Defining culture

Culture is a slippery and ubiquitous concept. Initially, culture was associated with the notion of civilization tout-court. At the end of the 30s Margaret Mead put in contrast “culture” with “a culture”. “Culture means the whole complex of traditional behavior which has been developed by the human race and is successively learned by each generation” ([11] cited in [12]). However, specificity of the notion of culture with respect to a given human society was needed in order to study other societies. So the same citation goes on as: “A culture is less precise. It can mean the forms of traditional behavior which are characteristic of a given society, or of a group of societies, or of a certain race, or of certain area, or of a certain period of time” (cited in [12]). As a consequence, in the anthropological literature culture has been introduced as the concept denoting the object of study of cultural anthropology. Other definitions were proposed and they largely vary. However, they seem to converge to the notion that culture is learned [1], it is associated with groups of people and its content includes a wide range of phenomena including norms, values, shared meanings, and patterned ways of behaving [13–18]. In anthropological literature the usefulness of the notion of culture as a scientific tool has been attacked giving rise to the so-called “writing against culture movement” (see Brumann [12] for a reaction against it). The culture as defined in anthropology usually refers to societies defined in national or ethnic terms, however, the concept of culture has been recently used for describing knowledge and behavior of other groups like in the concepts of corporate culture or organizational culture [13, 19, 20]. Moreover, globalization has brought about the problem of interaction of cultures. On the one hand, such interaction leads to blurring boundaries between cultures, while on the other hand it leads to the increasing need of cultural-aware managers and professionals. Recent anthropology textbook definitions take into account the shift in meaning as, for example, in the definition by Peoples and Bailey:

*Culture is the socially transmitted knowledge and behavior shared by some group of people* (Peoples and Bailey [21, p. 23] cited in [12]).

Earlier authors define culture in the following ways (cited in Brumann [12]):
- Culture ... refers ... to learned, accumulated experience. A culture ... refers to those socially transmitted patterns for behavior characteristic of a particular social group (Keesing [22, p. 68]).
- Culture, or civilization, ... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor [23, p. 1]).
- The culture of any society consists of the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior which the members of that society have acquired through instruction or imitation and which they share to a greater or less degree (Linton [24]).
- A culture is the total socially acquired life-way or life-style of a group of people. It consists of the patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that are characteristic of the members of a particular society or segment of a society (Harris [25]).

As we can see, definitions agree on the fact that culture consists of something that is shared and/or learned by a group of people, but the content of the culture varies in

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different definitions. Similarly to Axelrod [1], we see the content of the culture as a set of traits, which can refer to behavior, knowledge facts, ideas, beliefs, norms, etc.

From “ICCROM Working Group ‘Heritage and Society’”

**On Cultural Heritage**

To start with, however, a reference to the concept of 'culture' which has been studied by anthropologists. It may be useful to begin with the definition of 'culture' by Edward Burnett Tylor in his Primitive Culture (1871):

*Culture ... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.*

With the development of anthropological science, the definition has gradually become more complex. In 1952, U.S. anthropologists, A.L. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn cited 164 definitions of culture, including for example: "learned behaviour", "ideas in the mind", "a logical construct", "a statistical fiction", "a psychic defence mechanism"; more recently, they have favoured to define 'culture' as "an abstraction from behaviour". (See: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1984, vol. 8, 1151 ff)

UNESCO has defined 'cultural heritage' in its Draft Medium Term Plan 1990-1995 (UNESCO, 25 C/4, 1989, p.57), which has been reproduced below. In addition it has seemed useful to reproduce more extensively the account on UNESCO's policies for the current mid term period, considering that much of it seems to be directly relevant also to ICCROM's activities:

**Programme III, 2: Preservation and Revival of the Cultural Heritage**

*Background:*

The cultural heritage may be defined as the entire corpus of material signs - either artistic or symbolic - handed on by the past to each culture and, therefore, to the whole of humankind. As a constituent part of the affirmation and enrichment of cultural identities, as a legacy belonging to all humankind, the cultural heritage gives each particular place its recognizable features and is the storehouse of human experience. The preservation and the presentation of the cultural heritage are therefore a corner-stone of any cultural policy.

