Podcast

Perils of Preservation

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Introduction: When we talk about documentation, digitalisation and restoration we usually assume that the sites where this takes place are accessible and safe, like in an open-air museum. However, there is a category of conservation specialists who, on a daily basis, are dealing with a range of challenges when they work in remote and/or dangerous areas. In this episode two heritage preservation experts talk about what drives them and how they address the perils their teams face in places like Iraq, Mozambique or Angola. **Stefano Campana** is Professor of Landscape Archaeology at the University of Siena, specialising in documentation and remote sensing. **Giovanni Fontana Antonelli** is an architect and landscape planner who devoted two decades of his work to the safeguarding of cultural heritage in the Arab world.

Meet our Guests

Stefano Campana
Stefano Campana is Professor of Landscape Archaeology at the University of Siena, specialising in documentation and remote sensing. He is the co-founder of Archeo Tech & Survey, a spin-off company from the University of Siena, which specialises in archaeology, remote sensing and geomatics.

Giovanni Fontana Antonelli

Giovanni Fontana Antonelli is an architect and landscape planner who devoted two decades of his work to the safeguarding of cultural heritage in the Arab world. He is the co-founder of Archi.Media Trust, a non profit organisation focussing on cultural heritage preservation and cultural development.

Transcript

It's the first Friday of the month, which means that it's time for the next episode of #FinallyFriday, bringing you insights and discussions from around the world focussing on experimental archaeology, ancient technology, archaeological open-air museums and interpretation.

Jess: Hello and welcome to #FinallyFriday. My name is Jess Shaw and today I'm joined by two specialists focussing on documentation, conservation planning and world heritage.

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Thank you so much for joining me both today. Can you start off by telling me how you met or started working together?

Giovanni: Well, Stefano Campana and I, we met physically for the first time on a trip to Iraq, to Hatra. There was a meeting beforehand, we met in our area between Siena and Grosseto for another short meeting. But the real encounter between us happened in Mosul and Hatra, where we joined both a mission for the documentation and conservation of Hatra World Heritage Site. This was in February 2020, right before the outbreak of the pandemic in Italy. We had this mission together and then when we came back to Italy there was a very long lockdown that obliged us to focus on our work and this somehow reinforced our ties, our friendship, because we started to work together on a number of proposals. Maybe Stefano can complement on that?

Stefano: Yeah, I would add maybe some details, because we were very, very close in 2018 when Giovanni was in Erbil and at the time he was organising and managing the reconstruction of some mosques in Mosul. I went with a colleague of mine visiting him at his flat. And he was there, I discovered later that he was there, but unfortunately he didn't hear us. So we were very, very close at the time, but we didn't meet. The meeting he was talking about we had in southern Tuscany was very interesting for several reasons, because Giovanni, on that occasion, told me about the ALIPH Foundation and thanks to his tips we asked fundings to the ALIPH Foundation for the Hatra project.

Jess: Can you tell our listeners about some of the projects you've worked on together?

Giovanni: Yes, we started co-operating on the Hatra project during the preliminary mission. We had a sort of exploration mission in February 2020, for a couple of weeks in a very cold Iraq at that time, where we had the first survey and the first analysis of the decay and the state of conservation of the World Heritage Site of Hatra. This was a mission where Stefano Campana was scientific director on behalf of the University of Siena and I was just an advisor to the team of experts. That project later on continued, Stefano can talk more about that. It achieved a number of significant results towards the preservation of Hatra.

Let me tell you only one little thing. When I was with UNESCO in Northern Iraq, between 2017 and 2019, I tried three times to reach Hatra, and I was never able to arrive to Hatra because of the security situation. And if Stefano remembers, he can recall that the first four or five days during our mission together also it wasn't possible to reach Hatra, because of unrest, fighting and other conflict situations that were erupting all around the site. At that time, ISIL was still a reality in northern Iraq, and this can lead later on to other questions that certainly will be raised about

the challenges that we are facing in this type of activities. Now I maybe give the floor to Stefano to complement a bit on the Hatra project that he followed after me, because after the first mission I left and he continued in that project.

