

A Long Journey

Metamorphosis and Safeguard of ‘Traditional Knowledge’ in the Frame of Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention

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Abstract Starting from an overview of international Conventions between culture and nature, the paper analyses some aspects of the heritage-making process. We explore the connection between ICH and TK in the light of two case studies: cultural policies in the French Savoy and in Venice, Italy. In Savoy, a movement is connecting civil society, local economies and policies in a decentralisation process, between conflicts and compromises. In Venice, civil society and scientific communities work together for the safeguarding of ICH. We argue that only effective ICH safeguarding policies, well connected to the economy, can support and make productive this dialogue on the current process of change.

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Keywords Traditional Knowledge. Intangible Cultural Heritage. Cultural communities.

1 Introduction

Traditional knowledge (TK) has been gaining international attention by different scientific disciplines and policy sectors in the latest decades. Its definition is still broad and dynamic. In 2002, the ICSU provided the following definition of TK:

a cumulative body of knowledge, know-how, practices and representations maintained and developed by peoples with extended histories of interaction with the natural environment. These sophisticated sets of understandings, interpretations and meanings are part and parcel of a cultural complex that encompasses language, naming and classification systems, resource use practices, ritual, spirituality and worldview. (ICSU 2002, 24)

In a policy perspective, it is not a case that a significant part of the work of the WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization) is devoted to TK. WIPO defines TK as “a living body of knowledge passed on from generation to generation within a community”¹ and highlights the fact that TK is part of a people’s cultural and spiritual identity, including a variety of aspects from genetic resources to TCEs (Traditional cultural expressions).

Besides definitions, TK appears in a number of specific international instruments and conventions, chronologically as follows:

- 1992 CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity), art. 8(j) on “knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity”;
- 2001 International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture of the FAO, art. 9.2 on the protection of TK relevant to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture;
- 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage;
- 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions;
- 2010 Nagoya Protocol to the CBD on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization referring to traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources.

One may easily note that the concept of TK is on a long and dynamic recognition process from different perspectives. First within the human rights and indigenous people’s framework. Then the concept rises in the context of environment and only later in the one of culture and heritage.

But we should also note a further historical shift: from TK considered as an object to the people and communities as active subjects, producers and protagonists of culture, constantly creating and recreating TK and TCEs.

Within the UN process the identification and involvement of active subjects in TK and TCEs is referred to as ‘indigenous peoples’, creating separations and misunderstandings on the consistency of TK and TCEs in any other groups or communities in civil society not classified as ‘indigenous’, i.e. artisans and farmers. Consequently, the effective place and role of groups and communities on TK and TCEs in a wider cultural and natural perspective has not yet been fully considered and captured. Today a widespread process is in progress: the empowerment of civil society and the various local actors recognised as subjects and protagonists in the construction and safeguard of cultural and natural heritage in a perspective

¹ <http://www.wipo.int/tk/en/> (2017-12-15).

of socially-based sustainability. So far the 2003 UNESCO Convention is the only international legal instrument connecting individuals, groups and communities with TK and TCE in an open, dynamic and complex vision of socio-cultural processes and in a sustainability perspective.

2 An International Overview from the Biodiversity Framework and Landscape

In an inspiring work published in 1999, UN brought together policy and science contributions by groups and communities on the theme of cultural and spiritual values of biodiversity (UNEP 1999). This exercise collected evidences for the practical foundations and development of participatory methods in field projects and local-regional programmes. The fact that cultural and spiritual values were raised in a biodiversity, say from a 'natural', perspective, contributed to the implementation of participatory field projects starting from national protected areas, mainly national parks, and forested areas where local inhabitants with their TK have been eventually involved in the different steps (analysis, decisions, planning and management) with their rights, responsibilities, knowledge, skills, practices, perceptions and representations. Contributors to this publication include a variety of people: local groups, communities, experts and scientists from all over the world, scholars, political and spiritual leaders, indigenous elders, traditional farmers, shamans and curers, poets, artists, song-writers, journalists and others. They raised some key points and messages on culture, traditions and heritage, among others the following:

