Decoding the Venice Charter: A Multidisciplinary Exploration of its Interpretations and Translations

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ABSTRACT

Each decade marking the anniversary of the Venice Charter prompts fresh contemplation of this cornerstone of conservation doctrine, which has woven itself into the fabric of preservation history for the past sixty years. Today, the Charter's relevance persists for some, yet others find it lacking, even decrying it as a vessel of 'authorized heritage discourse', synonymous with European cultural imperialism. Its wide-ranging scope and universal aspirations are now challenged in the name of embracing the diversity of heritage, methodologies, and stakeholders overlooked during the debates of 1964. While the preamble ostensibly entrusts each nation with the responsibility to apply the Charter's principles within the context of its own culture and traditions, these principles were initially crafted based on experiences primarily drawn from European monumental heritage, with intentions to apply them globally. The impracticality of universal application was acknowledged as early as the 1970s, prompting numerous revision processes and attempts to articulate supplementary commentary.

However, does *the* Venice Charter truly exist as a singular entity? Originally drafted in French and based on multiple cultural backgrounds, the document has undergone many translations. A cursory examination of the French original and its English rendition reveals disparities not only in language but also in underlying principles. As subsequent translations have been based on these two versions, such discrepancies have only proliferated, casting doubt on the Charter's universal nature. While this issue has been sporadically acknowledged, it has yet to be systematically studied. In commemoration of its sixtieth anniversary, the authors of this paper embarked on establishing methodological frameworks for a comprehensive chronology, cartography, and genealogy of the Charter's linguistic iterations. This interdisciplinary endeavor unites researchers from heritage, translation, and IT development fields. By the close of 2025, the project aims to propose a database structure and visualization interface facilitating collaborative aggregation of data on Charter versions, interpretations, and implementations worldwide. In this paper, initial findings and methodological choices from an exploratory analysis of the French, English, Italian, and Spanish versions are unveiled.

Keywords: Venice Charter. Universalism. Translation. Networks. Cultural diversity

A COMMON POINT OF REFERENCE

In this anniversary year, the Venice Charter once again took center stage. One notable example was ICOMOS's decision to dedicate the scientific symposium of its General Assembly to the theme "Revisiting the Venice Charter: Critical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges". ICOMOS national[1] and international scientific committees[2], universities, and professional associations all reflected on the continued relevance of this foundational document. How does the Charter contribute to fostering a "resilient heritage" [3]? Does it need to be (re)framed to address new challenges[4]? What role has it played in restoration projects, both in theory and practice[5]? How has it been received on a global scale[6]? Numerous symposia, congresses and publications explored these questions far beyond Europe. For instance, the *Chinese Cultural Heritage* journal dedicated a special issue to the Venice Charter, including an annotated new translation[7].

Interest in the Venice Charter on its ten-year anniversaries is far from new. Since 1994, each milestone has been marked by scientific events[8]. What is remarkable, however, is that this interest shows no signs of waning – not only evidenced by the numerous events organized in 2024 but also by initiatives in recent years unrelated to any anniversary. In France, for instance, the Charter was a focal point during the European Heritage Year in 2018, prompting critical reflections on its relevance in Europe and beyond[9]. Similarly, in 2021, the journal *Monumental* dedicated a special issue to the Charter, further exploring its contemporary significance.

The Venice Charter, however, appears increasingly disconnected from contemporary issues that were unimaginable or unconsidered at the time of its drafting, such as climate change, inclusivity, or the growing importance of heritage communities. From a post-colonial perspective, the Association of Critical Heritage Studies (ACHS), founded in 2011, critiques the Charter as emblematic of the "authorized heritage discourse", privileging "old, grand, prestigious, expert-approved sites, buildings,

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[1] e.g. ICOMOS Netherlands and ICOMOS Flanders-Brussels academic session on 4 October 2024 in Louvain, https://icomos.be/vb/evenement/academische-zitting-jubileum-60-jaar-charter-van-venetie-1964-2024-titel-ontwikkelingen-in-monumentenzorg-en-verduurzaming-van-gebouwd-erfgoed/ accessed 10 December 2024.