Stefano: As Giovanni was saying, when we went to Hatra, there was lots of tension. It was the very beginning of 2020. Of course, we didn't stay overnight in Hatra, we came back to Mosul every time, but also in Mosul, the situation was not exactly stabilised. So I tell you this because, working with Giovanni made everything much easier because, it's really amazing to have a good team and people that make you feel fine. It's possible to reduce as much as possible tension and face this kind of situation in a completely different way. I give you just an idea. As we arrived in Mosul, thanks to the initiative of Giovanni, we immediately left our place and we visited the citadel. That was a brave initiative, but we did and it was really amazing. And we did with a very good spirit. So this is something that really helped a lot. About other projects, we got this experience in Iraq but we also started - thanks to Giovanni that involved me - another project in Mozambique, where we worked in the past. I didn't get the opportunity to go to Mozambique, but some people that are working in my team did. In any case, this is the second experience that we got together. We also developed further opportunities. For instance, we submitted a project for Samarra. That is another huge, massive site in Iraq. Unfortunately, so far, we don't get the opportunity to get fundings.

Jess: And why Iraq? How does your project come about? Do people approach you and ask you to come to Iraq or did you decide you wanted to go there and get funding for it, for the first project?

Stefano: Well, about Hatra. It was to a certain extent a follow-up of a previous project, because I would say that I'm a beginner in this field, because my experience started in 2017. I was involved from the Ministry of Cultural Heritage in Italy, to participate to a program of general assessment of northern Iraq. I did my first experience in Erbil, delivering a course on remote sensing, and how to assess, how to develop assessment in this field. And among the sites that we were interested to survey and to get further information, Hatra was one of them. But that program was over and the fundings were also over, but we got the opportunity - thanks to the information provided by Giovanni - to apply to ALIPH.

Jess: Giovanni, can you elaborate?

Giovanni: Yes, why Iraq? Iraq was somehow an obligatory step for our work in terms of preserving cultural heritage around the world, because Iraq was coming out of a conflict, a severe one, and not only a conflict, but before the conflict, it was affected by a sort of iconoclastic wave, promoted by ISIS or ISIL. You know the story. ISIL started a sort of crusade against cultural heritage, in order to divert the attention of the public opinion from what was their real goal in this sector, which was looting and trading archaeological artefacts on the international markets. It happened that I was called by UNESCO to work there, for the reconstruction of Mosul, which in 2017 was liberated from ISIL at a high price. At a high price because the citadel, the historic town that Stefano was mentioning before, was severely affected by bombardments and de facto left with circa 5,500 historic buildings destroyed and circa 10,000 buildings affected at different levels. So I found myself working there for a couple of years, until early 2019 and therefore I developed a knowledge about that context. In our job, the knowledge of the context is probably one of the most significant assets we can bring to the projects. I'll give you another example for Mozambique, which was mentioned before. Mozambique was a new country for us in 2019, 2020. We started analysing the data. We started fielding one exploration or one mission to explore the area. And then it was possible to implement the project itself, which was a project about the documentation and emergency measures for conservation of the historic town of Villa do Ibo in Cabo Delgado, which is the north part of Mozambique, bordering with Tanzania. Because of that knowledge that was developed in these two years, right now, we are promoting a number of activities and potentially future projects also in the same area, as we keep doing in Iraq. Because the entering in a sort of familiarity with a country or a territory, a region, it is not something that we can take for granted. It requires an enormous effort, it requires bravery, to be brave to initiate the contacts with the locals, institutions and communities, of course. So, an advice is to work in a context that is well-known somehow. And I don't think that we choose the territory or country. I think that the country is choosing us, in one way or another…

Jess: Thank you. I think that's such an honour and really incredible that you've had such an opportunity to work in so many different places. Do you have dream projects? You mentioned, Stefano, that you'd love to go back to Iraq, other places you'd love to go and different archaeology that you'd like to focus on?

Stefano: Well, Samarra is a very fascinating place for several reasons. It's a massive, a huge abandoned city.