- inextricable links between nature, society, language and culture are carried throughout generations and testified by local people, groups and communities;
- consideration to be given to:
 - different frameworks for the evaluation of the diverse peoples who are grouped together as 'indigenous' or local;
 - direct individual voices and depositions by myriad of indigenous, traditional and local peoples reinforce formal declarations and statements by national and international agencies on the vital values of diversity;
- clear evidences show that the best way to safeguarding the diversity of cultures and nature is through the empowerment of the people with their local knowledge, skills and experiences;
- anthropologists and ethnoecologists, aided by advances in information technology, might be able to adequately describe TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge) systems. But scientists themselves admit that they will never get more than a inkling of the whole, intricate webs

- of symbols, values, practices and information that have evolved in unique systems for each society;
- the only way to employ all the force and sophistication of local communities is to allow them to develop and design their own systems for change, conservation, land and resource use. All evidences show that this can be done best through communities in equitable relationships, true partnerships, with scientific and technical advisors and that it works best when the scientific experts are in the role of advisors, not commanders;
 - there are some serious multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural dilemmas. Some of these are methodological, as well as philosophical and political: how can local concepts be used as criteria and indicators in the development of baseline studies of biodiversity? And how can these become central, for example, to environmental impact assessments, monitoring activities and national biodiversity surveys? How can spiritual and cultural values be incorporated into planning and policy decisions? Can any of this be assigned monetary value? If not, how can other value systems be respected and weighed?
 - these questions do not depend on political will alone to implement change, but also require considerable intellectual work to develop integrated methodologies to guide the practical tasks for such studies;
 - likewise the legal basis for protection of indigenous, traditional and local community rights is far from complete, given that the people involved have rarely been seriously consulted on what the basic principles for codes of conduct, and standards of practice, and new, appropriate laws might be. The latter, it must be said, depends more upon changes in political and economic policies than on methodological difficulties.

A Special Session of the UNGA was convened to evaluate progress years after the Earth Summit. Most observers found that the tally for Nation/State action was poor. But some of the parallel processes that have accompanied the global environmental movement are finding considerable successes. Indigenous peoples, for example, have become significant players in debates on sustainability, trade, environment and human rights. Traditional farmers have become well-organised and their demands increasingly heard through debates in the international arenas.

3 Some Contributions from Human Sciences. Cultural Diversity and Heritage's Re-Evolutions in Europe

A considérer la culture comme on la pratique, non dans le plus valorisé par la représentation officielle ou par la politique économique, mais dans ce qui la soutient et l'organise, trois priorités d'imposent: l'oral, l'opérateur et l'ordinaire. Toutes trois nous reviennent par le détour d'une scène supposée étrangère, la "culture populaire", qui a vu se multiplier les études sur les traditions orales, la créativité pratique et les actes de la vie quotidienne. Un pas de plus est nécessaire pour abattre cette barrière fictive et reconnaître qu'en vérité il est question de notre culture, sans que nous le sachions. Car les sciences sociales ont analysé en terme de "culture populaire" des fonctionnements restés fondamentaux dans notre culture urbaine et moderne, mais tenus pour illégitimes ou négligeable de la modernité (de Certeau 1990, 1: 353).

It can be really interesting to reflect on the impact of policies on the development of heritage's imaginary, and to reflect on some ethnographical experiences of the last decades focussing on the political frames of ethnographical commissioning. The thought of Michel de Certeau (1976; 1990), French philosopher and historian, had a major impact on policies, heritage practices and scientific ideas in France over the twenty years from 1990 to 2010 (Lang 1983; Mirlesse, Anglade 2006).² The orientations of cultural policies during that time determine the multiple and widespread public investments, in a territorial vision of culture, plural and socially-based (Lapicciarella Zingari 2012).

I propose here some reflections based on my ethnographical experiences in a boundary region between France and Italy, Alpine Savoy. Here, between 2003 and 2009, in the frame of interministerial programs on culture, some local associations in dialogue with researchers and policy-makers, were engaged to build a new vision of local history based on concrete memories and identities, where an invisible and implicit battle opposed the concept of popular culture as folklore, to a more inclusive and politically strong vision of heritage. To put in light the concrete historical context of this region, we can start this reflection reading Michel de Certeau.

Depuis 1880, l'enseignement primaire a structuré une cohésion nationale et profondément marqué la culture et la société française.

2 See Mirlesse, Anglade 2006, 18-22, for an interesting analysis on the relation between Michel de Certeau and the Ministry Jack Lang. URL <http://www.eleves.ens.fr/pollens/seminaire/seances/politique-culturelle/politique-culturelle-francaise.pdf> (2017-12-15).

