



THE 'OPEN' VENICE CHARTER. LEARNING FROM THE MULTIPLE INTERPRETATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS OF THE CHARTER'S ARTICLE 9

HOUBART Claudine ¹ DAWANS Stéphane ²

¹ Claudine Houbart, University of Liège (Belgium), Faculty of Architecture
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7037-5815>

² Stéphane Dawans, University of Liège (Belgium), Faculty of Architecture
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0876-7391>

ABSTRACT: This paper contributes to a research initiative aimed at addressing a significant gap in the historiography of the Venice Charter: its translations. Originally composed in French, the Charter underwent subsequent translations into English, Spanish, and Russian shortly after its inception, with the French and English versions serving as the basis for subsequent translations. However, a cursory examination of these versions reveals notable disparities, indicating a departure from Umberto Eco's notion of translations 'saying almost the same thing'. These linguistic variations gave rise to diverse interpretations over time and across geographical regions, suggesting that the Venice Charter operated more as an 'open work' than a rigidly universal standard. While refraining from direct engagement with the Charter's contemporary relevance, this article delves into the potential significance of examining translations and interpretations, focusing on one of its most contentious sections: Article 9 and, particularly, the concepts of 'distinctiveness' and 'contemporary stamp'. These reflections are contextualized through Umberto Eco's insights on the nature of the 'open work' and the intricacies of the translation process.

KEY WORDS: Venice Charter, universalism, translation, open work

1. Introduction

In 2024, as with every decade since its adoption, the Venice Charter inspired numerous events and publications worldwide. These activities consistently referred to the Charter as a universally recognized document. But does this universal Venice Charter truly exist? Are all cultures genuinely referring to the same document? In reality, each cultural group relies on one of the Charter’s language versions, which differ significantly – not only in terminology but also in certain principles. Originally drafted in French, the Charter was gradually translated into multiple languages. During the first ICOMOS General Assembly in June 1965, versions in French, English, Spanish, and Russian – the four official languages of ICOMOS at the time – were distributed. In subsequent years, most additional translations were based on the French and English versions. However, these initial translations already contained substantial discrepancies, which were amplified with every new translation.

Sixty years after the Charter’s adoption, attempting to correct these discrepancies seems pointless. Instead, they represent a valuable opportunity for research into the history of conservation and a platform for fostering intercultural dialogue. Article 9 of the Charter, which addresses restoration, exemplifies the variations between versions. Figure 1 compares the French and English versions of the article, highlighting one of its most quoted – and controversial – sentences. This sentence, requiring that ‘any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp’, has often been interpreted as advocating a sharp contrast between new and old. This interpretation has fueled debates between traditionalist and modernist approaches to conservation, making it a focal point for analysis in this paper.

Tab. 1 Original French (left) and English (right) versions of the Venice Charter, article 9

<p>La restauration est une opération qui doit garder un caractère exceptionnel. Elle a pour but de conserver et de révéler les valeurs esthétiques et historiques du monument et se fonde sur le respect de la substance ancienne et de documents authentiques. Elle s'arrête là où commence l'hypothèse, sur le plan des reconstitutions conjecturales, tout travail de complément reconnu indispensable pour raisons esthétiques ou techniques relève de la composition architecturale et portera la marque de notre temps. La restauration sera toujours précédée et accompagnée d'une étude archéologique et historique du monument.</p>	<p>The process of restoration is a highly specialized operation. Its aim is to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historic value of the monument and is based on respect for original material and authentic documents. It must stop at the point where conjecture begins, and in this case moreover any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp. The restoration in any case must be preceded and followed by an archaeological and historical study of the monument.</p>
---	---