[2] e.g. ISC Theophilos annual conference 'Venice at 60: Doctrinal Documents in the Protection of Cultural Heritage', 7-8 March 2024, https://theophilos.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2024-03-Abstracts.pdf accessed 10 December 2024.

[3] Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi (India), *Resilient Heritage - Preparedness, Response and Recovery through the Lens of the Venice Charter*, 18 April 2024, https://ignca.gov.in/events/resilient-heritage-preparedness-response-and-recovery-through-the-lens-of-the-venice-charter/ accessed 10 December 2024.

[4] *Venice Charter (Re)framed 1964-2024. New Heritage Challenges*. Lisbon, School of Arts and Humanities, May 27-30, 2024, https://artisihaflul.wixsite.com/venicecharter) accessed 12 December 2024.

[5] University of Florence, Architecture Department, *1964-2024 The Venice Charter. Theoretical reflections and operating practices in the restoration project*, Florence, 25-26 October 2024, https://www.dida.unifi.it/vp-888-la-carta-di-venezia.html#FRA accessed 12 December 2024.

[6] Institute of Architects of Brazil and Faculty of Architecture of the Federal University of Bahia, *ArquiMemória 6*, Special axis 'Sixty years of the Venice Charter and 30 years of the Nara Conference', Salvador de Bahia, 5-8 November 2024, https://www.even3.com.br/arquimemoria6/?lang=en accessed 10 December 2024.

[7] Cong, Jiaqiang, Wei, Yi 2024.

[8] e.g. 'The Venice Charter: 1964-1994' 1994; 'The Venice Charter 1964 - 2004 - 2044?: The Fortieth Anniversary' 2005; 'The Venice Charter at Fifty' 2014.

[9] Lagneau 2018.

and artifacts that sustain Western narratives of nation, class, and science" [10]. But despite these widely acknowledged limitations in the use if the Charter, and the existence of numerous other documents developed by ICOMOS, UNESCO, and the Council of Europe to address the expanded notion of heritage and the growing array of challenges it faces, the Venice Charter remains a cornerstone of international debate. Its principles continue to be revisited, whether to advocate for their update, confirm or critique their relevance, or lament their persistent dominance as a reference point in heritage discussions.

In her keynote speech at the latest ICOMOS General Assembly, Laurajane Smith, founding chairperson of the ACHS, made no secret of her desire to see the Venice Charter "retired". While the authors of this article acknowledge the Charter's obvious limitations, they argue for its continued relevance for the history of conservation and to stimulate inter-cultural debates. To this end, however, it is crucial to move beyond viewing the Charter as a singular, universal document and instead examine a largely overlooked dimension of its history: its many translations. For which version of the Venice Charter are the recent symposia, conferences, and publications referring to? Discrepancies between translations have been noted since the 1970s[11]. Following the anniversary colloquium in 2004, the *Pécs Declaration on the Venice Charter* even called for "a more precise re-examination and corrections of the existing translations"[12]. Yet, no systematic study of this issue has ever been undertaken. We have initiated such a study, starting with a pilot project focusing on four languages: French, English, Spanish, and Italian. The goal is to develop a methodology for analyzing these translations and their interpretations before extending the research to additional languages. Unlike the *Pécs Declaration*, the aim is not to "correct" discrepancies between versions but to view these variations as opportunities rather than problems. On one hand, tracing the successive translations of the Charter, their context and the agents involved, allows for documentation of its global circulation, its reception in different cultural contexts, and its role in shaping conservation-restoration practices. On the other hand, these translations provide a unique platform for intercultural dialogue. For example, what interpretations of the various articles have been transferred to each new host language of the Charter? What terminological or conceptual variations have been incorporated? How do different languages translate key concepts, and which terms do not exist in certain linguistic traditions? By leveraging these questions, the Venice Charter's persistence as a shared reference point can spark critical reflection on the future of heritage conservation. Rather than clinging to somehow outdated principles from a vastly different era, this approach embraces cultural diversity and the potential for reinterpretation, providing information on cultural interaction and friction between cultures.