N'a-t-il pas aussi, en répandant l'instruction (un savoir: ce qu'il faut apprendre) et l'éducation (une morale civique : ce qu'il faut faire), accéléré la destruction de cultures locales ? L'impérialisme culturel, était l'envers d'une grande ambition sociale et centralisatrice, n'a-t-il pas créé cette "incapacité" qui consiste à n'être pas conforme aux critères des sciences distribuées d'en haut, intellectualisé la culture au détriment d'autres types d'expériences, et donc appauvri les régions parce que qui fortifiait la centralisation? (...) Une ignorance massive laisse la masse dans l'oubli. Elle tient sans doute au privilège que possède l'écrit, à la répression qu'il a exercé sur l'oral et sur des expressions différentes, devenues des folklores aux frontières d'un empire. (1976, 147)

Recalling the wide "lands of silence" in its remarkable pages devoted to the "social architecture of knowledge", de Certeau tells us of centralising pressure of France and of the effects on local cultures. In Savoy, at the "borders of the Empire", in a land that came the latest inside the borders of the Exagone,³ in the heart of a huge colonial empire, the centralising and repressive forces have been powerful. Its definition corresponds to a situation that I personally lived in my ethnographic fieldwork in Savoy. Memories, complex and solid systems of TK of Alpine communities, were actually perceivable as "folklore at the borders of the Empire". On those fields, I could listen shy testimonies of social groups heirs of a powerful Alpine culture, subaltern to the dominant French culture infused of modernism in the myth of scientific and technological progress connected to the social one (Lapicciarella Zingari 2012).

The writings of de Certeau had a strong impact on the policies of the '80s. *La culture au pluriel* can be considered inspiring to the ministry of Jacques Lang and at the origin of a number of cultural policies reforms in France. Signs of this evolution are found in the writings of Isac Chiva and Daniel Fabre, anthropologists working at the big design of cultural policies and involved in the preparation and implementation of the ICH Convention in France. Some relevant writings are available on the website of the ministry under "Démocratisation culturelle, diversité culturelle et cohésion sociale".⁴

What can we read behind some ethnographical fields, funded by inter-ministerial French programmes?

The website of the French ministry shows the articulations between the

3 The annexation of Savoy to France is rather recent in the national history, 1860, just one year before the formation of the Italian State.

4 URL <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/div-culturelle/5-salmet.html> (2017-12-15).

inter-ministerial, national territorialised and regional programmes.⁵ The term of “territorial re-identification”, used in official documents, should be noted. The website of the French ministry shows the articulations between the three inter-ministerial, national territorialised and regional programmes.

The decentralisation policy was turned to soften the line of national identity, not exempt of strong contradictions also expressed during the debates on the crisis of the notion of ethnological heritage (Lapicciarella Zingari 2012). Scientific research remains strongly rooted in the national dimension, centralised in the orientations and disciplinary splitting, territorialised in the practices. In the grid of the ministerial orientations, ethnologists take spaces to work on the rural and urban memory (Althabe 1996; 2001). This is the matrix of different scientific projects at that time like a compromise between the ministerial orientations, local policies concerns and the emerging social needs incorporated also by a number of administration services. The inter-ministerial programme on *Cultures, dynamiques villes et sociales*, was implemented at the regional level in a multi-year project, still in progress, as a study and enhancement of memory and plural memories that live and are defined at the regional level. Some vision conflicts that I analyse in my doctoral work,⁶ reveal friction between the scientific guidelines dictated by the Ministry and the local political/social projects, geared to reach out to the widespread need for identity and recognition of populations and specific local traditions.

In the case of the border and railway city of Modane, a project oriented by construction values of dialogue between populations and contexts of social welfare tied to the traditions of “border solidarity”, was confronted with a scientific project, oriented to a knowledge objective, the national historical memory of border territory. In other contexts, such as rural and mountain villages of Villarodin-Bourget and Bessans, the memory of TK and practices, knowledge of nature, rituals are a strong fabric that opposes the lifestyles and the imaginary mountain agro pastoral evolution of a violent modernisation, imposed by external agents to the local population as an inevitable destiny.