Probably the biggest abandoned city in the world, so it would be an extraordinary challenge, to map, to work in that context. But to a certain extent, as Giovanni was saying, sometimes the contexts are choosing us. If you think about now, places as Ukraine or what is happening in Gaza, there is a matter of urgency, of emergency that of course, is pushing us to go in that direction. Then, of course, there is politics, because it is another point that is very important to emphasise and to underline is that cultural heritage and archaeology, is a target. It doesn't happen by chance that archaeology or cultural heritage has been destroyed and will be destroyed in the future. It's something that happened in the past. I'm talking about the ancient past. Since we have memory, we know about total destruction. Think about Carthage, for instance, or think about many other places that has been completely destroyed by armies, Romans or other situations. It's something that always happened. Unfortunately, nowadays the power of weapons is incredibly huge and there are incredible capabilities to destroy and delete identities.

Jess: And I think that's why recording and what you do with the remote sensing is so important. We have a wonderful network of members within EXARC and they're a group of Ukrainian archaeologists trying to preserve as much as possible and keep it going, spreading that knowledge. So this episode is particularly relevant to that network as well. And as you say, to wider current politics. You mentioned a good team was really important, and Giovanni kind of was really contributing to that feeling of security or making a good project. Giovanni, how do you pick a good team? How have you grown that team over time?

Giovanni: This is a key question, actually, because the team, not necessarily the skills of each component of the team, but the team as a whole, as one thing, is really one of the keys for success. Running projects, especially managing a non-profit organisation, I devote a good part of my time in organising the team, guarantee that the team is well-represented in terms, first of all, of gender balance, one of the things, but also in terms of capacity to understand each other. Because if I pick the best expert in each discipline, but I do not guarantee that they have a good understanding, mutual understanding, it's not going to work. I need to have in mind, first of all, the well-being of the team. The well-being of the team is the most important thing, the morale of the team. Of course, I need good experts as well. So it is a combination where choosing the team is a combination of, of course, availability of the personnel, of the experts, their capacities, but also the chemistry that you can establish between them. If you have these three elements playing together, we can have a successful project. The team will deliver good outputs, successful outputs. And how we pick up our teams. Stefano was essential in that because he, being a university professor, could select among his students some of the good ones. And he had the farsighting spirit to create a group of them and organising a spinoff company from his department, that is following and is contributing to this type of work. We are sometimes availing of this company, sometimes we work directly with the university department and sometimes when no one is available, we have to rely on other resources, but ideally we stay, let's say, within the family.

Stefano: Yeah, maybe I can add just some thoughts. Of course, I totally agree with what Giovanni just said, also because it is probably useful to recall that when you are working, for instance in Hatra, you are working 24 hours a day, more or less, because there is nothing else that you can do. There isn't pubs, restaurants, a city centre, or anything like that. You are in the middle of the desert. Which means that you spend all the day with a very small team, day after day, there are always the same people. Sometimes, as I told you, there is some tension, within the team, but also outside, the environment and the overall situation. So this is definitely important. The feeling and the overall mood has to be absolutely positive. Another point is also from the technical point of view and the skills, it is important to work with people that are super reliable. Because, as I told you, I'm a beginner in this field. Most of my experience comes from working in Italy or in the Mediterranean in a context, if you forget something during field work, you can always come back. This is definitely not the case of Mozambique, Iraq or this kind of places. You have to be sure that whatever you do on the field, you get exactly the data that you need. You can't forget anything. So you need to work with people that are really reliable and highly professional. Furthermore, there are always problems. I can give you an example. We are using drones for doing aerial survey, mapping and so on and I have lots of experience in crashing drones, but if you crash a drone in Hatra, this is a big issue. There are lots of issues that are not real issues but in that context become sometimes very, very difficult to face. So it's very important to work with the right people.