In his preface to the proceedings of the conference 'The Venice Charter Revisited', the Prince of Wales starkly observed that 'by requiring us to make distinct the breach between past and present' the Charter, 'had likewise often caused the spirit to fly from old buildings and places'¹. Such a critique carries significant weight, considering the Charter's explicit goal of transmitting monuments to future generations 'in the full richness of their authenticity'². Some may argue that this criticism stems from an individual with a well-known preference for traditional architecture³, published in a book edited by the International Network for Traditional Building, Architecture and Urbanism (INTBAU)⁴, an organization regularly advocating for pastiche. But it is crucial to note that the ardent proponents of traditional architecture who vehemently criticize this specific article, even advocating for the outright 'rejection' of the Venice Charter, citing it as 'opposed to tradition and beauty'⁵, are not alone in questioning its impact on heritage practices. Surprisingly, similar concerns had been voiced much earlier by some of the Charter's own co-authors.

The Belgian Art Historian and Conservationist Raymond M. Lemaire (1921-1997) played a significant role in shaping the Venice Charter, as evidenced by the successive drafts and correspondence meticulously preserved in his archives⁶. These documents, coupled with an earlier national draft charter penned by Lemaire himself, underscore his pivotal contribution to formulating the specific passage we are presently addressing⁷. However, in one of his final articles contemplating the need to revise the Venice Charter, Lemaire expressed regret over the 'mistakes' attributed to Article 9. He provocatively queried whether certain circles had begun to equate the essence of preservation with 'modernist interventions in buildings or districts'⁸. This lamentation was not merely a belated acknowledgment; twenty years earlier, Lemaire had already articulated his belief in the importance of achieving harmony between the old and the new. He emphasized the necessity for new interventions to be 'clearly recognized' while advocating that 'the art and the condition for success is to harmonize the two and merge them into a global

¹ His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales (2009). Foreword, [in:] *The Venice Charter Revisited: Modernism, Conservation and Tradition in the 21st Century* (xiii). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

² ICOMOS (1965). *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites* (Venice Charter, 1964).

³ Jencks C. (1988). *The Prince, The Architects and New Wave Monarchy*. New York: Rizzoli.

⁴ See: <https://www.intbau.org>

⁵ 'Architectural revival' Facebook post, 21 August 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/ArchitecturalRevivalMMXII/photos/reject-the-venice-charterthe-venice-charter-is-a-set-of-guidelines-relating-to-h/1196700567068003/>

⁶ This collection is kept at the University Archives of KULeuven in Belgium.

⁷ Houbart C. (2014). Deconsecrating a doctrinal monument: Raymond M. Lemaire (1921-1997) and the Revisions of the Venice Charter. *Change Over Time* 4(2), (pp. 223-228).

⁸ Lemaire R. M. (1995). Faut-il revoir la Charte de Venise. *Restauro, La Carta di Venezia trenta anni dopo: incontro internazionale di studio* 24(131-132), (pp. 5-9), our translation.

work of art⁹. These convictions, coupled with Lemaire's projects contemporary to the Charter¹⁰, strongly suggest that the wording of Article 9 spawned interpretations that exceeded the original intentions of its authors. Although they likely opted for a deliberately ambiguous formulation to allow, as stated in the preamble, 'each country' to apply the Charter 'within the framework of its own culture and traditions', their intentions were shaped by the specific limits of their time and cultural context. These implicit boundaries, however, were never explicitly defined in the text. As a result, when the Charter was disseminated globally, these contextual limits slipped beyond the authors' control, leaving room for diverse interpretations that extended far beyond what they may have originally envisioned.

2. Ambiguity and interpretation

Hence, it becomes apparent that Article 9, with its notion of a 'contemporary stamp' (referred to in French as '*marque de notre temps*' - 'mark of our time'), grappled with ambiguity right from its inception. During a symposium in 1976, examining the 'French Restorations and the Charter of Venice', Michel Parent, slated to later assume the presidency of ICOMOS in 1981 following Lemaire, astutely pointed out the malleability of this concept. He highlighted how the meaning of the 'mark of our time' could vary significantly based on the lens through which it is perceived, leading to a plethora of potential, and at times conflicting, interpretations.