Unexpectedly, interviewed people wanted to talk about their forgotten traditions, about their natural environment rich in resources overwhelmed and threatened by the industrial progress of the valley, about the knowledge, skills and practices, about lifestyles of the past agro pastoral and a mythical and fabulous universe, further and further away from their everyday life and so vital to their cultural and spiritual survival. In recent years, this area

5 <http://www4.culture.gouv.fr/actions/recherche/culturesenville/fr/programme.html> (2017-12-15).

6 Lapicciarella, Valentina (2014). *Storie dalla frontiera, frontiere della storia. Paesaggi di montagna, storie e voci di confine* [PhD dissertation]. University of Siena.

experiences activities of rebirth of local traditions by local associations in the first row. The association Patrimoine sans frontières in Modane, the Association de Saint Antoine in Villarodin-Bourget, the association Bessans jadis et aujourd'hui in the upper valley of Maurienne, are the protagonists of countless activities of transmission of knowledge and traditional practices, as well as the birth of new social practices. The ethnographic research on the "heritage and local memory" become the expressive space of desires and claims of development decisions often in conflict with other powers at work in those areas, resulting in a shift of the analysis to the subjects and social processes. A shift that widens the perspectives of research to the possibility of building common knowledge and heritage projects together with the tradition bearers. I analysed the passage of vision, in France, from a heritage of objects to a "heritage in project": a change that implies the transformation of tools in our profession (Lapicciarella Zingari 2012).

In the context of the Italian anthropology and demological studies, Fabio Mugnaini took over the sense of the lesson of the demologist Alberto Cirese:

Studies that we call demological must in any case consider, and not-generically, with the social and cultural contemporary life, with the forces and ideologies that animate it, and with the rigor of the concepts that his study requires, transforming them accordingly. (Cirese 1977, 310)

Mugnaini wrote:

The path can be summarised in the following points: the content of folklore or demological studies [...] does not disappear with the socio-cultural transformations nor with the technological innovations that have modified the overall structure of production, communication and use of cultural events. Expressive verbal and artistic resources, rituals, practices of sociability and interpersonal communication, continue to convey different conceptions of the world from those hegemonic (official, elitist or simply spread by the mass media) that refer to many collective subjectivities (of social or cultural nature) that make up the social systems, variously disposed with respect to power and access to resources, both material and cultural. (Clemente, Mugnaini 2001, 21)

If traditions do not disappear with the socio-cultural transformations and technological innovations, the domination and power processes can however endanger the expressive spaces and the contexts of the transmission. In this sense, the project of international policy as expressed by the international Conventions calls scholars to their responsibilities in the negotiation with the cultural institutions in the role of mediation with the "cultural

communities".⁷ What I have just mentioned, between Modane, Villarodin-Bourget and Bessans, is a concrete evidence of the "proliferate in social" of traditions, including intimate and everyday sphere, associations, heritage action that is linked, in sometimes conflicting combinations, with action of scientific territorial research linked to the national programmes.

The emergence of heritage and museographic projects can be considered as places claiming recognition of cultural diversity in the public space. On the other hand, as we read in some texts that analyse transformations of cultural policies in France, in the years of the ministry of Jack Lang, French cultural policies were supported in this respect by the commitment of scholars like Michel de Certeau and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Between the late '90s and 2010, in the French regions the DRAC (Directions régionales des affaires culturelles) representing the institution of culture, have in the 'conseillers à l'ethnologie' the interlocutors responsible for programmes and funding with a dual role, which can be seen as a top-down, reflecting the guidelines of the research programmes of the decisions taken at the ministerial level policies of the central state, and bottom-up, being their action targeted to the emergence of regional and local land projects negotiated in relation to 'local needs and projects'. As part of these programmes, partnerships with National Parks, local communities, cultural foundations allow anthropologists to explore 'local systems', whose knowledge goes from the words of people to the construction through dialogue and negotiation of narratives, as part of the progressive emergence of participatory methods, already present in the need of 'restitution' of the studies with scientific or heritage character to local communities.

The progressive transformation of cultural policies and the ratification of international conventions come to legitimise, by changing the political coordinates, a vast society movement which likewise tend to the recognition of rights to culture and cultural diversity. The process of *heritage-making* reveals the complexity of structures that connects different levels and actors, on the one hand marked by the character of process in the making that we find already expressed very effectively by Gérard Lenclud in a writing that is today a reference for the social studies.