This is one of the fields where UNESCO's action has been particularly appreciated and noted, as regards both its standard-setting aspects and the major preservation and safeguarding campaigns. In this way it has helped to gain worldwide recognition of the very idea of the heritage, which, at the same time, has been broadened and extended.

The cultural heritage should be considered both in time and in space. First, it no longer stops at the dawn of the nineteenth century but now also embraces the records left behind by the twentieth century. Second, the aim is not only to preserve increasingly numerous items of cultural property but also to safeguard complexes which go far beyond single large monuments or individual buildings. The idea of the heritage has now been broadened to include both the human and the natural environment, both architectural

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complexes and archaeological sites, not only the rural heritage and the countryside but also the urban, technical or industrial heritage, industrial design and street furniture.

Furthermore, the preservation of the cultural heritage now covers the non-physical cultural heritage, which includes the signs and symbols passed on by oral transmission, artistic and literary forms of expression, languages, ways of life, myths, beliefs and rituals, value systems and traditional knowledge and know-how.

The situation of the cultural heritage has deteriorated during recent years as a result of industrialization, rapid urbanization, the increase in atmospheric pollution, various climatic factors and mass tourism. In addition, many examples of the nonphysical heritage are dying out because of the disruption of economic structures and rapid changes in life-styles.

As a result, public awareness of the value of the cultural heritage has increased. This is particularly evident in the growing number of people who, in many countries, visit buildings and architectural complexes which make up the essential part of the heritage. The vitality of associations established to defend the heritage, and also the increased interest in the non-physical heritage, reflect the new life and cultural development. In general terms, through their impact on economic activity and tourism, policies regarding the cultural heritage make an effective contribution to development.

However, the widened connotation of the idea of the cultural heritage provides a challenge for national and international action which it is providing increasingly difficult to meet. The crisis in public finance, austerity measures or policies of structural adjustment have frequently limited the capacity of Member States (particularly the developing countries) to take action. Yet the safeguarding of one of the major assets of a 'multidimensional' type of development which will ensure the best possible general living conditions for both present and future generations. Many Member States have been led to the same conclusion: the need to provide substantially increased resources to preserve the cultural heritage, and to adopt the functions of the heritage so as to incorporate it in the human and natural environment and the living culture of the community.

Selection of Definitions of 'Cultural Heritage'

1877, England, SPAB Manifesto
William Morris, 'Manifesto' of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB founded by Morris on 23 March, 1877)
** For what is left we plead before our architects themselves, before the official guardians of buildings, and before the public generally, and we pray them to remember how much is gone of the religion, thought and manners of time past, never by almost universal consent, to be Restored; and to consider whether it be possible to Restore those buildings, the living spirit of which, it cannot be too often repeated, was an inseparable part of that religion and thought, and those past manners. For our part we assure them fearlessly, that of all the Restorations yet undertaken the worst have meant the reckless stripping a building of some of its most interesting material features; whilst the best have their exact analogy in the Restoration of an old picture, where
the partly-perished work of the ancient craftsmaster has been neat and smooth by the tricky hand of some unoriginal and thoughtless hack of today. If, for the rest, it be asked us to specify what kind of amount of art, style, or other interest in a building, makes it worth protecting, we answer, anything which can be looked on as artistic, picturesque, historical, antique, or substantial: any work, in short, over which educated, artistic people would think it worth while to argue at all. [...]

1904, Madrid (UIA) The 6th international congress of architects in Madrid, 4-9 April, 1904; a resolution was adopted based on the paper by M. Cloquet (Belgium)

1. Monuments may be divided into two classes, dead monuments, i.e. those belonging to a past civilisation or serving obsolete purposes, and living monuments, i.e. those which continue to serve the purpose for which they were originally intended.
2. Dead monuments should be preserved only by such strengthening as is indispensable in order to prevent their falling into ruin; for the importance of such a monument consists in its historical and technical value, which disappears with the monument itself.
3. Living monuments ought to be restored so that they may continue to be of use, for in architecture utility is one of the bases of beauty. [...]