For some, this mark will be scientific rigor, in reference to a world that is constantly rebuilding itself around the models of the so-called exact sciences (...). For others, this mark would concern support structures (...) which, as we know, derive their 'composition' above all from calculation. (...) It is a brutalist bias that assumes that these additions (...) are, by an appropriate intellectual operation, voluntarily removed from the reading of the work (...). But (...) the Charter itself holds the key to another interpretation (...) since the aim of restoration is not only to conserve but also to 'reveal the aesthetic values' of the work. And so, we return to the equivocal interpretation of these values by the restorer's subjectivity and their conception of 'harmony'¹¹.

The ambiguity inherent in the Venice Charter, notably exemplified by the article under scrutiny, served as the inspiration for the title of this paper, paying homage to Umberto Eco's concept of the 'open work' developed in the early 1960s. Admittedly, applying this concept to a document intended to offer guidelines and uphold the fundamental values of heritage conservation might seem far-fetched. Eco originally coined the term '*opera aperta*' in 1962 with a focus on demanding, avant-garde works of art, such as James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and the labyrinthine narratives of Jorge Luis Borges. These works beckon readers to actively participate in constructing meaning,

⁹ Lemaire R. M. (1976). *La mémoire et la continuité*. Louvain, Archive of the R.M. Lemaire International Centre for Conservation, our translation.

¹⁰ Houbart C. (2018) The Great Beguinaage of Leuven: An Early Challenge for the Venice Charter. *Opus, Nuova serie* (2), (pp. 105-128).

¹¹ Parent M. (1976). Problèmes de la restauration avec l'environnement sociologique et culturel. *Les monuments historiques de la France, hors-série, 'Les restaurations françaises et la Charte de Venise'*, (p. 11), our translation.

or rather the various acceptable meanings generated by the text. Eco aimed to underscore that certain works are crafted to elicit a breadth of subtle interpretations, and that their richness lies precisely in this invitation to cooperation as an 'act of reading'¹².

Since then, literary semioticians have delved into this intricate device within texts, pinpointing its triggers. Scholars like Jean Cohen (1966), Groupe µ (1977), and Michael Riffaterre (1978) concur that the invitation to interpret arises from encountering unexpected, obscure, or even illogical formulations. This notion echoes Roman Jakobson's assertion that the referential and poetic functions of language are in opposition and even in struggle for supremacy: 'Ambiguity is an intrinsic, inalienable property of any self-focused message, briefly a corollary feature of poetry (...). The supremacy of poetic function over referential function does not obliterate the reference [denotation] but makes it ambiguous'¹³. Jakobson underscores the poetic function's aim to draw attention not to the referent but to the message itself, fostering intrigue and prompting exploration. Thus, it embraces vagueness as a means to captivate, inviting readers to engage with the text on multiple levels. In contrast, the referential function prioritizes clarity and transparency, aiming for the unequivocal transmission of information, as seen in legal writing where clarity is paramount: an offender must know clearly what they risk in such and such a case.

It is therefore not unreasonable to assert that the Venice Charter operates akin to a literary text open to interpretation, when it employs, consciously or otherwise, ambiguity as a poetic trigger. The rhetorical formula 'the contemporary stamp' – and its French counterpart, '*la marque de notre temps*' – injects Article 9 with a level of opacity or vagueness that prompts interpretative analysis, at the risk of divergent readings. While this interpretative process is common and even welcomed in literary analysis, its applicability within a charter sparks debate. While foundational texts guiding legal drafting emphasize clarity, simplicity, and transparency, some philosophers and legal theorists recognize the value of ambiguity, acknowledging its role in fostering flexibility and nuanced interpretation within the law¹⁴.

