FARO – HERITAGE FUTURES





Faro – (Spanish, Italian, Portuguese) – lighthouse (after the Pharos of Alexandria, with its cultural beacons – the Library and Museum).



Faro, Portugal – The European Convention of Faro: Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Council of Europe, 2005) – [Link].

FARO – the NGO cultural agency/consultancy in Flanders dedicated to promoting cultural heritage within the spirit and terms of the FARO convention.

Faro – an extraordinary sweetened and quintessentially Belgian ale based upon

spontaneously fermented lambic.

I am back after a visit to Brussels and Tongeren (Limburg, Flanders, or technically, the Flemish Community) exploring the future of heritage – that powerful and contentious notion of cultural legacy.

Questions about the role of the past in the present, what to do with historical and archaeological sources and sites, museum collections, and especially in this part of the world, questions of the links between nation state and people, the region and “Europe”. Policy and agendas in this most important of cultural fields.

I was with FARO, the agency in the Flemish Community charged with integrating cultural heritage policy, stimulating qualitative management, long term sustainability and the unlocking of the cultural heritage. FARO is at the heart of a network of cultural heritage organizations designed to cultivate, to represent, to acknowledge and to valorise the different ways the public participates in and experiences cultural heritage. Under Marc Jacobs they are doing a superb job across several hundred museums organizations, local history societies, community groups. I heard about a year of events organized around the notion of “the fake”, a massive regional assessment of just what “heritage” is in the Flemish Community, managed through a new and open online database, plans for the annual week of taste – celebrations of cuisine and locality.

In particular FARO looks to implement the Council of Europe’s Faro Convention of 2005, as its name suggests. This is human-centered heritage (as distinct from focused upon sites and collections), particpatory, dynamic and negotiated, with cultural values and memory practices at the heart of quality of life and sustainable society, that is, looking forward as much as back. My long-standing argument that archaeology is as much about the future as the past.

For my part, I talked about the archaeological imagination, animating the archive, and ways of cocreating cultural heritage.

This was the first time I encountered the detail of the Faro Convention. It is quite a visionary document, very much worth sharing and discussion.

Not a long document: here are the highlights, as I see them.

Preamble

Recognising the need to put people and human values at the centre of an enlarged and crossdisciplinary concept of cultural heritage;

Emphasising the value and potential of cultural heritage wisely used as a resource for sustainable development and quality of life in a constantly evolving society;

Recognising that every person has a right to engage with the cultural heritage of their choice, while respecting the rights and freedoms of others, as an aspect of the right freely to participate in cultural life enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and guaranteed by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966);

Convinced of the need to involve everyone in society in the ongoing process of defining and managing cultural heritage;

…

Article 1 Aims

c. emphasise that the conservation of cultural heritage and its sustainable use have human development and quality of life as their goal;

d. take the necessary steps to apply the provisions of this Convention concerning:
– the role of cultural heritage in the construction of a peaceful and democratic society, and in the processes of sustainable development and the promotion of cultural diversity;

Article 2 Definitions

a. cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time;

Article 3 refers to different forms of cultural heritage that together constitute a shared source of

remembrance, understanding, identity, cohesion and creativity.

Article 5 – Cultural heritage law and policies

The Parties undertake to:

a. recognize public interest, enhancing value through identification, study, interpretation, protection, conservation and presentation;

c. ensure, in the specific context of each Party, that legislative provisions exist for exercising the right to cultural heritage as defined in Article 4;

d. foster an economic and social climate which supports participation in cultural heritage activities;

e. promote cultural heritage protection as a central factor in the mutually supporting objectives of sustainable development, cultural diversity and contemporary creativity;

Section II – Contribution of cultural heritage to society and human development

Article 7 – Cultural heritage and dialogue

The Parties undertake, through the public authorities and other competent bodies, to:

a. encourage reflection on the ethics and methods of presentation of the cultural heritage, as well as respect for diversity of interpretations;

d. integrate these approaches into all aspects of lifelong education and training.

Article 8 – Environment, heritage and quality of life

Here is recognition of the complementarity of cultural, biological, geological and landscape diversity

and 8c refers to the importance of “place”

Article 9 is about sustainability – cultural heritage as an essential component of change

d. … promote the use of materials, techniques and skills based on tradition, and explore their potential for contemporary applications;

Section III – Shared responsibility for cultural heritage and public participation

This section is about the importance of participation and access, especially among young people – including encouraging constructive criticism of policy.

Article 13 – Cultural heritage and knowledge

a. facilitate the inclusion of the cultural heritage dimension at all levels of education, not necessarily as a subject of study in its own right, but as a fertile source for studies in other subjects;

b. strengthen the link between cultural heritage education and vocational training;

c. encourage interdisciplinary research on cultural heritage, heritage communities, the environment and their inter-relationship;

Article 14 – Cultural heritage and the information society

The Parties undertake to develop the use of digital

technology to enhance access to cultural heritage and the benefits which derive from it, by:

a. encouraging initiatives which promote the quality of contents and endeavour to secure diversity of languages and cultures in the information society;

This begs development of participatory, collaborative and social software and networks.

Implementation?

Broad and visionary, yes, with questions immediately raised of implementation. That’s what we are trying in the Binchester project, and this is what I talked about at Tongeren, with a group of heritage managers and academics at the Gallo-Romeins Museum [Link] and [Link].