level by means of cultural identity.

The subjects come into contact with cultural heritage, the process starts with knowledge, then they become users and successively they may also become promoters of cultural heritage according to their degree of attachment and feeling of recognition of cultural heritage as a constitutive factor of cultural identity.

Cultural heritage can be perceived in many ways: as history, but not only in the strict sense of the word, since it can be perceived on a personal level as history of a community, as a lifetime of memories.

4. The protection and enhancement of the intangible cultural heritage in Naples

Contemporary global society is not only an intercultural society, it is a digital society that stimulates connections; this happens also thanks to the most modern technological tools. There is a powerful need to adapt the language of communication to the new languages peculiar to the digital age – to develop new strategies for the enhancement and preservation of the cultural heritage.

These innovative projects had the purpose of preserving cultural memory, but also of filling the gap between tradition and innovation, taking into account the new generations that rediscover culture by means of the technological tools that are an important part of their daily life. New digital technologies have inevitably invested the different art sectors and have also had a significant impact on the way they are used in the creative process.

The contemporary cultural asset is also a symbolic representation of a specific community; it expresses the identity values of a civilisation but, at the same time – especially in this contemporary intercultural community – it can represent not only national communities, but also cultural groups, composed of individuals living in different geographical locations, of different nationalities, ethnicities and religions.

It is essential to consider that, especially in the context of intercultural societies, a very variegated cultural sense develops where there

is a close contact between different cultures. For instance, the city of Naples is a cosmopolitan universe, centuries of history and art, which sometimes coexist in the same square. It does not matter whether a church or an obelisk was built during a specific historical period – by the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, French, Spanish or that it was assembled according to peculiar stylistic canons: those who contemplate this city of art and culture, which has always been cosmopolitan, can experience a peculiar multi-coloured atmosphere created by all the different civilisations the city has come into contact with.

Thus, the people of Naples have assimilated the copious cultural influences that have permeated the city thanks to the countries by which the city has been dominated. It is a Creole cultural heritage, the Greek, Chinese, Pakistani communities celebrate their cultural festivities with songs, rituals and performing arts: they celebrate their intangible cultural heritage by sharing their customs and traditions together with the other different cultural communities.

Music is one of the best case studies to understand how the intangible cultural heritage of Naples is a perfect tool that is capable of recording the different cultural influences. Neapolitan song, in its various forms, has always recorded, documented and represented the thousand faces of Naples, its segments, its systems, subsystems, stratifications and modifications that have characterised the history of the city. By carefully observing lyrics, music and interpretations, it is evident the extent to which song functions as a "seismograph" of Neapolitan reality, recording transformations and changes through continuous references to social, everyday life, the community and events in the news.

The "events" of the community are "staged" according to the plots of a sociality which is based on two orders of reference: a membership, forced or complacent, in other words a restricted and contextualised location, or a sort of openness, which can become disorientation, where the cultural and then musical influences of other paradigms of humanity are welcomed[12].

When it comes to intangible cultural heritage it is easier to understand how the feeling of attachment has a close relationship with the memory of something that individuals have come into contact with,

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[12] S. De Matteis, (1997), *Concerto napoletano. La canzone dagli anni 70 ad oggi*, Argo: Lecce.

with something they have experienced, read or heard. If cultural heritage is memory, it is necessary to keep the memory alive and to make this memory travel as far as possible, also for those who feel the need to re-experience that bond because of their cultural origins or simply because of their feeling of attachment.

Crespi affirms that art tends to "celebrate" and "exalt" shared social values, performing functions of integration and confirmation of social identity, and representing, in different historical situations, the highest expression of the collective imagination. On the other hand, in many cases, art tends to question the aesthetic models of tradition, as a source of constant creativity, expressive innovation and contestation of established orders, opening up to new interpretations of reality and individual and collective experience. In the highest forms of art, its various functions are not contradictory, since even the representation of collectively shared aesthetic and social ideals takes on a symbolic dimension, which cannot be traced back to the simple legitimation or confirmation of the established order[13].