En quoi consiste alors la tradition? [...] Il s'ensuit que l'itinéraire à suivre pour en éclairer la genèse n'emprunte pas le trajet qui va du passé vers le présent mais le chemin par lequel tout groupe humain constitue sa tradition: du présent vers le passé. Dans toutes les sociétés, y compris les nôtres, la tradition est une " rétro-projection ", formule que Pouillon explicite en ces termes: " Nous choisissons ce par quoi nous nous

7 Following a distinction proposed by the Mexican anthropologist Lourde Arizpe between "cultural community", without reference to the territory and territorialised communities, presented by Antonio Arantes at the first forum of researchers ICH, held in Paris in 2012.

déclarons déterminés, nous nous présentons comme les continuateurs de ceux dont nous avons fait nos prédécesseurs ” (ibid). La tradition institue une “ filiation inversée ”: loin que les pères engendrent les fils, les pères naissent des fils. Ce n’est pas le passé qui produit le présent mais le présent qui façonne son passé. La tradition est un procès de reconnaissance en paternité. (1987, 32)

Connecting to international instruments that make it legitimate instrument of recognition. In this second sense, the Valdimar Hafstein reflections are particularly relevant. After examining the historical developments that accompany the emergence of the ‘traditions’ notion, he affirms:

Comme le patrimoine immatériel, la propriété intellectuelle crée des sujets. Je me suis référé plus haut à l’invention du sujet-auteur, summum de l’individualisme possessif bourgeois. Mais la propriété intellectuelle des cultures traditionnelles constitue des sujets collectifs, autour d’expressions culturelles traditionnelles soumises à une propriété intellectuelle collective ou à des marques commerciales de savoirs traditionnels brevetés, c’est toujours parler d’une culture incorporée. Il faut des sujets collectifs organisés pour détenir et gérer les droits de propriété intellectuelle, pour négocier avec l’extérieur et pour bénéficier des rémunérations d’où elles viennent. Si ce sujets n’existent pas (et c’est habituellement le cas), le régime de la propriété intellectuelle les fera exister. Comme le patrimoine immatériel, la propriété intellectuelle participe donc de ce que, dans un autre contexte, Michel Callon appelle la “prolifération du social” (Callon, Barry & Slater 2002). Cette ‘culture traditionnelle’ est donc incorporée, au sens où elle fait exister des entités collectives corporatives: des communautés dotées des pouvoirs administratifs. [...] Ils aident à construire des nouvelles formes de revendications, des nouvelles façons de se faire entendre. Ne vous laissez pas bernier par la rhétorique traditionaliste. Les pratiques culturelles dont nous parlons ont beau être résiduelles, les collectifs qui s’organisent autour d’elles sont émergents. (2011, 80)

Analysing the complex relationship between heritage regimes, institutions and “new emerging subjects”, in a complex space of negotiations and powers, Hafstein concludes:

Les nouveaux sujets ont un pied dans les régimes du patrimoine et de la propriété intellectuelle; il leur reste une jambe sur laquelle se tenir et une petite marge de manoeuvre. Des nouveaux groupes surgissent constamment. Pour eux, le patrimoine est un instrument de changement. (2011, 92)

4 “Folklore au frontières de l’empire”, culture populaire, TK, ICH? The Core Contribution of International Conventions

Some experts and researchers, also participating to the collective reflection developed by the ACHS (Association of Critical Heritage Studies), are at work to identify the current changes in and through the 2003 Convention system analysing the evolution of implicit criteria expressed by the different practices and policies for the implementation of the Convention and by the evolution of terminologies. In a recent writing Marc Jacobs (2015), analysing the characteristics of the European nominations to the Representative List of the ICH, develops a comparison between the disciplinary traditions and the European cultural policies, structured in the frame of an opposition between elite and popular culture in which prevails a monumental, architectural and authorial vision of heritage, with the use of the same list in other continents. In fact, the ICH Convention is the result of an international effort to bring together different heritage-regimes (Bendix, Eggert, Peselmann 2012), introducing some radical changes while respecting the European institutional frames. In an official document that retrace the history of the Convention, “elaboration of a Convention”, the definition of ICH is developed starting from “monuments and collections of objects” toward living heritage.