Whether intentionally embraced by the creators of the Venice Charter to foster cultural adaptability, as proposed in the preamble, or not, the perceived ambiguity or openness of Article 9 swiftly became a contentious issue. In the early 1970s, ICOMOS initiated an international consultation aimed at revising the Venice Charter¹⁵. While the primary objective was to incorporate specific principles for historic areas, drawing upon numerous experiments conducted since the mid-sixties, some national committees proposed amendments to Article 9 questioning, among other things, the 'contemporary stamp'. Among these proposals, the UK committee suggested

¹² Iser W. (1978). *The Act of Reading: a Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

¹³ Jakobson R. (1960). Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics, [in:] *Style in Language*, (pp. 170-171): Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.

¹⁴ See for example, the debates about Hart's 'open texture' of law in Lyons, 1999.

¹⁵ ICOMOS (1978). *Summary Report of the Vth General Assembly of ICOMOS*, Moscou-Souzdal, 22–24 May 1978. Available at: <https://www.icomos.org/public/publications/1978-Moscou.pdf>, (pp. 10-12); Houbart C. (2014). Deconsecrating a doctrinal monument: Raymond M. Lemaire (1921-1997) and the Revisions of the Venice Charter. *Change Over Time* 4(2), (pp. 218-243).

removing the term ‘contemporary stamp’ altogether, advocating instead for additional work to be ‘distinct from the architectural composition and appropriate in character’¹⁶. Similarly, the Swiss committee advocated for the replacement of the ‘contemporary stamp’ with the principle of reversibility, emphasizing that any additions ‘must be distinct from the original architectural composition and must be reversible’¹⁷. In a different vein, the Mexican Committee objected to the implicit favoring of ‘modern’ techniques inherent in the phrase ‘contemporary stamp’, expressing concerns that it could be construed as an encouragement to forsake traditional techniques. They argued that such a stance could ‘erect a barrier between people and their monuments in many countries’¹⁸.

This critique might have prompted Raymond Lemaire to propose a clarification of the article within a revised version of the Charter, which he presented at the ICOMOS General Assembly in Moscow and Souzdal in 1978. In this revised document, Lemaire stipulated that ‘in terms of conjectural reconstitutions, any addition work recognized as indispensable for aesthetic, technical or usage reasons is a matter of contemporary architectural or landscape composition and will bear the mark of the time, place and, if applicable, the authentic and living tradition that characterizes it’¹⁹. Both the revised text and the broader idea of Charter revision faced rejection by the assembly. Nonetheless, the necessity for clarification remained evident. In anticipation of the subsequent General Assembly in Rome, Alfred Schmid of Switzerland was tasked with orchestrating the drafting of a specific charter focusing on ensembles, alongside the preparation of a ‘commentary on the Venice Charter’. This commentary is of particular interest for the article under scrutiny here, as it underscored an additional layer of complexity in the document’s interpretation: that of its translations.

3. Lost in translation

Thus far, our discussion has centered on the conflicting interpretations of the term ‘contemporary stamp’, the English rendition of *‘la marque de notre temps’* found in the original French version of the Charter. Although divergent in wording, these two linguistic renderings share a common intent, aiming to position the requisite additions within the present context of the restorer’s intervention, as advocated by Cesare Brandi’s restoration theory²⁰. However, the same cannot be said for the initial segment of the sentence, which significantly influenced the interpretation of this ‘contemporary stamp’. As observed by the Prince of Wales, the English version of the

¹⁶ [UK ICOMOS Committee - SPAB, proposed revised Venice Charter, 1977], 3 (KULeuven, University Archive, Lemaire papers (hereinafter LP), 4107h).

¹⁷ ICOMOS. Révision de la Charte de Venise. Proposition du comité national suisse, our translation (LP, 4107h).

¹⁸ Ditchley Park meeting (18-20 May 1977), Annex III, Proposals received from national committees referring to specific articles, p. 5 (LP, 4107c).

¹⁹ Lemaire R. M. (1978). *Charte de Venise*, texte révisé, 23 January 1978 (LP, 4107j; translated into English in Houbart, 2024, (pp. 287-294)).

²⁰ Brandi C. (2005). *Theory of Restoration*, edited by Giuseppe Basile, translated by Cynthia Rockwell. Rome: Istituto Centrale per il Restauro, Nardini editore, (p. 49).

