

Global and Glocal Identity

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Abstract

What is the function of architecture in the global economy? Globalization is one of the most useful words of these days. It creates complexity and thus fear and new opportunities. It is an individual and community choice, but we can face globalization only if we pass through a "glocal" process following the stairs of the Maslow's pyramid of needs.

Going from a person to a community, the identity can be found by the re-discovery of traditions that has the function to re-union the local community in a self-centred process and to obtain a recognition of self by the outside world.

This process of re-discovery of the past is not the best way to have world's attention. Only few places can find their bases there and Unesco has collect them. Maybe a new global identity can be create by a re-elaboration of this past tradition through modern lenses.

1. Tangible and Intangible Society

There is an amazing debate between our cultural and industrial community on the meaning of our economy, and therefore on our work situation. Experts say that we have to change our point of view. When mass production - the production of a huge number of material -- item finishes, the intangible production starts. A kind of new mental handcraft (Pepper et al., 2002)

Until a few years ago we were certain of some points of reference that constituted the basis of our lives. Most of us started to work in a certain company and they knew that they would spend all their professional life there. In many firms there were ceremonies to celebrate the day of the retirement. Old people still remember also the farewell present (often a watch).

This fact involves not only the consciousness of our philosophical roots but also the right connection with tradition. After the II World War, in the economy of constructions, the most useful language is the one of engineering, of big infrastructures. Our philosophy was the control of nature and of natural processes.

In this situation of safety we have planned all our social rules and our welfare state. With the event of welfare, young people have started to study more and started to look for special jobs. They do not accept the job that the market offers anymore, they look for that particular job that they suppose would exhilarate them.

After this period, people have moved, emigrating from country to country; big factories have created the necessity to give houses to a large number of workers and now the most useful language is the one of the entrepreneurs. Many suburbs of our cities and towns clearly show this situation. So we can say that after the "technical power", there came "economical power". And this is true especially in Italy where we have assisted to a huge number of houses built illegally creating a disordered landscape.

And nowadays, after the period of high spirits, maybe the period we are living can be defined "architectural power" – referring to the intangible quality of design – and in this essay we will demonstrate it.

In other countries this economic cycle is about 30 years behind and they are at the beginning of their industrial revolution. The indexes of growth of China and India are an undiscussible example. So they are living in the "technical age".

Many companies have moved their production units to these emerging countries, stating that the "head" remains in the western countries. Now we know, and we have understood that this delocalization is not possible without "breaking the toy". Chinese say that it is very easy to cut a head but it is not so easy to put it on the shoulder again, and it is often impossible.

In this situation, while Eastern countries are busy with their growth, we are not able to understand our role in this global economy. And therefore the question: what are we doing? And what are our future challenges? Economists say that if we answer these questions we will find the path for our economy. It is a philosophical matter hidden beneath a marketing campaign.

When people still believed that head and arms could be separated without particular problems they called this new economy as the "knowledge society". Knowing that the biggest part of incomes in many western companies

budgets (and State ones) comes from patents and brands, they supposed that there could be an economy based on them (Steward...). As they were not a tangible products – material – they called them “intangible” (from the ancient Latin: not touchable). For ten years, these theses were true and scholars studied human capital too.

But if they had studied Latin they would have remembered the apologue of Menenius Agrippa and its analogy with the human body, which goal was that every part of society accept its place without discussion

With the entry of China in WTO (World Trade Organization) things have left their ancient path. The ethic of hackers (Himanen et al., 2001) shows that there is another way to look at reality and that patents can be copied easily. So we have to rethink of our certainties. Intangible value of products cannot be the brand only but has to comprise the emotion of living.

Globalization is one of the most useful words of these days. Economists say that we belong to a whole planet: stock exchange never close, markets are always open somewhere and maybe the flight of a butterfly in Brazil means a hurricane in India. The picture we have drawn is a representation of a complex world. But complexity has two sides: the one of advantages and the one of disadvantages. It is an individual choice and people have to be open to changes and strong enough to collect these changes.

Sometimes the term “globalization” creates panic. It is not so surprising that in Italy, for example, constructions represent the most lively industrial sector. They are felt as familiar, local, but this is only true for local industries, especially for the small and medium size construction sites which do not experience the competition with Eastern ones.