Giovanni: I can give you another example. In Mozambique, we're working in a very small island, offshore, not too far from the coastline, but it's an island. We purchased a drone - remember Stefano - we purchased a drone in South Africa. And then we, from South Africa, by bus, we brought it to Mozambique. It was impossible to import a drone from Italy, it would be very difficult. So we decided to buy the drone from this company. And of course we

gave them all the specifications, we want this, this, this, this, and that. When the drone arrived to the island, we opened the box, we assembled the drone and the card which records all the work was missing! The guy in South Africa forgot to give us the card. We had a spare card, of course, but it was not sufficient, so we should order and buy another card to the nearest city, and it took us three days to receive the card. So what do you do in such a situation? You put the drone on a shelf and you start doing the terrestrial photogrammetry with the camera. So what I'm saying is that you need to be very flexible, very adaptable to the situation on the ground in such an environment. Or for other reasons, for the drone in particular, sometimes you plan a mission of two weeks. Let's say Mozambique, you want to stay there for two weeks, you're planning your work. You consider a certain margin of unforeseen things, but maybe you don't expect that it rains every day. So you have to replan things, re-adapt your calendar, your schedule. These types of things happen every day, without considering the environmental conditions, the heat or the cold, mosquito sicknesses and the security situation, the safety for the people. Because we are working primarily in areas affected by unrest, by conflict and the situation is quite unpredictable. To reach the small island in Mozambique, you have to travel for about 24 hours from Europe, reaching the capital city, then overnighting there, then taking another plane, a domestic flight to reach Pemba, which is the nearest airport. From Pemba, renting a car, driving for three or four hours in the bush, stopping the car there, getting a boat, and with the boat arriving to the island. So it's a two, three day trip to reach the island and a two, three day trip to come back. You need to factor all these things. Of course, the second, third, fourth time it's easier, but the first time it opens to a number of incognito and uncertainties that you need to face according to your experience.

Jess: I can definitely relate to that. I did an archaeology dig in Mexico and it was deep in the jungle. It was a seven hour bus ride to this tiny little nowhere town and then a five hour drive into the jungle and you're there for three weeks. There's no internet, no trips outside of the camp, you're just there. And we worked every single day because it takes so much time and resources to get to that place, for three weeks only in a year. But yeah, group chemistry, I think, really makes a difference. We had board games and volleyball. A lot of volleyball after a full day of digging was the way we kept morale up. But how did you manage to keep morale? You said you carefully picked your team, but how do you also manage the risks of working in potentially volatile countries?

Giovanni: Well, I think that friendship and a sense of humour, really the connection between the different members of the team is very important. It's important to keep the morale high and also important in the event of an outbreak in the security and safety for the team. So we need to be very cohesive in all situations. When we are there, - you know, you've been in this type of missions - you basically are there for working. So you try to utilise the majority of the time, daytime and nighttime, working. Daytime, of course, is fieldwork. Nighttime is preparing the day after, usually preparing the reporting for the day just passed and preparing the day after. So basically it's very long hours. The security, you need to be very careful. I've been working in volatile environments for probably about 20 years and I went through training courses done by the military or by the UN system. Specialised personnel, they teach you how to approach the majority of the situations, of course, not everything. There is always an incident that cannot be foreseen or avoided. But in the large majority of cases those information, the experience, it helps a lot. And there is another very important point here to be said: the establishment of a trustful relation with the local community or some members of the local community. When we work in those places, we always include in our team, one or two, or three, it depends, persons of the local community. They can help in the logistics. Sometimes they are also experts, specialists. Like in Mozambique, we work with an architect from Mozambique. This is the best security and safety, in my opinion, because it also functions very well at the level of the alerts. When there is a potential risk, they are alerted before us, of course, in their language. Let's say in Iraq, of course, we don't speak Arabic fluently. The communication in this type of situation is happening in Arabic, so it's very important to have within the team local personnel.

Jess: Giovanni, you mentioned that Stefano sometimes selects students that you've taught. What kind of qualities are you looking for?