Charter mandates that additional work must be 'distinct from the architectural composition'²¹. Yet, he probably overlooked the absence of this requirement in the French text, which simply states that any extra work '*relève de la composition architecturale*' ('is a matter of architectural composition') – implying that any complement is a matter of design. Grasping the significance of this French formulation has proven particularly challenging for English-speaking professionals. In a commentary by Schmid's working group in 1980, it was noted that 'the English translation is not close to the French and Spanish texts', but '*relève de la composition architecturale*' was inaccurately translated as 'relevant to the very architectural composition', yielding a distinctly different meaning. To resolve this discrepancy, the commentary proposed that 'all additions should harmonize with the original elements but also remain identifiable'²². More recently, in one of the very few articles addressing the translation of the Charter, Dennis Rodwell proposed translating the expression as 'emanates from the architectural composition'²³, which, while still not corresponding to the meaning of the French locution, aligns more closely with the Spanish version ('*aflora de la composición arquitectónica*').

In this instance, the stipulation of distinctiveness for additions, which has sometimes led to a drastic interpretation of Article 9 of the Charter, does not stem from the original French wording of the document but rather from its English translation. None of the successive French versions of the document crafted during the congress make any mention of such a criterion. Furthermore, this specific segment of the sentence – seemingly borrowed from Lemaire's earlier national charter project²⁴ – remained unchanged throughout the process. Regrettably, the working English translation crafted by UNESCO delegate Hiroshi Daifuku during the congress has yet to be located. However, a translation put forward by the American State Department, pending official translation and published in January 1965 in the 'Journal of the American Society of Architects', alongside a rather amusing conference report by Charles Peterson, also fails to mention a requirement for distinctiveness. Instead, this translation simply asserts, in what was then Article 7 of the Charter, that 'all construction considered necessary to complete an architectural composition shall be recognizable as of our time'²⁵. Consequently, it was only in the official English translation produced in the months following the congress, the basis of which seems to have been drafted by Lord Euston²⁶, then president of the Society for the Protection of

²¹ His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales (2009). Foreword, [in:] *The Venice Charter Revisited: Modernism, Conservation and Tradition in the 21st Century* (xiii). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

²² ICOMOS, Commentary on the Venice Charter, [1980] (LP, 4107k).

²³ Rodwell D. (2022). Inhabited Historic Cities, Urban Heritage, and dissonances at the heart of the World Heritage system. *European journal of postclassical archaeologies* 12, (p. 308).

²⁴ 'any necessary complementary work is a matter of architectural composition and will bear the mark of our time' (Houbart C. (2024). *The Evolution of Urban Heritage Conservation and the Role of Raymond Lemaire*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge, (p. 271).

²⁵ Peterson C. E. (1965). The monumental patrimony. *American Institute of Architects Journal* 43(1), (p. 59).

²⁶ Letter from R.M. Lemaire to A.J. Taylor, 7 December 1964 (LP, 4107k). He asked Arnold Taylor, then Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings, to proofread the translation.

Ancient Buildings (SPAB), that the notion of necessary distinctiveness for additions emerged, steering the interpretation of the ‘contemporary stamp’ towards a visual contrast – perhaps echoing the SPAB’s understanding of contrasting repair.

This inconsistency then proliferated further with the production of additional translations, most of which – according to available information – were undertaken by heritage professionals rather than professional translators. For instance, in Italian, the requirement states that ‘any completion work (...) must distinguish itself from architectural design’ (in the sense of ‘the act of designing’, *progettazione*), a phrasing that appears to deviate from the meanings conveyed in either the French or English versions. In Spanish, the additions ‘emerge from the architectural composition,’ while in Dutch, they ‘must respect the architectonic composition.’ Thus, it is evident that the translations themselves significantly shaped subsequent cultural interpretations of the Charter. Moreover, matters are further complicated by the fact that different cultures use the same language version of the Charter, and some countries utilize a version of the Charter that is not in their native language – even when such a version does exist²⁷.

