

**NADJA VALENTINČIČ FURLAN**

**KNOWLEDGE AND IDENTITIES  
IN INTANGIBLE HERITAGE  
AND FILM**

**DRY STONE WALLING**



# Knowledge and Identities in Intangible Heritage and Film: Dry Stone Walling

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## Preface

Let me start with a riddle.

Michael Herzfeld claims that apprenticeship among artisans in Crete, Greece, was based on observation and the absence of explanations. The master was silent to avoid possible competition from apprentices who could one day take over his business and customers, as well as to protect the secrets of his family and clients. “The apprentice who remains silent, but unobtrusively watchful, has already learned the basic lesson” of the craft, therefore playing dumb was a strategy of cunning apprentices to “steal with their eyes” (Herzfeld 2004: 107). Disguised in a mask of apparent disinterest, they seized the craft by stealing it, just as Prometheus stole fire from the gods (ibid. 114–115).

The artisanal pedagogical approach was contrary to the academic *ex cathedra* one. The Cretan craftsmen maintained that academic knowledge may have carried a higher social cachet, but it provided a poor preparation for their socially highly competitive world, therefore they despised studies and books (Herzfeld 2004: 112). Pierre Bourdieu (in Kraus 1991: 252) also acknowledged that practical knowledge had its own logic, different from the logic of theoretical knowledge, so practitioners knew the social world better than theorists.

Herzfeld wrote his book *The Body Impolitic: Artisans and Artifice in the Global Hierarchy of Value* in 2004, just after the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO 2003) came into existence, which, together with safeguarding directives and protocols, enacted a different path to knowledge, as in the nomination forms for inscription of heritage elements to UNESCO lists, the skills and knowledge are supposed to

be described. Thus, the riddle is: has the safeguarding paradigm linguified tacit knowledge and its embodiment, and has it dissolved the habitus as an iceberg melts in the warm sea?

I explored intangible heritage and its safeguarding paradigm, as well as the practice of dry stone walling in Slovenia, including its heritagization and mediatization, in order to analyse, following Fredrik Barth's anthropology of knowledge (2002), changes in the corpus of knowledge, the media for its transmission, the social circles of dissemination, the criteria of validity and the relations of power, and the answer to the question asked above is not clear-cut.

UNESCO safeguards skilled practices; however, the nomination form is based on cognitive knowledge, so safeguarding does not impact skills much. I thus claim it is the film that can contribute significantly to the understanding of intangible heritage, its bearers and their skills, as it has the potential to deliver to the viewers experience-based knowledge about heritage elements and cultural identities of their practitioners. It is also this idea that I will explore in the following work.

# Introduction

In the twenty-first century, intangible cultural heritage is seen as increasingly modern, prestigious and desirable (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 61; Hafstein 2014a: 37), so its production is extremely lively (van de Port and Meyer 2018: 7–8) at all levels and in all forms, from private to public and from unofficial to official heritage. The official heritage is that confirmed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and on the national level by the States Parties to the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO 2003, hereinafter the *Convention*). UNESCO introduced the concept of intangible cultural heritage due to the need to safeguard heritage that could not be protected as part of world cultural heritage, which focuses mainly on tangible cultural heritage, artistic production and outstanding architectural achievements. The *Convention* defines intangible heritage as

the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage [...] (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1).

Although intangible heritage came into existence as a political (Nic Craith 2007; Smith 2012: 538; Hafstein 2012; Tauschek 2012b: 208; Kuutma 2013: 3) rather than scientific concept, it has attracted a wide range of researchers who either participate in identifying, documenting, researching and safeguarding heritage elements, or they critically analyse these processes. The

production of articles and books on such issues is becoming very extensive, if not overwhelming (Meskell and Brumann 2015: 27). Since in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum I have perceived dissonant views<sup>1</sup> on the role of the Coordinator for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,<sup>2</sup> I found Christoph Brumann's division into the contributions of heritage believers<sup>3</sup> (lay people and experts who devotedly care for it), heritage atheists (critical authors) and heritage agnostics, who take into account the publications of all groups (Brumann 2014: 179–180), worth reflecting on. However, I've also noticed that many believers can be critical of some traits of the safeguarding paradigm, and many critics and agnostics actively engage in safeguarding practices. Therefore, an individual can assume different roles in practical contexts and in the reflection of these activities. In order to understand the heritage processes transforming community practices into official heritage, it is necessary to understand the roles of practitioners, applied researchers and officials<sup>4</sup> who are engaged in the inscription of the elements to national registers and in nominating to the UNESCO lists of intangible cultural heritage.

I decided to research heritagization – the process by which objects, places and practices are transformed from functional matters into museum artefacts, world or intangible cultural heritage, and at the same time beautified for easier marketing (Walsh 1992: 136) – through the construction of knowledge and identities. Especially the former has rarely been reflected upon in relation to the heritagization of social practices into intangible heritage. When structuring the book, I combined the theoretical, cognitive and discursive knowledge that circulates in articles and books, the political and normative knowledge of the UNESCO paradigm, and empirical and practical knowledge originating in cultural practices in local environments, as well as in the safeguarding practices, and tried to couple “experience-distant” and “experience-near”

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- 1 Those who were employed after 2011, take the coordination of the safeguarding for granted, and among senior colleagues there are split views.
  - 2 In 2011, the Ministry of Culture, which manages the Slovenian Register of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, appointed the Slovene Ethnographic Museum the Coordinator for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Slovenia (the Coordinator, for short).
  - 3 David Lowenthal (2009: 1–2) was the first to compare heritage to religion, arguing that it relies on revealed faith rather than on rational evidence, that it encourages people's unwavering loyalty based on feelings of ritual devotion rather than on facts, and that it has even led them into conflicts and armed Crusades.
  - 4 In Slovenia, applied social scientists research heritage in cooperation with practitioners in local environments, while officials mostly meet representatives of practitioners at meetings, and UNESCO officials and evaluators do not meet practitioners at all (Hafner 2018: 11; Kuutma 2019: 72; Bortolotto et al. 2020: 68).

knowledge (Geertz 1983: 57). In the theoretical chapter, I provide empirical examples from my own practice and from articles by other researchers to shed light on the principles of heritagization.

## Research Design and Research Questions

The monograph is based on constructionist epistemology, which holds that there is no single objective truth, as ‘truths’ and meanings are created by subjects’ interactions with the world (Berger and Luckmann 1991). Thus, we do not discover meanings, but construct them in relationships with other people; hence there exist multiple, often contradictory, but equally valid interpretations of the world (Hall 1997a; Gray 2013: 20). Constructionism stands in opposition to the positivist assumption that there is an objective reality out there, and to the taken-for-granted knowledge (Burr 1995: 3). Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000: 148–153) recommended that we systematically deconstruct facts that we take for granted, looking at them from new perspectives. This also holds true for critical heritage studies, which pay attention to the social aspects and power relations of heritage studies (Smith 2012: 535). I recognize this to be a productive way of observing the complex field of heritage and heritagization, in which various actors are involved: practitioners, UNESCO, State Parties, officials, applied and critical researchers, and others. Their social constructions of heritage phenomena are not only diverse and dynamic, some are still more dominant and have a stronger influence on social practices than others (Erlewein 2014: 9).

The constructionist view of heritage is primarily interested in the way in which selectively chosen traditions, products, landscapes, mythologies and memories from the past become cultural, political and economic resources for the present and future (Graham and Howard 2008: 2). If the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (UNESCO 1972) was based on an essentialist view, the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO 2003) already incorporates constructionism, which highlights the processes of the creation, development, transformation, preservation and transmission of heritage (Erlewein 2015: 27, 34). Intangible heritage is a dynamic and highly processual category, so the focus of heritage research is shifted from objects and phenomena “to the creators, bearers and users – actors of heritage” (Slavec Gradišnik 2014: 14–15).

The *Convention* (UNESCO 2003) has mostly been praised for including previously overlooked communities, practices and traditions and for raising

awareness of the importance of social skills (Deacon et al. 2004: 11; Erlewein 2015: 29), while other authors point to the contradictions it creates. One of the fundamental controversies is the mandatory and at the same time deliberately vaguely defined participation of heritage practitioners in the designing of safeguarding measures (Blake 2009: 63; Bortolotto et al. 2020), while the establishment of the safeguarding systems and national inventories is the responsibility of the States Parties (UNESCO 2003: Article 11; Kurin 2004: 72). Another inconsistency is the extremely high level of mediatization<sup>5</sup> of heritage in the UNESCO paradigm – the UNESCO Evaluation Body does not see intangible heritage in local environments (Hafner 2018: 11; Kuutma 2019: 72), but it relies on the nomination file, when judging if a particular element meets the criteria given in the *Operational Directives for the Implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO 2008/2024: 5–6; further referred to as the *Operational Directives*).

Much of the knowledge in traditional cultural practices is embodied and tacit (Polanyi 1962: 55–56) – handed down informally, through shared activities in everyday life, and often not fully verbalized, while the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm is largely focused on describing heritage practices according to its own instructions (UNESCO 2003, 2008/2024, 2022). Does the safeguarding paradigm irreversibly transform the process of transmitting knowledge and identities, by converting habitus into intangible heritage? Do embodied skills and tacit knowledge in the processes of heritagization become conscious, written down according to uniform instructions and thus objectified?

In the case study on dry stone walling, I analysed the processes of the acquisition and transfer of knowledge and skills in two regions of Slovenia in various periods. First, I determined how heritage bearers acquired their knowledge and skills of dry stone walling when it still used to be a cultural practice. I researched what changes occurred in the corpus of knowledge and media for its transfer during the revitalization and during safeguarding, i.e. upon its inscription to the Slovenian Register of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and on the UNESCO Representative List, as well as after it was inscribed in 2018. What transformations in the acquisition and transmission of knowledge, skills and identities have occurred? Which media can best present embodied and tacit knowledge? Who are the bearers of knowledge and skills, and to whom do they pass their knowledge? What roles do researchers play? Who are the

5 Authors agree that every representation in any medium changes reality and influences society, however American authors (e.g. Bolter and Grusin 2000) use the term *mediation*, while in Europe *mediatization* predominates (e.g. Hjarvard 2008; Couldry and Hepp 2013; Livingstone and Lunt 2014). Thorolf Lipp (2013) and Gertraud Koch (2013) used the term *medialization*.

experts in the safeguarding paradigm and how do they accumulate knowledge? In which social circles are these processes positioned? Does heritagization lead to a reinterpretation of knowledge, attribution of values, changes in attitudes, adaptation of identities and appropriation of heritage?

Analysing the transmission of knowledge, I refer to Fredrik Barth (2002: 3) and his tripartite conception of knowledge traditions: the corpus of knowledge and skills, the representations in various media for transmitting knowledge (which he understands very broadly), and the social groups within which they are distributed, communicated, employed, and transmitted. These three aspects are equally relevant in observing the transmission of knowledge and skills in Indigenous communities around the world or in the social sciences, and here I also apply them to analyse knowledge in the political safeguarding paradigm. To the division into *knowing how* and *knowing that* (Ryle 1946), defining practical and cognitive knowledge, was added a third category, *knowledge about* – a very general knowledge about a heritage element that is present in society (Koch 2013: 176). My research conveyed that the safeguarding paradigm operates primarily on the level of cognitive knowledge, while the practical knowledge and skills that it is supposed to safeguard remain to a large extent beyond its horizon. I also observed the effects of political knowledge of the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm (Smith 2006: 38; 2012: 538) on local knowledge and skills, as well as on professional knowledge.

There are some critical voices about the social processes in the safeguarding paradigm that I wanted to reconsider in practical situations, in a case study of dry stone walling. Laurajane Smith attributes authorized heritage discourse<sup>6</sup> to UNESCO as a powerful global actor that functions top down to reach the practitioners in local environments through the States Parties, and also to the social and human sciences that are engaged in heritagization. On the other side, subaltern heritage discourse can also be traced, as the voices of practitioners are not always heard. All heritage is dissonant, as it is marked by contesting, challenging and opposing discourses (Smith 2006: 3–5).

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett considers heritagization a form of metacultural production transforming cultural phenomena into intangible heritage. With the help of concepts, standards and regulations, heritage experts integrate cultural practices into the field of heritage, where they become

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6 According to Michel Foucault (1991), discourses are forms of expertise collected in various disciplines that deal with the construction and representation of knowledge, and are closely related to power. Laurajane Smith (2006: 4) understands them as forms of social practices and an integral part of heritagization.



metacultural artefacts on the UNESCO lists. At the same time, performers, ritual masters and artisans experience a new, metacultural attitude towards heritage that used to be their habitus (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 161–162). However, people are the subjects and agents of heritage initiatives, and not a passive medium without intention and subjectivity (ibid.: 179).

In the process of heritagization, government bodies, professionals and non-governmental organizations formulate heritage policies and educate heritage practitioners about heritage regimes and values, which alienates them from their practices, transforms their mutual relations (by introducing new heritage bodies and associations), and changes their identities and views on heritage and the past (Hafstein 2012: 507). Intangible cultural heritage cannot be thought of without taking into account the related power relations, and thus a reflexive turn to the applied sciences in the safeguarding of intangible heritage is also necessary, i.e. in one's own work (Slavec Gradišnik 2008: 220–223).

## Field Research

As I am a curator of ethnographic film in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, my permanent research field has always been film production, both outside (and prior to) and inside the Slovene safeguarding system and the international paradigm.<sup>7</sup> When the Ministry of Culture appointed the Slovene Ethnographic Museum to be the Coordinator in 2011, I mostly dealt with films, but I wanted to understand the UNESCO paradigm in theory and practice and to rethink it in the context of cultural practices in the field, critical articles and dissonant views in the museum. My general research has thus extended from the Slovene Ethnographic Museum to the local environments of Slovenia, when I film, prepare the subjects for filming, or I present films and film approaches. In the case of organizing or attending conferences, and preparation of multinational nominations, the field has been extended to other countries, either through my physical participation or through remote cooperation with representatives and filmmakers from other countries.

The UNESCO paradigm of intangible heritage is based on the *Convention* (UNESCO 2003), *Operational Directives* (UNESCO 2008/2024), nomination forms and instructions on how to fill them. Global flows are in practice detectable on the UNESCO website, in the inventories and registers of the

7 Film production was an important chapter of my doctoral dissertation and Slovenian book *Znanje in identitete v filmih o nesnovni dediščini* (2024) – in English available in two articles (Valentinčič Furlan 2025, forthcoming).



States Parties, in countless publications and films, on websites, in projects and among people. For the case study, I deliberately chose dry stone walling in the Karst region<sup>8</sup> of Slovenia and compared it with dry stone walling in Slovenian Istria. It was of decisive importance that I was able to examine changes in the construction of knowledge during the revitalization of this practice, when it was transformed into unofficial heritage and when it was confirmed as official heritage in the Slovenian Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage and on the UNESCO Representative List. The division into unofficial and official<sup>9</sup> heritage, motivated by legislation (Graham 2002: 1004; Harrison 2013: 14–15), also suggests that the validity criteria (Barth 2002: 3) of the former are set by the practitioners, while of the latter by the responsible bodies of UNESCO and States Parties.

The research has shown that the skills and methods of dry stone walling have not changed much, cognitive knowledge has expanded greatly, the media for the transfer of knowledge and skills have been modernized, and social circles have widened considerably. Slovenia's participation in the multinational nomination<sup>10</sup> provided rough insights into the state of dry stone walling and the safeguarding systems in another seven European countries, as well as into the joint construction of knowledge and identities in the nomination form and film. It also ensured the international relevance of the findings in this publication. Finally, I was able to observe the feedback effects of international and global visibility on local practices and their bearers in Slovenia. The case study revealed how *habitus* has been transformed into heritage, that the two can coexist, and that heritagization can enhance the viability of *habitus* (Graseni 2008: 165; Tauschek 2011: 56; Tschofen 2012: 29).

The research was based on multi-sited ethnography, which expands from one location to several venues of participation and observation, while crossing the dichotomies of the local and the global, as well as the lifeworld and the political

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8 The decision moment for this choice was my filming of the theoretical and practical training *School of Renovation: Dry Stone Walling* in October 2016 in Škocjan and Matavun. During the filming of the practical workshop, I noticed various approaches of practitioners and researchers to passing on skills, and later I explored the reasons for these differences in conversation with interlocutors and by consulting the relevant literature.

9 The Coordinator and the Ministry of Culture do not use such a division. Laurajane Smith (2006: 85–87) uses the expression authorized heritage in the same sense, while the opposite concept was not introduced.

10 Multinational nominations are worth joining, because they enable heritage bearers to achieve greater visibility and international cooperation, while the experts exchange best practices on the preparation of nominations and formulations that are most likely to convince UNESCO evaluators.

system (Marcus 1995: 95). Researching the global actors that produce a particular political discourse requires different research methods and practices than fieldwork among the communities affected by that policy. The study of translations between the discourses of local communities, politics, officials and researchers is of key importance here, going beyond the dualistic framework of us and them, and requiring more nuances along the often dissonant cleavages of social issues (ibid.: 100). Multi-sited research can be designed according to different principles, following people, things, stories, biographies, conflicts or media (ibid.: 103–110). In the study of dry stone walling I examined social practices on the verge of decline through its revitalization and heritagization from local and regional levels to national, European and global ones, together with the impacts of global recognition on the practices, heritage practitioners and society. The inscriptions to national inventories and on UNESCO lists, which are the most visible part of the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm, actually involve the “translation” of social practices into three types of media representation: the text of the nomination form, photographs and film.

According to Cris Shore and Susanna Trnka (2013: 17), anthropological knowledge is largely created by shifting between the insider, *emic* (experience-near) viewpoints of local residents and the outsider, *etic*<sup>11</sup> (experience-distant) perspectives of researchers and analysts. The next dynamism is between the universal and the specific, the global and the local (Geertz 1983: 69). The observation of culturally specific events is important to show how global processes are localized, regionalized and embedded in social settings. We can thus follow the diffusion of concepts, for example how certain discourses and practices take on unexpected meanings when they enter new domains (Shore and Trnka 2013: 18).

Intangible cultural heritage is a phenomenon that was introduced by UNESCO at the global level, and politically directed to the States Parties, in order to then bring local practices to the global consciousness as elements of intangible heritage. That global discourses can take on different meanings in local environments is demonstrated by the practice that, due to the desire for modernity and prestige, people begin to call their practices intangible heritage, even though they are not officially recognized as such by the States Parties or UNESCO. In doing so, they continue to determine the validity criteria themselves, independently of UNESCO and the States Parties.

11 *Emic* concepts and categories are those applied by the members of researched culture, while *etic* concepts are those with which their culture is interpreted by anthropologists, with their cultural specificity, professional views, and personal preferences (Goodenough 1970; cf. Slavec Gradišnik 2004: 112; Križnar 1996: 114–120).

George Marcus and Michael Fischer rethought Geertz's (1983: 57) concepts of experience-near and experience-distant in the context of cross-cultural research and discussion. When anthropologists write about another culture for readers from their own culture, they "translate" the experience-near concepts of the other culture with the experience-distant concepts of the home culture, which are common to the authors and their readers (Marcus and Fischer 1999: 31). The first juxtaposition and negotiation of concepts already takes place in dialogues during field research, while the second juxtaposition takes place during communication to the domestic readership at the level of transformation of cultural categories and concepts. In addition, each historical period also uses its own expressions and methods of communication, which may also contain prejudices against cultural Others (ibid.). David Lowenthal expressed the historically conditioned characteristics of perception and communication in the title of his book *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985).

If we perceive the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage through Geertz's concepts and Marcus-Fischer's levels of translation, we find that it is rarely a matter of translation from radically different cultures – the safeguarding of heritage is the responsibility of the States Parties in their own territories and researchers of domestic intangible cultural heritage mostly conduct research within their culture, except in the case of Indigenous, ethnic or minority heritage in their territories. Due to the requirements of the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm in the nomination forms and instructions for preparing nomination files (UNESCO 2022: point 16), we primarily research the current state of the heritage, so we only marginally encounter potential differences in the interpretation of past periods and heritage. According to my observations, the most sensitive relationship is between the insider, experience-near attitudes of local practitioners, which researchers and officials translate into outsider, experience-distant descriptions conditioned by UNESCO apparatus (the *Convention*, *Operational Directives*, instructions, recommendations, etc.). This applies to descriptions of elements in national registers and on UNESCO lists, as well as to professional commentaries in illustrative films. In contrast, experiential films can convey skilled practices and experiences, embodied speech and identities of heritage practitioners to their viewers.

Anthropologists and ethnologists have been well trained to discover how things look from other perspectives (Strathern 1987: 261). This is a valuable source of intellectual, epistemological and ontological insights, and in addition, the reflexivity of anthropology also allows the reflection on one's own existence and research, which offers the possibility of exchanging the perspectives of the centre and the periphery (Strathern 2013). This type of

reflexivity can be used for understanding the role of the applied researchers in the heritage safeguarding paradigm, where they voluntarily give up their academic independence and submit to the UNESCO policies and anonymity (Bortolotto 2015).

Anthropologists noted that locality became a new anthropological margin, as local knowledge is often perceived as exotic, backward and limited in itself (Lass in Asad et al. 1997: 721). In this context the adjective local increasingly means marginal, peasant, rural, and even primitive (Grasseni 2009: 3), and many Western anthropologists have viewed societies in (post)socialist countries in similar ways (Habinc 2008; Kürti 2008: 29). In today's globalized world, we have significantly easier physical or online access to diverse environments, groups and reflections, so anthropology perceives and deals with many contradictions between marginal and dominant views, positions, identifications and representations.

## Research, Analytical and Interpretive Methods

I applied language analysis for an in-depth reading of the UNESCO *Convention*, Slovenian acts, the UNESCO forms and instructions on how to prepare nominations and produce films. A careful and critical reading of the formulations in the *Convention* showed that UNESCO deliberately keeps some definitions vague and, by using passive structures, emphasizes the intangible heritage significantly more than its practitioners, without whom there is no intangible heritage, nor transmission to the next generations (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 179). Language analysis of the UNESCO instructions for film production revealed why a great majority of films on the UNESCO website (Internet source 1) are illustrative word-and-sentence-based films (cf. MacDougall 1998: 70).

In the empirical case study of dry stone walling, I used the following ethnographic methods for data collection: visual research (filming and analysis), participant observation and semi-structured interviews. I chose five interlocutors among the eight official bearers of dry stone walling in the Slovenian Register of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Internet source 2, cf. Internet source 3, Display of the Inscribed Elements on the Coordinator's website). Among the Karst *mentors*, I gave priority to the three I filmed at the *School of Renovation: Dry Stone Walling* in October 2016 and perceived their different attitudes towards the transfer of knowledge. The descriptions in the Register and conversations with them confirmed their different biographies

and motivations for preserving dry stone walling skills. The fourth individual showed an interest in cooperating, so I also filmed a conversation with him. Since I intended to deal with the Karst dry stone walling in depth, and the Istrian practice mainly for comparison, I chose just one of two Istrian bearers, namely the one who was also involved in the establishment of the National Vocational Qualification.

To shed light on the production of heritage by people in local and regional environments on the one hand, and in heritage institutions on the other, I conducted conversations with three researchers from the Karst and Istria who took part in the revitalization of a community practice. I also interviewed a representative of the Coordinator and an official of the Ministry of Culture, who, together with heritage bearers and researchers, cooperated in converting dry stone walling into official heritage in the Slovenian Register and on the UNESCO Representative List. The goal was to gain insight into how the interlocutors experienced involvement in community practices and various phases of the heritagization of dry stone walling, as well as what kind of knowledge and skills they invested in these activities and shared with other actors of dry stone walling and its heritagization.

The conversations with five bearers and two researchers were filmed between October 2019 and February 2020, and due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the questions were sent to the last three interviewees by email in April and May 2020. The seven in-person interviews were longer and interactive, while the last three were shorter and more formal. The seven filmed interviews thus yielded significantly richer data than the three conducted by email, because I was able to listen to and watch their embodied speech several times, analysing the formulation of thoughts, facial expressions and gesticulations, tone of voice and their moods. At the same time, they also required a much greater analytical input when I transcribed the narratives and prepared passages that shed light on the research topics for use in the case study. In doing so, I reduced the above-mentioned characteristics of filmed interviews to the bare content of the narrative.

I used the comparative method to contrast the Karst and Istrian dry stone walling and to compare how knowledge and skills were passed on in community practices, during the revitalization and during heritagization: I analysed the body of knowledge, the media used for its transmission and the relevant social circles (Barth 2002: 3), distinguishing practical and cognitive knowledge (Ryle 1946; Koch 2013: 176). I applied language analysis to define the emic and etic terms: *subi zid* (dry wall) in the Karst and *subogradnja* (dry

construction) in Istria, as opposed to the official etic “dry stone walling”; *mentor*, *majstr*, *mojster* (mentor, master) in the Karst and *mojster* (master) in Istria, as opposed to “heritage bearer”, which is an etic expression of the Slovenian researchers and officials.<sup>12</sup>

Cristina Grasseni defines skilled vision as a concept, research method and ability to understand social phenomena and practices in the way local people see them, through their moral values and aesthetic codes (Grasseni 2004: 16–17), i.e. through emic categories. Participant observation combines the advantages of an outsider’s view and intimate participation in a chosen community or social activity (Grasseni 2017: 2). Skilled vision is not only characteristic of the ethnographic method in ethnological and anthropological research, it is mastered by other communities of practice as well: cattle breeders immediately see which cows are beautiful, healthy and good dairy cows; experienced dry stone wallers know how to assess where a certain stone best “fits” in the wall and which face of stone to turn outwards so that the surface of the wall will be nicely aligned. The most widespread form of skilled vision is reading, which we have practised for years so that we no longer have to think about how we connect letters to words and those into sentences to understand the meaning of a text and its message. When studying ethnology and anthropology, we specialized in the discourses of social and human sciences, but we are not skilled, for example, in reading treatises on astrophysics or medicine, and legal texts can also be a challenge.

The education of attention takes place within situated practices (Grasseni 2007b: 7). For example, when cattle breeders’ children play with toy cows, they are educated in the ecology of cattle breeding practices (Grasseni 2007c: 64). I used this principle to interpret the learning of dry stone walling as a game of young shepherds, or the education of television documentarians, who are directed by producers into the dominant television discourse with easy-to-understand verbal information and illustrative shots (Ruby 1996: 197–199; Grimshaw 2001: 153; Lipp 2013: 142–143). In this book, the sessions of the

12 It was first used by Naško Križnar in a study that laid the foundations for the safeguarding system and the register of intangible heritage (Križnar 2008: 27), as well as in the 2008 Act (ZVKD-1: Articles 20 and 98). However, in Slovenian ethnology, the term “bearer” originates in the 1970s, when, with the introduction of the concept “way of life”, the research focus shifted from cultural phenomena to their bearers (Kremenšek 1978: 122; 1980), thus it is part of ethnological habitus (Slavec Gradišnik 2008: 221). When reading a case study, Cristina Grasseni experienced the phrase “heritage bearers” as an expression with a negative connotation, based on Bortolotto’s (2015) discussion of how the term “heritage bearers” is employed institutionally – often positioning communities as passive transmitters of culture, while heritage professionals and anthropologists act as gatekeepers or intermediaries (Zoom, December 3, 2020; EM, August 18, 2025).



UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereinafter the Intergovernmental Committee) and capacity-building workshops are interpreted as the education of attention in the ecology of practice.

Grasseni draws attention to the constructionist nature of skilled visions, which “orient our perception and structure our understanding, they do not only convey ideas, meaning and beliefs, but configure them” (Grasseni 2007b: 5). To give an example, visual anthropologists will use the approaches and methods of visual ethnography in making films on intangible heritage, actively involving heritage bearers in the production process. Those who are accustomed to the aestheticized television documentaries with explanatory commentary and pleasant music added, would most probably want to produce such a film on intangible heritage. They would not consider the various power relations at play, or they might readily embrace the privileged position (Smith 2006: 51) of being able to decide on film narrative and aesthetics.

In the case study, I have analysed testimonies, articles, anthologies, handbooks and films about dry stone walling in the Karst and Istria, as well as documents connected to official heritagization and three official communication modes and media (text, photographs, film) of inscription to the Slovenian Register and on the Representative List, to find out how the structure of knowledge changed during the revitalization of dry stone walling and its safeguarding. I have examined the corpus of embodied skills and cognitive knowledge, media for its transmission, the social circles within which the transmission of knowledge is situated, who determines the criteria of validity, and the external influences on this tradition of knowledge (Barth 2002). I have also determined when practitioners and researchers began to label habitual practices (“dry construction” in Istria and “dry wall” in the Karst) with the term “heritage” and when with “intangible cultural heritage”. My interlocutors confirmed that habitual community practices and intangible heritage coexist in their local environments.

## Literature, Sources, Testimonies and Filmography

Due to the constant search for correspondences between theory and empiricism, in parallel I collected and read the related literature<sup>13</sup> and various public and semi-public sources (Literature and Sources), and reviewed films

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13 There are references from ethnology, (visual) anthropology, museology, critical heritage studies, psychology, sociology, cultural studies, media studies, geography, etc.

(Filmography). In the case study, I also refer to the testimonies of ten interlocutors (Interlocutors).

The heritagization of dry stone walling developed without major social conflicts and the interlocutors were proud of their work, their knowledge and contribution, so they had no reservations when I made arrangements for filming the conversations. The interviews with the heritage bearers Rudi Bak, Zdravko Škrlić, Boris Čok and Mitja Kobal from the Karst region<sup>14</sup> and Dejan Zadavec from Istria were semi-structured. I had prepared questions about their life histories, sources of knowledge and skills, the ways of learning dry stone walling during communal activities, its place in their lives at that time and the methods of passing on their knowledge and skills in workshops, their views on the inscription of dry stone walling to the Slovenian Register and on the Representative List, and especially if that had any impact on their knowledge and skills. At the same time, I let the interlocutors direct the conversations in their own way. During the filming of Boris Čok, I noticed, after the first questions, that he was in a state of perfect concentration and flow (Csikszentmihalyi 2008). In an extremely fluid and precisely structured narrative, he presented the significance of dry stone walling in his childhood, youth and adulthood, embedded in family, social and political contexts.

According to the four categories of knowledge set out by Slavoj Žižek (2006), in the conversations I learned some “known knowns” (confirmation of what I already knew from the workshop, articles, films and from participation in preparation of the nomination file), a lot of “known unknowns” (what I wanted to explore in the interviews) and also some “unknown unknowns” (which I did not think of to ask myself, but which shed additional light on the topic). I did not perceive the fourth category of “unknown knowns”, which would reveal my or our blind spots, stereotypes or prejudices, although this does not mean that they were not present. I used their narratives as data for analysis and comparison, often contrasting them with information from the literature and other sources.

As mentioned above, in the Slovenian safeguarding system, persons, groups and communities who practise heritage and pass on knowledge and skills to others are denoted as heritage bearers (ZVKD-1: Articles 20 and 98;

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14 At the time of the research, the Karst mentors were members of the Partnership for the Preservation and Popularization of Karst Dry Stone Walling (Partnerstvo za ohranitev in popularizacijo kraške suhozidne gradnje, Internet source 4, hereinafter also referred to as the Partnership), which turned out to be a very important platform for the research and diffusion of knowledge and skills.



ZVKD-1D: Articles 20, 40, 66), while I use the term heritage actors (Slavec Gradišnik 2014: 14–15; Brumann 2014: 185) for a wider circle of people engaged with heritagization – in addition to the practitioners, there are also researchers, managers, users, enthusiasts, promoters and marketers of heritage.

I interviewed five people who were engaged either in researching, reviving or in safeguarding dry stone walling: ethnologist and cultural anthropologist Darja Kranjc from the Public Institution Škocjan Caves Park, Slovenia,<sup>15</sup> the ethnologist and sociologist Eda Belingar from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, Nova Gorica Regional Office, and the art historian and ethnologist Eda Benčič Mohar from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, Piran Regional Office. They have cooperated in two cross-border EU projects reviving dry stone walling in the Karst and Istria and they also took part in transforming it into official intangible heritage.

There are two crucial institutions responsible for the safeguarding in Slovenia that inscribed dry stone walling to the Slovenian Register and cooperated in the preparation of the nomination for inscription to the UNESCO Representative List. I sent questions to the curator of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Department in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, with an MA in ethnology and cultural anthropology, who is in this book denoted as a representative of the Coordinator (at their request for privacy). Ksenija Kovačec Naglič, with an MA in mathematics, is employed at the Ministry of Culture, in the Heritage Information and Documentation Centre, which manages the Registers of Immovable (Internet source 6) and Intangible Cultural Heritage (Internet source 7; cf. Internet source 8, the old domain with the list of registered units).<sup>16</sup> Both institutions are located in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia.

When communicating with fellow researchers, I sometimes perceived a vague feeling that I had broken some kind of unwritten rule that the work of one's colleagues should not be researched. Was it because at that moment I moved to the position of a critical researcher of heritagization, and thus also of their activities? Is this the reason Brumann (2014: 182) observed that “heritage

15 Škocjanske jame (the Škocjan Caves) are on the UNESCO World Heritage List (Internet source 5).

16 The Register is a primary source that provides the name of the unit, classification, short and long description of the unit, its location, safeguarding measures (general guidelines), bearers, photographs and a map of the location. The Coordinator displays the elements in the Register on its website (Internet source 9), on the subpage Display of the Inscribed Elements (Internet source 10), together with photographs and films.

institutions and their personnel” were poorly studied? Is this one of those “rules” that people internalize without much thought, in addition to the rules of grammar and laws of logic (Foucault 1972)? This unreflected conceptual framework then determines the mentality and behaviour of individuals and groups in a certain institution or domain (institutional habitus, Bourdieu 1990: 59, 73; cf. Slavec Gradišnik 2008: 221). It also supports the existing power/knowledge structures (Foucault 1980, 1991), present in the institutions and in the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm (Smith 2006: 51).

The researchers from Primorska were asked about their academic and institutional knowledge, as well as about the knowledge and skills they invested and acquired in projects revitalizing dry stone walling and when inscribing the element to the Slovenian Register and on the UNESCO List. I was particularly interested in how they included heritage bearers in the drafting of the texts for inscription to the Slovenian Register and for the nomination form, and also how they experienced the successful inscription to the Representative List, its results and consequences. The representatives of the Coordinator and the Ministry were asked how they acquired new normative, theoretical and practical knowledge about the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm and how they were engaged in the organization of the Slovenian safeguarding system.

I have not anonymized<sup>17</sup> the statements, as the data on five heritage bearers is publicly available in the Register of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, while the other five interlocutors are employees of public institutions. Neither they nor I perceived any ethical issues or negative social impacts with regard to the heritagization of dry stone walling during the research. In order to obtain their permission to publish personal data, I sent them the case study and the integral text of the Slovenian book.<sup>18</sup> As mentioned above, one interlocutor decided to protect their personal data and so remain fully anonymous.

Returning to sources of information, in the twenty-first century, more and more data and knowledge on intangible heritage is published on the Internet, including data on the registered elements of intangible heritage, so the

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17 This choice was inspired by a conversation with Cristina Grasseni, who read the case study in 2020, and saw the heritagization of dry stone walling as a successful and unproblematic story. In contrast, she characterized the protection and heritagization of cheese-making in the Italian Alps as “cheese wars”, with disputes among the actors and heated political debates. The interlocutors’ names were thus changed in order to protect their economic interests (Grasseni 2017).

18 I cite verbatim or summarized statements in the book with the names and surnames of their authors in brackets (e.g. Eda Belingar; Boris Čok), while the use of a surname and year refers to their publications (e.g. Čok 2014a).

cited references are given among Internet Sources. In the text I also refer to data from emails, which I cite as the abbreviation EM and the date, for example Lúbia Volánská (EM, August 18, 2020).<sup>19</sup> Moreover, I also use statements from in-person conversations or those conducted *via* online tools. To be on the safe side, I have sent these parts to my colleague interlocutors to be checked and agreed on before being published.

Ultimately, I also use my own memory as an important source, especially due to my multiple roles that have been intertwined throughout the research. As a matter of fact, I am the eleventh person engaged in the heritagization of dry stone walling *via* filming it, and also part of the Slovenian safeguarding system by dealing with film production and providing reflection on it. Simon Ottenberg (1990) characterizes memories as “headnotes”, which have to be objectivized and published to be available to others. According to Jan Assmann, all face-to-face communication, e.g. oral tradition, is part of communicative memory, but when we write down the oral tradition or someone’s opinion, communicative memories are turned into more widely accessible cultural memories (Assmann J. 1995: 126, 133). Regarding memory practices, Aleida Assmann claims that, when we draw from our memory depot those memories that functionally support the current project, these become our functional memories, drawing their legitimacy from the connection with the past (Assmann A. 2011: 126–129). Once published, they enter the public domain and become available for discussion.

## Various Roles of the Author in the Researched Processes

I am not the first to write critically about the safeguarding paradigm of intangible heritage, while also actively involved in it. The ambivalent situation “complicates the relationship between the discipline of anthropology, which scientifically investigates cultural transmission, and the policy field regulating this process” (Bortolotto 2015: 252). When Bortolotto investigated the establishment and implementation of UNESCO’s global policy of intangible heritage, while at the same time participating in these processes herself, she realized that the distanced role of the ethnographer was no longer possible (*ibid.*; cf. Schreiber 2017: 456).

Anthropologists became aware of the complex issue of the distanced and engaged roles of ethnography during the reflexive turn, marked by the publication

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19 These sources are not listed collectively at the end.

of the volume *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Many authors cited Jean-François Lyotard (1979) who recommended scepticism towards all authorities with the abolition of universal theories and metanarratives or grand narratives, as all ethnographic “truths” are constructed, partial and incomplete (Clifford 1986: 6–7). The powerful anthropological voice, which used “informants” in a subordinate role, was replaced by the dialogic model with a polyphony of local voices (ibid.: 15); their more equal position was suggested by the term “interlocutors”. It has to be admitted that visual researchers had come to question the same principles about a decade earlier (Ginsburg 1995a: 261; Ruby 2000: 164) – the positivist models of knowledge construction in films were replaced by dialogical, reflective and participatory ones (Rouch 1975; MacDougall 1975). In multi-sited ethnography, George E. Marcus (1995: 113) noticed that anthropologists pursuing contradictory topics from local environments to global political and economic systems, as a rule choose the position of “ethnographer-activists, renegotiating identities in different sites”.

In the twenty-first century, related shifts are taking place in many areas of applied research, for example in the new museology, when curators combine a top-down methods with more democratic bottom-up ones to position themselves within the community with participatory, inclusive and collaborative approaches (Clifford 1997, 2004; Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Sandell 2003; Simon 2010; Valentinčič Furlan 2014, 2021; Palaić 2016; Lunaček Brumen 2018). Similarly, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2000) has defined the democratic approach to public folklore of the American Folklore Society and the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage as engaged and progressive practices of heritage production. On the other hand, Albert van der Zeijden reported that the majority of Central European folklorists and ethnologists (*Volkskundler*) identified themselves as closer to critical observers, and spoke out against public interventions at a conference on public folklore in Bad Homburg in 1998 (van der Zeijden 2014: 357). Could that still be possible some twenty-five years later, after the intensive implementation of the UNESCO paradigm of intangible heritage?

In Slovenia, ethnologists and cultural anthropologists discuss cultural heritage from at least two points of view: theoretically and reflexively, when questioning how to think about heritage in modern society, or applicatively (Fakin Bajec 2011: 13; Hrobat Virloget 2019: 37–38). In the second case, we become co-creators of heritage (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1988; Fakin Bajec 2011: 13). The museum curators give the object, which they bring from the field and inscribe data in the inventory programme, the status of a museum artefact. At

the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia they declare selected buildings, cultural spaces and cultural landscapes protected heritage by decrees. In the field of intangible heritage, the Working Group of the Coordinator gives a positive opinion that the heritage element meets the criteria to be inscribed to the Register (Coordinator 2021b: Article 4), which is then inscribed by the Ministry of Culture. Applied researchers often create heritage together with local communities in the context of developmental, cross-border and European projects (see e.g. Benčič Mohar 2013; Kranjc 2014b; Valentinčič Furlan 2014; Godina Golija and Ledinek Lozej 2018; Hrobat Virloget 2019; Fakin Bajec 2020a, 2020b).

However, even in the same project, the researchers can function from two different starting points: on the one hand, they may support the community in preserving heritage by helping with research and organizing workshops, and on the other hand, they may critically observe the effects of a certain cultural policy on cultural phenomena and communities, as broad-spectrum researchers (Nikolić Đerić 2015: 88; cf. Hrobat Virloget 2019: 37–38). Lidija Nikočević, who in 2008 participated in the preparation of the nomination for the inscription of the heritage of bell ringers from the Kastav region, Croatia, to the Representative List, felt split, as her long-term research relationship with bell ringers changed when she became an evaluator of their tradition according to external, UNESCO criteria (Nikočević 2012: 10). She was critical of the top-down approach and the weak participation of local communities in the drafting of the nomination file, and wondered if the inscription to the UNESCO list might lead to the fossilization, alienation or invention of carnival tradition, and how the politicization of international and Croatian safeguarding programmes would affect intangible practice. In the process of preparing the nomination, she simultaneously acted as an applied anthropologist, who took into account the mechanisms of creating universal standards for inscription to the Representative List, and as a critical researcher (Nikočević 2012: 11).

Thus in the field of intangible cultural heritage, ethnologists and anthropologists can function according to two separate traditions of knowledge: in the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm, they agree to submit to the anonymity and UNESCO criteria for regulating the validity of knowledge, while in critical research of heritagization they respect the scientific criteria of validity, citing references and authors, documenting methods and explaining contexts. However, researchers can also switch between different positions, crossing virtual boundaries, without feeling split.

Kirin Narayan (1993), an Indian who studied anthropology in the USA, learned to cross the divide between “native” and “regular” anthropologists

according to her own professional choice. The dynamic understanding of the role of the researcher and the processes of the construction of knowledge allowed her to replace the paradigm based on the fixed (geographically based, identity-based) separation of insiders and outsiders, with a paradigm that allows flexible identifications and roles. Similarly, Ann Taves knows how to move between detached approaches of religious studies and engaged approaches of theological studies. She claims that the way she defines research questions signals her status as an insider or an outsider of the researched culture, or rather, that in any academic discipline a researcher can choose between engaged and detached positions (Taves 2005).

In the monograph, I critically discuss the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm of intangible heritage. However, as I also participate in it and report on diverse experiences and reflections, I repeatedly switch from critical observer to the role of an applied anthropologist, and engaged visual anthropologist who aims to enhance the methodology and ethics of visual ethnography in visualising intangible heritage. Although at times it is a bit schizophrenic to move between three different roles, I internalized Taves' perspective that open attention and reflexive switching among critical, applied and engaged approaches do not lead to the breakdown of professional integrity, but present the possibility of more complex analysis, and an open space for rethinking and generating new insights (Taves 2005). I expected to be able to retrospectively write down when I crossed the boundaries, as during the actual activities there is no time nor any need to define in each step from which position I am acting. To my surprise, I found that the roles are so intertwined that for each decision, with retrospective reflection, I can only determine the approximate ratios between the shares of two or three positions, similar to how we make sense of our identities in retrospect (Muršič 1997: 227).

When I designed the visualization of intangible heritage for the Slovenian Register close to visual ethnography, I pursued the emic views of the bearers, as the experts have already reconciled the etic views in the texts. I prioritized films produced by the heritage bearers, local communities, societies and museums, as long as they corresponded to the basic characteristics of film communication. In the Guidelines for Making Films about Intangible Cultural Heritage (Valentinčič Furlan 2016/2021), I collected UNESCO's instructions and added ethical recommendations of visual ethnography for filmmakers that intend to produce films for nominations. Recently, I have promoted collaborative productions in which heritage bearers take part in the planning, filming and editing, which is in line with UNESCO's emphasis on the participation of practitioners. In doing so, I assumed the role of



an engaged visual anthropologist in film productions and in promoting such approaches.<sup>20</sup>

Although I was critical of the visualization in the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm, I nevertheless took into account the UNESCO instructions regarding the content (emphasis on the current state of heritage, its social roles and ways of transferring heritage) and length of the film, and I signed Grant of Rights forms, as well. I admit that I was upset and frustrated when professional approaches in film productions had to be subordinated to political decisions or when I noticed the influence of UNESCO stereotypical illustrative videos on members of the working group to prepare nominations. And this was one of the motives for writing the book.

Personally, writing helps me to sharpen the clarity of my views, to organize my thoughts, and to extract the essence of an issue in relation to the focal research questions from the mass of theoretical and empirical data, which can often be chaotic or conflicting. When writing I discipline my thoughts, rethinking matters, processes, concepts and methods, confronting theoretical starting points and the various views of interlocutors, asking additional and alternative questions, possibly discovering additional literature and corresponding formulations, or creating new ones, thus turning tacit knowledge into explicit insights. This is how I climb a ladder constructed by the arguments of theoreticians and interlocutors, linked by the rope of my own insights (cf. MacDougall 1998: 69).

## The Structure of the Book

The main topic of the monograph is the construction of knowledge and identities in social practices, intangible cultural heritage, in the safeguarding paradigm and its official media: text, photographs and film. The *Introduction* is followed by a theoretical chapter, an empirical case study on dry stone walling, and a *Conclusion*.

In the first chapter, *Intangible Heritage, Knowledge and Identities*, intangible cultural heritage is analysed through a series of different concepts and

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20 I organized two international conferences on filming the intangible heritage for the purpose of nominations to UNESCO lists, so that we could exchange experiences with other European visual anthropologists and filmmakers. The contributions are available in the anthologies *Documenting and Presenting Intangible Cultural Heritage on Film* and *Visualising Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Valentinčič Furlan 2015c, 2018b).

questions. The postmodern discursive model focuses on processes, which is also reflected in the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. In the first section, I write how the canonical and nationalistic Western models of world heritage in the postmodern era provoked criticism from communities with radically different views of heritage, on the one hand, and from the social and human sciences, on the other.

In the second section, intangible cultural heritage is analysed as a concept and a safeguarding paradigm between the declarative and the operational. It examines how the *Convention* is instrumentalized, and how the States Parties “translate” the normative into the operational. What UNESCO understands by the phrase “communities, groups, and in some cases, individuals” in theory and practice is also examined, as well as how the terms “cooperation” and “participation” are used, and what roles are assigned to anthropologists.

In the third section, the concepts of three critical authors, Laurajane Smith (2006), Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004, 2006) and Valdimar Tr. Hafstein (2012, 2014a, 2018b) are presented. The discourses and powers of practitioners, officials, applied researchers and critical social scientists are analysed, as well as the possibility of alienating heritage from the source communities (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 170, 184–185; Hafstein 2012; 2018a: 134). The theory is supplemented with examples of heritagization from the critical literature (Foster 2011; Foster and Gilman 2015; Hafstein 2018a) and Slovenian practice.

In *The Knowledge in and about Intangible Heritage*, three types of knowledge and “knowers” (Barth 2002) are identified: the knowledge and skills of practitioners in local environments, the normative and political knowledge of the UNESCO *Convention* and *Operational Directives*, and knowledge of researchers that study practices before and during the heritagization. Blended together, they maintain the main safeguarding tool – inscribing intangible elements in the inventories in the States Parties and to the UNESCO lists. Safeguarding includes “the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement” (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.3) that are mostly based on cognitive, discursive knowledge.

In the fifth section, *Heritage, Emotions, Agency and Identities*, heritage is first discussed in relation to emotions, which are important motivators for engaging in heritage practices (Smith 2006; Hafstein 2018b; van de Port and Meyer 2018). They are not allowed in nomination forms, but are encouraged in the consent forms and upon solemn confirmation that the nominated element will be inscribed on the desired list at the sessions of the Intergovernmental



Committee. In the *Convention*, agency is attributed to the heritage itself rather than to its practitioners (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1), although agency is defined as the ability of human actors to initiate causal sequences of events (Gell 1998: 16). Finally, the relationship between heritage and identities is also considered (Albert 2006; Wulf 2011). Cases are given when practitioners stress boundaries between insiders and outsiders of a heritage element, or when ethnic minorities experience racism and stereotypes in heritage elements.

In the sixth section, *Heritage as Assemblage, Communities of Practice and Epistemic Community*, intangible cultural heritage is discussed as an assemblage of actors and actants (Deleuze and Guattari 1980). Communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) and the dominant UNESCO epistemic community (Jacobs 2017) have different epistemic and ontological characteristics, but their representatives have to cooperate closely to prepare a successful nomination of the heritage element if they want to inscribe it on the UNESCO list.

In the seventh section, *The Mediatization of Intangible Cultural Heritage: Texts, Photographs, and Films*, the reasons for the high level of mediatization of intangible heritage are thematized. Stuart Hall's (1997a) encoding/decoding model of communication is applied to analyse signifying practices of texts and films on the UNESCO website that permit the cultural circuit of intangible heritage. The protocols, conventions and standards embedded in the official three types of representation in nomination files impact the power relations among heritage practitioners, researchers and officials (Goodwin 1994; Grasseni 2011: 41). Various media used to preserve Indigenous languages and cultures are showcased (Graham 2009), and after a short review of the methods and ethics of visual ethnography that can be beneficial in filming intangible heritage is provided, the main functions of films in the safeguarding of heritage are discussed (Postma 2012).

In the eighth section, *Films on Intangible Heritage on the UNESCO Lists*, the development of relatively modest instructions for film production is presented. I argue that UNESCO has chosen the medium well, while the potential of film as a medium has often been ignored. Selected films are analysed and film productions reported to show how knowledge is constructed top down in illustrative films and more inclusively in experiential films (Erlewein 2015; Valentinčič Furlan 2015b, 2018b, 2024, 2025; van der Zeijden 2018). Finally, the social circles in which visual knowledge is disseminated are examined, as well as the reception of films by the professional and general public (Sicard 2018). Since the function and the main target audience of films on UNESCO lists have changed in the last decade, it is time to reconsider how to structure their stories.

In the second chapter, *Dry Stone Walling*, the metamorphosis of dry stone walling from a community practice in decline to unofficial and official heritage is analysed, in order to determine if UNESCO's safeguarding paradigm really melts the iceberg of tacit knowledge and habitus. The case study is structured in such a manner that the ways of acquiring knowledge and skills of four practitioners from the Karst and one from Istria are presented, as well as the reasons for the decline of this practice in the second half of the twentieth century.

In the second section, the three researchers from Primorska and the revitalization of dry stone walling in two European cross-border projects are introduced, to show what changes were brought about in the acquisition and transmission of knowledge and skills, which new media were used, and which new social circles were engaged. Voluntary renovation campaigns and workshops are considered successful media (Barth 2002) or heritage genres (Hafstein 2018a, 2018b) for the informal transfer of skills, knowledge and enthusiasm. The third section analyses the module for training dry stone wallers at the Higher Vocational College Sežana, as well as the state supervised National Vocational Qualification with internationally recognized certificates.

In the fourth section, the safeguarding system of intangible heritage in Slovenia is introduced, with appropriate legislation and the Register of the Intangible Cultural Heritage as the main tool for practical safeguarding. The Coordinator for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Ministry of Culture cooperated with heritage bearers and researchers from Primorska in inscribing dry stone walling in the state register in 2016, and in the preparation of a joint nomination file of eight European States Parties for inscription on the UNESCO Representative List. The construction of knowledge and identities in filming dry stone walling and editing the processual film that was sent to the Andorran film editors is presented auto-reflexively. The construction of knowledge is examined also in the text of nomination *Art of Dry Stone Walling, Knowledge and Techniques* (2018) and in the joint film.

In the fifth section, the feedback effects of the new meta-cultural status on the practice in Slovenia is analysed, as well as on the practitioners, researchers, safeguarding experts, institutions and Slovene society. They have mostly been positive with little dissonance traced. No defamiliarization (Foster 2011: 66) or alienation of heritage from the source community have been established (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 161–162; Hafstein 2018a: 134, 143), as hard physical labour is not easily appropriated by outsiders. The final section presents the reasons for the exemplary heritagization of dry stone walling in Slovenia.

In the last chapter, *Conclusion*, the roles of vision, viewing and views in the processes of identification, heritagization and film production are summarized. Regarding identities and identifications in the safeguarding paradigm, I conclude that they are obscured to some degree, as UNESCO gives more importance to the intangible heritage itself than to the “communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals”, without whom the heritage cannot exist. UNESCO does not come into direct contact with intangible heritage and its practitioners, as it operates through the intermediaries – the State Parties, which then engage applied researchers to reach the heritage and practitioners in the local environments.

Regarding the construction of knowledge and skills, local communities still incorporate knowledge and skills through practice, while the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm mostly encourages the inscription of cognitive knowledge (cf. Connerton 1989: 72–73). However, the mediatized forms used in this context do not enable the embodiment of practical knowledge and skills, which can be learned experientially through observation and mimetic repetition (Grasseni 2008: 164) in life practices or in practical courses and workshops.

Within the nomination file, the nomination form is focused on the safeguarding measures, while the film can transmit practitioners’ skilled practices, views, languages and identities. The visual dogma on the UNESCO website – the top-down production of logocentric illustrative films is criticized, while experiential films and collaborative productions are deliberately highlighted to demonstrate that the approaches and methods of visual ethnography can flatten power hierarchies, giving agency to heritage practitioners.



