Intangible Cultural Heritage in France: From State Culture to Local Development

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1 Introduction

The nature of the state has an impact on heritage nomination and implementation. France is the classic case of a centralist nation-state, and this paper will trace this state’s heritage approach, including more recent problems faced by the French state in trying to regulate the nominations in the context of the 2003 UNESCO Convention on intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Since the 1980s, French decentralization has allocated a greater role to local and regional administrations, especially at the economic and financial levels. In this context, the selection of the cultural elements fit to be acknowledged as ICH in the terms accepted by UNESCO often leads to struggles between the local and the national levels. Local tradition bearers who seek state acceptance of their proposals have to show that these proposals are compatible with the universalistic ideals of the French nation. If the proposed cultural elements look too specific or too local, they might not be accepted by the state. However, if they do not appear sufficiently special, UNESCO might reject them. Accordingly, the decisions concerning the definition of intangible cultural heritage in France are compromises between local and national views.

Building on my fieldwork on the “Processional Giants and Dragons in Belgium and France,” I will demonstrate how issues concerning ICH change the interactions between the state and the local economy in France. These festivities were first introduced as a “Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity” in 2005 and incorporated in the “Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity” in 2008 (Fournier 2009, Fournier 2011).
2 Heritage and the State: the French Doctrine

To understand French policies in the realm of ICH, one needs to pay attention both to the history of cultural heritage in general and to the administrations in charge of the UNESCO policies in particular. Notions such as universalism and centralism have to be carefully looked at to understand the administrative situation of ICH in France.

2.1 Cultural Heritage and Universalism

Broadly speaking, the notion of cultural heritage is deeply anchored in the French universalistic doctrine introduced with the Revolution of 1789 (Chastel 1986). When the castles and the cathedrals were abandoned by the aristocracy and destroyed by the revolutionaries, the left-wing constitutionalist priest Abbé Grégoire pleaded that they should be preserved and protected for the nation’s sake. Such valuable goods had to be considered as common goods, “res publica” in Latin, bringing together the ideas of cultural heritage and the Republic itself. However, at that time, the French word for cultural heritage, “patrimoine”, was still mainly used by solicitors to inventory the material goods inherited inside families: Heritage was then both a matter of material culture and of private inheritance. It was the 1789 Revolution which led to the idea of preserving a cultural heritage within the building of a modern French nation-state. During the 19th century, a list of noteworthy cultural goods was established, and inspectors were appointed by the state to inventory the cultural heritage in the different regions and to reinforce the new central nation-state’s eminent hold, with a special emphasis on monuments and the fine arts.

In this context, a never-ending struggle took place between the different French provinces and the central nation-state. Some local intellectuals in different places tried to valorize their regional cultural heritage, often insisting on the cultural value of the dialects or on the folklore. In Brittany, for instance, the so-called “Académie Celtique” aimed to revive the regional folk culture of the modern Brittons as a survival from the ancient Celts (Belmont 1995). In Provence, the “Félibrige” movement, founded in 1854 by the great poet and folklorist Frédéric Mistral (1830–1914), enhanced the Latin cultural heritage and the local “langue d’oc” (Martel 1986). However, such attempts to valorize the regional cultural heritage in France were frowned upon, in most cases, as secessionist, regionalist or merely romantic. As of 1870, the French national educational system imposed shared values on all French citizens and the main stake of the Third Republic was the unification of the national territory (Chanet 1996, Thiesse 1997). During the same period, the train system developed and helped the French state in its unification project. Furthermore, after Napoleon III was defeated by the Germans in Sedan in 1870, the idea of national unity was considerably reinforced, which also had a vital impact on the definition of a national cultural heritage.
At the end of the 19th century, however, the political left began complaining about the criteria according to which the cultural heritage was inventoried in France. They did not really complain about the absence of regional references within cultural heritage, but about the hierarchies between the different items acknowledged as heritage. The avant-garde painters, for instance, began to argue that modern and contemporary paintings were as important as those from the Renaissance. Struggles broke out at the painters’ annual *salon* in Paris where it became fashionable to valorize the outsiders. For their part, the factory workers said that the industrial buildings were sometimes more valuable than the old ruins or chapels; and the regionalists were still asking for regional folklore artifacts to be put into the museums. At this time, several regional folklore museums were founded in spite of the strong centralist and nationalist feelings.