ICH does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. While fragile, ICH is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalization. An understanding of the ICH of different communities helps with intercultural dialogue, and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life. The importance of ICH is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a State, and is as important for developing States as for developed ones. ICH is:

- Traditional, contemporary and living at the same time: ICH does not only represent inherited traditions from the past but also contemporary rural and urban practices in which diverse cultural groups take part;
- Inclusive: we may share expressions of ICH that are similar to those practised by others. Whether they are from the neighbouring village, from a city on the opposite side of the world, or have been adapted by people who have migrated and settled in a different region, they

all are ICH: they have been passed from one generation to another, have evolved in response to their environments and they contribute to giving us a sense of identity and continuity, providing a link from our past, through the present, and into our future. ICH does not give rise to questions of whether or not certain practices are specific to a culture. It contributes to social cohesion, encouraging a sense of identity and responsibility which helps individuals to feel part of one or different communities and to feel part of society at large;

- Representative: ICH is not merely valued as a cultural good, on a comparative basis, for its exclusivity or its exceptional value. It thrives on its basis in communities and depends on those whose knowledge of traditions, skills and customs are passed on to the rest of the community, from generation to generation, or to other communities;
- Community-based: ICH can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it - without their recognition, nobody else can decide for them that a given expression or practice is their heritage.

In a recent article, introducing in the process of discussion of the ICS ICH (International Cultural Studies on Intangible Cultural Heritage) 2015, Marc Jacobs writes:

Between 2003 and 2016, a strategy of the organs of the 2003 UNESCO Convention was to reduce the vocabulary to a limited set of appropriate words, primarily those used in the authoritative French or English versions of the Convention. The organs tried to be careful and restrictive when expanding that set of words in the subsequent operational directives, in the official nomination and request forms that were used, and in the decisions taken by the Intergovernmental Committee and the General Assembly of the States Party of the 2003 Convention. However, as time progresses, it will be useful or even necessary to introduce new terms like, for instance, “cultural brokerage”, “mediation”, “access and benefit sharing”, or “stakeholders”. [...] Until 2015, the word stakeholders was not used in any of the four versions of the operational directives (2008; 2010; 2012; 2014). In several of those directives, there is, for instance, an extra specification about prior and informed consent, which implies a process for which stakeholder analysis is needed. But in the Evaluation of UNESCO’s Standard-setting Work of the Culture Sector Part I—2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Final Report (2013), the concept of stakeholder is manifestly pushed forward. The Internal Oversight Service of UNESCO underlines that safeguarding should be done in: “a participatory manner and through negotiation within the relevant community and between all stakeholders concerned. [...] In the decisions of the Windhoek meeting,

the word stakeholders is used many times, including in the new draft chapter of the operational directives and in the decisions about the codes and tools of ethics that should be updated “through a participatory process involving communities, groups and relevant stakeholders”. Henceforth, stakeholders are officially part of the appropriate language of the 2003 safeguarding paradigm—just like the sleeping beauty, ‘updating’ has finally been awakened and activated. (2015, 3)

The argument of the article is that the 2003 UNESCO Convention, in a context of public disinvestment is encouraging and legitimizing the empowerment of civil society and of the various actors recognised as protagonists of culture, contributing to the construction of heritage as a widespread social phenomenon, living, transformative and trans boundary. Thanks to this new paradigm and political frame, TK are contextualised as heritage, in a complex process that connects different stakeholders placing at the centre of the process the communities, groups and individuals, practitioners and traditional bearers first responsible of transmission, all involved in a dynamic and transformative vision of heritage. Founded on the values of cultural rights as human rights, the Convention is accompanying conflictual and complex processes of active citizenship. This sheds light on the reasons sustaining the projects of production and recognition of cultural traditions as a heritage, in a process that can transcend the boundaries of States, while organizing themselves within the national frames. It can be interesting to connect three levels and contexts:

a. The international context of the ICSICH

These are places of debate, confrontation and mediation between political (national, international, regional and local), scientific, legal, institutional and social actors; these translated into regular appointments, concrete meeting places, work and training. Here communities, groups and individuals move with strategies, tactics and interests in the name of some shared values. A community of particular interest is the one made by NGOs accredited by the Convention to perform advisory functions (Lapicciarella Zingari 2014). Every year, before the work of the Committee, the NGOs Forum steering committee organise a thematic seminar,⁸ which sees a growing participation of NGOs and researchers. The gradual organization of this space of action reveals the complex relationship between the “establishment of culture”, government policies, the positions of the HC (Faro Convention 2005, art. 2(b). See Zagato 2015), the knowledge of scientific communities.