## First chapter

# Intangible Heritage, Knowledge and Identities

The concept and category of “intangible cultural heritage” were introduced by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The heritage scene is highly productive (van de Port and Meyer 2018: 7–8) in terms of practices, empirical research and theoretical reflection. Academic interest in heritage expanded in the 1980s, with David Lowenthal’s book *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985) generally considered the starting point of heritage studies. Those works then uncritically reproduced a Eurocentric discourse of expert knowledge that emphasized monumental and aesthetic heritage with inherent value for Western narratives of nation, class and science, defined as an “authorized heritage discourse” (Smith 2006: 4).

Researchers seeking to move beyond such views deliberately distanced themselves from dominant perspectives and, within critical heritage studies, highlighted the social aspects of heritage and, in particular, power relations (Smith 2012: 537). They questioned widely accepted and taken-for-granted concepts of heritage, critically reflected on conservative cultural, economic, and political power structures, and enabled the active participation of groups and communities that had previously been on the margins of heritage management.

We argue that a truly critical heritage studies will ask many uncomfortable questions of traditional ways of thinking about and doing heritage, and that the interests of the marginalised and excluded will

be brought to the forefront when posing these questions. (Ibid.: 535; Internet source 13)

Heritage goes beyond economic interests and UNESCO declarations of universal values; it “matters because it has emotional, political and intellectual consequences in people’s lives” (Smith 2012: 538).

## The Development of Concepts of Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage

David Lowenthal stated that heritage is something mandatory and binding that we receive from our ancestors, whether we want it or not, and therefore something we cannot simply reject (Lowenthal 2009: 2). However, the meaning and the attitude towards this concept have changed over time. In English, the term “heritage” means property that is inherited; something that is passed down from previous generations, e.g. tradition; and status acquired by birth (Internet source 14). Rodney Harrison identified three phases in the development and perception of culture and heritage: the first concepts of preservation appeared in the nineteenth century; in the twentieth century, states started to control the management of heritage and used it to build nations; and in the postmodern era, international institutions raised the policy of heritage protection to a supranational level (Harrison 2013: 43).

After World War II, the threat of heritage destruction led to the establishment of UNESCO (1945, Internet source 15). Heritage has since been defined as a value by many conventions, among which I highlight the *Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict with Regulations for the Execution of the Convention* (UNESCO 1954), the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (UNESCO 1972), and the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO 2003).

Harrison argues that it was the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* that triggered the postmodern approach: it established the idea that certain buildings, places and natural sites are vulnerable resources threatened by industrialization and modernization, globalization and migrations, and therefore states and the international community must protect them as monumental heritage. The consequences were the professionalization and bureaucratization of heritage management and its exclusion from everyday life (Harrison 2013: 68). Without much public debate,

UNESCO introduced classification, World Heritage Lists (Internet source 16) and protection due to the uncertainty resulting from the impression of the accelerated passing of time in the postmodern era, and in doing so initiated the preservation of what is remote, old, hidden and authentic (Harrison 2013: 68, 227). In essence, the rescue paradigm, already abandoned in anthropology, has caused a heritage boom (Lowenthal 2009; Dicks 2003), a postmodern abundance of heritage and the past (Harrison 2013: 79, 228). “UNESCO protocols enthrone heritage as the sovereign core of collective identity and self-respect, a nutriment as necessary as food and drink” (Lowenthal 2009: 5). The knowledge of experts and expert systems has prevailed over the knowledge of local people (Giddens 1991: 29–32; Harrison 2013: 27), and the global interpretation has become stronger than the local understanding (Tauschek 2012a: 13; 2015: 301).

Heritage, offered as a remedy for the homogenization of culture caused by globalization, is in fact a product of globalization and economic and political changes in which cultural tourism has become the dominant form of the world economy (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006). All forms of heritage now intensively promote both the globalization and the homogenization of culture. Robert Hewison (1987) coined the phrase “heritage industry” to describe heritage as the commercialization, aestheticization and sanitization of the past, and also as popular entertainment imposed from above to appeal to middle-class nostalgia for a supposed golden age (of England) and to distract people from dealing with the pressing issues of the present (*ibid.*: 83). In thematic parks, experience is a consumer good, thematicity is intertwined with entertainment, and emotions are commercialized. Many heritage sites enable the experience of the past through performances of traditional dances and songs, local food offerings, and staged reconstructions, in which both performers and visitors take active roles (Harrison 2013: 85–88).

In the postmodern era, canonical and national Western models of heritage have caused crises in countries and communities with radically different views of heritage. Since the late 1980s, some Indigenous groups and source communities have demanded that their heritage and human skeletal materials be repatriated. Museums have reacted differently to this, some have respected their demands and others rejected them, citing universal rights of access for the majority of the public and the rights of (Western) experts to research this heritage. However, lately these hegemonic arguments have gradually given way to the rights of peoples to their own heritage and to its interpretation (Harrison 2013: 109). Invoking universal values and representing all of humanity is contradictory if the demands of Indigenous and marginalized groups to



be represented on an equal footing with dominant cultures and groups are ignored (Bennett 1995: 103). It is not possible to develop universal methods of heritage management because each culture and its experts have specific cultural and historical characteristics (Fairclough 2008: 301). Furthermore, appealing to the universal category of heritage is often a means of denying local actors and communities the opportunity to participate in the management of their heritage and heritage sites (Byrne 1991 in Harrison 2013: 111).

Laurajane Smith (2006: 99–100) has credited UNESCO with the international codification of Western authorized heritage discourse, the values and ideologies that have influenced the development of culture. The *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972) promoted the universal values of heritage that became the property of humanity and whose protection is the responsibility of all – this is a totalizing discourse constructing a global hierarchy of values (Harrison 2013: 116; Herzfeld 2004). The inscriptions on the World Heritage List (Internet source 16) demonstrate

a *geographical* bias towards Europe; a *typological* bias towards historic towns and religious buildings in preference to other forms of historic property; a *religious* bias in the overrepresentation of Christianity in relation to other religions; a *chronological* bias in the emphasis on historic periods over prehistory and the twentieth century; and a *class* bias towards ‘elitist’ forms of architecture in relation to vernacular forms. (Harrison 2013: 128; based on UNESCO 1994: 3)

Besides these imbalances, the experts at the meeting on the Global Strategy for World Heritage List in 1994 noted that the most striking element was the underrepresentation of living culture, especially ‘traditional’ culture, with all its wealth and complexity, on the World Heritage List. The over-simplified division between cultural and natural heritage was criticized, as in most human societies the landscape is both inhabited by human beings and (re)created by them, and so natural heritage is culturally meaningful (UNESCO 1994: 3–4). UNESCO has since adopted some recommendations for improvements (ibid.: 6–8), while Harrison called for the geographical representation of other continents to be expanded, and interpreted this document as a step toward paying more attention to living (intangible) heritage (Harrison 2013: 130).

Such criticisms by researchers were a consequence of the postmodern reflexive turn in the social sciences and humanities, and the new recognition that by objectifying and authorizing Eurocentric views of culture, and promoting methods for its preservation and representation under the exclusive purview of

experts, they were supporting postcolonial relations (Clifford 1997; Bortolotto 2015: 255). Indigenous, minority, postcolonial and non-Western critiques and initiatives also contributed to a significant shift in heritage discourses in the late twentieth century, and UNESCO consequently expanded its heritage model (Aikawa 2004: 131; Harrison 2013: 116–117; Bortolotto 2015: 255).

Certain notable cases led to two expansions of UNESCO's views on heritage. For example, Indigenous Australians and Māori complained that the Uluru-Kata Tjuta (Internet source 17) and Tongariro (Internet source 18) national parks were listed as natural heritage sites, but they also considered them as cultural assets, and an indivisible whole.<sup>21</sup> As a result, a recommendation was adopted in Paris in 1991 to take into account the cultural landscapes, values and practices of Indigenous peoples (Harrison 2013: 118–127). A third example is a very well-known story from Morocco: in the 1990s, local authorities wanted to demolish the open-air market of Jemaa el-Fna in Marrakech and replace it with a modern concrete shopping mall. The Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo, who fled to Morocco because of the Franco regime, launched a campaign to preserve the market, which featured storytellers (*halaïqui*), musicians, traditional dancers, magicians, snake charmers, fortune tellers, and charm sellers. He proposed to the Director-General of UNESCO, Federico Mayor,<sup>22</sup> that all these activities be protected as the “oral heritage of humanity”, prompting a meeting at UNESCO in 1998 (attended by Goytisolo and Moroccan heritage experts, while *halaïqui* and other performers were not invited) and a conference on traditional culture and local empowerment in 1999. The result was that in 2001 the *Cultural Space of Jemaa el-Fna Square* (Internet source 19) was declared a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (Harrison 2013: 131–134). The cycles of proclaiming the Masterpieces in 2001, 2003 and 2005 were touchstones for the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003) and precursors to the lists of intangible cultural heritage (Sicard 2018: 60).

UNESCO has thus extended the concept of heritage to include oral traditions and intangible practices, as well as the spaces and landscapes that are their settings. This shift of heritage from materiality to discourse, values and

21 For Indigenous ontologies see Harrison and Rose 2010; Viveiros de Castro 2013; for ontology of heritage Harrison 2019.

22 It should be mentioned that they were friends, so Goytisolo's initiative was given priority. In heritage, we can also observe the interplay of the internal narrative of the heritage (the content of the element) and the external narrative – the social contexts of a heritage element, its safeguarding and media representations, similarly as Marcus Banks (2001: 11–12) claims for film contents and the social contexts of their productions.

intangible aspects, is called the “discursive turn” of heritage (Harrison 2013: 9). Multicultural contexts, postcolonial critiques and new models of heritage representation have complemented previous canonical models (*ibid.*: 114–115). According to Laurajane Smith, heritage is “a subjective political negotiation of identity, place, and memory, and it is something that is done rather than something we simply have or curate and protect” (Smith 2015: 460). As such, heritage is a verb, a process related to human agency and creativity, and at the same time an instrument of cultural power, often used by politics to conceal power relations (Harvey 2001: 319, 327).

There is [...] a range of activities that include remembering, commemoration, communicating, and passing on knowledge and memories, as well as asserting and emotionally engaging with expressions of identity and the social and cultural values and meanings that underpin these expressions. It is a process that can have conservative or socially progressive outcomes [...]. (Smith 2015: 460)

The nostalgia that accompanies heritage is mostly reactionary, looking back to the past, but there is also a progressive nostalgia that can construct the future from memories, for example through efforts for greater social justice (Smith and Campbell 2017).

Many authors have considered the relationship between culture and heritage from a temporal perspective. Culture becomes heritage when cultural patterns, practices and objects are no longer used in a traditional way and transmitted in everyday life, but their use is distanced from the historical and social contexts (Kockel 2007: 20; Slavec Gradišnik 2014: 9). Heritage is a set of present-day ideas and practices that refer to the past, a versatile medium of social, cultural and political recognition, and a potential source of cultural exchange and economic and tourist development (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). “[T]he possession of heritage – as opposed to the way of life that heritage safeguards – is an instrument of modernization and mark of modernity, particularly in the form of a museum” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 61). “[H]eritage is not an inquiry into the past but a celebration of it, not an effort to know what actually happened but a profession of faith in a past tailored to present-day purposes” (Lowenthal 2009: x), for “viewed as history, the past is a foreign country; viewed as heritage, it is highly familiar” (*ibid.*: 139).

The extraordinary expansion of heritage has been influenced by rapidly changing living, social, economic and ecological conditions, the modernity of heritage and the ever-increasing number of people and institutions

dealing with it, from heritage practitioners to researchers, professionals, officials at the national and international levels, as well as its users, marketers and tourist agencies. In Slovenia, the establishment of an independent state in 1991 stimulated discussions about heritage and the search for new identifications at the state level, while when Slovenia became a member of the European Community in 2004, a new emphasis on regional and local identifications was detected (Slavec Gradišnik 2014: 8–9). New identity strategies are characteristic of many countries that emerged after the collapse of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. A typical example, Croatia, became independent in 1991, and its national identity has been built on historic imagery and the intensive promotion of Croatian heritage on the World Heritage List and Intangible Heritage Lists (Harrison 2013: 147–151; Internet sources 20 and 21).

It was Roland Robertson who defined local and specific responses inside the global paradigm as glocal, and glocalization was described as a process that indicates the simultaneity of universalization and particularization tendencies in postmodern social, political and economic systems (Robertson 1995: 27–35). The fundamental paradox of globalization is visible in the model that most towns endeavour to be recognized by promoting a public event, festival, carnival or pageant, which then become local institutions, embedded in specific social relations and historical contexts, while at the same time these events are predictable and surprisingly uniform throughout the world (Wilk 1995: 110). The new global cultural system therefore encourages distinction at the level of content, while on the other hand, the forms of representation are copied, and thus the search for diversity results in the homogeneity or “global systems of common difference” (ibid.: 115–118).

Differences between communities are adapted, celebrated, exaggerated, and exoticized in the media, a process which integrates communities into one or another, possibly international, programme of unity in diversity (Appadurai 1996: 39; di Giovine 2009: 6, 41–42, 399–400; Hafstein 2018b: 119). The strongest international player is UNESCO, offering highly desired programmes of world and intangible heritage that make inscribed local heritage and communities visible worldwide. The processes of heritagization and identification (heritage is a medium of identifications) are often constructed with the help of or against “significant others” (Friedman 1990: 321; cf. Berger and Luckmann 1991: 118, 151–155), be that competing groups or towns, neighbouring nations or global bodies, who, through their actions and feedback influence the formation and transformation of identities and the selection of heritage for internal and external representation.

## Intangible Cultural Heritage as a Concept and Safeguarding Paradigm

Kirstin Kuutma wrote that the process of the institutionalization of intangible cultural heritage essentially entails a “relocation from the margins to the centre” with “the establishment of canons, the conceptualization of paradigmatic truths and the fixation of socio-cultural practices” (Kuutma 2007). Marshall Sahlins (1985: 153) argued that cultural order is virtual and exists only *in potentia*, while individual meanings are realized *in presentia* as events of action and speech – Križnar (2002: 164) denoted it a *manifest* level. In this section, I treat the *Convention* as heritage safeguarding *in potentia*, and the safeguarding practices as the manifest level *in presentia*, not turning a blind eye to the polarization between the declarative level and the phenomenological character of the safeguarding manifestations.

The basis for the institutionalization of heritage is the *Convention*, which is why an analysis of its text and the use of language follows.

### *The Declarative Level*

The *Convention*<sup>23</sup> brought about a number of innovations, replacing an elitist and static conception of heritage with an egalitarian and more democratic approach, taking into account the intangible aspects and practices of all societies, including those that had often been marginalized. It transcended the Eurocentric and evolutionary assessment of cultures and heritages as if they were at different stages of development, and stressed their equity (Albert 2006, 2010; Ruggles and Silverman 2009; Erlewein 2014: 32–33). The *Convention* defines intangible heritage as follows:

The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted

23 Article 1 defines four purposes of the Convention:

(a) to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage; (b) to ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned; (c) to raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof; (d) to provide for international cooperation and assistance. (UNESCO 2003: Article 1)

from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development. (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1)

The *Convention* emphasizes the relation between intangible elements (practices, activities, knowledge, skills) and material elements (instruments, artefacts, spaces) and the dynamic character of heritage, which is constantly recreated and transformed by its practitioners in response to social needs, natural conditions, historical development and creative approaches. This is a non-essentialist or constructivist understanding of heritage and cultural identities (Albert 2006; Erlewein 2015: 27, 34). In this regard, UNESCO has followed recent perspectives of social sciences and humanities, while on the other side, it uses the term identity in the singular form, while anthropology, social sciences and the humanities highlight the plurality of identities and, even more so, the processes of identification (Muršič 1997: 226; Jenkins 2004: 6). Finally, the *Convention* emphasizes values such as respect for human rights, cultural diversity, sustainable development<sup>24</sup> and mutual respect (UNESCO 2008/2024: points 192–197; Internet sources 22 and 23). As such, UNESCO does not safeguard “intangible cultural heritage that advocates apartheid, mutilation of women, or severely harms other groups or individuals by any other means” (van Zanten 2004: 37–38; cf. Ruggles and Silverman 2009: 2; UNESCO 2015a: point 33; Janse 2023: 19–20).

Richard Kurin<sup>25</sup> (2004: 67) acknowledged that the term “intangible cultural heritage” is a technical and vague description, so UNESCO defined five domains of intangible heritage: “oral traditions and expressions, including

24 In *Operational Directives*, this is addressed in Chapter VI, Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development at the National Level (UNESCO 2008/2024: 56–71, cf. World Commission on Environment and Development 1987: 16, point I.3.27; United Nations 2015; Schreiber 2017: 459–462; Bortolotto and Skounti 2024; Wulf 2025: 1).

25 Kurin was one of the “anonymous” coauthors of the *Convention*, among whom were anthropologists, ethnologists, folklorists, musicologists, lawyers, etc., and many of these contributed articles to a special issue of the *Museum International: Intangible Heritage* (2004). See the overview of the preparation of the *Convention* by the then head of Intangible Cultural Heritage Section of UNESCO, Noriko Aikawa (2004).



language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship” (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.2). UNESCO also defined safeguarding as follows:

“Safeguarding” means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and nonformal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage. (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.3)

The focus of the *Convention* is therefore not on products, but on processes and the maintenance of socio-cultural conditions that enable the reproduction, transmission and revitalization of focal heritage (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 53; Erlewein 2014: 26).

After defining the basic concepts, the *Convention* envisaged special bodies at the international level, such as the General Assembly of the States Parties, Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and UNESCO Secretariat (UNESCO 2003: Articles 3–10), and at the level of the States Parties, which are the intermediate link to the heritage practitioners. The State Party is obliged to “take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory”, and will identify the various elements of the cultural heritage “with the participation of communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations” (Article 11a, b). Although the heritage practitioners already maintain their heritage, *the Convention* requires the States Parties to organize the safeguarding of heritage in their territory and to establish one or several inventories of the intangible heritage and regularly update them (Article 12).

When States Parties organize a policy framework for safeguarding, they establish one or more bodies for safeguarding, institutions for management, as well as institutions for the documentation and presentation of intangible heritage (Article 13), and decide on the profiles to engage for all these. Moreover, communities, groups and individuals should be involved in the processes of safeguarding their own heritage (Articles 11b and 15), which can include documentation and research (Articles 13 and 14).

UNESCO has envisaged three lists as safeguarding tools at the international level: the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Representative List), the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need



of Urgent Safeguarding (Urgent List) and the recognition of Programmes, projects and activities for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO 2003: Articles 16–18), that is in practice called the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices.

In short, in order to reach heritage practitioners around the world, UNESCO, as a powerful global organization, operates top down, through the States Parties to the *Convention* as intermediaries. Ministries of Culture, UNESCO National Commissions or other responsible bodies then organize the identification (inventorying) and the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in their territories. Once the States establish formal frameworks and mechanisms, the bottom-up principle is desirable and encouraged: initiatives to inscribe a particular element of heritage in the inventory or register of intangible cultural heritage can come from heritage practitioners, local communities, museums, professionals, non-governmental organizations or local and regional administrations, however, the consent of heritage practitioners is required. The principles are by no means equivalent: top-down measures have significantly more power and influence than the bottom-up perceptions, desires and aspirations of heritage practitioners (Slavec Gradišnik 2014: 10). “[T]he 2003 *Convention* reinforces the prestige and the soft power of the countries and UNESCO itself” (Schreiber 2017: 448).

### *From the Declarative to the Operational*

What is the current result of the implementation of the UNESCO Convention and *Operational Directives* (UNESCO 2008/2024) in practice, *in presentia*? By December 2024, 183 countries had ratified *the Convention*, the last being the United Kingdom, while Australia, Canada, the United States, New Zealand, Israel and the Russian Federation are not among States Parties (Internet source 24). Heritage elements can be nominated for inscription to the UNESCO lists by States Parties, after having already been included in their national inventories or registers. By December 2024, 788 elements from 150 countries had been inscribed: 667 elements on the Representative List, 81 elements on the Urgent List and 40 elements in the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices (Internet source 1). Among the inscriptions, 97 are multinational, for which nominations were submitted by two or more countries (Internet source 25).

The years of inscription of elements demonstrate that the States Parties needed a considerable amount of time to ratify the *Convention*, which entered into

force in 2006, to implement it in their legislation, and then to organize the safeguarding of heritage in their territories, accept the first elements in the national inventories and nominate them to the UNESCO lists. In this regard, the information about the inscription of 90 elements in 2008 may be misleading: these are inscriptions of the previous phase, the *Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* from 2001, 2003 and 2005 (Internet sources 26 and 27). In 2008, they were simply transferred to the Representative List (Internet source 28), as stipulated in the *Convention* (UNESCO 2003: Article 31), as well as in the *Operational Directives* (UNESCO 2008/2024: points 57–65).

The *Operational Directives* set out five criteria that can be defined as UNESCO criteria for the validity of knowledge for inscription on its lists (UNESCO 2008/2024: 6–8). Only the first of the five criteria for the most desirable Representative List refers to the description of the heritage and its practitioners with reference to the definition of intangible heritage, while the other four deal with expected positive consequences of the inscription and provide the evidence of the safeguarding measures and inscription of heritage in national inventories and the participation of communities, groups and individuals in the nomination procedure:

R.1 The element constitutes intangible cultural heritage as defined in Article 2 of the Convention. R.2 Inscription of the element will contribute to ensuring visibility and awareness of the significance of the intangible cultural heritage and to encouraging dialogue, thus reflecting cultural diversity worldwide and testifying to human creativity. R.3 Safeguarding measures are elaborated that may protect and promote the element. R.4 The element has been nominated following the widest possible participation of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned and with their free, prior and informed consent. R.5 The element is included in an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in the territory(ies) of the submitting State(s) Party(ies), as defined in Articles 11 and 12 of the Convention. (UNESCO 2008/2024: 7)

While the *Proclamation of Masterpieces* had emphasized the exceptional value of heritage elements, elements on the Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists were included as examples of the diversity of heritage and cultures around the world (Albert 2006; Tauschek 2012a: 11; Blake 2014: 298). In the following years, UNESCO began to advise against the use of the terms “masterpiece”, “outstanding value”, and “uniqueness” in its recommendations for completing nomination forms (UNESCO 2015a: point 14), in order to emphasize the

egalitarian nature of heritage and discourage the submitting States from ranking their heritage elements.

The year 2009 was transitional, as UNESCO encouraged states to send as many candidature files as possible, the criteria were still being set, the number of entries per country<sup>26</sup> was not limited yet, and UNESCO bodies<sup>27</sup> positively assessed a total of 85 candidatures. Since 2010, evaluators have assessed approximately 50 nominations per year, and in recent years over 60, and between 28 and 55 of them have been inscribed each year on the lists at the sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee. In 2024, 78 files were evaluated and 66 inscribed. Recently, a system has been established whereby UNESCO confirms a maximum of one nomination per country every two years. In this context, countries with no or few entries are given priority, while countries with a larger number of inscriptions can wait several years for new nominations to be considered, which is why some States Parties have intensified engagement in serial or multinational nominations. UNESCO initially strongly encouraged multinational nominations that surpassed national principles (Internet source 30; UNESCO 2015a: points 40–42; 2008/2024: 13–15; Blake 2014: 298), but then limited their number for a certain period, because international nominations can obscure the specificities of the heritage of individual countries (Hamar and Voľanská 2015b: 42). Moreover, the evaluation of multinational files requires much more time and effort than evaluating files submitted by a single state. In addition, multinational nominations may also cause controversy if, for example, not all countries which have this intangible heritage element present in their territories are invited to prepare the nomination (Ľubica Voľanská, EM, August 18, 2020; August 14, 2025; cf. Kuminková, Voľanská and Andrade Pérez 2025).

The Intergovernmental Committee approved 14 multinational nominations in 2022, 12 in 2023, and 16 in 2024. To date, the most widespread element is *Falconry, a Living Human Heritage* (Internet source 31; Grenet 2018). In 2010, it was submitted by the United Arab Emirates, Belgium, the Czech

26 In 2008, Croatia prepared 14 candidatures in three months (Hrovatin and Hrovatin 2015: 76) and seven elements were inscribed in 2009 (Internet source 21), while China inscribed 25 elements (Internet source 29).

27 Nominations were evaluated by the Subsidiary Body for nominations to the Representative List from 2009 to 2014, by individual evaluators in 2010 and 2011, and by the Consultative Body from 2012 to 2014. Since 2015, they have been assessed by the Evaluation Body (Sicard 2018: 63, note 7). The latter comprises six experts representing States Parties who are non-members of the Intergovernmental Committee and six representatives of accredited non-governmental organizations (Bortolotto et al. 2020: 67).

Republic, France, Mongolia, Morocco, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Spain, and the Syrian Arab Republic. In 2016, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, and Portugal joined, and in 2021, Croatia, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, the Netherlands, Poland, and Slovakia, too.

If we examine the inscriptions on intangible heritage lists by geographical criterion, European heritage is clearly dominant: out of 788 inscriptions, about a third are from European countries. In addition, entire continents (North America, Australia, Northern Asia) are empty areas, because many countries with complex social relations are not States Parties to the *Convention*, and the heritage of national, Indigenous and minority communities in their territories is neither officially recognized nor safeguarded.<sup>28</sup> The *Convention* therefore included previously overlooked practices and traditions of Indigenous and marginal communities (Deacon et al. 2004: 11) *in potentia*, but the safeguarding paradigm failed to instrumentalize this principle from a declarative level into a manifest one, *in presentia*. Thus, after a decade, the call to increase the geographical representation of the heritage from other continents is still relevant not just for the World Heritage List, but also for the Intangible Heritage Lists (cf. Harrison 2013: 130).

Slovenia passed an act to ratify the *Convention* in 2008 (*Zakon o ratifikaciji Konvencije o varovanju nesnovne kulturne dediščine*, MKVNKD), when the *Cultural Heritage Protection Act* (*Zakon o varstvu kulturne dediščine*, ZVKD-1) also entered into force. The latter regulates all areas of cultural heritage, i.e. immovable, movable and intangible heritage: the first is under the jurisdiction of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (Zavod za varstvo kulturne dediščine Slovenije), which administratively falls under the Ministry of Culture; the second is under the jurisdiction of national and authorized museums; and the third is under the jurisdiction of the Cultural Heritage Directorate at the Ministry of Culture. The latter act was amended in 2016 by the *Act on Amendments to the Cultural Heritage Protection Act* (*Zakon o spremembah in dopolnitvah Zakona o varstvu kulturne dediščine*, ZVKD-1D). The Ministry of Culture is responsible for implementing the safeguarding paradigm and managing the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage, while its safeguarding is coordinated by the Coordinator for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. In 2008, the Ministry of Culture authorized the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, at the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of

28 Were they discouraged by Kurin's assumption that "[l]arge or significant groups might, through cultural assertion, seek their own civic or political autonomy or even the independence from the state party" (Kurin 2004: 72)?

Sciences and Arts (SRC SASA), to carry out this task, and in 2011 it entrusted this role to the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, and approved one job position.