THE LANGUAGES OF THE VENICE CHARTER(S)

While some details remain to be clarified, the cultural context and drafting process of the Venice Charter are relatively well documented, particularly in the archives of Piero Gazzola, Roberto Pane, and Raymond Lemaire, rapporteur for the drafting process [13]. Lemaire's archives contain multiple successive drafts and correspondence that shed light on the genesis of the document and the ordering of the articles during the congress and the subsequent months, as the Charter was not finalized until

[10] ACHS manifesto 2012, https://www.criticalheritagestudies.org/history, accessed 15 December 2024.
[11] E.g. in Erder 1994.
[12] Kovács 2005.
[13] Pane 2010; Pane 2015; Houbart 2025.

December 1964[14]. Notably, all these drafts were written in French, reflecting the working language of the drafting process.

Although French had been competing with English as a lingua franca since the Second World War[15], an analysis of the Venice Congress proceedings underscores its dominance during the event. Of the 169 articles included, 75 were written in French, 30 in English, and 64 in Italian. The high number of articles in Italian is unsurprising, given that the colloquium was held in Italy with almost one third of Italian participants[16]. However, only 10% of the Italian articles were authored by non-Italians, whereas half of the French-language articles were contributed by non-French-speaking delegates from a diverse range of countries, including Afghanistan (1), Germany (1), Austria (1), Brazil (1), Spain (9), Greece (2), Hungary (2), Italy (4), Netherlands (1), Poland (3), the Holy See (1), Czechoslovakia (1), Turkey (1), the USSR (4), and Yugoslavia (11). A similar pattern can be observed in English-language contributions: half were authored by non-native speakers, including delegates from Germany (1), Austria (2), Denmark (1), India (2), Japan (1), Mexico (3), the Netherlands (1), Poland (1), Sweden (2), and Turkey (1). However, the total number of English-language articles was only half that of those written in French. In addition, while the introductory lectures for the event's five main sections and three subsections alternated between French and English, all general reports – which replaced individual presentations to encourage collegial discussions – were delivered in French. These reports were prepared and presented by French-speaking rapporteurs such as R.M. Lemaire (Belgium), F. Sorlin, and S. Stym-Popper (France), as well as non-French-speaking ones, including P. Romanelli, P. Rotondi, and C. Ceschi (Italy) and F. Iñiguez Almech (Spain).

Previous research indicates that the drafting of the Venice Charter was undertaken during the congress by a small group comprising P. Gazzola, R. Pane, R. M. Lemaire, P. Philippot, and J. Sonnier – three French speakers and two Italians fluent in French[17]. Gertrud Tripp later confirmed that the Charter would not have existed without "the French", in the sense of native French speakers, since she included Lemaire[18]. While some of the Charter's foundational documents were originally in French – such as the "Conclusions of the Athens Conference" (1931) or a draft charter written by Lemaire in Belgium in 1962 – others were in Italian, including the *Carta italiana del restauro* and its critical revision for the congress, *Proposte per una carta internazionale del restauro*, authored by Pane and Gazzola[19]. Furthermore, the French-speaking members of the drafting team came from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Philippot and Lemaire were Belgian, with the latter belonging to a bilingual French-Flemish family, while Sonnier was French. As such, the French language of the Venice Charter is itself a compromise, reflecting terminological nuances from France, Belgium, and Italy at the time. For example, preliminary discussions within our project suggest that the term "assainissement" (sanitation), used in Article 14, had a broader meaning in Belgium than in France, where it was primarily associated with wastewater and drainage.

[14] KU Leuven (Belgium), University Archive, Lemaire collection [hereinafter KU Leuven, UA, LC], 4107.
[15] Wright 2006.
[16] *The monument for the man* 1971, XXXIII-XXXIV and XXXVII-LIII.
[17] Houbart 2025, 48-56.
[18] Tripp 2006, 15.
[19] *The monument for the man* 1971, 14-19.