8 See the web site of the ICH NGO forum, <http://www.ichngoforum.org>.

- b. The national contexts, in which are engaged some NGOs accredited by the ICSICH and researchers.
- c. They are all in various ways involved in the processes of heritage-making within national “heritage regimes” (Bendix, Eggert, Pesselmann 2012). At the national level, inventories of ICH are relevant tools for the identification and recognition of TK and practices within heritage regimes. In Italy, SIMBDEA with other accredited Italian NGOs⁹ and Institutions, as the Lombardia working group of the regional register of ICH (R.E.I.L), support the implementation of “participatory inventories of intangible cultural heritage” including cultural mediation, co-production, co-governance (Jacobs 2014). In these contexts, some pioneering experiences related to European projects¹⁰ are providing significant outcomes of “transboundary ICH inventories”, recognising TK as ICH elements. In some cases, as the European project AlpFoodway, national policies and programs, as the French national inventory of ICH,¹¹ are connected to regional trans-boundaries projects.
- d. The local fields, where community groups and individuals move on to transmit and revitalise traditions, between environmental, policies and economic crisis, recognition of values, legitimacy and systems of power.

The case of Venice is, in this regard, quite significant. As an important touristic city of world attraction and UNESCO World Heritage Site, Venice is an excellent observatory to monitor the uses of heritage by different stakeholders involved in the local life, strongly influenced by globalization and mass tourism. Here some cultural and artisan associations, as El Felze,¹² association of artisans contributing to the construction of the gondola embody different challenges of the CH in contemporary post-industrial and post-modern society. With a key mediation role of some researchers in human rights and anthropology, different associations of civil society and professional artisan corporations started a challenging and complex dialogue, trying to make use of the international Convention as tool for change.

9 The Italian network is connected with the international network www.ichngoforum.org.

10 I refer to the European Project INTERREG ECHI and to the inventory ICH online at: www.intangiblesearch.org

11 See the website of the French Ministry “Inventaire National du Patrimoine Culturel Immatériel” (<http://www.culturecommunication.gouv.fr/Thematiques/Patrimoine-culturel-immateriel/L-inventaire-national>) and the Project on the inventory in the Parc des Bauges: “Savoirs et pratiques alimentaires et culinaire dans le Massif des Bauges” (<http://www.parcdesbauges.com/fr/actualite/savoirs-et-pratiques-alimentaires-et-culinaires-111.html#.Wk37T0tJkWo>).

12 URL <http://www.elfelze.it/> (2017-12-15).

Since 2010, some scientific meetings, seminars and publications (see Picchio Forlati 2014) have been opportunities to share ideas and projects, and start together with the traditional bearers and civil society associations to discuss doubts, problems and possible solutions. In this period, a first experience of ICH scientific inventory was implemented, via the Italian model of BDI catalogue system.¹³ But the voices of artisans raise more and more the dramatic context of crisis of the lagoon shifting to a playground for mass tourism associated to the growing difficulties of the artisan activities that disappear due to a lack of any consistent project of safeguard. Venice, the city of the Biennale¹⁴ and crossroad of the artistic contemporary expressions, does not show a concern on the deterioration of its lagoon, a complex ecosystem deeply human-conditioned, and by the dramatic of TK and activities for example connected with navigation and transport. In such a gloomy context, some artisans, last keepers of TK and practices of the lagoon, decided to make use of the ICH Convention. In the web page on the project of El Felze,¹⁵ a UNESCO nomination project on “the tradition of gondola as intangible heritage, to save in Venice” is announced. But what are the expectations of an association of artisans when choosing this way for the safeguard of traditions that are the heart and life of their activities and heritage?