By June 2025, 133 units were inscribed to the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage and 394 bearers<sup>29</sup> of intangible cultural heritage were identified (Internet source 7). Slovenia has so far inscribed seven elements on the UNESCO Representative List, four are national: *Škofja Loka Passion Play* (2016, Internet source 32), *Door-to-Door Rounds of Kurenti* (2017, Internet source 33), *Bobbin Lacemaking in Slovenia* (2018, Internet source 34), and *Beekeeping in Slovenia, a Way of Life* (2022, Internet source 37), and three multinational: *Art of Dry Stone Walling, Knowledge and Techniques* (2018, Internet source 35), *Lipizzan Horse Breeding Traditions* (2022, Internet source 36), and *Midwifery: Knowledge, Skills and Practices* (2023, Internet source 38).

### *Communities, Groups, and in Some Cases, Individuals*

The UNESCO *Convention* uses the phrase “communities, groups, and in some cases, individuals”, thus avoiding a precise definition of who are the practitioners and bearers of heritage and who might have the most rights to decide on heritage. The *Glossary of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (van Zanten 2002), which was produced during the preparation of the *Convention*, already contained a draft definition of intangible heritage and four domains (van Zanten 2002: 3). The drafters have defined 33 terms that could appear in the *Convention*. Under the common denominator of Agency, seven roles are listed: Bearer, Creator, Custodian, Practitioner, Researcher, Administrator and Manager (ibid.).

“Practitioner” is a “member of a community who actively reproduces, transmits, transforms, creates and forms culture in and for the community by performing and otherwise maintaining social practices based on specialized knowledge and skills” (van Zanten 2002: 5). “Bearers” are defined as members of a community who recognize, reproduce, transmit, transform, create and form a certain culture in and for a community, and they can also be practitioners, creators and custodians (van Zanten 2002: 4).<sup>30</sup> The drafters therefore acknowledged that these four roles are often interconnected, and the last three,

29 In Slovenia, we inscribe the phenomenon and identify its bearers (individuals, groups, communities, societies), except for units with numerous practitioners, such as dialects and cooking traditional dishes (Križnar 2012b: 154). It is thus possible to subsequently identify new heritage bearers (Pukl and Jerin 2017: 152, 2018: 6).

30 Practitioners and bearers are therefore denoted with rather similar roles. In English, the use of the term “practitioner” prevails, while in Slovenian, the term *nosilec* (bearer).

“Researcher, administrator and manager”, are interpreted as a single category – “specialists who promote, exhibit or communicate culture through personal efforts and in organizations and institutions at the local, national, regional or international level” (van Zanten 2002: 6). The term “practitioner” appears once in the *Convention* (UNESCO 2003: Article 21), and “bearer” not at all. In the recent form for the nomination of an element to the Representative List, both terms appear once, namely in General information about the element (R.1): “Who are the bearers and practitioners of the element?” on the second page of a blank document (UNESCO 2025b: 2). The bearers, creators, custodians and practitioners are members of a community, insiders, while researchers, administrators and managers appear to be outsiders.

In the period between the publication of the *Glossary* (2002) and the *Convention* (2003), the drafters apparently decided not to use these definitions in the latter, opting instead for the distinctly neutral phrase “communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals” with no reference to their insider or outsider roles in heritage. The *Glossary* defined “community” as

people who share a self-ascribed sense of connectedness. This may be manifested, for example, in a feeling of identity or in common behaviour, as well as in activities and territory. Individuals can belong to more than one community. (van Zanten 2002: 4)

The groups were not defined at all – they were evidently added later as an intermediate link between communities and individuals. Cécile Duvelle, former chief of the Intangible Heritage Section at UNESCO and the Secretary of the *Convention*, gave vague and open definitions of communities and groups:

For the purposes of implementing the Convention, communities refer to a network of people who share a sense of connectedness and identity in the practice and transmission of their intangible cultural heritage. Groups consist of persons from one or more communities who share specific characteristics such as skills, experience and knowledge in the practice and transmission of their ICH, while individuals possess them in their own right. (Duvellé 2010: 8)

The phrase “communities, groups, and in some cases, individuals” suggests that UNESCO often emphasizes communities and groups rather than individuals in order to ensure the continuity of heritage transmission. It cannot be ignored that embodied skills and practices are limited by the temporality of the human body (Wulf 2011: 77).



According to Richard Kurin, local communities and groups are highly informal associations, so the question arises of who will officially represent them in the safeguarding processes. Any formalization of social relations means a departure from traditions – so far, people have become heritage custodians because of the trust and respect of the community and have not been formally elected to the position. Determining representatives of a cultural tradition is an even more difficult task in cases where heritage spreads over large territories (Kurin 2004: 72). Here, the essential questions are who elects the representatives – the community itself, experts, the political-administrative structures, or all together – and how the process is carried out – consensual decision-making is certainly more appropriate than authoritative determination.

UNESCO nomination does not drop into an empty space, but tops an already existing format of management and representation, although on a different scale and authority. The community has to reinvent itself as a heritage stakeholder in order to comply with the UNESCO regulations and execute a certain normative turn. (Kuutma 2019: 77)

Cécile Duvelle pointed out the central role of communities in the *Convention*, as they are most closely connected to their heritage and must therefore be fully involved in all safeguarding activities; their free informed consent must be obtained for any initiative to safeguard a specific element of intangible heritage (Duvelle 2010: 8–10; cf. Blake 2009: 51). The *Convention* has a strong potential to promote a process of democratization in cultural heritage policy and practice, recognizing the value of previously often marginalized forms of cultural heritage, and empowering local people to become authorities in assigning value to their own heritage (Deacon et al. 2004: 11). However, this potential has not yet been fully developed, as the structural shortcoming of the *Convention* is that it authorizes the state to implement the safeguarding measures and the inventorying of heritage (Erlewein 2015: 29; Kearney 2009). The cooperation of public officials and experts on the one hand, and practitioners of heritage on the other, often develops with a great imbalance of their social statuses (Kurin 2004: 72). The production of knowledge in the safeguarding paradigm thus oscillates between democratic and authoritative.

Janet Blake therefore proposed a two-way, bottom-up and top-down partnership between the state and communities. The role of government officials and experts is to support informed community participation, provide information, transcend local patterns of domination, facilitate public discussions, support democratic approaches and leave decisions to heritage practitioners



(Blake 2009: 63). However, effective local democracy is hampered by the fact that the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm defines neither the community nor the meaning and extent of participation (ibid.: 61, 63; cf. Kearney 2009; Erlewein 2015: 29; Bortolotto et al. 2020). Blake based the starting points of community participation on the principles of social marketing and customer relationship management (Blake 2009: 63), which reads like a good action plan, but in practice often does not function in an ideal fashion among heritage communities.

Communities are not organic, stable and coherent groups, but can be fragmented, polyphonic, dissonant and dynamic in themselves and in relation to their heritage. Within a group or community, and even more so between different groups and communities, there may be different interpretations of intangible heritage. Furthermore, a heritage community or group can be local, regional, national, international or supranational by spatial distribution (Deacon et al. 2004: 42). An individual community can simultaneously be characterized by distinction and unity, by conflict and harmony, by selfishness and mutuality, by separateness and wholeness, by discomfort and comfort, and if only one aspect of these dualisms is privileged in the interpretation of a community, its transformative power is denied and the community is essentialized (Burkett 2001: 242).

In heritage projects, the community is often essentialistically defined as a unanimous consensual and homogeneous entity (Waterton and Smith 2010: 4), and as a result (in the United Kingdom) the heritage of the white majority and the middle or elite class predominates, while the heritage of other social classes and categories, such as workers, immigrants, coloured people and women, is neglected. Professional communities, with an inbuilt nostalgia for homogeneity, regulate, evaluate and revitalize heritage for all other communities, thus also impacting their identities, while ignoring their alternative views (ibid.: 12–13).

A similar contrast between the perspectives of experts and the views of local communities was observed in Slovenia by Jasna Fakin Bajec in the Karst and Vipava Valley: villagers did not restore village ponds (*kali*) and other common goods for the sake of preserving heritage, but for the sake of life needs: on the one hand, to functionally and aesthetically arrange common spaces, and on the other, to socialize, converse and have fun (Fakin Bajec 2011: 57–60). In Slovenia, typical heritage communities are active local people in villages and city neighbourhoods, various associations and study groups (Fakin Bajec 2020b: 71). Cultural, heritage, tourist and related associations and societies (*društva*)

flourished at the end of the twentieth and in the twenty-first centuries, as, due to administrative regulations, village communities (*krajevne skupnosti*) were unable to submit projects to municipal, national and international tenders, if they wanted to obtain funds for the renovation of common village spaces, the publication of books, film productions or the organization of thematic trails and exhibitions (Fakin Bajec 2020a: 93).

### *Cooperation vs. Participation*

The UNESCO *Convention* defines the participation of communities, groups and individuals in Article 15:

Within the framework of its safeguarding activities of the intangible cultural heritage, each State Party shall endeavour to ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management (UNESCO 2003: Article 15).

The importance and necessity of the participation of communities, groups and individuals in heritagization processes is emphasized by several authors (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 53; Blake 2009: 50–51; Duvelle 2010: 8, 10). Here, I want to point out the difference in formulations of the *Convention*: it uses the term “cooperation” in relation to international cooperation of States Parties (UNESCO 2003: Articles 1d, 19) and the term “participation” for the inclusion of heritage practitioners in the safeguarding processes (Articles 11b, 15). Cooperation is a broad concept, mostly denoting an equal contribution and strength of two or more actors, groups or institutions in a joint activity. The term participation indicates that an institution has conceived of an activity or a project, and others have joined this initiative. The initiator usually directs the activity, sets the goals, divides work and responsibilities, and finally also gives credits to participant bodies, possibly from the position of power.

At the declarative level, UNESCO, through its use of language, gives more power to the States Parties (it cooperates with them, they cooperate with each other) than to the heritage practitioners who participate in the safeguarding measures designed by the responsible bodies of States Parties in line with the *Convention* and established practices of the safeguarding paradigm. One of the fundamental contradictions of the *Convention* is the fact that it acknowledges the important role of heritage practitioners in identifying, managing

and preserving their heritage, and especially in transmitting it to future generations (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 53; Blake 2009: 50; Duvelle 2010: 8, 10), while at the same time assigning the main responsibility for preparing safeguarding measures and compiling national inventories to the States Parties (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 55; Kurin 2004: 72; Kearney 2009; Erlewein 2015: 29). As a matter of fact, UNESCO's interlocutors in the safeguarding paradigm are always the States Parties, since UNESCO does not cooperate directly with heritage practitioners.

Researching the history of the principle of participation, based on the memoirs of several actors involved in the negotiations on specific formulations in the *Convention*, Bortolotto and colleagues established that the participatory shift was not a priority at all, as some countries strongly opposed it. Social scientists, on the contrary, insisted on giving communities, groups and individuals a prominent role, and this was eventually accepted by UNESCO. Due to the political power of certain countries, the *Convention* deliberately did not define participation in more detail. Although the States Parties have to respect the principle of participation, the vagueness allows them to adapt the interpretation of participation to their historical and socio-political contexts (Bortolotto et al. 2020: 69).

At the international and national levels, UNESCO intangible heritage programmes are managed by a modern professional bureaucracy, who see heritage also as a tool for improving people's social and economic conditions. The ethnographic research into processes at UNESCO headquarters, in China, Greece and Brazil, has revealed that UNESCO Secretariat officials regret the great distance from local partners, i.e. heritage practitioners, and the excessive proximity to States Parties and their political pressures (Bortolotto et al. 2020: 67–68). The intractable challenge for officials in the States Parties is how to demonstrate the widest possible participation of communities, groups or individuals in the nomination files. "At the national and local levels, in contrast, the source of heritage bureaucrats' frustration is often the struggle to reconcile personal conviction and belief with the bureaucratic and political constraints inherent in their respective national administrative systems" (ibid.: 68). Institutionalized utopianism expresses a broader tension

between the normative idealistic aspect of the organization (do good, bring peace, be just), the mechanistic technical one (order, control, audit), and the political and economic interests that are played out there, as well as the frustrations and the impetus for change that the actors in these organizations experience. (Müller 2013: 2)

The officials can direct their frustrations<sup>31</sup> towards finding ways to implement the participatory ideal – their struggle is a dialectic between disappointment and creative efforts to fulfil the required utopian principle. In the three countries – China, Greece and Brazil – each with different socio-political views on democracy, community participation is enabled in three different ways (Bortolotto et al. 2020: 78).

In China, participation is a politically sensitive concept, and the nomination process is carried out top-down. Heritage practitioners are asked for information and signatures, while the implementation is led by newly established bodies closely linked to state authorities. The Chinese interlocutor explained that nominations are essentially about knowing the rules of the game – nominations for inscription on UNESCO's lists are successful when the correct terminology is used and the normative administrative procedures are followed, regardless of whether community participation is real or only claimed in the nomination. In drafting a nomination *The Twenty-Four Solar Terms, Knowledge in China of Time and Practices Developed through Observation of the Sun's Annual Motion* (Internet source 39), the practitioners participated very passively, but the nomination was approved by UNESCO bodies (Bortolotto et al. 2020: 70–73).

In Greece, the cradle of democracy, the Greek Directorate of Modern Cultural Heritage adapted the forms for inscription in the national register directly from the UNESCO nomination forms and engaged heritage bearers to participate as independently as possible in completing them. Learning the procedures for preparing documents and statements of informed consent would later facilitate the preparation of nominations for inscription on the UNESCO lists. While this idea may have seemed very practical, in fact heritage practitioners shy away from bureaucratic procedures, leaving them to officials. Consequently, researchers or recently graduated anthropologists are hired to prepare the documents, and they are listed as bearers or cultural mediators. The Greek interpretation of effective participation of heritage bearers is therefore a creative bureaucratic pragmatism (Bortolotto et al. 2020: 71, 73, 76–77).

In Brazil, the participation of bearers is real, as community officials create practices that involve people in order to strengthen democracy. In doing so, they use a representative model that does not include all interested individuals,

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31 Leon Festinger argued that people strive for consistency in their opinions and actions, and a gap in opinions or a discrepancy between opinions and actions leads to cognitive dissonance, a strong psychological discomfort, which a person can reduce by adjusting either the internal or the external frame of reference (Festinger 1957: 1, 3). Officials of powerful international organizations can much more easily adjust their internal frame of reference and behaviour, while they often have very limited influence on the functioning of the organization.

groups and communities, but it is faster and more operational (Bortolotto et al. 2020: 71, 74, 78). Brazil has inscribed the *Call for Projects of the National Programme of Intangible Heritage* to the UNESCO Register of Good Safeguarding Practices. Projects should involve communities and groups, promote social inclusion, improve the living conditions of bearers and connect local people in networks together with institutional actors (Internet source 40).

As Bortolotto and colleagues (2020: 66) note: “Bureaucratic operations often disenchant [Weber 1968] the participatory ideal and alienate it from its original purpose.” Professional officials creatively discover new tactical approaches to generate evidence of practitioners’ participation in designing safeguarding measures and in drafting nominations. The authors conclude that heritage bureaucracy is not an appropriate means to achieve UNESCO’s goal of practitioner inclusion in the safeguarding paradigm (Bortolotto et al. 2020: 77–78). The *Convention* has failed to deliver its promise of community involvement, and has instead expanded bureaucracy and competition of national governments for prestige (Kurin in Stefano 2017: 40).

The power and authority of heritage bearers (Deacon et al. 2004: 11; Erlewein 2015: 29) in the safeguarding paradigm can be strengthened with the support of social scientists, familiar with soft methods of participation and cooperation, who can actually involve local people in the safeguarding of their heritage and leave decision-making to heritage bearers. Blake called this local democracy (Blake 2009: 63). The dialogical model of heritage management in hybrid forums reduces hierarchical relationships between practitioners, experts, politicians, and bureaucrats (Harrison 2013: 225). The Swiss *Public Participation Manual* trains civil servants and officials to enable people to take more active roles in political decisions, which corresponds to the concept of participatory democracy (Müller and Stotten 2011: 5; cf. Fakin Bajec 2020b: 70).

### *The Roles of Researchers and Facilitators in the Safeguarding Paradigm*

The *Convention* defines the cooperation of researchers only indirectly, among “Other measures for safeguarding”, while the main safeguarding tool is inscribing heritage to the inventories and on UNESCO lists. States Parties ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage by endeavouring to “foster scientific, technical and artistic studies, as well as research methodologies, with a view to effective safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage” (UNESCO 2003: Article 13c).

Chiara Bortolotto noticed that there are two ways of constructing anthropological knowledge regarding the safeguarding paradigm: researchers use a critical and reflective approach and also investigate the processes of heritagization, while the UNESCO Secretariat and the bodies established by the Intergovernmental Committee have assigned them the role of facilitators who create a corpus of heritage elements in accordance with the political paradigm of safeguarding (Bortolotto 2015: 260–261). Although they often have an anthropological education, they are not expected to intervene with the scientific criteria, but rather to provide “neutral” technical guidance on the principles of the *Convention* to strengthen “human and institutional capacities for safeguarding” (UNESCO 2012: 2). Their position is similar to the role of museum curators in the production of community exhibitions, where they act as museological “ghost writers” (Phillips 2003: 164) – they make their expertise available to community members who decide on the content of the exhibition and the interpretative texts (Bortolotto 2015: 261–262).

In UNESCO debates, in fact, technical guidelines have a positive connotation as neutral and based on decisions collectively taken against “objective” criteria. In contrast, political decisions are considered unrelated to heritage preservation and as the mere outcome of an exchange of favours intended to increase states’ national prestige.<sup>32</sup> [...] Specifically, this debate points to the most crucial, and at the same time most ambiguous, aspect of the participatory model put forward by UNESCO, namely the role of the mediators between the “heritage bearers” and the “heritage apparatus”. (Bortolotto 2015: 264)

Guardians of the “spirit of the *Convention*”<sup>33</sup> do not value academic research, claiming that it does not situate heritage practitioners and their values to the very centre of the safeguarding (ibid.: 261). They perceive the role of researchers as colonialist (!), while they value the role of facilitators as consistent with the de-colonizing approach of the *Convention* and with the idea of heritage being determined by its bearers (ibid.: 265).

32 When considering nominations at the Intergovernmental Committee sessions, alliances between countries can be a helpful support, especially if some part of the nomination requires an oral explanation or defending. However, other states can also oppose to nomination as a whole or to some formulations in it, thus doing damage to the interests of the nominating state (Židov 2018a: 53; 2019: 17).

33 The phrase is often used at the sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee and it also appears in UNESCO documents, for example in the *Aide-Mémoire* (UNESCO 2015a: points 14 and 49).



On what basis has UNESCO consolidated such a negative image of anthropology as a colonialist science? Its origins indeed date back to the time of colonial conquests, but in the last 60 years it has undergone a series of reflexive and self-critical revisions, increased sensitivity to ethical relations between researchers and research subjects, and introduced ethical codes (Cassell and Jacobs 1987; Turner 2006; de Mendonça 2012: 241; Ginsburg 2018: 39; Internet sources 11 and 12). There are critical voices among anthropologists, claiming that anthropology, despite reforms, remains a predominantly Western intellectual and ideological project, embedded in given power relations and the capitalist world system (Harrison 1997: 1). While others see decolonized anthropology as “able to recognize, in the social infrastructure, colonial effects, asymmetry of relationships, mechanisms of power and exploitation” and to analyse its “own positions and the positions of others in the context of class struggle, gender relations, racism, colonialism, etc.” (Culiberg 2022: 48). In Slovenia, anthropology was not connected to colonialism, and ethnology was in general focused on exploring Slovene and minority cultures, and therefore we are significantly less sensitive to UNESCO accusations about the (neo)colonial legacy of the discipline.

On the other hand, UNESCO’s outdated positivist positions on “neutral” and “objective” criteria contradict postmodern views on social reality and heritage as a site of negotiation between all actors (Lyotard 1979; Clifford 1986; Berger and Luckmann 1991; Burr 1995; Hall 1997a; Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Graham and Howard 2008; Gray 2013). The highly hierarchical power relations of UNESCO’s intangible heritage policy, with almost no contacts with heritage practices and practitioners in local environments, are not consistent with the declarative post-colonial processes of heritagization (cf. Harvey 2001: 320, 327).

Questioning the depoliticized governance of international organizations, three strategies of their apparent depoliticization are listed: “the use of ethics and norms, the political neutralization of their official rhetoric, and the resorting to multiform expertise as a means of apolitical self-legitimization” (Petiteville 2018). However, facilitators’ “neutral technical guidance” intended to strengthen the safeguarding capacities of the communities, influences the ways in which communities represent themselves and their heritage by setting external international criteria and promoting “best practices”, thereby unintentionally schooling communities in UNESCO language and values (Bortolotto 2015: 267).

It is possible that it was initially an unintentional education of attention (cf. Grasseni 2007b: 7) within the situated practices in capacity building



programmes and Intergovernmental Committee sessions. Over time, however, official meetings and various documents, such as the *Aide-Mémoire for Completing a Nomination to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity for 2016 and Later Nominations* (UNESCO 2015a, hereinafter the *Aide-Mémoire*), systematically educated participants of the safeguarding paradigm in the values and the “spirit of the *Convention*”. The safeguarding paradigm is a pedagogical project (Hafstein 2018b: 4, 14), educating heritage bearers about heritage regimes and values (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 53).

Descending from the UNESCO level to the level of safeguarding in the territories of the States Parties, the partnership between the State Party and the communities should involve negotiations among representatives of the community, technical and administrative personnel of government institutions and researchers. In practice, the mediators are mostly social scientists in official heritage safeguarding bodies, who combine professional and official roles (Jacobs, Neyrinck and van der Zeijden 2014). In Slovenia, these two roles are split between officials of the Ministry of Culture and ethnologists and anthropologists, as well as other social scientists, who are either representatives of the Coordinator or researchers from institutes, faculties and regional or local museums. The terms facilitator, mediator, broker or their Slovenian equivalents have never been adopted.

Contemporary ethnology and anthropology have transcended authoritative and patronizing approaches that would teach heritage bearers how to “correctly” practise it, while an emic and reflexive research approach with a great deal of empathy is now recommended (Križnar 2012a: 185). Slovene ethnologists and cultural anthropologists mediate between cultural policy (UNESCO, Ministry of Culture) and practitioners in local environments. In doing so, they not only translate between different discourses, but also alleviate the tension between declarative policy and bureaucracy on the one hand, and living cultural practices and their bearers on the other. They master empathetic techniques for knowledge construction in local communities and they have learned methods of uniform description in accordance with the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm. They act as intermediaries between safeguarding in *potentia* and manifestations in *presentia*, although it also happens that over the years they have internalized some bureaucratic discourse and consciously or subconsciously accepted the hierarchy of values (Brumann 2014: 173–174), i.e. the habitus of the UNESCO paradigm. Many European anthropologists and ethnologists noticed that the *Convention* created new opportunities for cultural anthropology, ethnology, folklore studies and other disciplines that research people, their cultures and heritagization, at the same time admitting

that on the one hand this strengthens their fields of power, and on the other it creates many controversies (Schreiber 2017: 454–456).

It is essential for ethnographic research of heritage and heritagization to understand the perspectives, activities and agencies of all actors in the UNESCO paradigm, including the power relations between them (Smith 2012: 537), as well as the protocols, standards and even unwritten rules embedded in the safeguarding routines (cf. Goodwin 1994; Grasseni 2011: 41).

## Critical Views on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage

If the previous section was based on the UNESCO *Convention and Operational Directives*<sup>34</sup> as starting points, the perspectives of critical researchers of heritagization are taken into account in this section. They will be complemented with examples from practice and early experiences of inscriptions on UNESCO lists, from which practitioners, experts, UNESCO and the States Parties have learned.

### *Heritage Discourses and Dissonant Heritage*

“Social meanings, forms of knowledge and expertise, power relations and ideologies are embedded and reproduced via language”, claims Laurajane Smith (2006: 4). The discourses in which we define concepts, research and discussion, at the same time construct our understanding and guide further discussions, and moreover, they also influence our behaviour. The dominant Western discourse, based on the concepts of monumentality and aesthetics, naturalizes certain narratives, is often connected to ideas of nation, and is denoted as “authorized heritage discourse” (Smith 2006: 4). It also includes professional discourse, which presents the values and interpretations of experts as objective knowledge (ibid). In authorized heritage practices, a combination of UNESCO political and professional discourses predominates, while in the local contexts, there is a range of subaltern, marginal, alternative voices and discourses that often do not find a way into public discussions (ibid.: 4, 11). Some popular discourses and folk practices simply coexist with the dominant discourse, while others actively challenge it (Smith 2006: 4–5). In essence, all

34 See also regularly updated *Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO 2024a).

heritage is dissonant, because it is marked by conflicting or competing interpretations (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996: 21; Smith 2006: 80).

Gregory J. Ashworth attributed the dissonant views on heritage to a number of factors: heritage may belong to several individuals or groups with different views and values; it may be associated with different identities at different levels from individual, local and regional to national, continental and global (the views from each of these levels may be different); people may attribute different values and worth to the same resources at different times; tensions may arise with different uses of heritage, especially when seen as an economic commodity in heritage industry, for example in tourism (who has the right to market it, who pays and who benefits); heritage is a tool of ideologies, power, social control and the management of economic change, so there may be a conflict of legitimacy (whose heritage and whose past it is); communities are usually plural and perhaps even multicultural, so cultural, ethnic and religious conflicts cannot be ruled out when ethnic groups, minorities and immigrants are either included in local heritage or excluded from it (Ashworth 2011: 27–31).

Laurajane Smith declared the authorized and professional heritage discourses – which are powerful because of their attachment to state-funded institutions and influence the legitimization of certain values and identities, as well as their relations with subaltern voices – as forms of intangible heritage (Smith 2006: 44–45). Heritage thus becomes primarily a political negotiation of interpretations, identities, memories and values. The activities of practitioners, users, researchers and decision-makers are also embedded in power relations (*ibid.*: 5). Consequently, she argued that all heritage is intangible (*ibid.*: 57), dissonant (*ibid.*: 4, 80), and political (*ibid.*: 38; cf. Bendix 2009: 265; Leimgruber 2010; Tauschek 2012a, 2015).