Stefano: The first quality for being a good archaeologist is passion. If you don't have passion, probably it's the wrong activity. Because, it's very unusual to get, let's say, a satisfactory salary. You don't become an archaeologist for money, so what is really important in my view and what I'm also looking for during classes and so on, is passion, genuine interest. Of course, every student has different skills, qualities and, for instance, reliability is another very important point. And then, of course, also talent, different kind of skills, different kind of talent, but this is also important. I would say, a balance of the three, with passion first.

Jess: Yeah, absolutely. Speaking of students, you also recently trained some Iraqi experts to use drones for photogrammetry. How was that? What were the challenges that you encountered there?

Stefano: Well, that's a real challenge, sometimes I talk about this with Giovanni. Usually, the funders or the donors, they expect to have a capacity-building training, but a very little part of the money is addressed to accomplish this task. And it is complicated because we are talking about students. Our students usually need years and years to get the skills that allow them to participate to this kind of activity and achieve a piece of the assessment. So, it is pretty tricky to expect that an Iraqi student or a Mozambique student, in two or three or four weeks can get all the information and the training he needs or she needs. So, talking with Giovanni, the idea is to find a way to bring them to Italy, for instance, but this is also very challenging because in some places in Iraq, for instance, most of the guys at 18 or 19 years old, they are already married and maybe they have children. So it is not that easy to move them from their environment and bring them to Italy or somewhere else for a month or even more. One of the problems in my view is that we need a bit more time to spend with them. An interesting approach could be to involve a relatively large number of students. I'm talking about 20 students, for instance, and then progressively do a sort of selection and going progressively in depth, identifying and teaching them, to a relatively small number of them, what they need to know so that when they come back or when they are in their environment, they can do the same: spread the knowledge to the local people and local colleagues. That's also an interesting approach. But of course, they have a relatively small experience.

Giovanni: The capacity-building and training component of our projects is mandatory. And I support this component to be mandatory. At the same time, it has lights and shadows. I always say that after 10 years spent in Palestine at the UNESCO Ramallah office, if I look back, 10 years there, so the beginning was 20 years ago of this experience. Probably the best results that I achieved there, the best part of my work is certainly the people that raised their capacities. These young girls and boys, young engineers, architects, archaeologists, anthropologists, different type of disciplines that really became better professionals, which means that the capacity-building component shall be mandatory. I support this to be an important part of our projects. But, there's a big but, however, this requires an enormous amount of waste. We can say waste. Why? Because, it's probably in the nature of this activity to have a large number of people who at one point, either were never fit to do such a thing, either they lost interest, either for some reasons couldn't complete the training, many other reasons. One of the most dangerous facts in capacity-building is the risk that the trainee, once trained, will not stay in the institution for which he or she was trained. They leave their institutions. The delivering of a training and skills for someone in certain cases become the reason for quitting, the opportunity for quitting with those better skills. Given a simple example, they can apply for a master's in Europe. And they leave the country, they leave the institution, and sometimes they never go back, which brings you back to square one. You need an archaeologist with expertise in drone surveying in that institution, that country. You train the person, person is good. Well, you train five people, four are not good, one is good. The one which is good, after two years is in another country and never come back. You wasted the whole thing. Of course, this is not a total number, but it's high. It's very high and we need to know that when we invest in capacity-building, there is probably the Pareto law, 80-20. You invest a hundred, 20 percent achievement, 80 percent is a waste, which sometimes is very frustrating, especially if you consider that it's a lengthy effort. It's a very time-consuming effort and every trainee that is leaving it's a big loss, especially for the country that it's supposed to help.

Jess: Is there any way that you work with the countries to try and motivate them to stay there?

Giovanni: Unfortunately, we always work in countries that are either affected by conflicts, either affected by - now - climate change and severe climate threats, or simply by poverty, instability, unrest. There is a big tendency to quit their homeland and moving to better locations. It depends really, it depends on a number of factors. This is why it's so important to know the context very well. And also when you select the people, when you select the locations, when you select the institutions to partner with and so forth. There are a number of challenges. We didn't mention that, but in countries like Iraq for instance, corruption is a very high risk. You never know when and how you will be requested to pay extra for X and Y, people, institution, et cetera. So, again, this is like dropping from a training course. The damage is not for who's paying or is obliged to pay for the… what we call 'wasta' in Arabic, for the bribe. The damage is for the one who receiving it, because receiving the bribe they're not contributing to the growth of their country. Of course, we have a no tolerance policy on that, so we never pay that, but we are suffering sometimes the consequences of this. Stefano might remember a car that should be purchased for an XY department, which was totally irrelevant for the project itself, right?

