Lorenzo Casini

The public/private dialectic in the valorization of cultural heritage

In this contribution I will focus on three issues, and for each of them I will try to address three questions. First, what is valorisation of cultural heritage? Second, what does valorisation tell us about the public and private distinction and the public and private relationship in the field of cultural heritage? And the third and final question I will try to address is: why is valorisation so important?

1. What is valorisation?

The Italian word 'valorizzazione' cannot be properly translated into promotion. Therefore, we need a different word, one which the Italian government greatly struggled to have recognised during the 2017-G7 Declaration in Florence. That word is valorisation. We are aware that this word is uncommon. Hence why, in 2017, were the US representatives at first against its use? In the end, however, the European Union had already used valorisation in some official documents, and this was the main argument that thankfully allowed Italy to have the word valorisation inserted in the G7 Declaration. The reason why it is crucial to use the word valorisation is because it appears to be the most appropriate word to express the intangible component of tangible cultural heritage, *i.e.*, the intangible cultural value. The word valorisation has nothing to do with the idea of an economic value. Valorisation refers to the cultural value that every cultural property inherently expresses.

We can define valorisation as a set of activities aimed at increasing access, enjoyment, and education about cultural heritage. If we take the Colosseum in Rome, for instance, valorisation is whatever allows people to know about it, to enter the site, to access it or even to have a postcard. If you have a cafeteria close to the Colosseum this would allow you to eat or drink something and to stay on the site longer: this is a form of valorisation. Therefore, valorisation is something that moves people to better understand and to better enjoy the cultural value that is inextricably linked to the tangible element of a given cultural property. Promotion, whilst it may be fruitfully used in the case of activities related to intangible cultural heritage, cultural activities, performing arts, or cinema, is not capable of meaning or of expressing such a deep concept. Valorisation identifies something more than promotion, and this is why the word valorisation is also in the Italian Constitution. In 2001, the term valorisation was inserted into the text together with the more ancient term 'tutela', or preservation. Preservation identifies a function that is of course the most important one: if we do not preserve and we do not protect, we will have nothing to valorise.

This logical assumption must always be kept in mind because those two public functions – preservation and valorisation – may often be in conflict: too many people accessing a site or a museum can produce risks for the integrity of cultural heritage. Consider what happens in Milan with the *Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci, where visitors can enter only in small groups, to avoid high levels of moisture from breathing that can damage the masterpiece. Lastly, the two public functions of preservation and valorisation can be viewed from a dual perspective: on the one hand, there is the regulation of these functions; on the other hand, there is the moment when the public authority exercises such functions. In the phase of regulation, for instance, several instruments, including fiscal leverages, can favour valorisation; one should also distribute powers between public authorities. When functions are delivered, many issues are at stake, such as the ownership regime of cultural heritage: here is a case where the public and private relationship predominantly matters.

2. Valorisation and the public and private distinction

the latter example regarding ownership brings us to our second question: What does valorisation tell us about the public and private distinction? From this perspective, we should go back to when the word 'valorisation' was first used. In the early twentieth century, Marcel Proust in his *Recherche* used the expression «mise en valeur» together with those he called «Art of Nothing». The turning point was the end of the Second World War; after that, we witnessed a process of democratization that strengthened the public interest in fostering education through cultural

heritage and its enjoyment, a moment that triggered the transformation of relationships between public and private in that field. Such relationships moved from a bilateral dimension – where a public authority would impose limitations to private ownership – to multilateral dimensions – where there are also investors and donors, besides a public formed by visitors, experts, or researchers. The appearance of this new function in the field of cultural heritage, therefore, changed the framework, and completely changed the kind of relationship between public and private.

The public and private distinction is also crucial when we must regulate the function of valorisation. Deciding, for instance, if the initiative comes from the public or from the private; or if the property is publicly owned or privately owned; or even if the legal regime is private law or public law, and this decision of course also depends on the legal order at stake. In any event, if we take Italian legislation as our case study, we see that valorisation is regulated according to the public and private distinction, and we find most of the above-mentioned hypotheses. For example, public museums deliver a public service, whilst private museums deliver a service that is only deemed useful for society.

Lastly, it is crucial to avoid ideologies when considering the roles of private and public in valorisation. We may of course embrace the idea that public is better because this would simplify public access; or we may embrace the idea that private is better because it would bring more money and more efficiency. But this is not the right approach due to the high complexity, large dimensions, and rich differentiation of cultural heritage. There is no one single, right answer, and therefore cooperation between public and private is the only way to properly take care of cultural property, which overwhelmingly belongs to public authorities. In conclusion, the public sector cannot do everything alone and without the private sector; but the private sector cannot truly help anyone without a public sector well equipped with adequate skills and vision.

3. The importance of valorisation

Our third and final question: why is it so important to study valorisation?

First, as I have tried to explain, this new function gives us a better understanding of what cultural heritage is. It also gives us a better understanding of how tangible cultural heritage represents a link between material elements and intangible components, and that is the very reason why we protect cultural property. Only the original Colosseum in Rome will give us that feeling of entering history, something that no reproduction and no virtual experience can genuinely replace.

Second, the birth and growth of valorisation has moved cultural policies towards knowledge and education. This means that the economic dimension is only a consequence of these policies, not the aim of valorisation.

Third, valorisation is the better instrument to foster the transformation of cultural institutions. A museum, for instance, is not only a place where you protect heritage, but it is and should always be an 'empowering' institution capable of communicating, educating, and promoting; that is capable of, in one word, valorising.

Fourth, valorisation is an interesting way to distribute public powers amongst different actors. In fact, whilst protection requires a central authority and a single voice with a last word on permission or sanctions, valorisation is an open concept, and it can be delivered by many institutions or individuals. As a matter of fact, in Italy this function can be exercised by several public bodies and many actions can be taken by private parties.

In conclusion, I want to cite an anecdote from 2008, when I went to see John H. Merryman at Stanford. We spent all morning discussing in English about cultural heritage, and at the end he asked to know more about 'valorizzazione' because he found the concept significantly interesting. I am not sure I was able to help him understand exactly what valorisation is, but I hope, at least, that these few pages may explain what I think valorisation should be.