In Slovenia, the Coordinator for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage detected a heritage dissonance in the unit *Making Palm Sunday Bunches in Ljubno* (*Izdelovanje ljubenskih potic*, 2012, Internet source 41). According to the local priest, the element should be primarily defined as religious heritage, while the mayor claimed that this was primarily a common cultural heritage, and therefore did not want to emphasize religious aspects. The opinions of the villagers also became polarized, but in recent years they have managed to overcome these disagreements. A similar competition between “secular” and “religious” heritage also takes place in society and politics: after the inscription of the unit *Visit from Grandfather Frost* (*Obisk dedka Mraza*, 2020, Internet source 42) as a characteristic heritage from the Yugoslav socialist era,

right-wing Slovenian politicians encouraged the inscription of *St Nicholas Day* (*Miklavževno*, 2021, Internet source 43) and the *Three Kings' Rounds* (*Trikraljevsko koledovanje* 2021, Internet source 44) to the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Authorized discourse is mostly associated with official heritage, which is authorized by legislation and protected or safeguarded by decrees, while subaltern discourse can refer either to official or unofficial heritage. I regard official intangible heritage as those elements inscribed to the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage and on UNESCO lists, while unofficial heritage is the wide range of practices and traditions that practitioners or researchers call intangible heritage, but have not been (yet) recognized as official forms of heritage (cf. Graham 2002: 1004; Harrison 2013: 14–15). The reasons may be different – perhaps bearers do not see the need for its official recognition, maybe they have split opinions about the heritage and inscriptions, or their heritage simply does not meet the criteria for inscription.

The concept of authorized heritage discourse had a significant impact on the way heritage was reflected and handled, so it is not surprising that several authors sought alternative approaches and offered concepts and methods that could reduce the contradictions between authorized and subaltern discourses. Rodney Harrison proposed a “dialogical model of heritage, based on an ontology of connectivity” which “flattens the hierarchies of relationships” between “experts, politicians, bureaucrats and interested laypersons” involved in decision-making on a heritage element (Harrison 2013: 226). Hybrid forums openly discuss heritage, which can be very useful in preparing conservation plans for natural and cultural heritage (*ibid.*: 223–226), or in preparing nominations and films for inscription on the UNESCO intangible lists.

Višnja Kisić, in her book on governing heritage dissonance (2016), proposed the concept of inclusive heritage discourse (cf. Smith 2006: 299), which articulates heritage as a culturally and politically determined and context-dependent interpretative process, whereby dissonance is understood as a quality that challenges a dominant discourse, makes space for negotiations, and provides a framework for softer interpretations and the co-management of heritage (Kisić 2016: 23–24). The author acknowledged that this was a utopian vision, but nevertheless, it could raise awareness among practitioners, researchers, citizens, and cultural policymakers in the future (*ibid.*: 295).

Marc Jacobs, in his analysis of Vietnamese nominations of folk music and songs to the UNESCO lists (Internet source 45), argued for a participatory or popular heritage discourse in contrast to the elitist, expert-led,

prestige-heritage-centric and conservative authorized discourse that is prone to the so called Matthew-effect.<sup>35</sup> Participatory methods are the right way forward in the paradigm of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, not only to manage the effects of visibility and visitability, but above all to ensure the viability of heritage (Jacobs 2017: 183–185).

In conclusion, Harrison, Kisić and Jacobs emphasize the active involvement of practitioners in all decisions about their heritage, in the safeguarding activities and in processes of inscription to inventories and preparing nominations and films for inscription on UNESCO lists. This is also the only ethical and epistemically just (Fricker 2007, 2008) answer to the question of “who has the right to decide how inscribed elements can be presented: as seen by officials of responsible state institutions, experts or bearers?” (Židov 2018a: 48). The involvement of bearers and the dialogue of all three actors is essential.

### *Heritage as the Result of Metacultural Production*

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004, 2006) defined intangible cultural heritage as a metacultural production. Heritage professionals use museum concepts, standards, values and methods (collecting, documenting, preserving, presenting, evaluating, interpreting, displaying) to bring cultural phenomena and their bearers into the heritage sphere, where they become metacultural artefacts; at the same time, bearers also experience a new, metacultural relationship to their cultural practices (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 161–162). Cultural practices based on habitus were distinguished from intangible heritage, resulting from metacultural production (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 57): habitus was taken for granted, while heritage was a conscious choice of objects and practices (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 161–162). In metacultural production, UNESCO experts, government bodies, non-governmental organizations and social scholars make heritage policy and educate heritage bearers about heritage regimes and values (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 53), and therefore safeguarding is a pedagogical project (Hafstein 2018b: 4, 14). While in the past ethnological, folklore and linguistic research models were

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35 This is based on the idea that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer – those who already have status are more likely to be placed in situations that reinforce it. When Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron analysed why education systems fail to reduce social inequalities, they discovered that teachers often misinterpreted socially determined differences as the “natural” talents of students from wealthy bourgeois families, while in fact their academic success was provided by their refined conduct – a cultural capital acquired in early socialization in the well-to-do families and akin to that of teachers (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990: 202, 209–210).

based on documenting and preserving records of disappearing traditions and cultures, the new model of safeguarding and research aims to preserve living traditions by supporting the conditions for their cultural reproduction in local communities, i.e. the way of life of practitioners, their *habitus* and *habitat* (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 53).

Hafstein further emphasized this distinction: “Making sure that people keep singing their songs tomorrow is very different from archiving the songs they sing today” (Hafstein 2018b: 104). UNESCO’s safeguarding of intangible heritage creates instruments for regulating public life. Interventions in intangible heritage allow states to exert soft power over people, to transform their behaviour – by safeguarding intangible heritage, states intrude into the social fabric of folk practices (*ibid.*). Since the *Convention* calls on states to preserve their traditional cultures by “all necessary means” (UNESCO 2003: Article 11a), Richard Kurin (2003) rhetorically asked who had the right to force the children of carpet weavers to continue the family tradition if they want to become lawyers or anthropologists.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s thesis implies, among other things, that buildings, technologies, objects and ways of life, through recycling, take on a second life and become “representations of themselves” in heritage sites, museums, festivals (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 151) or on the world wide web. Intangible heritage is remembered, embodied, performed and transmitted by its bearers, and therefore their subjectivity and agency must be taken into account (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 196). All interventions in heritage change people’s attitudes towards what they do, their understanding of their culture and themselves, and the fundamental conditions for cultural (re)production (*ibid.*: 179).

From my practical experience, an example of the transition from living cultural practices to heritage is the workshop for making Palm Sunday bunches, which has been taking place in the Simon Kos Elementary School in Podbrdo since 2008. Members of the Cultural-Technical-Tourism Association of Baška Heritage (KTT Društvo Baška dediščina), which is responsible for preserving the heritage in the upper part of Baška grapa in the Tolminsko region, assessed that the tradition was dying out and wanted to bring it closer to the younger generation with a workshop lasting two school hours. The organizers collect the greenery for the bunches in their home environment, and buy olive and laurel branches, the children and women then make the bunches according to their instructions, and finally the expert committee gives awards to the most beautiful ones. In doing so, the organizers preserved the material



dimensions and practical work in assembling the bunches, but the connection with the natural environment (where boxwood, ivy, hazel, willow grow) has been weakened. The workshop is no longer about passing on knowledge within the family, and the customs associated with the apotropaic powers of the blessed Palm Sunday bunches have been abandoned. The division by gender has also changed – bunches used to be made by farm masters, who in doing so passed on a wealth of knowledge about the natural, cultural and social environment to their sons. The heritage is inscribed to the Register (*Making Palm Sunday bunches / Izdelovanje cvetnonedeljskih butar*, 2013, Internet source 46), documented in film, and the association has also published the brochure *Moj pulj je ta leus: Cvetnonedeljski šopi zelenja v Baški grapi* (Zgaga 2021).

### *Heritagization as a Transformative Process*

Valdimar Tr. Hafstein<sup>36</sup> (2012: 596–597; 2014a, 2018a) has explored heritagization as a transformative process that changes the relationship of heritage practitioners with their practices and identities, in which heritage is perceived as a technology for acting on the social tissue. Heritagization is conceptualized through social relations and hierarchies. In this context, several contradictions in the protection of the material heritage of the past and in safeguarding intangible heritage have been noted: castles and monuments, which were once the property of the upper social class, are now on the shoulders of the majority middle class in terms of protection and financing; intangible cultural heritage, which is mostly the successor of folk culture, is also the property of everyone, including the upper classes, and at the same time is expected to sustain itself. The mixture of the aristocratic and the peasant, the snobbish and the popular, gives the impression that social hierarchies are a thing of the past, evoking nostalgia rather than a desire for rebellion, and therefore cultural heritage is also a medium for concealing class differences (Hafstein 2012: 505–506).

Organizing communities as spaces of emotional relationships and strong identifications is a response to the policy of promoting cultural diversity, which is supposed to be threatened by globalization. Governing through communities is also linked to the orchestration of differences (Hafstein 2014a: 51; 2018b: 119), which are often exoticized to fit into a programme of unity in diversity. While the differences are orchestrated as cultural diversity, groups within the

36 Hafstein (2018b: 16) was the Icelandic delegate to the Intergovernmental Committee and a member of the Icelandic National Commission for two years, and he also defined those roles as ethnographic participant-observation.



state are not given just a voice, but also a score so that they can sing in harmony (Hafstein 2014a: 51; 2018b: 119; cf. Wilk 1995: 110). The politics of tuning such communities are practised uniformly throughout the world as an international spectacle. The process of safeguarding at the same time preserves the belonging to the community, the nation-state, and to international authority, which are the three points of reference of the intangible heritage management according to the *Convention* (Hafstein 2014a: 55). The risk is that communities will suppress their multivocality, amplify the preferred voice and deny polyphony and dissonance – in which case “the *Convention* safeguards not only cultural heritage but also a political heritage of subjection” (ibid.: 57).

A series of processes is also taking place: in safeguarding, individuals or groups may compete to speak on behalf of the heritage practitioners and to decide on the manner of representation. Political power in a community can also mean easier access to authority over the heritage, and vice versa. Cultural heritage can therefore become a field for either tuning or contesting social networks (Hafstein 2012: 513). UNESCO obviously believes that the community has to be constantly rescued from its imminent disappearance, or created and organized if perceived that it does not exist yet (Bennett 2000: 1422–1423). The *Convention* shapes and organizes communities in order to facilitate the management of heritage (Hafstein 2012: 508–510; 2018b: 95–99).

Where Harrison (2013a: 131–134) concluded the “happy” story of the Jemaa el-Fna market, Hafstein continued by focusing on the top-down governance of heritage and local community: he called it communalization (Hafstein 2014a: 40–41, 54–55). Goytisolo founded the association Les Amis de la Place (Friends of the Square), which then, with the help of UNESCO, convinced the city and national administrations to preserve the market. The city authorities then musealized everyday practices, introduced uniform kiosks and scheduled performances, transforming the previous spontaneity and chaos into order and harmony. In this way, Jemaa el-Fna was symbolically transformed from a vagrant element into a public theatre of Marrakech identity. As the city administration also moved the bus station and taxi rank, the flow of people to the market dried up, which significantly diminished the vitality of the intangible heritage. At some point, artists, performers, and ethnic groups also founded associations and unions, but those were easier for the authorities to manage than unconnected individuals (Hafstein 2018b: 95–96). The patronizing and hegemonic attitude towards heritage practitioners and users was reflected in the fact that no one asked them for their opinions. All the important initiatives, proposals and decisions were made by outsiders: Goytisolo, Friends of the Square, the city administration, national cultural politics and

UNESCO (ibid.: 99–101). Throughout these processes, the local identification and interpretation of heritage was subjected to the global “standardisation undertaken notably by UNESCO” (Skounti 2009: 74).

This case was actually a great reminder to UNESCO that the safeguarding paradigm should seriously take into consideration of the opinions, wishes and views of heritage practitioners and local communities.

### *Objectification and Alienation of Heritage and the Issue of Ownership*

In addition to the transformative processes and defamiliarization of heritage, Hafstein also pointed out the objectification of heritage practices, as this makes them transferable and is therefore the first step towards their alienation from the source community (Hafstein 2018a: 134, 143). Folklorization is “a processing of local traditions for external consumption”, when cultural practices are moved “from an original point of production” and relocated “in a distanced setting of consumption” in an adapted form (McDowell 2010: 182–183).

The aforementioned cultural space of Jemaa el-Fna in Marrakech was exported as a festival to UNESCO headquarters in Paris and to other European cities in 1999 and 2001. The practices were torn out of their social context and cultural space in order to be presented to foreign audiences, and in this process were severely curtailed: the visitors did not understand the stories as they did not master the language of the storytellers, and herbalists were not allowed to sell herbs due to French law, which changed the functions of some heritage elements. The festival was a reduction and simplification of the activities in the Moroccan market, and “their alienation from the source community, possibly through folklorisation, festivalisation, consumption, globalization and neoliberalisation of heritage” (Hafstein 2018a: 134–135).

Festivals experienced a significant increase in the last decades of the twentieth century, as people had more free time and their purchasing power increased (Cudny 2016). In Spain, they were a strategy of the tourism industry to extend the seaside summer season to inland cities and stretch it throughout the year, and in doing so they often referred to UNESCO’s world and intangible heritage (Giguère 2014: 312). At the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, UNESCO thus joined the process of festivalization, seduced by the ‘unbearable easiness’ of exporting intangible heritage in comparison to world heritage that is well rooted in the physical world. However, when moved to Paris the aura or uniqueness of practices in their original environment was no

longer felt (cf. Benjamin 1969: 223, 226). Critical researchers began to warn that this was a senseless alienation of heritage from its bearers, among the first of whom was Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006), while the loudest was Hafstein (2018a). More recently, heritage festivals are no longer seen as good safeguarding practices, as they require top-down organization and considerable external funding (UNESCO 2018b: 17):

If the methodology focuses almost entirely on presentation and raising the visibility of intangible cultural heritage, it is very likely to lead to the decontextualization and folklorization of such heritage, rather than foster its intergenerational transmission. (Ibid.)

Taking a closer look at the principle that the heritage of a group or community becomes the public good of all humanity through its inscription on the UNESCO lists (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 170, 184–185; Hafstein 2012), reveals that the *Convention* does not define any intellectual rights to the heritage bearers. Instead, Article 3b in fact protects the sovereignty of States Parties: “Nothing in this Convention may be interpreted as [...] affecting the rights and obligations of States Parties deriving from any international instrument relating to intellectual property rights” (UNESCO 2003: Article 3b).

Shina-Nancy Erlewein (2014: 236) states that in many societies “customary law defines a collective or communal ownership of cultural traditions and expressions”, and Beate Engelbrecht specifies that folk performers mostly have rights over their performance, but not over the cultural practice itself (Engelbrecht 2015: 45). Copyright law, on the other hand, is mostly inadequate in the context of intangible heritage safeguarding, as it was conceptualized based on the Western premise of individual authorship and protects only objectified creations (songs, stories, performances) that are written or recorded in film, photography or sound, yet not necessarily published. And finally, copyright protection is not an appropriate measure for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, because mimesis (imitation) and copying are important ways of transmitting skills and cultural practices (Erlewein 2014: 236).

Erlewein illustrates that in the traditional Indian theatre art of *Kutiyattam*, the theatre families had a monopoly over artefacts and knowledge for centuries, but their control loosened in the twentieth century. When the *Kutiyattam* was proclaimed a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage in 2001, and then transferred to the Representative List in 2008 (Internet source 48), the general access to communally owned knowledge and artefacts has further increased, as the safeguarding included documentation,

digitization, archiving and promotion. The traditional communities of practice have therefore been slowly losing exclusive authority and control over knowledge of *Kutiyattam*, although they still have protocols defining how the written and visual documentation in their archives can be accessed and by whom (Erlewein 2014: 238–240).

UNESCO's position is that the *Convention* focuses on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, while the international legal protection of manifestations through intellectual property rights falls under the competence of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).<sup>37</sup> The enforcement of intellectual property rights in the safeguarding of intangible heritage is not productive for at least two reasons: intangible cultural heritage is created, maintained and transmitted by groups and communities, so it is not easy to define the collective owner, and moreover, intangible heritage is constantly evolving due to its continuous recreation by communities and the protection of specific manifestations, such as “the performance of a dance, the recorded interpretation of a song or the patented use of a medicinal plant, may lead to freezing this intangible cultural heritage and hinder its natural<sup>38</sup> evolution” (UNESCO 2011a: 8).

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has pointed out an asymmetry here: patents, trademarks, trade secrets and copyrights protect the rights and interests of owners by restricting access, while UNESCO, with its intangible heritage label, intended to safeguard cultural practices from extinction, places this heritage in the public domain, where it is accessible to everybody (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 184–185).

The conversion of habitus into heritage and heritage into cultural assets, cultural capital, and cultural good, a process that is integral to concepts of public domain, public goods, fair use, and global cultural commons, can engender the kind of public debate associated with a public sphere. (Ibid.: 195)

UNESCO is cautious when encountering data on trademarks, patents or geographical indications in nominations, as certification can fossilize the heritage, obstruct its recreation and alienate it from communities. The Slovenian *Traditional Production of the Kranjska Klobasa* was not inscribed on the Representative List, because sausage-making seems to be frozen by certification and codification

37 It was established by the United Nations in 1967, and includes 193 countries (Internet source 47).

38 The natural evolution of social practices or intangible heritage is of course an oxymoron.

of the manufacturing process by “an economically motivated interest group, thus depriving bearers and practitioners of any initiative in safeguarding Kranjska klobasa”; and “the nomination focuses more on the product than on the skills related to its production or the social function of its consumption” (UNESCO 2015b: 37). UNESCO also criticized that the emphasis placed on a single certified method of production was contrary to the processual and dynamic nature of intangible heritage, and that the element was not described in the spirit of the definition of intangible heritage in the *Convention* (UNESCO 2015b: 37–38; cf. Židov 2014: 158; Bortolotto and Ubertazzi 2023: 7).

### *Critical Literature on the Experiences of Local Communities*

The critical studies in the anthology *UNESCO on the Ground: Local Perspectives on Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Foster and Gilman 2015) were written by independent researchers who were not members of the working groups for drawing up the nominations. They were interested in the bottom-up perspectives of grass-roots practitioners and local communities on the heritagization of their practices, as opposed to the bird's eye view of UNESCO and academic-bureaucratic actors (Gilman 2015: 71).

Leah Lowthorp described *Kutiyattam* theatre actors as members of a respected profession with a thousand-year history, which in the twentieth century lost its previously elite significance due to social changes. The proclamation of *Kutiyattam, Sanskrit Theatre* as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (Internet source 48) brought visibility, pride and better material support to the artists, but at the same time many perceived the process as a loss of freedom: “We used to be completely free with our programmes, but now it is all regulated. Now we have a situation of full-time employed workers. This is good for the office and bad for art” (Lowthorp 2015: 27–30). The administration established in the heritagization process regulated practices and concentrated decision-making previously distributed among many actors (Hafstein 2015: 149–150).

Kyoim Yun analysed the nomination process of the Korean shamanic ritual and cultural festival *Jeju Chilmeoridang Yeongdeunggut*, which embodies the identity of Jeju Island and expresses the villagers' respect for the sea. Due to the modernization of life, the ritual was no longer important to the female divers and ship owners who prepared food and offered sacrifices for the shamans, while the state wanted to safeguard the dying tradition as intangible heritage. After the inscription on the Representative List (2009, Internet source 49), the heritage

practitioners enjoyed global recognition, and the social status of the shamans increased. When preparing presentations for tourists, the several-hour-long ritual was shortened to 20 minutes, thereby impoverishing and commodifying it. Eventually, the most important shamans were no longer engaged by the local community, who found the payment too high. Global recognition deprived shamans and female divers of the opportunity to stop performing the ritual, which many seashore villages on Jeju Island had already done (Yun 2015: 46–55). If a ritual is endangered, it means that it no longer serves the purposes for which it was created in the community; if it is revived as intangible heritage, only the shell is preserved, but the original meaning is lost, and without the innate ideological messages it becomes something like a paper tiger (Ashworth 2011: 33).

Lisa Gilman defined the *Vimbuzza* healing dance of the Tumbuka people as a blend of Malawian and Western views of healing, of ancestral traditions and Christianity. The ritual was researched – there were performances, publications, museum exhibitions – and alive, so there was no need for safeguarding (Gilman 2015: 65, 72; cf. Kreps 2009: 204; Hafstein 2012; Nikočević 2012: 10). The preparation of the candidature for the Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage list (*Vimbuzza Healing Dance*, 2005, 2008, Internet source 50) was led top down, and the healers were not invited to participate. Some healers felt that commodified performances for tourists were making fun of the *Vimbuzza* and reinforcing stereotypes instead of enhancing cross-cultural understanding (Gilman 2015: 63–74). The author also recognized that the skills of practitioners and those needed to prepare a candidature file were of different types, and that state administration and professionals were thus needed to provide the knowledge, skills and resources for completing a demanding document (ibid. 72).

Michael Dylan Foster analysed the Japanese New Year's Eve ritual of *Toshidon*, in which demonic deities frighten children. The inhabitants of Koshikijima Island were not involved in the preparation of the nomination. Instead, they signed statements of consent and much later learned from the public media that the *Koshikijima no Toshidon* was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List (Foster 2015: 77–82). They were concerned about the loss of autonomy over their custom – already at the time of inscription, they feared that due to the emigration of young people there would be no children on the island in the near future, so most interlocutors insisted that in this case the ritual should be abolished (ibid.: 82–85), which apparently happened in the following years.<sup>39</sup>

39 The annual custom was inscribed in 2009, and removed between 2015 and 2020. Only a little information is still available about it in 2025 (Internet source 51).



The inscription on the UNESCO list caused the islanders to step back and see their tradition from an external, global perspective, which was a defamiliarization of their heritage (Foster 2011: 66; Hafstein 2018a: 143). There were frequent discussions about population decline, infrastructure, employment and tourism development. Locally, UNESCO was perceived as performing a kind of critical gaze that reminded the islanders of the outside world. It was a floating signifier, open to multiple and dissonant interpretations and meanings: to some, the inscription was a sign of local status, an inspiration for local pride or a reason for confidence; to others, it was a catalyst for tourism and municipal funding; and to a few, a responsibility to preserve the tradition and a burden for future generations (Foster 2011: 87). Foster (2011: 66) called this complex of conflicting feelings and activities the “UNESCO effect”. “There are many different UNESCOs and they are all [...] imagined” (Foster 2015: 89).

Carol Silverman compared the heritagization of two Macedonian dances: the *teškoto* dance was unsuccessfully nominated for inclusion to the *Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* twice (2002, 2004), while a decade later the *Kopachkata, a Social Dance from the Village of Dramche, Pijanec*, was inscribed on the Representative List (2014, Internet source 52). However, the *kopachkata* remained a dance of regional significance, while the *teškoto* became a national treasure and a symbol of the Macedonians. It is now part of a reconstructed traditional wedding in the village of Galičnik, which had some 3,000 people in the nineteenth century, but after World War II the majority emigrated, and the last real eight-day wedding was celebrated in 1953. The folklorized wedding, which is performed in a two-day condensed version by members of the Skopje dance ensemble Kočo Racin and former villagers, is attended by thousands of people. The event is promoted by the Ministry of Tourism as “authentic” folklore and national heritage, despite it being a staged re-enactment. It has become a symbol of the historical non-subordination of Macedonians to the Turks (Silverman 2015: 97–101). It can also be interpreted as a form of resistance to UNESCO, as the practitioners preferred to remain faithful to their emotional views, national sentiment and folklorized version of the dance (ibid.: 102–103), rather than adapting the candidature file to UNESCO’s requirements and values.

Hafstein summarized, from all the cases in the book, that intangible heritage was a cure for social problems inflicted on cultural practices by economic development, migration, depopulation or social upheaval. “Known as safeguarding, the treatment is a long-term, intensive intervention requiring advanced expertise to obtain the desired results” (Hafstein 2018b: 155). However, its side effects are in some cases worse than the condition itself, as safeguarding



transforms the relationship of subjects to their practices (through feelings such as pride, self-confidence or self-belief), changes practices (directs them towards representation with characteristic heritage genres, such as lists, festivals, films, workshops, and shortened, staged performances) and finally transforms the relationship of practitioners to themselves (new institutions formalise previously informal relations and centralise dispersed powers) (Hafstein 2015: 146–150; 2018b: 155).

All these transformations disempower local communities and bearers (Hafstein 2015: 156). Heritage practitioners from different parts of the world have thus had the same complaint: “as part of the safeguarding of intangible heritage, local actors are asked to surrender to experts and councils and administrators the control over their cultural practices [...] Is safeguarding dispossession by another name?” (ibid).

Still, it has to be admitted that these were early experiences from which both the researchers and UNESCO experts learned, and today there exist also more positive practices and outcomes, one of which will be presented later in this monograph with the case study of dry stone walling.

## The Knowledge in and about Intangible Heritage

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1991), in their discussion of the social construction of reality, argued that the stock of knowledge, and especially everyday knowledge, originates in interactions and social processes, and also maintains them. According to Vivien Burr (1995), the central assumptions of constructionism are a critical attitude towards taken-for-granted knowledge and opposition to the positivist premise that there is an objective reality. The categories and concepts we use to make sense of the world are temporally and contextually defined and historically and culturally specific, so knowledge and understanding of the world are relative and dynamic; they are created and maintained in social processes, and therefore they are also dialogical and negotiated, and besides, the shaping of our worldview influences our social actions (Burr 1995: 3; Erlewein 2014: 8–12).

Berger and Luckmann analytically distinguished three phases in the process of reality construction – externalization, objectification and internalization (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 65–109), which can also be applied in knowledge construction. For example, people can externalize their idea of the world by speaking or writing – when their idea enters the social sphere as a recorded

or written object of knowledge, it is objectified. Other people can then internalize it, and sometimes they adopt it so strongly that it seems to them to be their own, as it has become part of their habitus, while the original source may well be forgotten (Erlewein 2014: 9). To give an example, Boris Čok began restoring *hiške*, or dry stone huts, in the late twentieth century, and by publishing a calendar in 2003 he externalized and objectified the idea that *hiške* are common Karst heritage. In the social sphere, his idea connected with similar views and practices of several local, regional and international institutions, and in the following decade the Karst actors joined their efforts to revitalize dry stone walling.

If we consider intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding from the perspective of the processes mentioned above, then the unnamed architects of the *Convention* and the safeguarding paradigm perceived critical initiatives from various communities around the world and from social and human sciences which implied that, in addition to material cultural heritage, it is also necessary to safeguard social knowledge and practices, especially those of non-Western cultures and Indigenous peoples. In externalizing the idea, they first constructed an umbrella concept – intangible cultural heritage – based on many examples from various domains. After discussions, drafts, definitions of the main concepts and terms (van Zanten 2002) and interim lists of *Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*, the text of the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO 2003) was crystallized in the process of objectification, and finally, protocols for its implementation with safeguarding tools (UNESCO 2008/2024) were adopted. The States Parties ratified the *Convention*, and the competent political bodies and applied researchers then brought the concepts of intangible cultural heritage and safeguarding into the social sphere and operational activities through internalization and externalization processes. Many individuals, groups, associations and communities thus began to look at their practices differently when they internalized the concept of intangible heritage. If they wanted to inscribe their heritage in the national register or on the UNESCO lists of intangible heritage, they had to learn more about the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm and to objectify knowledge of their social practice in an initiative or nomination. The processes of externalization, objectification and internalization of ideas, concepts and knowledge about intangible heritage are constantly exchanging and intertwining at different levels, from the global to the grass-roots level and back again.