If we want to synthesize this picture we can represent it in a chart. Near intangible economy there is the sense of loss that we have mentioned above. An uneasiness that is often depression and that is as immaterial as our production. The lost of ancient points of reference gives birth to the necessity to look for new ones, with all risks involved, or accept their absence.

Now we will concentrate our attention how this situation reflects on architecture, territorial marketing and urban planning. Many philosophers agree with the consideration that in urban planning the experimentation of a new architecture of institutions is present.

2. Glocal identity

The fragmentation of both countries and society has created several communities which live following some elementary rules of the groups

dynamics. The first thing which characterize a community is its symbol and so people have to choose something that represents their lives. The simplest step is to search this symbol in the past, in traditions, something that still belongs to everybody. In a glocal system of reference.

We can consider these dynamics as “natural”. It is something that has always happened in different places and in different times. It is like the emotion described by Evans (2001): ancestral as a flag. When the symbol is also the aim of the group, people feel to believing in a “flow”.

To understand what the “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003) of a community is, we have to look at the natural evolution they had in these recent years. From the fall of Berlin wall, we are witnessing new movements of division in almost every European country. The two sides of the coin apparently seem to be in contradiction. This process of separation is the most visible part of a more general process of “hiding” in a well-known burrow against an arriving globalization.

So people start to consider only their caves as safe and, in architecture, this is the age of “conservation” and “restoration” which means a unconditioned respect of the past. Home and food are the first natural needs and Maslow (1954) has put them at the basis of his pyramid.

Abraham Maslow was an American behavioural psychologist, in 1943 he wrote his first book, “Motivation and Personality” that set out his idea of the hierarchy of human needs. He argued that the factors that drive or motivate people to act lie on an ascending scale. Once a group or order of needs is satisfied, the individual will not be motivated by more of the same, but will seek to satisfy higher order needs. What's more, a higher order need will not be a motivator if lower order needs remain unmet. Maslow defined five orders of needs, listed in ascending importance:

- Physiological: The basic survival requirements of warmth, shelter and food
- Security: Protection from danger of threat
- Social: Relations with others, expressed as friendship comradeship or love
- Self-Respect: Sense of personal worth, respect and autonomy
- Self-Actualisation: Sense of achieving your full potential

So, for example, we will not be concerned about working relationships or professional achievement if we are truly concerned about our own security. Of course, Maslow's ideas were applied to the complete range of human experience, whereas for most us, Physiological and Security needs are usually

met to a large extent. But recent history has shown that when individuals are homeless, hungry and under threat, all social systems and self-respect break down.

There have been a number of variations on Maslow over the years. Some split physiological needs down into energy (food, warmth) and protection (shelter). Others have added Power – the need of influence on the actions of others, either one-to-one, or group-to-group.

Following these considerations, the restoration of the old houses of the ancient population has become one of the most important aim of several communities, because it represents the consolidation of the needs of the first two steps and the search of personal identity.

Going from a person to a community, the identity has two aims: one projected inwards the individual and one outwards. The re-discovery of ancient fairs or feasts in many towns, for example, has the function of uniting the local community in a process centred on itself which gives confidence and importance of self to people. They work for a full year to prepare these public manifestations to give new meanings to their lost traditions.

As Maslow affirmed, someone cannot jump a step but has to go up the stairs step by step. And it is interesting to note that in a period without ideals and dreams people have felt the necessity to go again up the pyramid of needs from the bottom.

We can affirm that the pyramid represents a cycle and that during their lives people go up it several times. But the interpretation and the representation of a need is different in different stages of both individual and community" life. If, in the past, the first step was the burrow made of mud and wood, now it is the restoration of those old burrows.

It is very interesting to understand how deep this belief in the past is. Anthropologists may investigate in how many times people have spent finding or sewing old dresses or cooking historical meals.

This situation has been also amplified by internet and by the high mobility of both thoughts and products. For example we can describe the evolution of the brand Mc Donald. At the beginning, this fast food was a symbol for the American way of eating and in Europe it was considered as exotic. Then this brand became a symbol of a homogeneous world, a world without identity and dominated by multinationals.

Now economists say that we do not have to mistake them for negativity but we can properly find the strategy and the arms for the trade battle with Eastern countries in them.

