Chapter 17
Cultural Heritage Management at the Local Level:
A Geo-Spatial e-Participation Approach

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ABSTRACT

In a virtual space conveniently chosen, citizens of the Web can interact and develop social capital and empowerment, intended as the consciousness of possibilities to influence the social context and to improve it, by increasing capacity of taking reasoned decisions on problems and of adopting adequate behaviour to face them. The Web can be seen in this sense as an innovative decisional system where it is possible to activate processes of electronic governance (e-governance) to make notions and expectations appear for a self-promoted and self-sustained local development. From this basis, Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei has taken part to the research project ISAAC (Integrated e-Services for Advanced Access to Heritage in Cultural Tourist Destinations)[1], with the objective of designing, experiencing, and testing innovative forms of participation by taking advantage of the potential of the New Technologies for Information and Communication (NTIC) to support and promote e-governance processes.

1. INTRODUCTION

The study presented in this chapter[2] focuses on the development of a geo-referenced e-participation tool as a new instrument for involving the different social actors in decision-making processes about cultural assets in urban destinations. This is based on a 'bottom-up' public participation process (OECD, 20001), promoting the role of residents, tourists and service providers in the process of recognising the territorial "cultural heritage" and its effective management. The method is developed and applied to the city of Genoa, and it is designed in order to map first the cultural

heritage in the territory of Genoa as perceived by the citizens; and secondly, to identify specific e-services, suggested by the citizens, which should be promoted to improve access to cultural heritage and to valorise tangible and intangible heritage. Innovative e-services would help in preserving intangible values and encouraging local identities in terms of traditions, aesthetics and artistic expressions.

The approach proposed tuned to the objective of promoting the role of inhabitants using cooperative techniques in constructing maps that represent their lived and perceived space. Maps represent the "places" or cultural values and aspects of identity that are perceived by the population but not always made explicit. The interlacing of different visions is aimed at identifying the cultural resources that exist in the territory from the different stakeholders' viewpoints. Discovering (or rediscovering) links with the territory means placing the "actors" who are endowed with a unique and original worth at the centre of that very territory.

In this context we can speak of a "bio-cultural diversity" that is wrapped in the different places, just as the ecological biodiversity. This can be seen as an asset that should be preserved and protected to counter the processes of globalisation which tend to spread standardised lifestyles and often lead to the destruction of original cultures. This is a high priority, according to Dematteis (2005). The push towards globalisation tends towards the loss of cultural diversity, which would bring about a reduction in human evolutionary "plasticity" and thus a levelling "from the top down" that might cause serious territorial imbalances. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (2002) this priority was taken into consideration and culture was considered in constant relationship with recognition/improvement/preservation and development.

Against this background, it is crucial to analyse the relationship between the development of a sense of identity and the sense of belonging to a place: educating means discovering the link with the community of living people and respect for life on Earth. In this way a sense of place reinforces the defence of ecological and cultural diversity and is a prerequisite for an attitude of caring for the territory. The territory is not only the context in which our experience unfolds and the background for our actions, it is also the reference point for cultural roots and values, and the sense and significance attributed to it by the cultural practices of groups and individuals (Dematteis, 2004). It is this door to the identification of society-territory or man-place that defines a precise sense of belonging, a precious one-to-one connection, which derives exclusively from a process of cultural fixation.

One of the principle benefits that can be had from an approach immersed in visions "from below" is thus an equilibrium between a vision of the city as spread out and standardised and the image that the citizens have of their own territory in relation to the "differential spaziality" connected to them (Lacoste, 1976). One may observe that different actors, to accomplish the greatest variety of practices, refer to numerous "spaces" in a more or less conscious way. In the past, when most people were farmers and they lived in small houses, the physical space was identical to the emotional and economic space: everyone who one might know, love, and with whom one might have economic relationships belonged to the same village. Thus the spaces were overlapped rather than disassociated as they are now. Today people adopt, more or less explicitly, multiple interpretations of the territory by travelling over greater distances. These "visions" come into play in "territorial practices" and lead to various points of view that are expressed through "voices." The "shift in level" that characterises social relations and the proliferation of the networks that exist in the territory "catch" these "voices" which struggle to meet and become "visions" (Magnaghi, 1990). The Web is an added network, a virtual one, which is a meeting place for those that want to get to know each other and to share interests and passions. Thus today, just as in the past, thanks to the

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