5. Conclusions

Is it therefore possible to investigate the perception of cultural heritage in this digital age? Yes, it is possible. The response of the new generations can therefore be portrayed through the analysis of positively surprising data offered by the new digital media tools. The new media and especially social networks can truly be a privileged window of observation to understand how the new generations actively participate in the process of disseminating and conserving cultural heritage.

Recently the cultural offer has substantially adapted to the latest needs of the digital age. Cultural heritage is becoming more and more "portable", news is increasingly delivered directly to smartphones and tablets. Thanks to new media, new archaeological discoveries are announced almost instantaneously. It is really interesting to analyse the process of conversion of the communication strategies adopted by archaeological museums, associations and institutions that promote culture. In the social media, in fact, it is an increasingly common practice – in vogue for museums, archaeological sites and institutional associations –

[13] F. Crespi, (2006), *Manuale di sociologia della cultura*, Editori Laterza: Rome-Bari.

to offer and guarantee the dissemination of news and the latest updates on topics of interest in order to promote their cultural offer and encourage the public and, above all, the new generations to participate in their initiatives. On the social media of these institutions, it is possible to observe the way in which young people actively participate in the activities planned by the museums and archaeological sites.

The new promotion contexts generate new job demands and there is an increasing request for professional figures and profiles that support institutions in planning new strategies for the promotion of cultural heritage using digital tools and social networks. Again in the context of archaeological sites and museums, where previously people used to relate in a preordained way, addressed to a passive mode of fruition with the ancient, now, instead, archaeology and history start to speak a new language, through new digital languages.

It could be possible to list countless new models adopted in the sphere of cultural marketing, to show the effectiveness of promotion, but of primary importance in the context of this study is the point of observation, or rather the object of observation which is no longer just the cultural object, but the cultural subject with its particular relationship with cultural heritage. The new generations can benefit and are themselves promoters of a privileged relationship with culture compared to previous generations.

Cultural information can arrive very quickly on the same everyday devices through which individuals express themselves and communicate in the private and public spheres. Among the various notifications on mobile phones that come from friends' contacts on social media, it is possible to receive the new update status of a museum or archaeological site. The cultural interests of each individual can be shared on the personal profiles of users. In this way, not only does cultural heritage news propagate more intensively and quickly on the web, users can express their preferences and their sensitivity to culture.

Thus, the link between the individual and cultural heritage can be observed and analysed. Contact can take place both in presence and remotely.

The apex of the relationship between the subject and cultural heritage can be observed especially when the subject personally goes to a museum and, with a selfie, shares on their social page their link with the work of art.

The audience feels closer to cultural heritage thanks to new possibilities for enjoying culture; there is a growing closeness in the relationship between the new generations and cultural heritage. The individual's sensitivity and attachment to cultural heritage can also be

heightened through the use of smartphones and digital media become tools that the individual uses to express cultural identity.

The wide and varied cultural offer advertised through digital tools can be enjoyed by an increasing number of individuals who are stimulated by the digital community and who may be interested in different cultures, feel represented by works of art that can sometimes become avatars, images of the user's profile like a painting or a sculpture. No matter what nationality the artist who made the work of art is or what specific geographical location they live in, the specific prevailing cultural traits or the cultural context of belonging, if something triggers empathically within the individual and the work of art, in their feeling of attachment which then leads them at the end of the process to use the work of art as a symbol of identity, then the assimilation within the different facets of individual cultural identity will certainly contribute to the redefinition of the individual.

This individual process will in turn stimulate other subjects to take an interest in that new cultural element that will progressively spread in cultural groups both on a territorial and digital level, developing exponentially in the collective memory.

So, can cultural heritage be considered an identity value expressed in the new digital age? Definitely, yes. Especially now that culture has been brought into play in the new languages of communication and can be seen as an element through which individuals choose to self-represent their constantly changing identity. Now it is possible, because the cultural identities of individuals are inspired by a cultural heritage that is accessible on smartphones.