3. UNESCO and the universal heritage

Following the pyramid of need of Maslow, we can define this process of restoration – both in architecture and in life – as the satisfaction of the needs on the first two levels.

Only after the first two steps people have the strength to overcome fear and have the capability to accept intangible wellness. There is a gap between material and immaterial steps that people are afraid of like going up the stairs.

Nowadays many Western people are in a particular condition of feeling the fear of those who have been mobbed by unknown people. For example, in this trade battle with the Chinese we have understood that we knew very little about China. And after 11.9 we have also understood that we know very little about Islam.

We are self-referenced, we are self-centred and we are losing the connection with other cultures. We were concentrated in micro-differences inside our community and we have lost the macro differences among countries. We speak a glocal language. In a period of troubles, people try to close up counting the things they believed in.

Passing from a single man to a community, we pass from the restoration of the burrow to the conservation of towns and cities. These are the reasons for the re-discovery of antique houses, of the smallest old stone of every city. People need to be sure that the first two steps of the Maslow scale still belong to them. It is underlining their conquests. Only after these safe certainties people feel the need of conditions of esteem again, and they pass from the tangible to the intangible steps. These are called also the “esteem” sections, where people feel the need to show how they are in the eyes of the others.

As people look for a recognition of self by the outside world, so the community need to be seen by others. Obviously only few local fairs or feasts can arrive to have a global attention and their effects are only glocal while the intent was to reach a global identity. Or, better, be recognised by the world. This process of re-discovery of past traditions is not the best way to reach the attention of the world. Only few places can find their bases in the past, and we can talk about Venice or Florence or Machu-Picchu or Angkor but they are still few. UNESCO has put together all special places in its “collection” of monuments of mankind.

A real competition to enter the list of UNESCO has started of late because of two reasons. Technically, and therefore economically, these sites are a tourist attraction and then the transformation of the sites in symbols both for the local population and for the world.

As communication lies on two levels – the technical one and the relationship one – every urban planning or architecture creates two effects: one is economic and the other one is sentimental. Being positively identified involves being a point of reference for tourists and investments. But if a country is identified for its past history only the emotional effect on its community is very low.

We have said that going up the Maslow's pyramid people feel the necessity to be positively indicated. But looking at the Coliseum, we do not think of present Roman citizens but of the old Roman Empire. The same way, conservation without innovation cannot be sufficient to help men and community over a long period in their evolution.

4. Global identity

A new global identity could be created looking at these past tradition through modern lens. For example, if we think of Venice, we see only water, bridges, San Marco square and antique houses and we do not normally link it to modernity. Any manifestation will however have the background of these views and this situation is called the “neurological framework” (Pinneri et al., 1988). Even the Modern Architectural Festival will be analysed in a framework of the past.

But going from Venice to Bilbao, the situation becomes completely different. Not with standing its ancient tradition, Bilbao has found its global identity in new architectural signs. The Guggenheim Museum has created its own style and own language that is not in opposition with the past. It is a re-elaboration of a lost identity in a new way and by modern technology.

This is a matter for experts in territorial marketing. As the definition of sustainability of the Brundtland's Report (1987) stated, a process is sustainable when there is the contemporary respect of three aspects: the economic, the social and the environmental one.

Following these indications a sustainable project is composed by three projects too. For the moment only one aspect is managed by architects and civil engineers and the others by economists, lawyers and managing engineers.

While it seems to be easy to understand the kind of work of technicians, it is more difficult to define the work of the experts in a social project. Practically everywhere we can see to experiments of participation programs and of CSD – Context Sensitivity Design – and practically everywhere we assist to their failure too (Cardinali et al, 2002).

These experimentations of new form of planning, especially in urban matter, are attempts to reach a global identity. Politicians suppose that a shared process of planning involved shared identity. I do not agree with this way of thinking as I suppose that this properly is the representation of a glocal identity.

This personal strength must be found somewhere and generally inside the individual roots or in local identity. So we can say that we can face globalization if we pass through a “glocal” process, rediscovering our intangible roots and value. In a worldwide competition this is the natural passage to create an identity which can be recognized everywhere. Not a Western identity simply but a community’ identity.