In this context, the esthetic views commanding cultural heritage were dramatically changed. Heritage was becoming a matter of taste. It had to be discussed instead of being accepted as a standard. In the 1930s, the anthropologist Marcel Mauss said that “a tin-box tells us more about our society than the most precious jewel” (Jamin 1989). Connections between anthropologists and surrealist poets led to a definition of the new field of *arts et traditions populaires* (popular arts and traditions) and to a renewal of the accepted definitions of cultural heritage. French anthropologists clearly participated in this shift when bringing back African artifacts from the colonies. In the case of African masks, for instance, cultural heritage could be connected with social or symbolical values more than with the intrinsic value of the objects. Insights from such African cases could thus be utilized for generating a new understanding of cultural heritage in France. The discussion of cultural heritage entered a new era.

### 2.2 Cultural Heritage and Centralism

As of this point in time, cultural heritage was slightly divided in France. Historians, art historians and architects insisted on maintaining the old, accepted definition, encompassing the monuments and the fine arts; they valorized the museums. Whereas anthropologists and folklorists developed the notion of *patrimoine ethnologique* (anthropological heritage), including industries, crafts, popular culture, etc., which had to be preserved *in situ*. As head of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), Georges-Henri Rivière, the founding curator of the *Musée national des arts et traditions populaires* in Paris, had a leading role in this reflection after World War II (Segalen 2005).

However, this new trend represented a real schism regarding the universalistic doctrine of the French nation-state. Emphasizing cultural diversity instead of national unity is often considered as a threat by the national French elites; the French doctrine of cultural heritage is thus still a significant place for political struggles. On the one hand, historians and specialists of fine arts carry on with the traditional vision of cultural heritage. The training of the museum curators in the national
École du Louvre in Paris reflects their position quite well. Here, art forms are legitimized through their ability to encapsulate universal values. On the other hand, more and more people want to extend cultural heritage to everyday life. Local NGOs often insist on the fact that cultural heritage can help the identification and the valorization of local communities, which is highly problematic in a state where the notion of “community” does not even appear in the constitution.

Today, the implementation of ICH in France still reflects some of these historical features. Concerning the 2003 UNESCO Convention, there is ambiguity particularly connected with the fact that it is the civil servants from the central nation-state who should sort out and accept the proposals coming from the different French regions. In a country where all the different political and administrative elites need to train in the most prestigious Parisian schools, the provinces are still very much seen as peripheries. In such a context, nobody could seriously think that the national genius would burst forth in some remote countryside resort, when the eyes of international art critics are systematically turned towards the Louvre and the Parisian artistic milieu. This is also a reason why the word folklore is rather despised and laughed at in France. The word “folklore,” being almost synonymous with “weird” or “kitsch” in the French language, is broadly perceived to be connected with narrow-minded parochialism, with cultural traditions in the countryside, which totally cuts it off from the universalistic commitments of the French elites.