4. A universalist utopia

Even when confined to a brief excerpt from a single article, these observations already highlight the unrealistic nature of the universalist aspiration of the Venice Charter. Over the years, these discrepancies in interpretation and translation have been consistently recognized. Two decades ago, the Pecs Declaration on the Venice Charter recommended not only ‘a translation of the Charter of Venice for each country, nationality, or ethnic group that does not have access to a version of the Charter in its native language’ but also urged for ‘a more precise re-examination and correction of the existing translations’²⁸. More recently, an exploratory study conducted by ICOMOS France as part of the European Year of Heritage in 2018 concluded that ‘the French and English versions take a different approach to heritage from a political, philosophical, and even a spiritual standpoint’, particularly concerning restoration²⁹. Since most initiatives were driven by ICOMOS, whose Venice Charter was sometimes regarded as a kind of ‘decalogue’³⁰, they were largely motivated by a desire to reaffirm or at least consider the relevance of the document across cultural variances and shifts in the conception of heritage. For instance, the 2018 French study concluded that despite significant disparities, the French, English, Italian, German, and Dutch

²⁷ In Belgium, for example, many Dutch-speaking academics and institutions use the English version of the Charter, even though a Dutch version has existed since 1964.

²⁸ Kovács E. (2005). *The Venice Charter 1964—2004—2044?: The fortieth anniversary*, Budapest-Pécs, Hungary, May 22-27, 2004. Hungarian National Committee of ICOMOS, (p. 9).

²⁹ Lagneau J.-F., dir. (2019). *Retour à l'esprit de la Charte de Venise*. Paris : ICOMOS France, (p. 43).

³⁰ Tomaszewski A. (2005). Intellectual context of monuments and sites in their setting, [in:] *15th ICOMOS General Assembly and International Symposium: ‘Monuments and sites in their setting - conserving cultural heritage in changing townscapes and landscapes’*, 17 – 21 oct 2005, Xi'an, China. Available at: <https://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/300/>; Szmygin B., Skoczylas O. (2021). Factors shaping the Venice Charter and its usefulness – on the example of heritage protection in Poland. *Teka Komisji Architektury, Urbanistyki i Studiów Krajobrazowych* 17(3), Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.35784/teka.2861>.

versions of the Charter displayed a 'full agreement on the essential technical concepts', such as the necessity of maintenance or the advantages of keeping buildings in use³¹.

Despite these recurring observations, however, no systematic examination of the translations and interpretations of the Charter has ever been conducted. Furthermore, the exact number of Charter versions remains unknown. Thirty-seven are accessible on the ICOMOS website, but this count does not consider the existence of multiple versions sometimes coexisting in the same language (as in Spanish, for example), or the revisions made to some versions over time, like the German version in the late 1980s, based on a blend of the French and English texts³².

In Italian (and French), Umberto Eco's essay on translation is titled '*Dire quasi la stessa cosa*' ('Saying almost the same thing'). It doesn't take long to realize that at least some articles of the Venice Charter don't even come close to 'saying almost the same thing' in different languages. According to Eco, translation involves faithfulness to what he terms the 'intention of the text', referring to what the text conveys or implies concerning the language in which it is written or the cultural milieu in which it originates³³. In the case of the Charter, this milieu was multicultural, despite the document being authored in French. In this intricate process, the translator acts as a 'negotiator' between the source text, its author(s), the culture it stems from, and the translated text, intended for a specific audience within another cultural context. Consequently, translators must navigate the 'possible world' represented by the text and decide between various translations of the same term based on the textual context³⁴. This task was particularly delicate in the case of the Charter, as conservation professionals acted as translators while simultaneously holding doctrinal positions.