Stefano: Yep.

Jess: It's interesting. It sounds like a lot of what you do really centres around people. It's about finding the right team, training up the right people, working with the right 'in country' people as well, the local craftspeople as well. But ultimately, why do you do the job you do? Why do you feel it is important to restore buildings? And yeah, it sounds like a simple question, but I'd love to hear your answer.

Stefano: Well, I have to recognize that mostly my life happened just by chance. But, I can also tell you that during the first year of the Daesh state, watching at the TV some awful image of cultural heritage that was destroyed by bombing and explosives or by hammers was incredibly frustrating. In several occasions, I caught a strong feeling to have the opportunity to do something. So to be honest, I didn't choose this opportunity, but at a certain point, it happened. I grasped it immediately, because I thought that that was my occasion to contribute. Documenting is incredibly important within a warfare context, within unstable countries, but heritage is at risk everywhere, Notre Dame also burned. So implementing documentation and spending time and energy in this kind of activities is always welcome, I would say.

Jess: Absolutely, it really beautifully links with a project within EXARC at the moment. We've just had a conference about the RETOLD project, which it's all about preserving open-air museums. Obviously those were built more recently, based on archaeological finds and heritage, but a lot of the people that originally built those museums are finishing their careers or they haven't written down there all the decisions that went behind the buildings, and it's so important to preserve all the decisions about which archaeological find they based it on, why they chose to interpret it the way they did, and also preserving those cultural skills and crafts. So certain building techniques and things are dying out, and open-air museums are really trying to preserve that, so it's great that there's such transferable skills across the disciplines. Giovanni, do you want to elaborate on why you feel it's important to restore buildings?

Giovanni: Well, this is a lifetime answer for me in the sense that I'm involved in such a context more than 20, 25 years now. My first experience in a conflict-affected country was in Angola, in 1999. At the time Angola was in a civil war and I was sent by UNESCO to document, in fact, five museums, one of them located in the middle of the jungle, in an area bordering Congo DRC. It was an ex-diamond area, and it was the largest ethnological Museum, Ethnographic Museum in all Africa because the various directors of the diamond mining companies were collecting artefacts from the different tribes around it. It was mainly a Chokwe ethnic group area. And they collected up to, if I remember correctly, the number 20,000 artefacts. They were then stored in this museum, which was a jeopardy because of the civil war. Since that experience in 1999, I also found a sort of attraction, fatal attraction for this type of heritage because it's the heritage which is vanishing, is exposed to the risk of non-existence, so you have this very strange feeling sometimes of being the last person, or at least the last foreign person, to witness such a presence of cultural expression, a building, or a craftsmanship. And this feeling is something very strong. You do whatever is possible, whatever you can do to avoid this thing, to make sure that you are not the last one who's exposed to such an experience, such a beauty, such a significance. Our role is first of all to save it, to preserve it, to make it accessible, and also to make it potentially a benefit for the local community. So it is the integration of many factors together, which is not necessarily easy to achieve.

Jess: Thank you, both really interesting answers. I have one final question for you both. How do you harmonise the kind of European approaches to conservation with non-European expectations? I'm sure not every country has the same motivations that you do for preserving their heritage. Stefano, do you want to start?