2.3 The Case of Intangible Cultural Heritage

ICH in France is administered as follows: The French Commission for UNESCO is a branch of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. As such, it does not really need to bother with French internal affairs. Indeed, the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs is not interested in the national internal cultural diversity but in international diplomacy. The French Commission for UNESCO is, therefore, only concerned with the fact of France being a UNESCO member state. This commission looks to the outside, at the international level, but not to the inside, except for advertising the UNESCO values in France through some conferences and meetings. Its members may raise discussions at an international level but are not fit to look at the cultural phenomena at the sub-national level. Furthermore, this commission is in charge of all the different aspects of the dialogue between France and UNESCO, which means that ICH is only a minor part of its activities. According to its representatives, there is no need to worry about French ICH as there are no diplomatic conflicts which could threaten cultural heritage in France. Since there are no such conflicts, there is no need to help the different communities involved with the UNESCO policies in France. This is even more understandable as the term community, as already mentioned, has no legal existence in the frame of the universalistic doctrine of the French nation-state. In this context, the French Commission for UNESCO acts more as a consultative body than as an executive one. Some representatives of this commission, together with other representatives in charge of
museums, the fine arts, languages, culture, and international affairs in the Ministry of Culture, take part in a special committee called the “Comité interdirectionnel de suivi de la Convention” (Inter-Branch Committee for the Monitoring of the Convention). This committee is informed of the candidatures and submits them to the “Délégation permanente de la France auprès de l’UNESCO” (Permanent French Delegation to UNESCO), which is the French embassy at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris and the only body able to sign the candidature files.

It is a special branch of the “Direction générale des patrimoines” (General Branch for Heritage) in the Ministry of Culture, the Mission ethnologie, which is appointed to deal with the UNESCO policies and with the implementation of ICH in France. This Mission ethnologie was founded in 1980 under the name Mission du patrimoine ethnologique (anthropological heritage). After nearly thirty years of research on the notion of patrimoine ethnologique (anthropological heritage), this Mission ethnologie has begun since 2006, to inventory possible candidates for the UNESCO ICH lists. Its team in Paris is composed of three people including one art historian, one specialist in cultural studies and one secretary. Their job is to manage the implementation of the convention in France, with the help of a dozen anthropologists, the “Conseillers sectoriels à l’ethnologie” (Sectorial Councilors for Anthropology), who work in twelve different “Directions Régionales des Affaires Culturelles” (Regional Branches for Cultural Affairs), which are the regional administrations under the control of the Ministry of Culture. These regional councilors, working “in the field” both as anthropologists and as civil servants in charge of local cultural development, select cultural elements in the geographic regions they are in charge of and propose them to the central body, which discusses the opportunity of handing them over to the “Comité interdirectionnel de suivi de la Convention” and then to UNESCO.

The regional councilors, together with the three members of the central body of the Mission ethnologie, also have the task of proposing special files and guidelines to NGOs, local practitioners and associations interested in the nomination process in the field (Hottin 2011). The files proposed by the Mission ethnologie are principally inspired by the Quebec experience at Laval University (Turgeon 2010), which means they are simple enough to be filled in by local practitioners with the help of undergraduate students. The files describe the cultural practices, mention the places where they can be observed, the material elements connected with them, and the ways they are learned and handed down from generation to generation. They also document the history of the cultural practices and the efforts already undertaken to protect and valorize them, including a selective bibliography. Pictures and soundtracks of film footage can be added to the files, which contribute to establish a national repertoire of French cultural elements suitable to answer UNESCO criteria. Furthermore, several academic anthropologists have been asked to imagine common methods concerning the implementation of the elements already nominated, as well as the future nominations: The workshop, “Intangible Cultural Heritage,” held in Paris from 2006 to 2008, was supposed to play this role (Bortolotto
2011), but several French scholars have reflected in a critical way on the differences between the idea of filling in files and the importance of long-term fieldwork in the anthropological tradition. In spite of such critiques, the Mission ethnologie action plans expect more and more files to be completed over the next few years in order to build up a database of ICH practices in France.

However, the action of the Mission ethnologie is limited to the field of culture, which means that ICH is still strongly dependant on the universalistic doctrine of culture in France. Furthermore, this connection with the notion of culture does not allow any cooperation with the fields of local development or tourism, which deeply concerns the local actors. In this context, where only the national institutions are involved in the implementation of the UNESCO convention, no proper relations with local actors and “tradition bearers” have been built up yet.

3 Combining the Global and the Local

This historical and administrative background enables one to understand better some of the general issues involved in the implementation of the UNESCO policies in France. In the following section, I suggest that the principal problem lies in the combination of the new UNESCO global frame and the status of the local communities in the French universalistic nation-state.