This means that understanding the disparities among the linguistic versions of the Charter necessitates more than a mere textual comparison. It requires a comprehensive grasp of the source document's intentions, the identities of the translators, their cultural backgrounds and agendas, and a mapping of the chronology and geography of each version's dissemination, usage, and potential retranslations. On the sixtieth anniversary of the Charter, we deemed it an opportune moment to initiate such a study. With the collaboration of a steering committee comprising multilingual heritage researchers fluent in French, Italian, Spanish, and English, along with a translation studies researcher and an IT consultant³⁵, we launched an exploratory project aimed at establishing the groundwork for a collaborative database and visualization platform for the Charter's translations. Although currently focused on four languages, the project intends to finalize the database's structure and display interface by the end of 2025. The initial phase of data collection revolves around the Lemaire papers, which encompass all correspondence between the ICOMOS President and Secretary General and national committees from 1965 to 1980,

³¹ Lagneau J.-F., dir. (2019). *Retour à l'esprit de la Charte de Venise*. Paris : ICOMOS France, (p. 43).

³² ICOMOS (1989). *Charta von Venedig neu übersetzt. Denkmalschutz Informationen XIII*(3), (pp. 2-6).

³³ Eco U. (2003). *Dire presque la même chose*. Paris : Grasset, (p. 16).

³⁴ *Ibidem*, (pp. 20, 55).

³⁵ Other researchers involved are Valérie Magar, Franca Malservisi, Dennis Rodwell, Claudio Varagnoli, Clémence Belleflamme (translatologist) and Spatiodata (IT).

along with numerous exchanges regarding the abandoned Charter revision process in the 1970s. These documents enable us to identify key individuals involved in translating, disseminating, and interpreting the Charter, shedding light on any disagreements or inconsistencies in the various versions of the text. The subsequent phase aims to expand the investigation to encompass additional languages and collaborators, with ICOMOS naturally playing a pivotal role.

5. Conclusion

The process of translating the Venice Charter into dozens of languages, the agents involved, and the resulting divergences, which significantly shaped its applications and interpretations, remain a dark area in the historiography of the document. Yet, this issue lies at the core of the Charter's universalist aspiration. Can such an aspiration be realized in the realm of heritage? This question gains even greater significance today, especially as the Charter, still widely utilized and occasionally retranslated, faces growing critical examination through a post-colonial lens. Originating in an era dominated by 'white Europeans' and lacking the values of diversity and pluralism prevalent today³⁶, the Venice Charter is viewed by a segment of the heritage community within 'Critical Heritage Studies' as a cornerstone of 'authorized heritage discourse', a concept introduced by Laurajane Smith to describe 'the dominant Western discourse on heritage'³⁷. But whether it has functioned as a tool of European imperialism or remains relevant in contemporary contexts, documenting the translations, dissemination, reception, interpretations, and applications of the Charter provides a unique perspective for reevaluating, in precise and nuanced terms, the international, and even global, evolution of principles and practices in heritage conservation, restoration, and reuse from the 1960s to the present day.

Acknowledgments

The project VeniceCharterS is funded by the University of Liège.

Authors contributions

Claudine Houbart is main author, Stéphane Dawans is collaborating author for the links with literary theories.

³⁶ Wells J. C. (2019). The Treatment of Historic Automobiles and Buildings, [in:] *The Routledge Companion to Automobile Heritage, Culture, and Preservation* (p. 39). Routledge Handbooks Online.

³⁷ Smith L. (2006). *Uses of Heritage*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge, (p. 4); Wells J. C. (2007). The plurality of truth in culture, context, and heritage: a (mostly) post-structuralist analysis of urban conservation charters. *City & Time* 3(2).