Although English was a minority language at the congress, evidence from R. Lemaire's archives points to the existence of an English working translation prepared by Hiroshi Daifuku, a UNESCO delegate at the event[20]. This translation, which has yet to be located[21], was likely based on the version of the Charter presented for approval at the congress on May 29, 1964. That version contained 15 articles instead of the final 16 and arranged them in a different order[22]. In January 1965, another English translation of this earlier version, produced by the U.S. State Department and "a little bit fussed over" by Charles Peterson, a member of the American delegation, was published in the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*[23]. By this point, the official English translation of the Charter might already have been finalized, as an unapproved version is documented as early as December 1964[24], but it had not yet been distributed internationally.

Comparing this American English translation with the official English version adopted by ICOMOS at its first General Assembly in June 1965 is highly instructive. Some of the differences between the two translations can be attributed to their source texts: the American translation was based on an intermediate French version of the Charter, while the official translation was derived from the finalized French text. Some differences are tied to established variations in terminological usage, such as the translation of the French term "conservation". In the United States, this was typically rendered as "preservation", while in British English, the term "conservation" was retained. Other discrepancies, however, arise from divergent interpretations of the French text or, possibly, deliberate efforts to adjust the Charter's content. Such intentional changes are seen in specific passages of the Russian translation[25]. Interestingly, the American version proved much closer to the original French text in both wording and intent than the official English version that followed. A clear example of these differences can be found in Article 9. In both the intermediate and final French versions, the article begins with the statement that "*la restauration est une opération qui doit garder un caractère exceptionnel*" ("restoration is an operation which must remain exceptional in character"). The American translation adheres closely to this phrasing: "restoration is an operation to be employed only in exceptional cases". By contrast, the official English version shifts the meaning entirely, rendering it as "the process of restoration is a highly specialized operation". Other discrepancies within the same article further illustrate the divergences. The final French text justifies complementary interventions for "aesthetic or technical" reasons, but this detail is omitted in both English translations. Furthermore, the remainder of the article, which specifies how such kind of intervention "*relève de la composition architecturale et portera la marque de notre temps*" ("**is a matter of** architectural composition and will bear the mark of our time"), is rendered differently in each English version. The American version states that "all construction considered necessary **to complete** an architectural composition shall be recognizable as of our time", while the official English text declares that "it **must be distinct from** the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp". These variations had significant implications for the interpretation of the Charter. For instance, the official English version's emphasis on the need for

[20] *Letter from R.M. Lemaire to E.E. Connally,* 23 November 1988 (KU Leuven, UA, LC, 4107l).
[21] It is not to be found in either the Lemaire archives or Daifuku archives, at the University of Maryland (USA).
[22] In the absence of the future article 8 proposed by Paul Philippot on the evening of 30 May (Note from P. Philippot to R.M. Lemaire, 30 May 1964, KU Leuven, UA, LC, 4107k).
[23] Peterson 1965.
[24] *Letter from R.M. Lemaire to A. J. Taylor*, 7 December 1964, KU Leuven, UA, LC, 4107k.
[25] Demchenko 2021.

new interventions to be "distinct" has often been criticized for promoting an overly pronounced contrast between old and new elements in restoration projects[26].

Only the French, English, Spanish, and Russian versions of the Venice Charter were officially adopted at the first ICOMOS General Assembly to align with UNESCO's four official languages[27]. However, other translations already existed at the time[28]. In 1994, ICOMOS published a collection of 28 versions, noting the countries using each one. However, this inventory was not exhaustive; it only listed countries involved in the publication[29]. Today, 37 versions of the Charter are available on the ICOMOS website[30], a number underrepresenting the total number of versions that have existed over time or are in use today. Firstly, the list includes only one version per language, overlooking the simultaneous or successive variations that have emerged. For instance, as early as 1977, Cevat Erder reported the existence of four or five Turkish versions, each produced by a different translator and based on different source languages[31]. Similarly, in 1989, the Austrian, Swiss, West German, and East German ICOMOS National Committees collaborated to create a unified German version of the Charter, synthesized from several existing German versions and informed by both the original French text and the official English translation[32]. Secondly, the ICOMOS list excludes versions that have not been officially validated by the organization. A notable omission is the Chinese translation, which, despite being available since 1986, does not appear on the list[33].