3.1 Decentralizing the Nation-state

Since the 1980s, through French decentralization, administrative regions and départements have been pushed to the front of the scene, especially at the economic and financial levels. This was desired by the central state but did not open any real discussion of the old French universalistic doctrine. Decentralization in France was an initiative of the social democrats and was presented as a means to give some power back to the locals. However, it can also clearly be interpreted as a consequence of the oil crisis in the 1970s. At some point, the central state thought it better if local administrations could collect taxes themselves and finance different public policies in their own territories. Consequently, decentralization laws were introduced in the 1980s and led to a considerable gain of power for the different local governments, nearly one hundred Départements and about twenty Régions, which attained a relative autonomy.

However, some of the regions in France are more attractive than others. A lot of people, for instance, settle every year in the Mediterranean parts of France, but nobody settles in the northern and the central parts due to unemployment or bad climate. In the Languedoc-Roussillon region on the Mediterranean coast, the population increases by about 10% per year, while in Picardy, a lot of people had to leave the region and seek work in Paris. These objective differences between the different regions are never taken into account in the French political system. On a
legal and on an administrative basis, all the different regions are considered equal, and, in spite of this decentralization process, there is nothing like federalism in the French political system.

The role of the central nation-state has become mainly symbolical. It has no federal power, but also has no real political power on its own either. The local administrations in the Départements and the Régions – the so-called Conseils généraux and Conseils régionaux – pay for the roads, the schools and all the other public expenses. It is not a surprise then if the fields where the French central state remains most active are the ones with the greater symbolical value. This is why culture is still an important issue in France at a national level, but this also explains why culture in France is, in most of the cases, associated with the central state and, therefore, with universalism and with the global perspective.

### 3.2 Selecting the Cultural Elements

In this French context, the selection of the cultural elements to be nominated as ICH by UNESCO often leads to some struggles between the local and the national level, as I suggested in the introduction. It is difficult for the local administrations to present local or regional cultural elements as legitimate in the eyes of the universalistic national doctrine. ICH is spontaneously connected with the local milieu, with patrimoine ethnologique (anthropological heritage) or folklore, whereas the national level only supports the fine arts and more accepted cultural heritage items.

The local tradition bearers or local administrations who want to get their intangible heritage proposals accepted by the state usually have to show that they are compatible with the universalistic ideals of the French nation. However, it is interesting to note that such compatibility will not formally be asked for by the people of the Mission ethnologie, the section in charge of the ICH in the French Ministry of Culture. It will often surface as informal criteria when discussing the legitimacy of the different proposals. In some cases, the files are correctly filled in, but some evidence shows that the people who filled them in belong to a regionalist milieu. Their proposal will then be considered as political action, and it would be denied legitimacy as a genuine cultural initiative. In some other cases, the proposals come from unidentified people. In these cases, the civil servants in the Ministry of Culture will postpone the proposals in order to get more information on the different stakeholders involved in the candidature. Some investigations will be carried out to test the seriousness of the proposal. In short, proposing a cultural element as ICH in France requires firstly some competence in self-presentation. As a result, the most endangered or marginal cultural elements hardly manage to be accepted as ICH as the bearers of these traditions are too few in number and not sufficiently versed in dossier compilation. Several dozens of village carnivals in Mediterranean France, for instance, have processional giants, but only Pézenas and Tarascon, the two bigger towns where the people are most aware of their cultural value, have
asked for the ICH label. As a consequence, the French nation-state will not even mention the variety of these local traditions at an international level.

The French selection of ICH ultimately appears as a dilemma: If the proposed cultural elements look too specific or too local, they might not be accepted by the state at a national level. However, if they do not look special enough, they might be rejected by UNESCO at the international level. Accordingly, the decisions concerning the definition of ICH in France are generally compromises between the local and the national views. The centralist and universalistic doctrine of the French state often operates as a means of selection and prevents the most marginal cultural elements from being inventoried.