The term learning is used to describe the process of acquiring knowledge in schools, museums and other institutions and contexts. John H. Falk, Lynn

D. Dierking, and Marianna Adams (2006) claimed that learning processes were significantly more complex than educators had previously understood. Towards the end of the twentieth century, neuroscience refuted the behaviourist-positivist view of learning, in which the student was a kind of blank slate taught through didactic approaches of teachers. This was replaced by a constructionist view, which argues that learning is a continuous, individualized and highly contextualized process, influenced by three types of contexts: the individual's personal (biography, expectations, prior knowledge, experiences, interests, motivation), socio-cultural (roles of family, friends, cultural, educational and professional environments) and physical contexts (physical environment of educational institutions, study libraries and home learning spaces, books and other media, learning aids) (Falk, Dierking and Adams 2006: 323–336). Learners do not only learn in specific learning situations, but also later, when new data are processed and consolidated with existing internalized knowledge, experiences and values, and furthermore, additional information can be acquired from books, media and Internet, and the topic may be discussed with friends, colleagues or trusted professionals. As a result, educators increasingly write about lifelong learning and free choice learning (ibid.: 324; cf. Ingold 2018). Learning processes are also characterized by belonging or a desire to belong to certain social and professional circles, and they also influence the formation of identities, e.g. studying often changes people's personal and professional biographies (Ličen 2012: 12, 20).

For research on knowledge in cultural practices and intangible cultural heritage, I found Fredrik Barth's approach most appropriate, as it can be applied to the analysis of the knowledge traditions of Indigenous peoples in local environments, in the sciences and also in the political paradigm of the UNESCO *Convention*. Barth's (2002: 1) feelings, embodied skills, attitudes, and information, verbal taxonomies and concepts are here analytically divided into *knowing how* (also *know-how*), or practical knowledge, and *knowing that*, or cognitive knowledge (Ryle 1946; Koch 2013: 176).

The postmodern era of information societies and knowledge-based economies (Bell 1973) tends to limit the idea of knowledge to rational and conscious knowledge, while neglecting skills, embodied and tacit knowledge, rooted in the realm of trained observation rather than in explicit verbalization – in other words, the logocentric tradition attributes less value to forms of knowledge that are not taught in schools and universities (Herzfeld 2007: 211). From the analysis of knowledge production and reproduction in community practices and heritagization, it will be clear that UNESCO's safeguarding paradigm also values the cognitive knowledge of experts more

than the embodied knowledge and skills of heritage practitioners, although the *Convention* was created to celebrate and safeguard the “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills” of communities around the world (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1). Nevertheless, I emphasize that both types of knowledge are used by practitioners in the local environment, as well as by researchers and officials.

### *Fredrik Barth and His View of Traditions of Knowledge*

Barth presented traditions of knowledge as processes. He started from the relationship between subjective and collective knowledge, since individuals accumulate much of their knowledge by learning from others, including the criteria for judging its validity, which they acquired through the traditions of knowledge and the activities with which they were socialized (Barth 2002: 2–3). He criticized the academic prototype of knowledge in textbooks, encyclopaedias and dictionaries, where it was taken out of social and historical context, the actors of its production were erased, and the overemphasized coherence did not correspond to the real circumstances (ibid.; cf. Law 2004: 4, 6).

[W]e too easily focus on generalization, consistency, and a logical coherence in which an ideal system of knowledge is seen as one which derived its corpus from a few abstract principles by systematic deduction. But knowledge in its different modalities can range from an assemblage of disconnected empirical detail to a “theory of everything” [...]. (Barth 2002: 8)

Barth was therefore more interested in the processes of production, transmission and use of knowledge, which he defined broadly as all modes of understanding when experiencing reality (ibid.: 1). He analytically distinguished three faces or aspects of knowledge that dynamically coexist and influence the use, transmission and representation of knowledge:

First, any tradition of knowledge contains a corpus of substantive assertions and ideas about aspects of the world. Secondly, it must be instantiated and communicated in one or several media as a series of partial representations in the form of words, concrete symbols, pointing gestures, actions. And thirdly, it will be distributed, communicated, employed, and transmitted within a series of instituted social relations. (Barth 2002: 3)

Barth understood media ranging from rituals to scientific conferences, and recommended paying attention to the agency of the knowers – “the people who hold, learn, produce, and apply knowledge in their various activities and lives” (ibid.).

Barth emphasized that it is possible to observe the interaction of circumstances that generate criteria of validity for regulating knowledge in a tradition or social organization, such as the distribution of knowledge, its conventions of media representation, the network of relations of trust, and established positions of power and subordination (Barth 2002: 3). The potentials and constraints of criteria of validity can be identified to analyse the trajectories of changes in the corpus of knowledge. Finally, it is possible to analyse the influences of natural conditions and material circumstances on the one hand, or knowledge systems and power relations in the wider society or international environment on the other, that determine people’s life practices in the local environment (ibid.: 3–4).

Safeguarding involves several types of knowledge and different knowers: first, there are practitioners’ skills, embodied and cognitive knowledge; second, there are ethnographers who translate empirical data into cognitive knowledge and discursive forms (Geertz 1983: 56–57; Marcus and Fischer 1999: 31; Harris 2007: 6) or ethnographic films (MacDougall 1998: 61–92) that contain fewer ‘translations’ (Devereaux 1995: 72; Henley 2004: 112); and third, there are officials and applied researchers with normative knowledge (the *Convention* etc.) and practical knowledge of how to construct its main safeguarding tools – inscriptions.<sup>40</sup> I will also examine which media were adopted by knowers to shape and communicate this knowledge, and who determines the criteria of validity in these fields. Critical researchers investigate all types of knowledge, especially how it is created and transmitted, and how knowledge can operate as a form of power (Foucault 1980: 69).

### *Knowledge and Skills in Community Practices*

In previous centuries, people transmitted knowledge in live face-to-face communication: young people learned by observing and imitating embodied skills in the family or village community and by listening to stories (Lipp 2013: 135–136). Paul Connerton interpreted these modes of knowledge transmission as processes of memorization: the incorporation or embodiment of skills

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40 In some countries, officials and applied researchers belong to separate bodies (as is the case in Slovenia), and in others applied researchers and state officials are part of one body, or officials have a social or humanistic education.

takes place during common physical activities; while inscription was in the past based on listening to stories and explanations, later also on reading, in the twentieth century on receiving messages from films, radio, television (Connerton 1989: 72–73), and in recent decades also from the Internet. According to Berger and Luckmann (1991), incorporation and inscription are processes of internalizing knowledge.

Embodied knowledge belongs to tacit knowledge, and inherited practices, traditions, implicit values and also prejudices are of a pre-logical, pre-reflexive character. Skills are learned “by watching the master and emulating efforts in the presence of his example”, and in doing so, “the apprentice unconsciously picks up the rules of the art, including those which are not explicitly known to the master himself” (Polanyi 1962: 55). In traditional societies, the transfer of knowledge occurred with non-formal means, as young people participated in everyday and festive community activities. Some domains were organized with formal means of transmission, such as the processes of initiation and apprenticeship that could take several years (Duvellé 2010: 6–7). Along with practical knowledge, techniques and cultural manifestations, messages about the meaning, history and values of these practices were also transmitted. In addition to manual skills, linguistic, social and emotional abilities are also important here, as both verbal and non-verbal communication can contribute to a better flow of knowledge (Ličen 2012: 17, 22). Even today, many everyday skills are still passed on in similar ways in families and communities, such as food preparation, maintaining cleanliness, minor repairs, and caring for the garden and animals.

Bourdieu’s theory of practice bridges the gap between phenomenological subjectivism, according to which actors themselves create their own social reality, and structuralist objectivism, which argues that social reality is composed of a set of relations and forces imposed on actors (Wacquant 1998). Using the concept of habitus, he addressed the relationship between actors’ agency and social structures in a dynamic and dialectical way:

In practice, it is the habitus, history turned into nature, i.e. denied as such, which accomplishes practically the relating of these two systems of relations, in and through the production of practice. The “unconscious” is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of habitus. (Bourdieu 1977: 78–79)



The concept of habitus acknowledges that practical knowledge has its own logic, which cannot be reduced to the logic of theoretical knowledge, so practitioners in a sense know the social world better than theorists (Bourdieu in Krais 1991: 252). By incorporating cultural capital, knowledge and skills are embodied and transformed into an integral part of the person, into a habitus, together with the values and norms of the social environment that shape their identities (Meissner 2018: 238). We learn about society and culture from others through practice, and similarly, we later pass these skills and knowledge, which is why practice is a circular factor of socialization and enculturation (Muršič 2006: 52). Habitus does not blindly reproduce social structures – Bourdieu’s actor is socially competent and can transcend the limitations of systemic models (Ličen 2012: 15), as “habitus [...] in new situations can invent new ways of fulfilling the old functions” (Bourdieu 1990: 291, note 3). Due to new experiences, people can attribute new, different meanings to their practices over time, or they adapt practices to changed social conditions and values. And this is exactly what happens during the transformation of community practices into intangible heritage.

The emphasis of cultural practices and intangible heritage is on the skills and knowledge that are embodied in and conveyed through practices, and on the social context that requires at least a basic agreement<sup>41</sup> among the participants to do something together (Burr 1995: 8; Erlewein 2014: 9). Christoph Wulf emphasized that the body is still the bearer and medium of intangible cultural heritage in oral tradition, performances, social practices, rituals and handicrafts. The transmission of knowledge is enabled by mimetic practices – creative imitation and repetition, which include verbal and non-verbal forms of communication, and with these, knowledge is actively reproduced and imprinted in the body and memory, while at the same time adapted, changed and updated. After sufficient repetitions, mimetic processes are carried out routinely, subconsciously (Wulf 2011: 77–80), as they become part of habitus.

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) have termed this type of transfer of practical knowledge “situated learning”; Nives Ličen equates it with learning in everyday life, where it is an integral part of an individual’s actions in dialogue with the community and environment (Ličen 2012: 11). Tacit knowledge is unarticulated, subjective, diffused and preserved in practices and routines as skills, stories and oral tradition, while explicit knowledge is articulated,

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41 In cultural practices, this consent is most often tacit, but in the process of nominating heritage to UNESCO lists, UNESCO requires the written or recorded consent of practitioners to the nomination of their element.



specified and transmitted with concepts; tacit and explicit knowledge are therefore distinguished by the degree of codification and by the mechanisms of transmission (*ibid.*: 13–14). The transition from situated learning as unorganized, and to some extent even unintentional, learning to informal learning, which is organized and slightly structured (*ibid.*: 11), proceeds through reflection and externalization with three processes: codification, articulation and specification (Ličen 2012: 14).

The externalization of tacit knowledge is the process of articulating tacit knowledge into concepts that we can transmit, and it is also raising the awareness of routines, which occurs through verbalization. When researching narratives about tacit knowledge, we must not succumb to the epistemological naivety of believing that the description of experience (even if told in a very disciplined manner) is an accurate reflection of what was experienced. (Ličen 2012: 14)

Similarly complex processes, as in the internalization of knowledge, when new data and experiences are processed and harmonized with known knowledge, values and views (Falk, Dierking and Adams 2006: 323–336), also apply to the externalization of tacit knowledge. Over time, descriptions and concepts can be developed and refined to an objectified form that is permanently available to a wider circle of people. When describing skills and tacit knowledge, the researchers apply the process of eliciting data and knowledge. If the communication with the research subjects is not empathic enough, knowledge, values and identities can also be reinterpreted to the detriment of the community and its knowledge.

In visual anthropology, two well-known methods are photo elicitation or photovoice and film elicitation. The former (Collier 1957; Collier and Collier 1986; Harper 2002: 13; Turk Niskač 2013:130) is based on the idea that photographs are used in a research interview as a “can opener” (Leonard and McKnight 2015: 630; Walstra 2020: 10–11) – an aid and encouragement for interviewees to recall information, memories, and experiences. Anne Mette Jørgensen (2017: 84) showed Jette Bang’s films from 1936 to older people in Greenland as a trigger for their memories of the era of industrialization. Hilary Parsons Dick has explored linguistic methods to help interviewees more easily recall vague knowledge and memories (Dick 2006). Cristina Grasseni (2004: 28; 2008: 157, 168) sought to understand the tacit skills, worldviews, and professional identities of her interlocutors by engaging in their everyday practices and by filming them. Her methods of skilled vision, as well as filming, are ways of eliciting knowledge through a combination of verbal and nonverbal

communication (cf. Crawford 1992: 68; MacDougall 1992: 39; 1998: 68–72; Ingold 2000: 22; Pink 2009: 54, 101). The camera can be a catalyst for attention and attunement with the group under study, to enhance understanding of their practices, skills, and identities (Grasseni 2004: 27; Ingold 2000: 22).

Michael Polanyi (1962: 67) analysed the arts of skilful doing and skilful knowing. He argued that exercising a skill and the construction of expert (cognitive) knowledge about that skill are marked by a fundamental change of being. Skilled performers themselves set standards for their practices and act according to them, which occurs in relation to the existential meaning of these practices. These are the criteria for the validity of knowledge in the community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98). External researchers, on the other hand, evaluate performers' practices according to standards that they have formulated for the practitioners' work, tools, contexts and oral tradition. The prototype of expert endeavour describes and judges the skills and practices in local environments in the light of universal expert criteria and methods (Polanyi 1962: 67), especially when the researchers do not learn the practices themselves.

This is a competition of double standards of evaluation, and expert views, due to their greater social power, can prevail over the views of practitioners, which are to some extent tacit. There are two boundaries (Barth 1969: 10; Cohen 1985): between insiders and outsiders of a skill, and between laypeople and experts. Externalized and objectified discursive forms of knowledge have a greater impact on society, but they are mostly not sufficient for the reproduction of practical skills.

### *Knowledge and Skills in Heritagization*

Cécile Duvelle defined intangible heritage as only those practices that are constantly re-created and transmitted from generation to generation, while an element that did not remain in the living memory of community members could not be revitalized, but instead only reinvented or reconstructed, usually to serve particular interests (Duvelle 2010: 7). In addition to informal and partially structured learning, there are also officially organized forms of formal and certified education, which as a rule also include knowledge tests, such as master exams. But these are relatively rare in the transmission of cultural practices and intangible heritage, and if they exist they often have other, parallel goals and purposes. According to Ličen, practices are physical and mental routines, and learning is a "crisis of practice", as it changes these routines. Practices are not hermetically separated from other practices or learning,

and therefore they can accommodate innovations (Ličen 2012: 14). The main question in both habitus and intangible heritage is how learning and innovations are received by different participants in the community of practice, as their views are often dissonant.<sup>42</sup>

The UNESCO safeguarding paradigm aims that communities, groups and individuals can sustainably maintain practices, expressions, knowledge, skills and related manifestations (Duvelle 2010: 6–7), but heritagization also introduces innovations and changes into them. Bortolotto gave an excellent example of the conflict between the grass-roots views and changes imposed by the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm when preparing the nomination on the Luminara Festival in Pisa. On June 16, the citizens install thousands of burning candles on the shutters of windows in the old town along the Arno River, celebrating Saint Ranieri, and then admire the effects of the lights and magical atmosphere. As a facilitator, Bortolotto guided the Luminara organizers in drafting the nomination form, but they were rather frustrated by the UNESCO bureaucratic requirements and procedures strictly forcing the categorization of their heritage. They wanted to emphasize the long and authentic tradition and express their attachment to heritage, while she encouraged them to describe the festival in accordance with UNESCO's definition of intangible cultural heritage, without stressing history, authenticity or emotions (Bortolotto 2025: 24).<sup>43</sup> The anthropologist did not respect the views of the practising community, but simply reframed them into a politically required form of knowledge, and in doing so, local knowledge, values and identities were reinterpreted.

It is precisely because of these opposing views that Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004: 57) distinguished between cultural practices based on habitus and heritage as a result of metacultural production. What happens to knowledge and habitus in this transition?

As already mentioned, various communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98) have mostly successfully taken care of their traditions for several generations, or even centuries, but when a State Party inscribes a practice to

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42 I remember the great disappointment of a classmate from Tolmin grammar school, who had graduated from the Biotechnical Faculty with a degree in agronomy and wanted to introduce many innovations and improvements to their farm. His father simply could not accept this and preferred to pass the farm on to his younger son, who continued his traditional way of farming, closer to the family's habitus.

43 The nomination was submitted to the Italian National Commission for UNESCO in 2014 and 2015, but never promoted to UNESCO due to harsh competition: States Parties can promote one national nomination every two years for the UNESCO lists, so *The Art of Neapolitan "Pizzaiolo"* was chosen instead (Bortolotto 2025: 25).

the register of intangible heritage, it is supposed that research, documentation, promotion and education (safeguarding measures) can ensure its viability (UNESCO 2003: Articles 2.3 and 13). This may involve the establishment of research institutes, the creation of archives, the organization of conferences, the releasing of publications, film production, educational programmes, the development of museums and exhibitions, the creation of thematic trails, artistic activities, cultural tourism and the organization of festivals (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 57). Safeguarding is thus a combination of social institutions (heritage councils, committees, commissions, networks, and working groups) and heritage genres (inventories, lists, festivals, workshops, competitions, documentaries, websites, exhibitions and brochures) (Hafstein 2015: 146–150; 2018b: 155). In Slovenia, some new bodies have been established<sup>44</sup> and some of the listed genres applied, but the Coordinator's Working Group does not encourage the inscription of festivals and folklore events, as the heritage is not "performed in primary time and space" (Coordinator 2021a: point 12).

If we look at the transition of community practices into heritage from the perspective of Barth's three faces of knowledge, the corpus of assertions, the media for knowledge transmission and the social organization, we see that the corpus of knowledge has expanded and changed. When the practitioners, associations, museums or local administrations start the process of inscribing their heritage (to a state register or on the UNESCO list), they must describe the element and evaluate its significance for the community. The embodied skills and tacit knowledge are less important for any inscription than cognitive knowledge about the heritage element, and familiarity with the mechanisms of inscription is also important. The transfer of skills is now complemented by modern media with live face-to-face communication, such as workshops and various educational programmes, and it is also supported by representations in books, films, photographs, and mass media (newspapers, radio, television), where live interactions and feedback are no longer present. The research on dry stone walling has shown that local communities still embody practical knowledge and skills, while the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm encourages the inscription of cognitive knowledge. Heritagization thus changes the ratio between the two types of knowledge and the ways of internalizing and transmitting it.

Cultural practices are available to community members, but after metacultural production, heritage is significantly more open to the outside world; on the

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44 In 2009, the Ministry of Culture established a new body – the Coordinator – and in 2021, the University of Primorska formed the UNESCO Chair in Interpretation and Education for Enhancing Integrated Heritage Approaches (Internet source 53).

one hand, to professional, scientific, educational and administrative-political institutions, and on the other, to the general public, and especially to marketers and tourist organizations, because the underlying neoliberal assumption is that intangible heritage can and should sustain itself (Kockel 2007; Hafstein 2012: 505–506; Bortolotto 2025: 23). However, such commercialization is not always positive: if local traditions are adapted and condensed for external consumers, which is one of the features of folklorization (McDowell 2010: 183), then the surplus of outsider interest expands the social organization of heritage, changes the substantive emphases, adapts cultural practices and exports them elsewhere (Hafstein 2018a: 132).<sup>45</sup>

Some researchers also see folklorization as the widespread practice that scientific reflections on folk cultural expressions are recycled back to the related communities (Moser 1962 in Hafstein 2018a: 140), and thus ethnological understanding of cultural practices begins to permeate those practices (Köstlin 1997: 261; Fournier 2016: 10–11; Hafstein 2018a: 146; 2018b: 142). I find this a patronising academic view, as the flow of knowledge is a question of reciprocity – when we look at somebody, they always look back at us (Berger 1972: 8–9; Willerslev 2009: 23–46). When ethnologists and anthropologists research cultural practices, people are interested in their perspectives, and if they like their interpretations, they incorporate them into their knowledge of their own practices. In dialectical cultural identifications people respond to academic categorization, either incorporating it into their ongoing processes of self-identification, rejecting it completely or selectively accepting some parts and declining others (cf. Barth 1969: 14; Hall 1980: 125–127). The postmodern era is characterized by the circulation of knowledge (Tschofen 2012: 29, 31) or feedback loops (Brumann 2012: 12).<sup>46</sup>

The criteria of the validity of knowledge in community practices are determined by the practitioners, local communities and, to some extent, also by the users, while in the safeguarding paradigm the criteria are largely determined by UNESCO and the States Parties. When the *Toshidon* ritual was nominated

45 The Evaluation Body expressed concerns in cases where the promotion of tourism and commercialization were considered safeguarding objectives, as this can decontextualize the heritage (UNESCO 2018b: 10–11).

46 Hafstein reports that heritage bearers have learned how to generate political knowledge of the safeguarding paradigm – Belgian fryers recycled interpretations of the art of brewing beer (*L'art brassicole en brabant wallon*, Internet source 54, cf. *Beer Culture in Belgium*, Internet source 55) and inscribed potato frying (*Les frituristes de Bruxelles*, Internet source 56) to the Belgian registers of intangible heritage of the Flemish, French and German-speaking communities (Hafstein 2018a: 144).

for inscription on the Representative List, Japanese cultural policy, without much participation from the island community, implemented its own criteria of validity. Then after its inscription on the UNESCO list, UNESCO's provisions also came into force. At that time, the inhabitants of the Koshikijima Island decided that global recognition should not affect the practice of *Toshidon* – if there were no more children on the island due to the ageing population and the emigration of young families, then the ritual would no longer be performed (Foster 2011: 90–91). In doing so, they once again set the criteria of the validity of their own tradition and community.

UNESCO is only morally responsible for the inscribed elements (Bendix 2013: 368), while the official responsibility for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage lies with the State Parties, which are obliged to inform UNESCO about the status of the inscribed elements of heritage in periodic reports (Židov 2018a: 54; 2019: 18). In practice, however, the vitality of heritage and the transmission of skills continue to be primarily the responsibility of its practitioners (Tauschek 2015: 292; Španiček 2019: 217, 223; Jerin 2020: 175).

Unofficial heritage, which is not inscribed in the national inventory but which its bearers have come to call intangible heritage, is situated in an intermediate position, as bearers accept some UNESCO and professional views, while at the same time continue to make their own decisions about heritage according to their own criteria. A practice may also come to be considered heritage by professionals, non-governmental organizations or local authorities, often in the desire for a modern and prestigious label (cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 61; Hafstein 2014a: 37; Schreiber 2017: 448–450).

The traditions of knowledge and skills around the world are influenced by the natural and social conditions of the local, national and global environments, and the strongest external influence comes from UNESCO, which, with the concept of intangible cultural heritage and mandated safeguarding, has changed people's attitudes towards community practices, made heritage fashionable and aroused in many people the desire to enter this arena. However, the political concept of heritage does not encompass all community practices in all local environments – some continue to exist independently of the UNESCO paradigm. There are still cultural practices whose bearers do not consider inscribing them to the national inventory and on UNESCO lists, nor do they label them as heritage. For example, during film productions for the exhibitions, I got to know a traditional carpenter who specialized in making doors (*Prikaz ročne izdelave notranjih vrat*, 2013) and the Vodeb family shoe-making craftsmanship (*Čevelj po meri noge: Boutique Vodeb*, 2019). However,



the situation is changing rapidly, and *Traditional Shoemaking* (*Tradicionalno čevljarstvo*, Internet source 57) was inscribed in the Slovenian Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage in February 2023. Will Vodeb shoemaking also want to be recognized as an official heritage bearer?

Cristina Grasseni, in her discussion of cheese-making in the Italian Alps, asked what happens to traditional skills when they were defined as heritage, and answered that there is a constant dialogue between habitus and heritage (Grasseni 2008: 165; 2017: 164). In the Bergamo area, she researched cattle-breeding and cheese-making, the preservation of traditions and the protection of several types of cheese. So far, the traditional cheese-making of this area has not been officially recognized as intangible heritage on the UNESCO list, but in 2006 the entire Taleggio Valley was transformed into an ecomuseum of cheese and mountain huts (*Val Taleggio – Civiltà del Taleggio, dello Stracitunt e delle Baite tipiche*, Internet source 58) (Grasseni 2017: 150, 156–158; 2021). Some cheesemakers have obtained European certificates of Protected Geographical Indication or Traditional Speciality Guaranteed for certain types of cheese, while others have managed to inscribe them on regional or national lists of traditional foods, still others market them under the auspices of Slow Food Presidia as a taste of a place or a brand, and some have protected them as *tipicità*<sup>47</sup> (ibid.: 21, 27, 34, 38).

“Metacultural and cultural operations go hand in hand. Reflexive aspects that have been produced through metacultural mechanisms can become habitus again and vice versa” (Tauschek 2011: 56). Or, with Bernhard Tschofen words, “habitual culture and ‘metacultural’ heritage [...] are intertwined and circularly interrelated in a way that they can no longer be separated into two different modes” (Tschofen 2012: 29).

### *Political Knowledge and Skills of the UNESCO Paradigm*

UNESCO provides a theoretical, normative and also practical framework for safeguarding intangible heritage with the *Convention* (2003), *Operational Directives* (2008/2024), nomination forms, instructions and protocols, all from a position of power. Heritage practitioners and the States Parties are subject to these if they want to situate their community practices under the global spotlight as official heritage. The social scientists who were UNESCO collaborators during the preparation of the *Convention* and the safeguarding paradigm

47 “*Tipicità* is not a synonym of terroir, as it designates both environmental and specific historical circumstances for local and regional craft productions” (Grasseni 2021: 78).



are also subordinated to UNESCO – if they want to become interlocutors, they must engage in one of its bodies (Hafstein 2009: 109, note 1; 2018b: 16),<sup>48</sup> and in doing so, they also internalize some institutional habitus. The organization appropriates the individual through habitus, which is the materialization of collective memory, and at the same time the individual appropriates the organization (Podjed 2011: 25; cf. Bourdieu 1990: 59, 73; Cohen 1994: 98). It can be assumed that individuals in UNESCO bodies have a relatively modest feedback effect on the organization.<sup>49</sup>

All practices and products of a given actor are structured products (*opus operatum*), created by a structuring structure (*modus operandi*) through retranslations in accordance with the logic of the field, and are therefore objectively harmonized among themselves (Bourdieu 1996: 172–173). In the case of habitus, this occurs without deliberate pursuit of coherence, while in the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm it is also a matter of conscious orchestration. One of the examples is the language that UNESCO uses as a “structured structure” – the medium through which it communicates its understanding of heritage, and then also a “structuring structure” by providing adequate and inadequate concepts to direct understanding of intangible heritage by practitioners and officials in States Parties (cf. Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002: 95). UNESCO advises against “inappropriate vocabulary” in the text of nominations – the *Aide-Mémoire* discourages the use of the terms authenticity, genuine, purity, pure, true, unique, original, essence, tradition (understood as something frozen in the past), masterpiece, high cultural value, and exceptional value, as they are incompatible with the spirit and values of the *Convention* (UNESCO 2015a: point 14). Marc Jacobs denoted inadequate expressions as taboo words (Jacobs 2017: 195; cf. Bortolotto 2025: 25).

