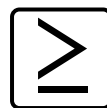


POLICY BRIEF



InterAgency Institute
BEYOND INSTITUTIONAL BOUNDARIES

**THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE INTANGIBLE
CULTURAL HERITAGE IN EUROPE:
A NEW SPACE FOR DEMOCRACY?
Author: Juliana Miranda Martins¹**

POLICY STATEMENT

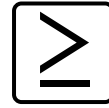
In the last decades, the decline of the European welfare state, the crisis of the founding values of the European Union and the exponential advance of the global market macro-economy have led the European Countries to the challenge of re-inventing their public policy, moving beyond the traditional approach of the post-war period. Since the reorganization of the “new world order” to the present day, the Member States signed many international treaties and conventions underlying the importance of social participation in public choices, conceived as “the new spirit of democracy” (Blondiaux 2008) and representing “the future of the relationships between society and institutions” (Allegretti 2006).

In this policy brief we introduced conceptually the new paradigm of Cultural Heritage as a premise of multifunctional public policies aimed at environmental sustainability and restructuring of the pilot plan for cities in smart cities; for the socioeconomic development of peripheral and border areas; for the holistic education of the citizens of the future and above all as a re-establishment of spaces for inclusion and democratic participation. In this sense, Cultural Heritage does not have an end in itself as a statistical entity and subject to preservation, but adds economic and cultural values at the same time that it is dynamically and interactively safeguarded with the community of which it is a part.

BACKGROUND

A simplistic analysis could explain that for several decades Europe has been promoting its Cultural Heritage in all its forms, and that, notoriously, this process has contributed to the development of its cities and to the formation of the cultural values of the peoples that compose it. However, the European cultural heritage was and continues to be presented to the world with the Eurocentric seal of “Old continent” as a historical heritage of the past, as the result of victories in the hegemonic field of historiography, as spaces of power for the “winners” and forgetfulness of communities. If, on the one hand, this concept contributed to the preservation of a large part of its cultural heritage, on the other hand, it did not generate around this heritage a social identity (especially in the last generation) or a collective and democratic perception of cultural heritage. It is not uncommon to speak to Parisians who have never entered the Louvre, Venetians who have never sailed in a gondola just to name a few examples. The trend is that in the way it is presented to the world, the European Cultural Heritage continues to be a camera that photographs only the past. The next question would be: how to change the concept of Cultural Heritage of European member states?

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FINDINGS

In this direction, the *UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (ICH) (Paris, 2003), which represents, in addition to a true milestone in the history of international cultural heritage policy, inaugurates a new paradigm in the epistemology of Cultural Heritage. By recognising the value of intangible elements (such as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills, including oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, traditional knowledge and techniques, social practices, rituals, festive events, ways of life, customs, social imagination etc.), and by highlighting the central role of social actors (communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals), it marks a significant shift from the classical idea of cultural heritage as a “heritage built in the past” – expressed a new concept of “living heritage”, in permanent transformation, the vitality and viability of which has to be ensured with the decisive contribution of “heritage communities”.

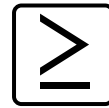
A further step towards this goals has been taken with the adoption of *COE Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* (Faro, 2005), which recognises the fundamental value of social participation in cultural matters and assigns a crucial role to heritage communities, considered as the real keepers of cultural heritage, in the decision-making concerning its identification and safeguarding.

In this sense, the Convention not only establishes an international legal framework for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, but also promotes a profound change in the public policies of the States Parties as a “keyword of global governance” (Bortolotto, 2013), aiming to resize the Cultural Heritage, but this time, as a heritage turned to the cultural experience lived in terms of Human Rights. An inclusive approach to Cultural Heritage imposes and normalizes quantitative aspects, transforming them into goals, which were previously seen as desirable effects (and which unfortunately have progressed at a very slow pace in terms of public policies), such as gender equality, autonomous and sustainable local development, respect for the environment, intelligent waste management and recycling, the creation of spaces for social participation aimed at the enjoyment of citizenship and holistic education for the citizens of the future.

CONCLUSIONS

In this context, we work with the hypothesis that public policies regarding the ICH can be implemented as a process of socio-economic (re) inclusion of traditional sectors that have been impoverished in recent decades in Europe. These sectors that have particularly suffered from a sort of dissolution of social identity (working hardship, economic crisis, etc.) with the expansion of the market economy to the point of losing trust in European institutions and renouncing its own democratic values. On the one hand, a process of marginalization has pushed individuals in these sectors to become more and more vulnerable to currents of anti-European, anti-democratic political thought, even to extremist ideologies that threaten the democratic state of law. On the other hand, the democratic social forces, more focused on European supranational issues, have not been able to grasp the local social malaise of these sectors, or else they have just ignored it believing that their demands were simply a nationalist appeal incompatible with the pro-European values. The EU strategy markedly top-down was the European Regional Development Fund, although an interesting initiative in terms of public policies very often finance individual initiatives that struggle to promote a collective effect on the community.

We are convinced that public policies regarding Cultural Heritage connect a community, redeem the shared experience, promote expressions and social practices, and maintain the identity of places through their social actors in their historical-architectural context by generating tourist circuits and producing economic income for the communities involved.



SUGGESTIONS

In this first policy brief we propose an Intangible Cultural Heritage as a kaleidoscope of options for public policy in the management of smart cities. On the basis of the emerging issues there follows a set of points for the actuation of a new perspective:

- A mapping of the festive events, historical re-enactments, and all kinds of ICH expressions and the traditional craftsmanship in the territory.
- Contact the heritage communities that have these expressions, organizing meetings with their referents to plan, starting from their experience, a sort of bottom-up cultural inventory.
- Know the community using qualitative and quantitative data, ex. how many women are directly or indirectly involved, how much income is produced, etc.
- Organize courses for the qualification of the staff involved on the ICH by UNESCO
- Give emphasis to the whole cultural expression, not only as a final product, but also as a process of work that precedes the event.
- Motivate the schools as a part of the heritage community for their participation to the organization and realization of the event, and as a scholastic preparation.
- Integrate also people not strictly belonging to the cultural and ethnic system.
- Encourage the communities to keep with care and reuse materials, also producing new ones in an eco-sustainable way.
- Facilitate the heritage communities to publicize the event in different languages, even dialects, underlying the eco-sustainability of the techniques and materials.

A general map of the safeguard measures in EU countries can provide elements that allow the realization of a model that identifies – in the three types of cultural heritage, intangible heritage and good practices – qualitative criteria that have contributed to the construction of democratic spaces of heritage communities. Such criteria could be, for example, a greater participation of women in activities related to ICH, the social inclusion of people who carried out traditional and craft works, the rescue of techniques and knowledge in the making of objects that attributed identity to certain groups, activities that prioritize ecologically sustainable techniques, ecc. In addition, we are interested in understanding the ripple effect, that is, whether public policies give rise to social participation and generate democratic spaces. Finally, if such democratic spaces, in turn, have a socioeconomic impact on these heritage communities and in general on a territory.

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