5 The Venetian Lab: Culture Against Cultures? The Arsenal as a Case of Cultural and Productive Sterilization?

The paradoxes and the suffering of the Venice of today help to identify and face these challenges: a cultural community, a cultural association reacting to the aggression of globalization and the lack of attention of local powers. This association transmitting the heritage of the artisans, El Felze, and connecting with the wider Venetian HC (including all the signatories of the Charter of Venice),¹⁶ together with the contribution of the scientific community and in dialogue with other stakeholders, try to use international instruments for the safeguard and transmission of TK and the practices of handcrafts of the lagoon facing a most severe crisis. A small, too small number of artisans can transmit today a large and deep heritage which is not only made by TK and techniques on boat-construction, but includes

13 URL <http://paci.iccd.beniculturali.it/paciSito/> (2017-12-15).

14 URL <http://www.labiennale.org/it/Home.html> (2017-12-15).

15 URL <http://www.elfelze.it/lassociazione/progetti/> (2017-12-15).

16 URL <http://www.elfelze.it/>.

a life style in the lagoon, a complex repository of values, rituals, social practices and oral traditions.

Referring to the definition of HC, Venice will appeal to Europe to meet the challenges of its future.

But which are the criteria that must be met in a sensitive, complex and fragile context such as the one of the lagoon? Which alliances for strategies building to make TK and its people fully recognised as the heart of processes to secure to Venice, its ecology, history, identity, economy and tangible and intangible CH a sustainable future?

How to manage the growing conflicts of interest and visions at work in the corridors of post-modernity (Appadurai 1998) that a city-symbol of the CH in the global world embodies?

What is the role of the scientific community face to the challenges and emergencies reported by 'artisans of the lagoon'? Can participatory methodologies in the identification of the ICH (Bortolotto 2011) combined with methods for mapping the "natural and cultural capital" (Charter of Rome 2014),¹⁷ produce new narratives, new awareness and alliances?

Which tools can become the most effective instruments of recognition, intergenerational transmission/intercultural, legal protection, economic sustainability, critical knowledge, continuity and creativity?

In a word, 'safeguarding', according to the definition given by the UNESCO 2003 Convention (art. 2(3)).

In a recent interview, some Venetian artisans call the decision-makers for a real juridical change on the work legislation. For this change three strategic points are raised. First, the revitalisation of urban residence in the historical town; second, the safeguarding of productive activities; third, the knowledge and promotion of traditional artisan knowledge as a living language. A different approach to and attention by the institutions should lead to laws bringing a new awareness on the value of ICH as a vital element of productive activities.

As recently referred by an artisan of Venice, Alessandro Ervas, the new "forges project" of the Arsenal proposed by the community of artisans should be a place to meet and work, to learn and transmit the knowledge and skills. There is no other place in Italy for water-related restoration activities and here in Venice it would be extraordinarily representative. Denying the specific nature of this place would mean denying its very origin and sense and neglecting the safeguard of its values.

Therefore, the proposal is to make the Arsenal a place of training and learning, with safeguard and creative laboratories, for example using the collaborative potential with the Biennale of Contemporary Arts. This will

17 Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (2014). *Charter of Rome on Natural and Cultural Capital* [online]. URL http://www.minambiente.it/sites/default/files/archivio/allegati/biodiversita/conference_ncc_charter_rome_24october.pdf (2017-12-15).

avoid the current trend of denying the cultural and historical sense of place with its memories and values, leading to a standard, trivial and sterilised container for any kind of events. Once memories disappear, the very sense of place vanishes.

In the Venetian dialogue and conflict, the idea to make use the USL (Urgent Safeguarding List) is in progress. In an UNESCO world heritage site, this innovative and engaging tool could provide a strong alliance for the future of the lagoon. The Convention is the only international instrument putting the communities and the very knowledge-bearers at the centre of the process of cultural transmission. It is the only instrument foreseeing the identification and description of the communities, groups and individuals together with the recognition of the social, spiritual and economic value of that specific heritage for its own community.

The importance to use this instrument is in the strong commitment of an urgent safeguarding plan, inscribing the project in a long-term perspective and associating the identification of community group and individuals, the description of the 'element', the TK and practices of carpenters and artisans of the lagoon boats with a shared safeguarding objective that calls for the involvement of institutions in the process.

The long journey of ICH in a globalized world seems to move towards a challenging and promising road made of research systems, mediation, collaboration and network monitoring. The Venetian experiences, building representations that help the negotiated understanding by "seeing the connections" (Wittgenstein 1967), indicate possible points of contacts: between the different disciplines and the local knowledge, skills and practices, within the community of traditional bearers and the different stakeholders, and among the criteria for safeguarding ICH and those of ecological, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability (Jacobs, Neyrinck, Van der Zeijden 2014).

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