Kristin Kuutma (2019), head of UNESCO Applied Studies in Intangible Cultural Heritage at the University of Tartu, who represented Estonia in the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2006–2010) and evaluated nominations in 2009 and 2010,

48 Independent observers and representatives of non-governmental organizations, members of the Intangible Heritage Forum (Internet source 59), can only present their perspectives at the General Assembly sessions in a few minutes at the end of the meetings, when everyone is tired, so their messages have very limited impact (Sousa 2018: 26; Bortolotto et al. 2020: 72; cf. Brumann 2012: 5–7; 2015: 279 for World Heritage).

49 Dan Podjed investigated the DOPPS-Birdlife Slovenia (*Društvo za opazovanje in preučevanje ptic Slovenije*), which is organized as an equal and partly hierarchical network or a pancake with a peak in the middle (Podjed 2011: 159–160). UNESCO is a colossal institution with a pyramidal structure – employees do not know all other employees or their work and achievements, and they have a rather limited power.

described the production of heritage and knowledge in the UNESCO paradigm as follows:

[I]f cultural heritage is made and constructed, it first needs to be imagined. Cultural heritage becomes real when someone identifies it as such, which denotes a process of knowledge production that involves academic research. The analysis of the identification and instrumentalization process of cultural heritage requires a critical investigation of the making and social dissemination of scholarly knowledge in the context of cultural heritage research, of the mutual effects of cultural politics and academia. The awareness of heritage is epistemologically related to scholarship of history, art, ethnology, folklore, etc. – heritage is a certain way of knowing cultural objects, sites or practices. It involves particular systems of meaning that are employed by specialists. Thus knowledge-holders claim a particular authority that depends on empirical, rhetorical and metaphoric determinism that makes a world of order and creates a discourse of authority. (Kuutma 2009: 7–8)

She made it clear that “cultural heritage results from a process of selection and identification that is subtly related to academic interests, but is put into force on the initiative of government, which establishes official regulations and interventions” (Kuutma 2009: 8). Thus intangible heritage “is a project of symbolic domination”, emerging “from the nexus of politics and power” (Kuutma 2012: 23; 2013: 3). The official safeguarding of heritage “requires highly specialized skills that are of a different order from the equally specialized skills needed for the actual performance” of cultural practices (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 55).

Heritage “experts” use concepts, standards and regulations to place cultural phenomena and their “bearers” in the sphere of heritage, to become metacultural artefacts, for example in national legislation and in registers, and at the global level, on UNESCO heritage lists. In this way, they create authoritative knowledge about heritage, and heritage is a political form of knowledge. (Slavec Gradišnik 2014: 16)

Preparing a nomination of a heritage element to be inscribed on one of the UNESCO lists requires understanding of the element and its practitioners, the *Convention* and relevant guidelines, as well as of UNESCO protocols and values, such as human rights, mutual respect between communities and groups, peace, sustainable development and gender equality (UNESCO 2003:

Article 2.1; 2008/2024: points 192–197; 2015a: points 11–37, 47–50; 2024: 143–145). The required top-down approach is to some extent understandable, as heritage practitioners do not have access to the knowledge and resources needed to complete a comprehensive document (Gilman 2015: 72). Moreover, the nomination form also needs to be officially signed and personally submitted to the UNESCO Secretariat by an authorized representative of the State Party (UNESCO 2022: points 4 and 6).

If we look at the body of knowledge, the media for its transmission and the social organization of knowledge in the UNESCO paradigm, the corpus of knowledge on intangible cultural heritage has been supplemented and expanded over the years, because the production of articles, handbooks, books, films and websites is enormous. A very important medium for the transfer of knowledge and consolidation of power are the meetings of various UNESCO bodies, the sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee with precisely defined protocols, conferences and capacity-building programmes. UNESCO also disseminates the safeguarding paradigm in electronic media and on its website, where it updates the heritage lists (Internet source 1), transmits recordings of the sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee (Internet source 60), provides access to updated forms and instructions (Internet source 61) and informs the general public.

Who are the knowers here? Officials, trained in the social sciences, humanities or international development (Bortolotto et al. 2020: 68), linked together in the large UNESCO body, operate from the top down, and heritage practitioners and safeguarding experts in States Parties prepare their participation in global intangible heritage. UNESCO has established a strong position of power, which has been strengthened over the years (Müller 2013; cf. Foucault 1980, 1991; Smith 2006: 50–51; Bortolotto 2015: 260; Bortolotto et al. 2020). It has also established ways of engaging experts and national representatives, and protocols for replacing official representatives when their mandates expire (UNESCO 2003: Article 6; cf. Barth 2002: 6). The safeguarding through enlisting with systematic standardization narrows the view of differences in intangible heritage, even though UNESCO emphasizes cultural diversity (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004; Kreps 2009: 204–205; Brumann and Berliner 2016: 27). It supports a “global system of common difference” with distinction at the level of content, but uniformly packed in the same forms of representation and media (Wilk 1995: 110).

The UNESCO *Convention* can be interpreted as an instrument of power, as it determines not only the knowledge of those who research and safeguard

intangible heritage in the States Parties, but also influences the transformation of knowledge and practices of local people (Smith 2008: 38; 2012: 538; Leimgruber 2010; Tauschek 2012a, 2015; Slavec Gradišnik 2014: 16). UNESCO, through administrative measures in States Parties, implements governmentality – its power/knowledge structure governs the thinking and behaviour of people around the world (Foucault 1980, 1991; Smith 2006: 50–52; Hafstein 2015: 146–149) – and thereby also strengthens its dominant field (Foucault 1980: 69).

Sheenagh Pietrobruno (2017: 8) defined UNESCO's Intangible Heritage Lists as a prestigious mechanism of display and public spectacle in honour of the global organization and the States Parties whose heritage is inscribed on the lists. Applying Bourdieu's concept of power fields or meta-fields that shape relations and practices in subordinate fields (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002: xii), UNESCO can be interpreted as a meta-meta-field that governs the meta-fields of States Parties, which regulate the conduct of heritage practitioners in their territories. UNESCO also organizes activities and practices of the applied social scientists involved in the safeguarding paradigm (Bortolotto 2015: 260–262). If the knowledge, concepts and standards of officials and experts prevail over the views of heritage bearers with regard to their heritage, this is an epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007, 2008; Pantazatos 2017). The dehierarchization of knowledge (Jackson 1996; Lunaček Brumen 2018: 93) can be achieved by consistently taking into account the views and concepts of heritage practitioners, when they are equally included in the common economy of knowledge (Pantazatos 2017: 375, 377).

## Heritage, Emotions, Agency and Identities

The literature often discusses the emotional relationship of heritage bearers to their heritage, especially in connection with the so-called affective turn. The relation between the emotions and agency of heritage bearers and practitioners is crucial for the maintenance of traditions, and both are also deeply intertwined with identities.

### *Heritage and Emotions*

In anthropology, emotions “came to the fore in the 1970s, when the field that we now understand as the anthropology of emotions developed” (Muršič 2004:

50). Rajko Muršič considered emotions as a cognitive category embedded in political space. In the twenty-first century, the many turns in anthropology were followed by the so-called affective turn (Hofman et al. 2020).

Critical heritage studies also took the affective turn into account when, for example, exploring dissonances and the physical sense of heritage, as embodied with particular values, meanings and ideas. Through affects and emotions,<sup>50</sup> all heritage becomes intangible and offers a greater conceptual space for researching memory and the activity of remembering (Smith 2006: 57; Smith and Campbell 2015). The two collections of articles on heritage, emotions and affects (Tolia-Kelly, Waterton and Watson 2017b; Smith, Wetherell and Campbell 2018) mainly addressed the emotions of nostalgia, sadness, anger, empathy and trauma in the context of museum exhibitions, places of memory (*lieu de mémoire*, Nora 1989) and pedagogical approaches.

Heritage that preserves the memory of deceased people, disasters, wars, violence, imprisonment, loss and trauma is called difficult heritage (van de Port and Meyer 2018: 10). By nature, this is often memorial or commemorative heritage, situated in former concentration camps, war fronts, cemeteries and places of remembrance. Difficult or dark heritage (Roberts and Stone 2014; Thomas et al. 2019) is associated with dark tourism (Stone 2006; Roberts and Stone 2014; Habinc 2010).

On the UNESCO intangible heritage lists, no element is described with the phrases 'difficult heritage' or 'dark heritage', but there are a few elements that are close to the meaning of dark heritage. Four entries refer to the celebration of the Day of the Dead and rituals associated with the spirits of the dead (Internet sources 62–65). The Cuban element *La Tumba Francesa* (Internet source 66) only briefly mentions the origins of this dance heritage in the time of slavery, presenting the fusion of African and European culture in a neutral, even cheerful light (Pietrobruno 2017: 11, 13, 14). All five elements were inscribed during the *Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage*.

UNESCO does not inscribe rites of passage that involve medical interventions on the bodies of young members of a community (van Zanten 2004: 37–38; Ruggles and Silverman 2009: 2; Janse 2023: 19–20; Internet sources

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50 Feelings are personal and biographical, emotions are mostly socially conditioned, and affects are pre-personal and physically intense responses to external stimuli (Hofman et al. 2020: 58). Researchers of emotions and affects in heritage, however, acknowledge that it is not always easy to distinguish between emotions and affects (Wetherell, Smith and Campbell 2018; Smith 2021).

67 and 68) out of respect for human rights and international declarations (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1). It also does not endorse nominations of elements that involve animal sacrifice, bullfighting, cockfighting, dogfighting, and similar activities (UNESCO 2015a: point 49). The nomination of the *Torch Festival of the Yi People* was returned to the submitting state for amendment because additional information was required to explain “whether animal fights are compatible with the requirement of respect for the sensitivities of diverse communities, groups and individuals, and with respect for sustainable development” (UNESCO 2014: 31). The submitting state apparently failed to meet this requirement, as the element has not been inscribed in subsequent years.

UNESCO inscribes only “good” heritage, and in recent years it has also become aware of manipulation in descriptions in nomination forms (Janse 2023: 20). In general, the emotions that sustain heritage preservation are largely positive. “Any social project that is not imposed through force alone must be affective in order to be effective” (Mazzarella 2012: 299). Thus, heritage and its providers act on emotions to attract people (Hafstein 2018b: 106). Matijs van de Port and Birgit Meyer claim that heritage is not simply given, so its cultural production requires an ‘aesthetics of persuasion’. Heritage creators use various devices and narratives, material and aesthetic forms to convince their addressees, while on the other hand, the receivers must be prepared to emotionally and mentally identify with such forms. Persuasion operates only partly on a conscious level, and very often through repeated exposure in the sense of penetrating people’s senses and bodies, whereby heritage ceases to be an object ‘out there’, and becomes a lived experience, embodied as a second nature (van de Port and Meyer 2018: 23).

In fact, it is difficult to determine the point at which affection grows into such an intense identification with heritage activities that it begins to direct the entire life and work of a person. Intense emotional identification with someone or something can trigger the transfer of the self to the object of identification, up to the point of fusion (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 17). The strong sensorial, emotional and mental entanglement of subjects or identification with heritage is characteristic of the romantic view of heritage, of the desire for experiential harmony between the subject and the object which eliminates the divide between the two of them (van de Port and Meyer 2018: 14, 19). A complete dedication to heritage is sometimes noticeable in the local environment. Often such individuals or families become enthusiastic connectors of the entire heritage community, as people who are passionate about their work can also light a fire in others (Podjed 2011: 77).



Although emotions are the catalysts of heritage activities, UNESCO does not want them to be emphasized in the texts of nomination forms, which are supposed to be emotionally neutral. The candidature of the Macedonian dance *teskoto* stressed the emotions of the dancers and the national sentiment, which had a counterproductive effect on UNESCO evaluators (Silverman 2015: 102–103). Chiara Bortolotto (2025: 24) prevented the Luminara organizers from expressing their emotional attachment to their festival of lights. In contrast, UNESCO allows and even encourages the expression of emotions in free, prior and informed consents, and after the solemn announcement that the nominated element is inscribed on a list, as is evident at the sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee.

Depending on their goals and target audience, authors of texts can reveal or conceal emotions and the general atmosphere of heritage. Feelings, emotions, affects and the energy of events<sup>51</sup> can be conveyed very well in experiential films, but much less in illustrative ones. For research on emotions, it is important to note that people can rarely verbalize their sensory and emotional responses to a situation immediately, and mostly they can only express these emotions after some time (Hofman et al. 2020: 60). Similar observations also apply to the identification process, in which one's own identities are mostly conceptualized retrospectively (Muršič 1997: 227), as well as to the formation of knowledge that continues after a learning situation with the processing of data and experiences, confronted with the previous knowledge, emotions and values (Falk, Dierking and Adams 2006).

Regarding the shared emotional register of intangible cultural heritage, it has been noted that UNESCO recognition often evokes an emotional response, described as pride, confidence, self-respect, or self-belief (Hafstein 2015: 152), in which strong emotions and identifications are invested (Hafstein 2018b: 106). However, the prestige of international success in the UNESCO paradigm is designed so that it also arouses a moral duty and commitment to safeguard one's own practices, which people may perceive as a form of pressure or onerous sense of responsibility (Hafstein 2015: 155). Divya Tolia-Kelly, Emma Waterton and Steve Watson argued that “heritage and its economies are driven by affective politics, and consolidated through sensibilities such as pride, awe, joy, pain, fear” (Tolia-Kelly, Waterton and Watson 2017a: 4). It was the frustration of national and international officials

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51 In intangible heritage, the difference between the solemn atmosphere of a performance of a live nativity scene, or the joyful and mocking atmosphere of a carnival can be considered in this context.



with the limitations of bureaucratic measures in establishing inclusive policy that triggered their efforts to creatively experiment with new approaches in order to produce evidence of community participation in official safeguarding (Bortolotto et al. 2020: 78).

Precisely because emotions move people and motivate them to act in certain ways, Sarah Ahmed argued that they contain a certain agency (Ahmed 2004). Moreover, practices not only create emotions, but emotions themselves can also be seen as practical engagements with the world, because “emotional practices” involve both body and mind, as well as language, material artefacts, the environment, and other people (Scheer 2012: 193; cf. Smith 2006: 57). Emotions therefore need to be observed in practice, as people experience and express them (Scheer 2012: 195), and naming emotions is an essential part of experiencing them (*ibid.*: 212).

It was also observed in the Slovenian environment that the subjective views and experiences of communities, groups and individuals primarily express their emotional attachment to heritage, community and place (Slavec Gradišnik 2014: 10). However, caution is required in field research, because the actual meaning of emotions is only revealed in the context of each situation; in addition, researchers are also restricted by a code of ethics when writing about the feelings, emotions and affects of their research subjects (Muršič 2004).

The power of emotions lies in the fact that they rarely appear in pure forms, because emotions are most often ambivalent or even in conflict, which is why they can be socially channelled in one direction or another. [...] A typical example of the ambivalence of emotions is the contempt felt by the majority population of all European countries towards the Roma people, and the simultaneous enthusiasm for their “authentic” musical expression. (Muršič 2004: 57)

As Laurajane Smith put it, heritage performances<sup>52</sup> are not only physical experiences of “doing”, but also emotional experiences of “being”. An important aspect of the “heritage experience” is the emotional content of the activity, as it creates, transmits and preserves social values and meanings, while also evoking conscious emotional acts of remembering and memory making (Smith 2006: 71). Smith deliberately did not analyse visiting museums and

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52 Visiting country houses and “enacting history” demonstrates the agency not only of those who prepared the heritage presentations, but also of visitors who, by participating, confirm or reject the offered, more or less plausible, version of the staged history (Bagnall 2003: 88–91; Smith 2006: 71, 158). The above observation can be applied to many heritage activities.

heritage sites as learning experiences – the museological literature emphasized the educational character of such visits towards the end of the twentieth century – but instead as a cultural activity “in which people either consciously or unconsciously seek to have their views, sense of self, and social or cultural belonging reinforced” (Smith 2015: 459). Museum visitors can engage in learning as much as in strengthening their values, attitudes and identities (gender, class, “racial”, local, national, professional), i.e. in confirming their set of “known knowns” (ibid.: 479).

These claims can be linked to Slavoj Žižek’s (2006) differentiation into four categories of knowledge: we can go to a museum or a workshop in quest of “known unknowns”, when we want to discover a certain topic or learn a new skill; we can also be surprised by some “unknown unknowns” that we did not know existed, but turn out to be interesting and important for us; we can seek emotional and intellectual confirmation of our repertoire of “known knowns” in order to feel good; and we can even become aware of some “unknown knowns”, for example, if we detect our blind spots, stereotypes, prejudices or parts of habitus, which is the forgetting of history.

Žižek’s typology and Smith’s motivations demonstrate the close intertwining of learning, emotional and identification processes in life contexts and heritage practices. It is not at all necessary to be aware of all these possibilities in advance – we may have chosen to visit a museum, heritage site or a concert for completely different reasons, for example, to show our children, relatives or friends from abroad something interesting in our environment or because we simply want to actively socialize with them. On the other hand, a long-term engagement with intangible heritage is usually the result of an intentional investment of our time, energy, mental attention and emotions in the chosen field.

### *Heritage and Agency*

Alfred Gell described agency as the ability of people to initiate causal sequences of events through acts of mind, will, or intention. Agents are the source of events in their vicinity that, according to their vision, should lead towards an expected goal, but these chains of events sometimes have unexpected consequences and side effects (Gell 1998: 16).

Interestingly, in the *Glossary of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, which was created during the drafting of the *Convention*, UNESCO emphasized the agency of bearers, creators, custodians, and practitioners, but also researchers,

administrators and managers of heritage (van Zanten 2002: 3). Agency was defined as the “capacity to make decisions that have an impact on social practices and representations in which individuals and communities are involved” (ibid.: 4). In the end, the agency of the bearers, practitioners and custodians did not find its way to the *Convention*, because of the decision to use the passive sentence structures of the English language. In the second part of the sentence, agency is attributed to heritage, which gives people a feeling of identity and continuity:

This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1)

English passive formulations allow the *Convention* to relegate the agency of heritage bearers to the background, thereby obscuring the issue of “ownership” of intangible heritage. Heritage protocols emphasize collective creations, but overlook people who are “conscious, reflexive” subjects and “agents in the heritage enterprise itself” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 179). Terms such as carriers, transmitters and bearers of traditions, “connote a passive medium, conduit, or vessel, without volition, intention, or subjectivity” (ibid.; cf. Adell et al. 2015b). As Gell noted, the agency of things is relational – it is made possible only in the neighbourhood of human agents (Gell 1998: 123) – and this also applies to intangible heritage, as social practices do not exist without the agency of their practitioners.

Sherry Ortner divided agency into “soft” versions, which are characterized by the agent adapting and submitting to social forces, and “hard” versions, with the agent’s tendency to organize their life according to their own ambitions, thus challenging social givens and pressures. We can observe different forms of agency as points on a scale from soft agency with a low level of intentionality, to hard agency with a high level of intentionality (Ortner 2006: 134–136). She got this insight through an analysis of fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm, which described princesses as victim heroines, whose role in their passage from childhood to adulthood was to be patient and passively accept the actions of others. In their rites of passage, boy heroes demonstrated agency by solving a problem, slaying a dragon and rescuing a maiden, while princesses had to patiently wait for the prince to rescue them and thus enable him to become a hero. Active girls were punished for their hard agency by either not growing

up or not getting married; the soft agency of princesses was rewarded, as they enabled the steady reproduction of the patriarchal order (ibid.: 140–141, 147).

Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische have analytically divided agency into three components, considering the temporal orientation of social actions and their relationship to social structures. Iterational agency operates on the principle of repeating past patterns of thought and action that are embedded in practical activities, routines and habits; similar to soft agency, it emphasizes the stable reproduction of tradition by maintaining the established order. Projective agency refers to alternative solutions and possibilities that the actor creatively imagines in relation to hopes, fears, desires and plans for the future; this is close to hard agency, which is aimed at transforming, updating and adapting traditions to the demands of modernity. The third is the practical-evaluative agency, which operates by evaluating past habits and traditions, current situations and dilemmas, and future plans and unknowns (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 962, 971; cf. Jørgensen 2017: 64). In life, people usually combine several aspects of agency.

The aforementioned *Toshidon* ritual was not nominated at the initiative of the island community, so the nomination submitters allowed the practitioners only soft agency – the acceptance of their visions and plans. After *Toshidon* was inscribed on the Representative List, the islanders determined the circumstances in which they would continue their tradition with practical-evaluative and projective agency. When, due to demographic changes, there were no more children on the island, they discontinued the ritual in accordance with their tradition and removed it from the UNESCO list (the remains are seen on Internet source 51). In doing so, they exercised hard agency and saved their tradition from becoming a paper tiger, no longer serving the purposes in the community (Ashworth 2011: 33–34).

Iterational agency is enacted by Slovenian Shrovetide groups which try to remain as faithful to tradition as possible, so they neither include married men, women and children, nor participate in big carnivals outside their own villages (for example, Ravenski pust; Zych 2003). Projective agency is prevalent in groups who introduce innovations, travel to well-known Slovenian and world carnivals and participate in events, unrelated to Shrovetide time or customs. For example, a group of *kurenti* was present at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London (Pukl and Jerin 2017: 154; Jerin and Pukl 2022: 57–59). The views of different Slovenian Shrovetide groups on this issue are markedly dissonant. In the future, we shall be able to observe how the UNESCO recommendation that women and children should participate in heritage

elements will affect the views of local communities of young unmarried men (*fantovske skupnosti*) who traditionally organize Shrovetide customs in Slovenia and other countries.

### *Heritage and Identities*

Identity is a construct of the modern era (Bauman 1996: 18), while in post-modern times identities are discussed in the plural, which emphasizes the numerous potentials that an individual or a community can develop and use meaningfully in various circumstances (Chapman, McDonald and Tonkin 1989: 17). Identities are a matter of practice, lifestyle, and experience (Barth 1969: 28), and are constantly being changed, recreated, and redefined, which is why contemporary anthropology, ethnology and sociology have abandoned the previous essentialist concept and concentrate on the processes of identification (Muršič 1997: 226; Jenkins 2004: 6).

The formation of identities is a dynamic process between opposing poles: the search for similarity and sameness in oneself, and the need for distinction and emphasizing difference from other individuals and groups (Južnič 1993: 101–102; Brumen 2000: 72–73; Nastran Ule 2000: 3; Ashworth 2011: 23; Žagar 2013: 14). This applies to both individuals and groups. Group identities are based on the internalization of an individual's belonging to a group, i.e. their self-identification (Cohen 1985: 12–15). Individual's identities are to some extent constructed from shared identities, such as ethnic identities, which are nominal identifications with general characteristics (Jenkins 2004: 77), while all the unique characteristics of all individuals in an ethnic group are actual, practical<sup>53</sup> (Barth 1969: 29) identifications.

Richard Jenkins defined self-identification as a continuous movement, an endless internal-external dialectic of self-discovery throughout life, as we adapt, change and also abandon different identities. When individuals present themselves to others, their presentations may or may not be accepted and thus become part of their identities in the eyes of others or not; on the other hand, individuals may or may not incorporate the feedback responses of others in their self-identification (Jenkins 2004: 50), as in any communication process (Hall 1980: 125–127).

53 Jenkins (2004: 77) used the term virtual in this sense: although he was aware of the meaning of the word in relation to cyberspace, he referred to the earlier, now outdated definition in the Oxford English Dictionary by which "virtual" means something that exists for practical purposes and not just as a definition. Therefore, I follow Barth on this point (1969: 29).

The formation of self-identification is largely based on mirroring – the responses of parents, siblings, friends, classmates, partners, colleagues, co-workers – and how the individual internalizes them.<sup>54</sup> The circle of individuals' relationships with others and their characteristics contributes to who they are, and tells something about them to other people. They can either validate who they claim to be or refute it, and when views on identities differ, power and authority often decide whose opinion will prevail (Jenkins 2004: 50). Hall summarized that we form identities in relationships with others, with what we are not, which is therefore a constitutive element of our identifications; in this dynamics, power games and exclusions are inevitable (Hall 1996: 4). Furthermore, people use other resources for self-identification, such as clothing, housing, cars, occupation, heritage, religious practices, music, pets, and so on (Jenkins 2004: 50).

In relation to intangible heritage, it is important that identities are embodied and inscribed in children through practices, everyday experiences, observation, imitation and the opinions of those who are close to them, leading to a series of relatively stable mental and behavioural patterns and habits, defined as *habitus* (Žagar 2010: 16). Identification without embodiment is unthinkable: the human body expresses individual continuity, indicates group similarities or distinctions and is a screen for performing identifications. Cognition and identifications develop simultaneously in primary socialization. Identities formed in early childhood through experiences and participation in the family, community and circle of friends are first-order identities: self, humanity, gender and kinship (Jenkins 2004: 19). Second-order identities, such as belonging to a nation and a state, are acquired through the influences of school, mass media and the state apparatus, and are weaker than primary ones (Muršič 1997: 230). The former are experience-near identities, while the latter are experience-distant.

Cultural identity in the broadest sense means the synthesis of all identities, if culture is understood as a way of life of individuals and communities (Južnič 1993: 179). Stane Južnič pointed out the importance of naming identities,

54 In a school experiment, Lenora Jacobson and Robert Rosenthal demonstrated the influence of "significant others" on academic performance and identification: students invested more effort and became much more successful when teachers, based on spurious tests of Rosenthal and Jacobson, considered them very talented and expected their learning progress (Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968). Identifications are not just about naming, but also about the changes that nominal identification can bring to the bearer in life experiences (Jenkins 2004: 22). Due to the new labels teachers invested extra engagement in "gifted" students and also demanded more from them, and as a result the students internalized their new categorization and also adjusted their behaviour (*ibid.*: 76–77).



maintaining ritual bonds and cohesive relations between people, as well as of attributing symbolic meanings to various narratives (*ibid.*: 180). Frederik Barth marked a turning point in the understanding of (ethnic) group identities, claiming that cultural differentiation occurs along and across (ethnic) boundaries (Barth 1969: 10). These are not always physical and spatial, as several (ethnic) populations may live in the same area. Furthermore, there is no unequivocal relationship between ethnicities and cultural similarities or differences: ethnic communities use some cultural characteristics as signals and symbols of differences, while others are simply ignored or even denied (*ibid.*: 14). Identifications are created at the boundaries of communities – they are negotiated in interactions between members<sup>55</sup> and outsiders (Barth 1969: 14; Cohen 1985). “Recognition of Otherness will help reinforce self-identity, but may also lead to distrust, avoidance, exclusion and distancing from groups so-defined” (Graham and Howard 2008: 5).