MAPPING THE VENICE CHARTERS AND THEIR CONNECTIONS

The exact number of versions of the Venice Charter that have existed or still exist today remains unknown. However, given the discrepancies between the English translation and the French original – both of which served as bases for subsequent translations – it is certain that these differences were perpetuated, if not amplified, throughout the translation process. This phenomenon ultimately inspired the Pécs Declaration's call for corrective action. Our project takes a different approach: rather than attempting to correct these discrepancies, we aim to transform them into valuable sources of insight for understanding the history of the conservation discipline and fostering intercultural dialogue. To achieve this, the first critical step is to compile the most comprehensive dataset possible on the linguistic versions of the Charter, including the contexts of their production, their interpretations, and their applications. Given the global scale of the research and its inherently multilingual nature, this endeavor necessitates the development of an interdisciplinary and participatory methodology for both data collection and analysis. Central to the project is the creation of a database of relations, complemented by a visualization interface that will allow for the mapping of connections between translations, their historical contexts, and their uses. Additionally, the project involves close collaboration with researchers specializing in translation studies to ensure a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in the translation process.

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[26] Lemaire 1995; Hardy 2009.

[27] These four versions also inspired the choices for our exploratory project, the Russian version being replaced by the Italian version given the important role of Italian culture and scholars in the drafting of the Charter.

[28] For example, drafts of the Dutch and Thai versions dated 1964 are present at KU Leuven UA, LC, 4107a.

[29] 'The Venice Charter: 1964-1994' 1994, 77-211.

[30] https://www.icomos.org/en/resources/charters-and-texts accessed 18 December 2024.

[31] Erder 1994, 25.

[32] 'Charta von Venedig 1964' 1989.

[33] Chen 2016.

Data collection: versions, agents, productions

The first phase of our project focuses on assembling the most comprehensive collection possible of current and historical versions of the Venice Charter, regardless of whether they have been officially validated by ICOMOS. This effort will incorporate versions that have been rendered obsolete after revisions (e.g., pre-1989 German translations), incomplete or unadopted revised drafts (such as several found in the R.M. Lemaire archives[34]), and versions in active use but not officially validated by ICOMOS. To identify and gather these versions, our approach will include an extensive online survey conducted through ICCROM and ICOMOS networks, a systematic review of the existing literature, and consultation of relevant archives.

The second phase of data collection will investigate not only the cultural and historical contexts in which these versions were produced but also their interpretations, applications, and the relationships that connect them. On which language version(s) was each subsequent translation of the Charter based? Who undertook the translation, and for what purpose? Preliminary findings from our pilot phase reveal a complex web of relationships between translations. A single version may draw from multiple prior versions – sometimes within the same article – resulting in a composite translation. For instance, in the case of article 9, we observed that the Italian version remains relatively close to the French original, except for the phrase "*deve distinguersi della progettazione architettonica*" ("must be distinct from the architectural design"), which aligns surprisingly closely with the discordant English formulation previously noted. In rare instances, archival records or publications provide direct evidence of a translation's origins, such as the 1989 German retranslation mentioned earlier. However, in most cases, this information has not been documented. In such situations, insights from witnesses or individuals involved in the translation process can be invaluable. Additionally, textual comparison plays a critical role, enabling us to identify patterns and establish a form of "genealogy" for the various versions.

Identifying the translators behind the various versions of the Venice Charter presents another significant challenge for the project. Preliminary research indicates that most of the translations were carried out by heritage professionals rather than trained translation specialists. For instance, Lemaire's archives suggest that the English translation of the Charter was prepared by Lord Euston, then President of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, with possible proofreading by A.J. Taylor, Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments of England[35]. Similarly, one of the Turkish translations was undertaken by the archaeologist Cevat Erder[36], while the first Chinese translation, in 1986, was completed by Chen Zhihua[37], a leading expert on the history of foreign ancient architecture and conservation of architectural heritage[38]. In 1989, the German retranslation was a collaborative effort involving Ernst Bacher, Ludwig Deiters, Michael Petzet, and Alfred Wyss – then presidents of the Austrian, East German, and West German national ICOMOS committees, and vice-president of the Swiss national committee, respectively[39]. Understanding the perspectives of these translators on the issues addressed by the Charter could offer valuable insights into the reasons behind the diversity of

[34] Houbart 2014.
[35] *Letter from R.M. Lemaire to A.J. Taylor*, 7 December 1964, KU Leuven, UA, LC, 4107k.
[36] Hakan 2024.
[37] Lai, Demas, Agnew 2004, 86.
[38] Chen 2016, 355.
[39] 'Charta von Venedig 1964', 245.

the translations. This requires delving into their broader body of work, such as their writings, conservation philosophies, or major projects during the period when the translation was produced.