3.3 A Double-Bind System

Tradition bearers who want to promote their local culture as ICH always need to combine the global and the local, because they face different sorts of logic which might appear contradictory to them. At a local or regional level, cultural diversity is usually clearly encouraged, whereas at a national level, it would be better to select elements emblematising the national unity. Interestingly, the idea of cultural diversity fits well with the requirements of the UNESCO policies at a global level, even if cultural diversity and communities are frowned upon at a national level as possible threats to the unity of the central state. UNESCO policies emphasizing cultural diversity in a way seem to feed the critiques coming from the local or regional levels within the most centralist nation-states.

In such a system, however, candidates are caught in a double-bind, because on administrative grounds, all the candidatures are examined at a national level. The candidates then have to be at once special and universal; they have to look “authentic,” but not too deeply entwined with the expression of local identities; they have to be local, but not closed to otherness, et cetera. Such a double-bind system compels the candidates to negotiate and to find a way between the opposite ideals of diversity and unity. In many cases, this situation can be problematic when it leads local traditions to change into a more “acceptable” cultural form for the guidelines of national or international authorities. In this way, sometimes the will to get the UNESCO ICH label leads to a standardization of the cultural elements.

Studies in other countries have already critically addressed this idea of standardization. In the case of the Binche Carnival in Belgium, for instance, it has been suggested that the people were considerably impacted by the UNESCO label and that they changed their Carnival habits in order to meet the tourists’ gaze (Tauschek 2010). In the case of the Patum festival in Berga, Catalonia, it has been claimed that the UNESCO policies were synonymous of a new era in public cultural management and in the festival itself (Noyes 2006). Looking at the role of the nation-state comparatively in the implementation of the UNESCO ICH policies in a centralist country like France helps one to grasp how the transformations can be
4 The Example of the “Processional Giants and Dragons”

The case of the “Processional Giants and Dragons” in France illustrates the importance of fieldwork for understanding better the role of the different nation-states in the implementation of the UNESCO convention. I will first describe my data and then propose a general overview of the French heritage regime in connection with the case of the “Processional Giants and Dragons.”

4.1 Traditional Processions as Intangible Cultural Heritage

On the official UNESCO website, one finds under the link “Processional Giants and Dragons in Belgium and France,” traditional processions of huge effigies of giants, animals or dragons encompassing an original ensemble of festive popular manifestations and ritual representations. These effigies first appeared in urban religious processions at the end of the 14th century in many European towns and continue to serve as emblems of identity for certain Belgian (Ath, Brussels, Dendermonde, Mechelen, and Mons) and French towns (Cassel, Douai, Pézenas, and Tarascon), where they are still practiced traditions. The giants and dragons are large-scale models measuring up to nine meters in height and weighing as much as 350 kilos. They represent mythical heroes or animals, contemporary local figures, historical, biblical or legendary characters or trades. The performances often mix secular procession and religious ceremony; they vary from town to town, but always follow a ritual sequence in which the giants relate to the history, legend or life of the town. Although these expressions are not threatened with immediate disappearance, UNESCO suggests that they do suffer from a number of pressures, such as major changes to town centers and increasing tourism, leading to the detriment of the popular, spontaneous nature of the festival.

The “Processional Giants and Dragons in Belgium and France” were first introduced as a “Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity” in 2005. The proposal was supported both by France and Belgium. The 90 masterpieces proclaimed before the 2003 Convention entered into force were incorporated in 2008 in the “Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.” The Convention was adopted in 2006 by the French state. Since then, several new elements have been acknowledged as ICH and appear either on the representative or on the safeguarding list. However, the “Processional Giants and Dragons” remain the oldest element on the lists. They have now been on the list for six years, which means that the people organizing or simply attending the processions may have had some time to learn about the convention and its general scope.
The combination of ethnographic fieldwork, interviews among the administrators and questionnaires distributed to the tourists since 2007 have enabled me to reach some significant results concerning the impacts of the nomination of the “Processional Giants and Dragons” as ICH in France (Fournier 2009, Fournier 2011). The data allows one to compare the views of the different actors, the impact of the UNESCO label on the different towns, and the differences between the initial project and its transformations five years after the nomination. They also enlighten the role of the French state in the implementation of UNESCO’s global policies.