These needs are not felt only in Europe but they are a necessity in many parts of the world: in Argentina as in India, in South Africa as in Japan, as described above in the pyramid of needs of Maslow.

5. Architecture and Engineering

Now it is time to analyse the role of architecture in this Western economic cycle. Following ying and yang separation some philosophers say that there is a female and a male way of living and speaking. Banally we could say that architecture is the female and engineering the male side of economy. But this is not sufficient to understand tangible and intangible economy.

We have affirmed that at the beginning of every industrial revolution there is a “technical supremacy” which corresponds also to the construction of big infrastructures. Watching the TV Program “Extreme Engineering”, on Discovery Channel, we can experience on the spot how many big airports, dams, roads and ports are been building in China.

But these infrastructures are only the basis of their economic growth, are its foundation, but they are not sufficient to create a sustainable development. A foundation has to be solid, well planted in the earth, strong enough to bear the heaviness of the construction above, also during storms and hurricanes, but nothing more.

When tourists go to Pisa they do not ask to see the foundation of the Tower, the same as when they go to Venice. But Venetian foundations are very interesting, there are chestnut piles in the water that have hundreds of years of story.

Florence and Venice are famous for their architecture and their sustainability is due to the fact that they still generate economic flows. People all over the world hope to see them and they have become a world heritage. So now their language is global. Correlating them with the pyramid of needs of their past owners, we can certainly affirm that they still represent the esteem of their ancient owners.

So, good architecture makes the economic differences because it creates value that go over the times. It is not so unusual that the most visited cities – after the historical ones – are the ones with new architectural constructions such as Bilbao, Berlin and Barcelona. As “globalization” creates a unique big market, and people work everywhere, maybe the right question is if the Guggenheim of Bilbao represents its architect or the city it where in. If its language is global or glocal.

At the beginning, it represents its architect and Frank O. Ghery will always have the Guggenheim in his bibliography, but a construction can overpass the connection with its creator as long as it creates new connections. As time goes by, the attention of people moves from the architect to the object and then – if the object has become a symbol – to the community.

This evolution depends on how the community has created social connections with the new construction. This is exactly the philosophical reason that lies under the participation programs in the design of big infrastructures. Again a matter of engineering. And this could not happen in architectural matter.

Participation programs are interesting in the qualification of big structure, as Corviale (Bettoli et al., 2003) or other popular public houses. In this situation architects works on the first step of the pyramid of Maslow when they are planning new comfort for people's burrow. But when architects work to obtain the esteem of a community, the situation is very different and difficult to cope with.

This is the reason for the huge importance of communication programs in the local community. People have to feel that they are the “owner” of this new object and they have to create connection with it well before it is finished.

In this case it is still an intangible and social project – as it lays on the sentimental level – but it is different from a participation program. It has to create the social connection that move the attention from the single object to the community. From the Guggenheim Museum to the city of Bilbao, from Ponte Vecchio to Florence.

Conclusion

We can describe this situation paralleling it with the film industry. The vital kernel of this industry is Hollywood and most of the film productions sold in the whole world is made in the USA. In this way we could imagine that the only international language is American-English. But it is wrong. Ever since a lot of years the largest film production has been made in India in a very singular way. Indians use the old American technology in their own way. They elaborate their own style of language and now they start to distribute their products out of their borders. People call this phenomena with the word “Bollywood” which is composed by the union of Bombay and Hollywood.

This is the re-creation of a new identity (it is difficult to use the word “local identity” for a 1,000,000,000 inhabitants country also if in a world vision Bollywood is a local fact) in a personal way. People are not afraid of using technology and tradition and only from this mixture a new global identity can be born.

Passing from cinema to architecture there are no differences. Architects are often strict in their views either of the traditional past or of modern technology without considering the possibility of inter-action. People have both the necessity of roots and of the help that they can have from technology. New identity can only come from the respect of these needs and architects have to consider them in their projects without nostalgia.

Maybe the next challenge will be the ecological houses and the greening industries. In this competition it is very interesting to see how countries define their architectural institution and how people create connection with domotica (Bettoli et al. 2004). For example, while the USA has a Minister for Energy, China has a Ministry for the Renewable Energy. But California is the advanced country in environmental matter. This country dynamics does not reflect in individual dynamics and this is a matter for architects.

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Biography

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