Another critical dimension of the data collection involves examining the uses and interpretations of each Venice Charter. Regarding uses, the project seeks to identify explicit references to the Charter in international doctrinal documents, legislative texts, regulations, codes of ethics, manuals, or training programs. Like the identification of language versions, this information will be gathered through a combination of literature reviews and extensive online surveys. Existing research has already explored the Charter's influence on documents such as the Burra Charter and the Nara Document[40], as well as its incorporation into certain regional legislation[41]. Understanding how the Charter has been interpreted in practice presents a particularly challenging task, especially given the brevity of its articles, which leaves them open to varied interpretations. Raymond Lemaire himself defended this openness, arguing that it allowed practitioners the flexibility to innovate[42]. To analyze these interpretations, the project aims to gather objective data, particularly explicit references to the Charter or specific articles, as they appear in the presentation, description, or critique of heritage projects. This includes both accurate and erroneous interpretations, which can be equally illuminating. For example, the French tradition of attributing to the Venice Charter the obligation to restore buildings to their "*dernier état connu*" ("last known state"), particularly highlighted during debates on the restoration of Notre-Dame's spire[43], is a misconception, like the frequent references to the Charter in discussions about the concept of reversibility[44], absent from the document. Another valuable source for examining interpretations is the wealth of scholarly articles and papers presented at conferences and symposia dedicated to the Charter since the 1970s. Archival research or interviews will complement the findings, particularly once specific projects or documents have been identified.

Archiving and connecting data

Given the sheer number of Venice Charter versions and their past and present use across many countries, the scale of the task and the potential volume of data to be gathered is immense. To manage this complexity, the project includes the development of a relational database and a visualization interface, serving both as tools for data collection and analysis. Network mapping, now a widely used method in sociology and history[45], will be central to this effort. Such mapping allows for the connection, interrogation, and visualization of large datasets involving agents, locations, events, and other historical or social elements. In our case, the database will link four key elements: versions of the Venice Charter, places, agents, and products. As outlined earlier, the **Charter versions** included in the database may be official or unofficial, currently in use or obsolete, finalized or in draft form. These versions will be further divided into individual articles to support genealogical analysis and facilitate the study of their usage or interpretation. **Places** are vital component of the database, documenting the circulation of Charter versions over time and space, while anchoring them within their cultural contexts. These places include

[40] E.g. Bourke 2004.
[41] E.g. Eberl 2021.
[42] Chen 2016, 355.
[43] E.g. Kuster, Mette 2020.
[44] E.g. Oikonomopoulou, Bristogianni, Barou, van Hees, Nijsse, Veer et al. 2016; Rich nd.
[45] E.g. Harvard University, *Vizualizing Historical networks*, https://histecon.fas.harvard.edu/visualizing/index.html, accessed 15 December 2024. A collaborative bibliography about the subject has been compiled by the Historical Network Research Community: https://historicalnetworkresearch.org/bibliography/, accessed 15 December 2024.

countries, regions, or other territorial divisions. Notably, linguistic usage does not always align neatly with geographic boundaries. For example, the English version is widely used in teaching and scientific production in non-English-speaking countries. **Agents** encompass both translators and users of the Charter, broadly defined. They can be individuals (e.g., architects, professors, archaeologists) or groups (e.g., associations, public bodies). Their inclusion in the database will help trace the human networks behind the Charter's translation, dissemination, and interpretation. **Products** refer to architectural or conservation projects as well as textual outputs such as articles, legislative or doctrinal documents, or any other texts explicitly linked to the Charter.