4.2 The Local Impact of Intangible Cultural Heritage

In the nominated sites, a small number of activists willingly take part in the process, mainly through associations and other local networks, without looking too much at the state’s role. These actors use the new label to experiment with strategies regarding the local implementation of cultural policies in general. In this respect, the UNESCO policies are only a pretext to discuss other local issues. As in each innovative process, there is local polarization, in this case between those who strongly believe in the benefits the label will bring and those who criticize it and think of the new policies as a new means of domination used by the local elites against the people. However, there is no clear consciousness here about the role that the state should play in the whole process. When asking the people at higher levels in charge of the implementation of the UNESCO policies, the positions differ. According to a local museum curator, for instance, the main issue is the management of the new label without any special financial support from either UNESCO or the state. For the people in the local tourist boards of the towns where the UNESCO label has been granted, the core question lies in the competition between the new and the old: In the interviews, several actors were concerned with the problematic articulation of the existing monumental and artistic heritage and the new ICH. For the elected representatives, ICH becomes something valuable in the marketing of the town’s image; as such, it is used as a motto in almost all the public planning discourses and projects. At this local level, however, the French state is often criticized, as people are used to receiving some subsidies in a centralist state and they hope that the UNESCO label will convince the state to provide some financial support for their local festivals.

The comparison of the impacts of the UNESCO policies on the different towns where the “Processional Giants and Dragons” appear yields further results. There are definitely some differences between the four French towns of Cassel, Douai, Pézenas, and Tarascon. In Cassel, the new label has become a significant part of the local touristic development program and a new museum has been created. In Pézenas, new partnerships have brought together different local NGOs, including the local rugby club, whose members usually carry the local processional giant. Comparatively, very little has been done in Douai, where the people in charge of the giants seem rather skeptical regarding the impacts of the new
UNESCO label. Focusing on the case of Tarascon, the main change is the visibility of the processional dragon. The Tarasque dragon was traditionally hidden at all times except for the time of the procession; it is now exhibited in a special showcase in the center of the medieval town. Moreover, a monumental stone sculpture is now on display in front of the local castle. The Tarascaïres, the Tarasque-pushers, are invited to more and more other festivals throughout the year, both in France and abroad. Accordingly, they feel they have to become more professional in performing their traditions. Meanwhile, the people in charge of the cultural heritage have launched several exhibitions on the topics of dragons, the medieval times and on the fantastic. Shopkeepers have begun selling books, mugs and key-rings featuring the Tarasque dragon. The UNESCO listing has thus been adapted to the local development policies. The French central state’s position, only being concerned with the symbolic value of the cultural elements, deeply contrasts with these practical considerations aiming at economic gain.

Lastly, the initial project has been transformed considerably. Before the nomination, all candidates were asked to plan previsions for the coming five-year term. In the case of the “Processional Giants and Dragons,” the 2005 candidacy file mentions that several meetings were to be held between 2006 and 2010 between the people in charge of the processions, and an itinerant exhibition was supposed to move from one town to another every two months to reinforce the connections between the different places involved in the nomination. A catalogue of this exhibition was to be published and emphasis was to be put on the giant- and dragon-makers as well. In 2009, a meeting of all the giants and dragons was supposed to prepare for the five-year term evaluation by UNESCO. Five years later, the report shows that only the first point – the 2006 meeting – was realized. All the other events did not happen. Sometimes this was due to the lack of financial resources. Sometimes the people in charge of the implementation of the convention were transferred to other cities; some of them died and new people were elected, et cetera. Such a comparison clearly shows that the UNESCO policies are suggestions rather than prescriptions. However, at the same time, the people involved in the organization of the festivals often consider that the role of the state would have been to accompany this valorization program. In a centralist state, people tend to ask the state to take on the prescriptions that UNESCO refuses to give.