Bibliography

- Brandi C. (2005). *Theory of Restoration*, edited by Giuseppe Basile, translated by Cynthia Rockwell. Rome: Istituto Centrale per il Restauro, Nardini editore.
- Cohen J. (1966). *Structure du langage poétique*. Paris : Flammarion.
- Eco U. (2003). *Dire presque la même chose*. Paris : Grasset.
- Groupe µ (1977). *Rhétorique de la poésie: Lecture linéaire, lecture tabulaire*. Brussels : Éditions complexe.
- His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales (2009). Foreword, [in:] *The Venice Charter Revisited: Modernism, Conservation and Tradition in the 21st Century* (xiii-xiv). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Houbart C. (2014). Deconsecrating a doctrinal monument: Raymond M. Lemaire (1921-1997) and the Revisions of the Venice Charter. *Change Over Time* 4(2), (pp. 218-243).
- Houbart C. (2018). The Great Beguinage of Leuven: An Early Challenge for the Venice Charter. *Opus, Nuova serie* (2), (pp. 105-128).
- Houbart C. (2024). *The Evolution of Urban Heritage Conservation and the Role of Raymond Lemaire*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.
- ICOMOS (1965). *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites* (Venice Charter, 1964).
- ICOMOS (1978). *Summary Report of the Vth General Assembly of ICOMOS, Moscou-Souzdal, 22-24 May 1978*. Available at: <https://www.icomos.org/public/publications/1978-Moscou.pdf>
- ICOMOS (1989). *Charta von Venedig neu übersetzt. Denkmalschutz Informationen, XIII(3)*, (pp. 2-6).
- Iser W. (1978). *The Act of Reading: a Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Jakobson R. (1960). Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics, [in:] *Style in Language* (pp. 350-377). Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
- Jencks C. (1988). *The Prince, The Architects and New Wave Monarchy*. New York: Rizzoli.
- Kovács E. (2005). *The Venice Charter 1964—2004—2044? The fortieth anniversary*, Budapest-Pécs, Hungary, May 22-27, 2004. Hungarian National Committee of ICOMOS.
- Lagneau J.-F., dir. (2019). *Retour à l'esprit de la Charte de Venise*. Paris : ICOMOS France.
- Lemaire R. M. (1976). *La mémoire et la continuité*. Louvain, Archive of the R.M. Lemaire International Centre for Conservation.
- Lemaire R. M. (1995). Faut-il revoir la Charte de Venise. *Restauro, La Carta di Venezia trenta anni dopo: incontro internazionale di studio* 24(131-132), (pp. 5-9).

- Lyons D. (1999). Open Texture and the Possibility of Legal Interpretation. *Law and Philosophy* 18(3), (pp. 297-309).
- Parent M. (1976). *Problèmes de la restauration avec l'environnement sociologique et culturel. Les monuments historiques de la France, hors-série, 'Les restaurations françaises et la Charte de Venise'*, (pp. 10-19).
- Peterson C. E. (1965). The monumental patrimony. *American Institute of Architects Journal* 43(1), (pp. 57-59).
- Riffaterre M. (1978). *Semiotics of poetry*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Rodwell D. (2022). Inhabited Historic Cities, Urban Heritage, and dissonances at the heart of the World Heritage system. *European journal of postclassical archaeologies* 12, (pp. 291-352).
- Smith L. (2006). *Uses of Heritage*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.
- Szmygin B., Skoczylas O. (2021). Factors shaping the Venice Charter and its usefulness – on the example of heritage protection in Poland. *Teka Komisji Architektury, Urbanistyki i Studiów Krajobrazowych* 17(3), Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.35784/teka.2861>
- Tomaszewski A. (2005). Intellectual context of monuments and sites in their setting, [in:] *15th ICOMOS General Assembly and International Symposium: 'Monuments and sites in their setting - conserving cultural heritage in changing townscapes and landscapes'*, 17 – 21 oct 2005, Xi'an, China. Available at: <https://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/300/>
- Wells J.C. (2007). The plurality of truth in culture, context, and heritage: a (mostly) post-structuralist analysis of urban conservation charters. *City & Time* 3(2).
- Wells J.C. (2019). The Treatment of Historic Automobiles and Buildings, [in:] *The Routledge Companion to Automobile Heritage, Culture, and Preservation* (pp. 35-46). Routledge Handbooks Online.