The database will connect each version of the Charter – or specific articles, where relevant – to its source version(s), the places where it was or is used, and the agents involved in its translation, dissemination, or application. These agents, in turn, will be linked to architectural or textual productions, creating an interconnected web of data. This networked structure will potentially reveal previously unknown relationships and allow users to launch complex queries by version, agent, or production, depending on their research focus. For example, users could trace the genealogy of a specific article across different language versions, analyze the spread of a particular interpretation across regions, or explore how a specific Charter version influenced conservation projects or regulatory documents. By organizing data in this way, the project not only enables the systematic study of the Charter's global impact but also opens new possibilities for interdisciplinary research and cross-cultural dialogue.

An interdisciplinary approach: translation studies

Our project fosters a dynamic collaboration between conservation and translation studies, allowing the two disciplines to mutually enrich one another. The linguistic expertise of translators will play a crucial role in conducting detailed textual comparisons with two primary objectives. First, we aim to identify the divergences and similarities between the various versions of the Venice Charter, mapping the relationships among them and determining, as precisely as possible, the source text(s) upon which each translation was based. This requires moving beyond the illusion of a singular, definitive "original" text – a concept often critiqued in translation studies. Many versions of the Charter appear to result from compromises between multiple source texts, as discussed earlier. By acknowledging this complexity, we can reconstruct the intricate genealogy of the Charter's translations with greater accuracy. Second, the project will undertake a terminological analysis to deepen our understanding of how different concepts related to conservation and restoration are articulated across languages. It is well established that languages do not divide reality in the same way, and heritage-related terminology is no exception. Direct equivalence for specific terms often does not exist, with certain words or phrases reflecting distinct cultural and professional frameworks. These terminological differences are far from superficial; they can reveal fundamentally different underlying conceptions of conservation and restoration practices.

The single term *aménagement* in the French version of the Charter, for example, which appears consistently in articles 5, 6, 14, and 15, undergoes varied translations in different language versions. The English version speaks in turn of "modification" in the section devoted to conservation, then reformulates the passage concerning the *aménagement* of monumental sites in article 14 using the verb "present" [the sites of monuments] and finally uses the verb "maintain" when referring to the

treatment to be reserved for ruins uncovered by excavations. Similarly, the Spanish version employs a different term for each instance of *aménagement*, using *acondicionamiento* in article 5, *arreglo* in article 6, *tratamiento* in article 14, and *mantenimiento* in article 15. In Italian, two terms are used in the section devoted to conservation: *adattamento* and *utilizzazione*. It is the latter which, although it differs from the French version, is retained in articles 14 and 15. By systematically comparing these variations, we can uncover the precise meanings of the terms used in relation to conservation and restoration, while also identifying the subtle nuances and semantic shifts that occur as the text transitions between languages and evolves through time. This work on terminology is useful both for heritage professionals and for training specialist translators.

The project offers translation studies other valuable insights. We hypothesize that the discrepancies between versions of the Venice Charter can, in part, be explained by the backgrounds and perspectives of the translators involved. As noted, a significant majority of the translations were carried out by non-professional translators, whose expertise lies outside the realm of language and cultural transfer. Consequently, their work was likely shaped by their own views on heritage management or the positions of the institutions they represented. These translations are, therefore, more likely to reflect personal interpretations and ideological stances on the subject, as well as current debates in their country at the time of the translation, rather than adhering to the neutral, "disembodied" approach typical of professional translators, who are generally more removed from the content's cultural and political implications. Focusing on these non-professional translators – a promising area of research in translation studies – will undoubtedly shed light on unique translation strategies that do not meet the same norms (in Toury's sense[46]) as those often described for professional translation, whether literary or pragmatic.

LEARNING FROM THE MANY VENICE CHARTERS

A networked history of conservation-restoration

Although the history of conservation has been the focus of several ambitious and thorough investigations[47], the dynamics behind the formation of specialized networks – and the circulation of ideas, concepts, and principles – remain largely unexplored. For instance, a comprehensive history of ICOMOS has yet to be written. While our project does not aim to fill this gap entirely, it will contribute to a better understanding of these dynamics through the lens of the Venice Charter. Additionally, the project will provide valuable initial insights into key figures in conservation, many of whom have not yet been the subject of detailed monographs. Research into the profiles of the 23 signatories of the Charter alone highlights the challenge of gathering in-depth information about conservation professionals who, unlike architects, are underrepresented topics in academic research. For most of these figures, information remains fragmented – except in the case of the Italians, who have often been the focus of intensive studies[48]. The launch of the journal *Conversaciones con...* in 2015 has significantly contributed to filling this gap, yet the potential for monographic research remains vast.