4.3 From State Culture to Local Development

The data suggest that the candidature of the “Processional Giants and Dragons” was paradoxically reinforced by its very weaknesses. One of the most significant features here is the territorial heterogeneity of the different cultural elements concerned by the nomination: In France, at least, the four cities involved belong to three very different regions, which means they do not have very much in common at a historical or at a cultural level. At the same time, giants and dragons incorpo-
rate universal features which can be found worldwide, including India and China. In this respect, they were fit to meet both the national and the global requirements.

At a local level, however, these considerations are far from being the most important. In a country where the nation-state was traditionally strong but where decentralization has recently made it weaker, people tend to consider the new UNESCO cultural policies as a handy tool for local development. In the context of a post-industrial economy, the UNESCO ICH label contains a lot of hopes. First of all, it is hoped that the UNESCO label will move the central state to give financial support to the local UNESCO festivals. Unfortunately, France sees its UNESCO membership as relevant only for matters of international diplomacy. Accordingly, the French UNESCO commission does not have the power to help locals with their cultural affairs. Neither the French Commission for UNESCO in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs nor the Mission ethnologie in the Ministry of Culture have the means to give subsides to local administrations in the cities where ICH is listed.

Another hope concerns tourism. In Tarascon, people in charge of this sector are especially keen to know whether the UNESCO policies will attract more tourists. This is understandable because Tarascon suffers from the excellent cultural reputation of several neighboring towns: Avignon, Arles, Nîmes, and Aix-en-Provence attract most of the tourists in the famous area of Provence and they are all located less than 50 kilometers from Tarascon. A lot of visitors just head for the Mediterranean Sea and miss Tarascon entirely. In this context, the town of Tarascon dreams that her processional dragon could attract more people. However, at the same time, there is also some fear that tourism will cause harm to the cultural heritage, which makes the Tarascon people uneasy about advertising the new UNESCO resource as a touristic one. ICH eventually asks questions which are determined by a post-industrial and post-national context: Are the labels able to bring in tourists as possible alternatives to the crisis faced by the local industries? Will the regions be able to make profit out of the new category of ICH when the central nation-state becomes weaker due to decentralization?

5 Conclusion

The case of the “Processional Giants and Dragons” in France is a very useful one to enlighten different aspects of the relations between the heritage regime and the state. Firstly, this example shows the different impacts that the UNESCO policies can have in the field, where local festivals are combined with tourism and other economic development. Secondly, the example illustrates the ways in which ICH issues change the interactions between the state and the local economy. The locals are encouraged to valorize their ICH, but, in the process, they have to learn how to do things by themselves as this new sort of heritage does not receive any funding from the central nation-state, as was usually the case with material cultural heritage.
Thirdly, the case offers a perspective on how an only half-heartedly lessened centralist state implements the global ICH doctrine.

Concerning the French example, I would suggest that a global cultural policy never erases the past. In the case of ICH, UNESCO wanted to propose a global frame to accompany the preservation and safeguarding of a new sort of heritage, but this new frame is interacting with the previous generations of national cultural policies. It would be naïve to study the UNESCO policies without studying the diverse regional and national contexts where they are implemented. In some cases, the preservation faces a popular refusal, because the tradition bearers do not want to get into the ICH nomination process; they feel the transmission would become artificial if they were to rely on global protectionism instead of carrying on themselves with their traditional skills or practices. In other places, the UNESCO policies are considered as a means to boost the local economy and the development of cultural tourism; they generate projects and have a true influence in the ways the actors consider their own cultural practices.

As a conclusion, I would like to emphasize three main features of heritage studies that are also relevant for cultural anthropology in France. ICH enables one to scrutinize the transformations of local traditions in a globalized world. Investigating the field contributes to global comparative projects aiming to understand how different local cultures react to contemporary changes. Finally, heritage developments enable one to grasp how politics, economics, esthetics, laws, et cetera, interact and thus build up a holistic approach to societies and cultures. Comparative research in the different UNESCO member states helps us to better understand the complexity of the different heritage regimes in contemporary globalized contexts.

6 References