Stefano: Well, I would start from a consideration that for sure every country has the same kind of issues. I found it pretty interesting, when I was working in Nineveh, so in Mosul, there were some intentional damage to the main gate of the ancient city. But there were also lots of destruction of the ancient city due to the construction, for instance, of a motorway. During the ISIS occupation ISIS built also a motorway. Furthermore, they built granaries. So huge trenches, very, very deep and super massive. I'm talking about 100 metres by 60 metres, with a depth up to 7 metres. Which means removing thousands of cubic metres of soil. What happened there is definitely vandalism, intentional destruction, but also what is happening everywhere. Because everywhere, we build new development, we build roads and so on. The difference is that, generally speaking, in western countries, the law is asking the builders, the polluters, to pay for the new development, which means also to spend money to record what is there, the archaeology and all the features. Nothing like that happened during the ISIS occupation of course. So, there are different rules for different countries. Also within so-called Western countries, there are very, very different rules.

Unfortunately, there are places where the kind of activity and the preservation is better and situations where it is a bit worse. I wouldn't say that there is any best country from his point of view, because there are always pros and cons, in different places. Of course, in countries that are affected from several issues, as Giovanni was saying before, so poverty for instance, instability and so on, sometimes there are other priorities. So from the one end, they have a strong feeling of keeping, and doing their best, to keep at least some evidence of their identity. From the other side, there is also a different maturity in recognizing the evidence and the features that can be associated to identity. If you think about some very evident and clear piece of architecture for instance, this could be easily identified as a piece of identity. There are some other, more perishable or less iconic evidence that are also very important, but maybe they - or we - don't develop that feeling enough. There are different practices, different rules and we are back again to politics because also politics is playing a very, very important role. I was talking about identity. Who is deciding what is identity or what could be identified as the identity and what is not identity is a pretty tricky issue.

Giovanni: This question is particularly difficult to answer, for me at least, because I went through the majority of my professional life through this debate: to which extent it is correct to import, to export our principles, practices, values, etc. to these places. But at the same time - with the exception of a very few cases which I never work with - we always work in countries that have been already, more or less, but usually heavily colonised. So we do not deal with a situation in an area, in a community, which was not already invested by this type of problems. I'll give you an example. If a community is asking for a museum... Two days ago I was here in a conference and I spoke with a woman from Cameroon and she told me that in her community, a mid-sized town north of Douala, they're working for the establishment of a museum of coffee. Now, the same term and the same concept of museum, it is something that is absolutely western and European. It's not something that can be in any, in any way, placed and located within the local community in Africa or in Latin America or in Asia. In this case, we are in Cameroon, in the very middle of Africa. The level of permeation, of penetration of our concepts and our notions is so deep already in most countries in the world, that it's difficult to work in the absence of our categories. So if I have to restore a building, it's very difficult to remove our background as Europeans and restore the building according to traditional knowledge. Traditional knowledge can be used for the restoration, for instance, the local materials, et cetera. But, there is always a filter between the local tradition and the more, let's say, advanced technology that is coming necessarily from Europe and North America, from the Western countries. Even Japan, which is a very well developped country, has a different approach to conservation, because of their very ancient culture that is looking at the work of conservation from a different lens. Said that, it is a constant dialogue - sometimes a bit conflictual and intense - in striking a balance between a correct approach, which is not imposing a point of view on others and at the same time being able to listen and to acquire the input that are coming from the locals. It's easier to talk about it than to do it. When you are confronted with the reality, the number of challenges related to this type of dichotomy are really numerous and it's difficult to strike a balance. The moment we bring a drone, going back to the documentation, the drone were not manufactured or created, designed in, let's use Cameroon again as an example. They come now from China the majority, the US, Germany and so forth, because the technology today is unavoidable and it's playing a big role.

Jess: It's interesting because I think it's a real privilege to be able to think about and conserve heritage. As you were saying, Stefano, if you live in a country full of conflict, your priorities are far more based on the bare essentials. Thank you so much, both of you, for taking the time to share your knowledge and some incredible insights. I've certainly learned a lot, and I know that our listeners will have found this really interesting as well. There's been a lot of applicable points to different members of our community, so thank you so much. And thank you to everyone for listening to this episode of #FinallyFriday by EXARC. If you'd like to become more involved with EXARC, why not become a member? Alternatively, you can make a small PayPal donation through the website to support EXARC in its endeavours.

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