1909, Futurism, Manifesto (Marinetti)
Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'Manifesto of Futurism', Le Figaro, 1909

** We will destroy museums, libraries, and fight against moralism, feminism, and all utilitarian cowardice. [...]

1931, “Athens Charter” (Monuments) 1931, Conclusions of the Athens Conference (§ 2-3), organised by the International Museums Office in Athens

2. Administrative and Legislative Measures Regarding Historical Monuments. The Conference heard the statement of legislative measures devised to protect monuments of artistic, historic or scientific interest and belonging to the different countries. It unanimously approved the general tendency which, in this connection, recognises a certain right of the community in regard to private ownership. It noted that the differences existing between these legislative measures were due to the difficulty of reconciling public law with the rights of individuals. Consequently, while approving the general tendency of these measures, the Conference is of opinion that they should be in keeping with local circumstances and with the trend of public opinion so that the least possible opposition may be encountered, due allowance being made for the sacrifices which the owners of property may be called upon to make in the general interest.

It recommends that the public authorities in each country be empowered to take conservatory measures in cases of emergency. It earnestly hopes that the International Museums Office will publish a repertory and a comparative table of the legislative measures in force in the different countries and that this information will be kept up to date.

3. Aesthetic Enhancement of Ancient Monuments. The Conference recommends that, in the construction of buildings, the character and external aspect of the cities in which they are to be erected should be respected, especially in the neighbourhood of ancient monuments, where the
surroundings should be given special consideration. Even certain groupings and certain particularly picturesque perspective treatment should be preserved. A study should also be made of the ornamental vegetation most suited to certain monuments or groups of monuments from the point of view of preserving their ancient character. It especially recommends the suppression of all forms of publicity, of the erection of unsightly telegraph poles and the exclusion of all noisy factories and even of tall shafts in the neighbourhood of artistic and historic monuments.

1964 UNESCO Recommendation (Illicit Transfer) Recommendation on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit export, import and transfer of ownership of cultural property, adopted by UNESCO in Paris, 19 November 1964 (§ 1)

1. For the purpose of this recommendation, the term 'cultural property' means movable and immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of a country, such as works of art and architecture, manuscripts, books and other property of artistic, historical or archaeological interest, ethnological documents, type specimens of flora and fauna, scientific collections and important collections of books and archives, including musical archives.

1964, Venice Charter International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites; the text was approved by the IIInd International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, in Venice, 25-31 May 1964 ("Venice Charter")

Imbued with a message from the past, the historic monuments of generations of people remain to the present day as living witnesses to 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.

It is essential that the principles guiding the preservation and restoration of ancient buildings should be agreed upon and be laid down on an international basis, with each country being responsible for applying the plan within the framework of its own culture and traditions. Be defining these principles for the first time, the Athens Charter of 1931 contributed towards the development of an extensive international movement which has assumed concrete form in national documents, in the work of ICOM.

Accordingly, the IIInd International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments which met in Venice from May 25th to 31st, 1964, approved the following text:

1. The concept of an historic monument embraces not only the single architectural work by also the urban or rural setting in which is found the evidence of a particular civilization, a significant development or an historic event. This applies not only to great works of art but also to more modest works of the past which have acquired cultural significance with the passing of time. ...
6. The conservation of a monument implies preserving a setting which is not out of scale. Wherever the traditional setting exists, it must be kept. No new construction, demolition or modification which would alter the relations of mass and colour must be allowed.

8. Items of sculpture, painting or decoration which form an integral part of a monument may only be removed from it if this is the sole means of ensuring their preservation.

11. The valid contributions of all periods to the building of a monument must be respected since unity of style is not the aim of a restoration. When a building includes the superimposed work of different periods, the revealing of the underlying state can only be justified in exceptional circumstances and when what is removed is of little interest and the material which is brought to light is of great historical, archaeological or aesthetic value, and its state of preservation good enough to justify the action. Evaluation of the importance of elements involved and the decision as to what may be destroyed cannot rest solely on the individual in charge of the work.