Collecting data on the translation, circulation, and interpretation of the Venice Charter also opens up the opportunity to explore more specific themes. Among other things, this data will allow us to

[46] Toury 1995.
[47] E.g. Jokilehto 2017; Glendinning 2013.
[48] E.g. Aveta 2008; Casiello, Pane, Russo 2010.

investigate the possible domination relationship between cultures and the colonial or post-colonial aspects of the various processes of dissemination and adoption of the Charter. Raymond Lemaire's archives reveal that one of the key reasons for the Charter's adoption at the 1964 Congress – despite its acknowledged 'imperfect' nature – was the pressure from many 'representatives of developing countries', who had approached him with urgent requests for a text that could assist them in negotiations with their governments[49]. What exactly happened in the dissemination and use of the Charter? In which regions and languages was it distributed, and how was it received? What influence have references to the Venice Charter in other international documents had on different cultural contexts? While this project does not seek to answer all these questions directly, it aims to collect and share foundational data that can provide the basis for further, more specific research in the future.

Cross-cultural dialogue: principles, concepts, terminology

While we fully acknowledge that the Venice Charter, which marked a fundamental moment in the awareness of conservation issues at a specific point in time, is no longer universally applicable (and perhaps never truly was), it still serves as a common point of reference in the field of heritage conservation. Regardless of perspective, the Charter is widely known, even by its most ardent critics. Its articles and their translations into various languages offer rich starting points for discussions on the diversity of interpretations and the evolution of principles and concepts across time and space. Such exchanges can foster greater understanding and tolerance between different cultural visions of heritage and contribute to the refinement of terminology. The 1994 Nara Conference on Authenticity is a prime example of how examining the meaning and application of the same concept across cultures and heritage typologies can lead to mutual enrichment among participants and beyond. The principles embedded in the Venice Charter's articles are potential catalysts for similar exchanges. By contextualizing the terms used in the Charter's translations in both historical and geographical contexts and linking them to concrete examples, this project will also complement existing glossaries and thesauri[50]. Preliminary research indicates that not only can different terms be used to express the same concept, but the same term can carry different definitions depending on the cultural context. For instance, a comparison of the draft revised English and American versions of the Charter produced in the 1970s reveals differing interpretations of the term "preservation". In the U.S. version, it focused on halting deterioration while excluding "significant reconstruction or restoration of lost historic features (…)"[51], while the British version defined the term more broadly, as "the process of preserving a valuable individual building, including repair and restoration as necessary"[52].

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Venice Charter is a product of its time and can no longer be regarded as a document capable of addressing the full spectrum of questions surrounding the transmission of heritage across diverse cultures. Nevertheless, it remains a landmark in the history of heritage conservation and a widely recognized, though not universally accepted, reference. Our project aims to develop tools to collect

[49] *Letter from R.M. Lemaire to G. Tripp*, 25 July 1964, KU Leuven, UA, LC, 4107k.
[50] E.g. Getty Art and architecture thesaurus online, https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies/aat/index.html; HEREIN System terminology, https://www.coe.int/en/web/herein-system/terminology, accessed 15 December 2024.
[51] *US ICOMOS draft outline,* April 1977, KU Leuven, UA, LP, 4107h.
[52] *ICOMOS UK proposals,* April 1977, KU Leuven, UA, LP, 4107h.

and analyze the most comprehensive data possible on the Charter's translations, dissemination, and applications, serving the global community of professionals and researchers.

The current phase, focused on four languages for practical reasons, serves as a foundation for expanding the study to include additional languages in the future. We warmly invite all those interested to join us in advancing this collaborative initiative. Together, we can critically reassess the Charter's universalism and, by drawing on its rich legacy, better understand the past while shaping the future of heritage conservation.

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