Heritage is a strong medium of cultural identifications (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004), and according to Marie-Theres Albert, one of the main functions of all types of cultural heritage is precisely the construction and maintenance of identities (Albert 2006; cf. Nas 2002; Wulf 2011: 79, 84; Jezernik 2010: 12–13; Fikfak 2021: 19). Heritage is the core of collective identity (Lowenthal 2009: 5).<sup>56</sup> It can be used by individuals and groups for their cultural identification as a marker of belonging to groups or communities at local, regional, national, continental and global levels (Ashworth 2011: 27–30). This simultaneously distinguishes them from other groups, a neighbouring locality or region, a foreign country or another continent with different cultural identities.

Meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we ‘belong’ – so it is tied up with questions of how culture is used to mark out and maintain identity within and difference between groups. (Hall 1997a: 3)

The internal-external dialectic of collective identifications, and the relativity of perspectives (Jenkins 2004: 123) need to be taken into account.

Brian Graham and Peter Howard argue that heritage artefacts, locations and activities are given value by people who view them “through a whole series of lenses, the most obvious of which are: nationality; religion; ethnicity; class;

55 The term insiders is also used (Jenkins 2004: 123; Ashworth and Graham 2005: 151).

56 UNESCO and Lowenthal use the concept of identity in the singular, but identities and identification are complex, dynamic, and often ambivalent, also in relation to heritage and heritagization processes.



wealth; gender; personal history; and that strange lens known as ‘insideness’” (Graham and Howard 2008: 2). Being an insider of a heritage is about belonging to a shared cultural identity. The large number of actual and potential participants and stakeholders of any heritage element means that there is no simple binary relation between insiders and outsiders, hegemony and rebels. Since heritages are created and shaped in response to the demands of the present, they are open to constant revisions, and these are either potential sources of social conflicts or their results (ibid.: 2–3). In other words, a sense of belonging to intangible heritage element and thus to a cultural identity is not only felt by the practitioners, but often also by heritage users, sympathizers, supporters, promoters, researchers, officials involved in the processes of its safeguarding and inventorying, and people who want to market it.

The differentiation of insiders and outsiders in intangible heritage and the boundaries between groups can be subtle and fluid: an individual, a family, a group of people or a community can participate in a variety of heritage activities. Family members can, for example, be active in choir singing, a theatre group, in cooking traditional dishes, in organization of a traditional Shrovetide custom, in Christmas celebrations, in school workshops for making and launching *gregorčki* models on the eve of St. Gregory’s Day (March 12), and in researching family genealogies. Each of these activities is carried out by more or less connected “we groups” (Elwert 1995; Habinc 2012; Žagar 2013: 14), and many individuals participate in several groups. They are often formed along generational lines: for example, children’s activities take place in kindergartens and schools, traditional Shrovetide events are (or used to be) organized by local communities of young men, and heritage associations often bring together different generations of people who engage in the transmission of knowledge and cultural identities. Members of these groups often do not feel any boundaries in their activities, but in certain situations they do. In what cases do people become aware of the boundary between insiders and outsiders of a heritage element, or of the boundary between the two related elements?

The initiative to inscribe Idrija lacemaking into the Slovenian Register was submitted by the Idrija City Museum in September 2012, listing the locations in the municipalities of Idrija and Cerklje na Gorenjskem, but also Žiri and Železniki in Gorenjsko. The Coordinator’s Working Group decided to inscribe the unit *Making Idrija Bobbin Lace (Klekljanje idrijske čipke*, Internet source 69), while inviting researchers and lacemakers of other regions to draft their initiative. In the following year, the Škofja Loka Museum and the Museum and Galleries of the City of Ljubljana submitted the initiative to inscribe Slovenian lacemaking, the name of which referred to the historical

division from the time when Primorska was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy. Research has shown that in addition to the lacemaking societies in Žiri and Železniki, numerous associations are active in central Slovenia, in Koroška and elsewhere, as stated in the inscription of *Making Slovene Bobbin Lace* (*Klekljanje slovenske čipke*, Internet source 70). When preparing the nomination *Bobbin Lacemaking in Slovenia* (Internet source 34) for the inscription on the UNESCO Representative List, associations and professional bodies from Idrija and Cerklje ob Savi on the one hand, and Žiri, Železniki and Škofja Loka on the other persistently emphasized the differences between the characteristics of the products of the two areas – the narrow and the wide lace patterns became the symbols of distinction. In doing so, ladies from Primorska and Gorenjska defended the boundary between the two neighbouring cultural identities that had been created after World War I and lasted until 1947. Since Idrija lace is a recognized and very successful brand, which was not stated in the nomination,<sup>57</sup> some of Idrija journalists and lacemakers, but not all, felt the common title of the nomination *Bobbin Lacemaking in Slovenia* as a departure from what had already been achieved. This shows that the views of actors on their own heritage, linked to experience-near personal, local and regional identities, differed from views based on experience-distant national identification (cf. Ashworth 2011: 27–31).

When drafting the nomination for inscription on the UNESCO Representative List, we emphasized the common social and cultural roles of lacemaking, while the distinction of techniques and patterns was less important for UNESCO's safeguarding paradigm. Extensive coordination was required to ensure that the text of the nomination form and the film met the wishes of the individuals, associations and professional institutions that participated in the preparation, and at the same time corresponded to UNESCO's requirements. This actually confirms Hafstein's thesis that the safeguarding claims a unification of voices in heterogeneous communities and enforces a common "score to sing in harmony" (Hafstein 2014a: 51; 2018b: 119), as well as Foster's that UNESCO imposes an outside view on heritage bearers (Foster 2015: 89), or the dominance of global interpretation over local one (Tauschek 2012a: 13; 2015: 301). The fact is that it is easier to inscribe an element to the national register or prepare a nomination for inscription on the UNESCO list if communities have moderately unified views on their heritage, and if there is a connecting person, association, institution, some kind of uniting capacity.

57 Based on the experience with the rejected nomination *Traditional Production of the Kranjska Klobasa*.

The boundaries between heritage practitioners and other groups can also be more permeable, despite the practitioners' desire for greater transparency. Hélène Giguère identified "legitimate" and "illegitimate" heirs to the traditional Sicilian puppet theatre *Opera dei pupi* (proclaimed a masterpiece in 2001, Internet source 71), and "pure" and "impure" practices. The "legitimate" puppeteers of Palermo and Catania try to preserve and pass on their family traditions, and saw the UNESCO recognition as an opportunity to increase their authority and prestige, but they were rather disappointed by their negligible influence. They argued that amateur performers who provided abbreviated shows with pre-recorded dialogues for tourists were degrading the puppet tradition, but they could take no action against the amateurs or the impoverishment of the tradition. Moreover, Sicilian cultural policy did not financially support live puppet theatre performances and passing the art to family members and outside apprentices, but rather invested in an international puppetry museum with multimedia presentations and no live performances.<sup>58</sup> The democratization of cultural practices raises ethical questions about the regulation of intangible heritage and the status of the custodians and preservers of traditional heritage (Giguère 2014: 304–311). The UNESCO safeguarding paradigm does not protect against unfair competition or distorted performances.

Is it possible to observe tensions among the national, ethnical or religious identities in an individual heritage element? The *Convention* emphasizes human rights and requires mutual respect for communities, groups and individuals (UNESCO 2003: Articles 1 and 2.1), but it is very easy to conceal less desirable aspects in nominations for inscription on the UNESCO lists. The Evaluation Body is not authorized to visit local communities of the nominated elements (Kuutma 2019: 72), and thus gets to know the nominated heritage elements through representations in the submitted file, where they are often embellished or presented in a way that pleases UNESCO (Hamar and Voľanská 2015b: 40–41).

*Aalst Carnival* (2010, Internet source 72), with its characteristic satire and mockery of events, public figures, politics and religions, had long featured a group of Jews with crooked noses, and presented antisemitic stereotypes and Nazi aesthetics. Several individuals and the Belgian League Against Anti-Semitism have thus repeatedly complained about the spreading of negative stereotypes, and demanded that this group of characters be excluded (Roth

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58 Media representations are important for documenting theatre, music and dance performances, but they cannot replace the live transmission of the repertoire of these arts (van Zanten 2008: 1).

2019). However, their complaints were not successful, as the carnival organizers refused to do so, claiming that they were just having fun and did not wish to harm anyone. A journalist of Jewish origin, Rudi Roth, then compiled a report and sent it to UNESCO that also received many other petitions in 2013, 2018 and 2019. In March 2019, the UNESCO Secretariat, while monitoring the elements inscribed on the lists, examined the circumstances of this practice and the complaints. As the organizers refused to adapt their carnival, in December 2019 in Bogotá, Colombia, the Intergovernmental Committee adopted a decision to remove it from the Representative List (UNESCO 2019). The description of the element and the decision are still accessible (Internet source 72) and, as a warning to other similar cases, it was stated that the Intergovernmental Committee “condemns all forms of racism, antisemitism, islamophobia and xenophobia” (Internet source 73).

UNESCO situates universal human rights above the preservation of traditions and cultural relativism – the *Convention* emphasizes that it applies only to heritage that “is compatible with existing international human rights instruments” (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1). In its preamble, it cites the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* (UN 1948), *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (UN 1966a) and *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (UN 1966b). *Aalst Carnival* is an example of a distinctly dissonant heritage, where a large group of citizens makes fun of an ethnic and religious minority and relativizes the sensitive Nazi past. As stated by Barth, at the community level, collectivities are created and groups mobilized for diverse purposes, for entrepreneurship, leadership, rhetoric (and heritage events), on one side, and for stereotyping and discrimination, on the other (Barth 1994: 20–21). There is a thin line between having fun together and making fun of minorities.

An example of controversial heritage is found also in the Netherlands: an important character in traditional St Nicholas Celebrations, inscribed in the national register (*Sinterklaasfeest*, Internet source 74), is Black Pete (*Zwarte Piet*), performed by white actors with painted faces (van der Zeijden 2014; van de Port and Meyer 2018: 10). The character has split Dutch society and media. Members of the coloured diaspora from the former Dutch colonies of Suriname and the Antilles, and The National Platform for Dutch Slavery History have protested against being reminded annually of the times of slavery and servitude. They claim that Black Pete continues to reinforce negative stereotypes and racism in society, and therefore fight against his presence in St Nicholas Celebrations (van der Zeijden 2014: 350). St Nicholas societies and Black Petes Guilds (*Pietengilde*) ignore their claims and refer to the tradition,

which must remain “as it is” – if it was not sensitive to racial issues in the past, it should continue to be blind to them in the future (van der Zeijden 2014: 354). Dutch official safeguarding of St Nicholas Celebrations and its community means excluding some other communities of Dutch society (Ruggles and Silverman 2009; Smith 2012; Rodenberg and Wagenaar 2016: 718). However, the discussion on Black Pete is also an instrument to address white privilege, microaggressions and institutional racism (ibid.: 725). Marc Howard Ross claims rituals are constructed and can be altered to become more inclusive, but this involves changing the way groups see themselves and others (Ross 2007, 2009: 2), i.e. their self-identifications and their categorization of others. The important message here is that acknowledging the self-identification of another group does not mean giving up one’s own identity (Ross 2007: 123; Rodenberg and Wagenaar 2016: 719).

In recent decades, the tolerance for social exclusion and racism has decreased, while the practitioners of the traditions in question have distinctly conservative views (cf. Smith 2015: 460). If we look at Slovenian customs critically in light of these experiences, the Roma could demand that the characters of the “thief Gypsies” be eliminated from Slovenian Shrovetide customs.<sup>59</sup> In 2002, the Roma community did not agree that in the *Shrovetide Wedding to a Pine Tree* (*Borovo gostüvanje*) in Predanovci, Prekmurje, the carnival character of thief (*touvaj*, *tat*) was performed looking like a Roma person (Židov 2018b: 142). The *borovo gostüvanje* is a symbolic wedding of a bride to a pine tree that was in the past performed in villages where no weddings were taking place the previous year (Internet source 76). In contrast, however, Jelka Pšajd (2024: 39–43) stresses also the positive roles of Roma people in the *Shrovetide Wedding to a Pine Tree*: Roma ladies (*Ciganice*, *Romkinje*) have performed the roles of those who invite people to the Shrovetide wedding (*vabouke*) and those who tell fortunes or negotiate for child support for an illegitimate child, and there are also cases that Roma men have performed as musicians and the roles of chimney sweep (*rouraš*) and policeman (*policař*).<sup>60</sup> Where Roma are well integrated into the village community and act as partners in the organization of the Shrovetide event, they themselves choose the characters they want to perform (ibid.: 41). The boundary between the self-representation of the Roma and (negative) representations of thief characters looking like Roma

59 See, for example, the role of a character in the film *Škoromatija* (2016), and compare the carnival group The Gypsies of Dornava (*Dornavski cigani*, Internet source 75), composed of non-Roma people.

60 These are just some of the numerous and more or less permanent traditional Shrovetide figures of *borovo gostüvanje*.

persons and acted by non-Roma people crucially depends on the inclusion or exclusion of the Roma in the production of heritage (cf. Hall 1999).

Most societies have had their Others, to whom they have attributed negative qualities in order to make themselves look better,<sup>61</sup> and some people and communities still persist in these divisions. Heritage is a strong medium of cultural identifications (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004) that can unite and strengthen the village or town community, and at the same time otherness is a constitutive element of all identifications, so there is always a danger that Others are excluded and mocked (Hall 1996: 4; Graham and Howard 2008: 5; Ashworth 2011: 27–31). Both self-identifications and categorizations by others are deeply connected to emotions. The dissonances of heritage and unequal power relations are pointed out by groups, minorities and Indigenous peoples who are stereotyped and placed in subordinate positions. Researchers can raise awareness of social inequalities, biases, stereotypes and racism, so that they can be discussed and possibly overcome. UNESCO also recommends countering racism, exclusion and discrimination through education (UNESCO 2024b; Wulf 2025: 6).

Heritage dissonances and social exclusions are particularly common in societies with complex forms of cultural diversity. Heritage can be used as a means to resist hegemonic discourses and to celebrate plurality in multicultural societies (Graham and Howard 2008: 3). In the new self-identification of marginalized, minority and Indigenous groups, intangible cultural heritage is both a vital source of their identities and a medium for their expression (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 54). However, there is also the question of whether the powerful majority will support or hinder their heritagization and identification processes – it is not a good sign that Australia, Canada, the United States, New Zealand, Israel and the Russian Federation, all with complex ethnic structures, are not among the States Parties to the *Convention* (Internet source 24).

Stuart Hall (1999) raised crucial questions in this context: “Who should control the power to represent? Who has the authority to re-present the culture of others?” He advocated that (minority) communities become aware of the symbolic power involved in any representation of their heritage, as it is related to their identities, and therefore they should re-appropriate the control over

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61 Psychoanalysis derives the emergence of stereotypes from the child’s separation from the mother in the Oedipal developmental phase, which leads to the splitting of the subject in adulthood (Lacan 1998). The division into good and bad is resolved in two ways: either by internalizing dichotomies, or by projecting all negative feelings and traits outward onto others (Hall 1997b: 237–238).



the writing of their stories (Hall 1999; cf. Smith 2012: 534; Ashley and Stone 2023). If heritage resources are to be sustained in the future, it is essential to respect community practices, values and traditional management systems, as well as the identification of the practitioners, and to take these contents and actors into account in all representations, policy documents and management plans (Smith and Akagawa 2009: xiii).

## Heritage as Assemblage, Communities of Practice and Epistemic Community

Rodney Harrison considered heritage as an assemblage of humans and non-humans (plants, animals, the environment, the material world, artefacts). The theory of the assemblage was developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980) to highlight the social complexity of diverse collectivities, as the assemblage is fluid, entities are interchangeable, and the agency is distributed among actors and actants, with the former regulating the latter (Latour 2005). The assemblage is more than just the sum of its parts, and the theory of the assemblage transcends the familiar modernist dualisms of nature – culture, human – nonhuman, social – natural (Latour 1993: 11; Harrison 2013: 33–35; Tauschek 2015: 293, 303).

The UNESCO safeguarding paradigm of intangible cultural heritage is an assemblage of people (heritage practitioners, local actors, non-governmental organizations, experts, government officials, members of the Evaluation Body and officials in the UNESCO Secretariat), phenomena and things (heritage practices and sites, artefacts, museums, interpretive apparatuses, discourses, legal frameworks, inventories and lists, nomination files, texts, photographs, films, websites, etc.). Many actors and actants operate at a distance: UNESCO, for example, with its heritage policies, bureaucratic processes and heritage lists; and the professionals and practitioners with their articles, books, films and websites, which in turn influence heritage management (Harrison 2013: 33–35). The concept of the assemblage helps to understand how heritage operates at the level of material and social relations, with an emphasis on relations of knowledge and power (*ibid.*: 35; Tauschek 2015: 293, 303).

Here, I will theoretically discuss assemblages of intangible cultural heritage with the characteristics and contrasts of two communities of different modalities, as defined by the social sciences and humanities: in the local environment, these are communities of practice, while UNESCO created a strong epistemic community that unites officials and social scientists. The activities of both



communities must be linked in joint efforts for the successful safeguarding of heritage according to the UNESCO paradigm.

### *Communities of Practice*

The term community of practice<sup>62</sup> was coined by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, who first used it in their book on situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation (1991).<sup>63</sup>

A community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage. Thus, participation in the cultural practice in which any knowledge exists is an epistemological principle of learning. The social structure of this practice, its power relations, and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning. (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98)

It is important that a community of practice is a voluntary group of people who develop and transmit embodied and tacit knowledge in everyday activities, while also creating feelings of belonging and identification (Ličen 2012: 12–13). Competences are developed in the community as a practical sense and habitus, by which a community of practice is distinguished from other such communities (ibid.: 20). This is a scientific concept, as groups of people do not define themselves in this way. Some groups have not even become aware of what connects them or what separates them from other communities of practice, and they often have no name, as in traditional culture there was no need for it (Kurin 2004: 72).

Cristina Grasseni discovered that different communities of practice can coexist in the same space and they often become aware of the differences between their experiences, views and values due to changed circumstances or specific demands. In the Taleggio Valley, the local community was dissatisfied with

62 Some authors use a similar phrase ‘practising community’ to denote “a community that has created and/or practised an intangible cultural form” (Deacon et al. 2004: 13; cf. Hafstein 2018a: 134).

63 Legitimate peripheral participation means that the newcomers first learn simple tasks, and eventually more complex ones, while they also move from peripheral to central roles. Together with new skills and discourse, they learn about shared meanings, values, identities and power structures (Lave and Wenger 1991: 122).

a tourist map issued by the provincial administration, so they decided that they themselves would prepare a new community map of their valley. To this end, it was walked and photographed by a cattle breeder, a botanist, a hunter, a mountaineer, a marathon runner and an anthropologist. Each of them contributed their embodied knowledge and skilled visions, and each saw and presented the valley differently. Their descriptions of the routes corresponded to their visual and bodily experiences of the territory and to their timescapes – where and when in the day or year they moved through the valley or in the mountains. The new map was thus the result of negotiations between different perceptions of the shared valley. Grasseni concluded that different ways of perceiving were related to the phenomenology of the skills and practices of six people from different communities of practice, with herself being one of them (Grasseni 2007a: 204; 2008: 159). Regarding identity processes, the local community first established a boundary between insiders and outsiders, and then harmonized the views of coexisting communities of practice in the valley, with the anthropologist not regarded as an outsider in this process.

Similarly, just as those six people were not aware that they belonged to different communities of practice until they participated in the community map project, it is not necessary for members of a community of practice to be conscious of their belonging to it. When they want to make their cultural practice official heritage in the register, this can be a trigger to define not just the heritage element, but also the knowers – practitioners and the community of practice. Some heritage elements are practised by so large communities that their bearers do not know each other, so they also make imagined communities (Anderson 1983; Adell et al. 2015a). In the Slovenian Register, widely spread communities are characteristic, among others, of the elements *Prekmurje Dialect* (*Prekmurščina*, Internet source 77), *Use of House Names* (*Raba hišnih imen*, Internet source 78) and *Baking Potica* (*Peka potic*, Internet source 79), for which bearers are not evidenced. There are elements of intangible heritage that are practised in several countries, which is also demonstrated on UNESCO lists. As of December 2024, one eighth (97 out of 788) of the inscriptions link communities of practice in two or more States Parties (Internet source 25).

In an analysis of the significance of communities of practice in adult learning in Slovenian heritage societies, it is emphasized that experiencing a sense of belonging and group identification in communities of practice is characterized by common practices, non-hierarchical relationships and dialogical learning *in situ* (Ličen, Findeisen and Fakin Bajec 2017: 26). “The key point here is that community members are not only bearers of cultural and heritage practices, but also transmitters of knowledge to younger generations” (Fakin Bajec 2020a: 94).

In a book on imagined communities and communities of practice, the latter concept was applied not just for grassroot communities, but also for working groups in the official heritagization:

Actors interested in garnering a heritage title may cooperate with experts and politicians to generate a nomination dossier; decision making bodies from the regional to the national and international level bring together individuals of diverse persuasion, yet they form a community of practice in their administrative and negotiation work. (Adell et al. 2015a: 7–8)

Against this, I argue that the nomination file is not prepared by a spontaneous, non-hierarchical and stable community, but rather by a project-based working group with the goal of inscribing a heritage element on the chosen UNESCO list. This is not situated learning, where a group develops a sense of belonging, but rather the action learning of a formal group with goal-oriented activities (Ličen 2012: 20–21). Their knowledge is not tacit and embodied, it is predominantly cognitive and to some extent political, defined by the apparatus of the *Convention*, *Operational Directives*, nomination forms, instructions and protocols. The knowledge is at some stage legitimized inside the group (in the decision that the file is ready to be sent to Paris), but the final arbiter is an outsider – 20 months later<sup>64</sup> UNESCO bodies and the Intergovernmental Committee decide if the nomination meets the criteria and the element can be inscribed on the desired list. Experience shows that working groups mostly cease to function after the nomination is sent to the UNESCO headquarters, and the responsible bodies in the States Parties may soon form a new working group with new heritage actors who want to prepare the nomination of their element.

### *UNESCO Epistemic Community*

Peter M. Haas defined the concept of an “epistemic community” as an international network of experts who help policymakers understand problems, find various solutions, and assess the anticipated policy outcomes (Haas 1992).

64 According to the UNESCO Timetable, March 31 is the deadline by which nominations must be received by the Secretariat; by June 30, the Secretariat process the files; between December and May of the following year, the Evaluation Body evaluates them and transmits them to the Secretariat; then States Parties respond to the requests of the Evaluation Body, through the Secretariat; and in late November or early December, the nominations are confirmed or rejected at the session of the Intergovernmental Committee (UNESCO 2022: 5).

‘Epistemic communities’ is a concept developed by ‘soft’ constructivist scholars of international relations concerned with agency to understand the actors associated with the formulation of ideas, and the circumstances, resources and mechanisms by which new ideas or policy doctrines get developed and are introduced to the political process. (Haas 2001: 11578)

Mai’a K. Davis Cross stressed that epistemic communities are not only composed of scientists, but also politicians.

In an increasingly globalising world, transnational actors are becoming progressively more numerous and influential [...] and a better understanding of how they form and operate can give us a clear demonstration of how knowledge translates into power. (Cross 2013: 137)

The concept was first applied to interpret the UNESCO paradigm for the safeguarding of intangible heritage by Marc Jacobs (2017). He argued that to identify a UNESCO epistemic community, one only needs to

trace the recurrent names in the lists of participants in the Intergovernmental expert meetings, the delegations, observers and members of the Secretariat in the General Assemblies and Intergovernmental Committee meetings, and facilitators’ roster of the capacity building programme.<sup>65</sup> (Jacobs 2017: 186)

Members of UNESCO bodies and representatives of the States Parties often combine official and academic functions (e.g. Wim van Zanten, Cécile Duvelle, Janet Blake, Valdimar Hafstein, Kristin Kuutma, Chiara Bortolotto, etc.). The current Secretary-General of the *Convention*, Fumiko Ohinata, is also an archaeologist and anthropologist by education. At the same time, social and human science profiles in the UNESCO paradigm are subject to UNESCO’s policy. Applied anthropologists see UNESCO safeguarding as an opportunity to confirm their professional identity, knowledge and participatory approaches, which the administrative-political hierarchy finally sees as useful, while the UNESCO principle of self-determination of heritage by bearers reduces the importance of their research, and due to the principle of anonymity of texts in the safeguarding paradigm, their work remains invisible. Some resort to identification with the hierarchy of power of this paradigm, some publish articles close to heritage studies, while others opt for critical research

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65 See the Global Network of Facilitators (Internet source 80).

into the paradigm, which UNESCO does not value highly (Bortolotto 2015: 259–265).

The concept of a “cultural field” can also be useful for considering the functioning of the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm, i.e. a specialized area of practice with a set of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions and categories that constitute an objective hierarchy and generate its own discourses and activities (Bourdieu in Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002: 21–22). The cultural field develops its own logic, criteria of evaluation and position of power to assign values to economic, cultural, social (networks, associations) and symbolic (social status) capital. Cultural capital exists in three forms: in an embodied state as long-term dispositions of the mind and body (*habitus*, skills, practices); in an objectified state as cultural goods (objects, paintings, books, films, exhibitions, websites); and in an institutionalized state (Bourdieu 2005: 95). UNESCO transforms community practices, i.e. cultural capital in its embodied state, through “social alchemy” into official intangible cultural heritage, which is institutionalized cultural capital. Under certain conditions, it can be converted into social, symbolic and economic capital, and possibly further into financial capital (*ibid.*: 100, 102). The more social alchemy UNESCO performs, the greater its cultural, social and symbolic capitals become.

Official intangible heritage is not directly convertible into economic and financial capital, but there are certain financial incentives. In Slovenia, the Ministry of Culture has been funding cultural projects in the field of intangible cultural heritage through annual public calls since 2021. These invest in the authorized or official intangible heritage and its safeguarding, increasing its visibility and public accessibility, and promote the dissemination of knowledge in various media: by preparing workshops and training courses, issuing publications, releasing films, preparing exhibitions and setting up websites.

## The Mediatization of Intangible Cultural Heritage: Texts, Photographs, and Films

When UNESCO drafted the *Convention*, it listed, immediately after identification, “documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission” as “measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage” (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.3). Many of these processes involve the use of representations in different media. The *Convention* also recommended “establishing documentation institutions for the intangible cultural heritage and facilitating access to them” (*ibid.*: Article 13d).

UNESCO stipulated that heritage elements must be presented in the text of the nomination form and media representations,<sup>66</sup> which had been tested in three cycles of the *Proclamation of Masterpieces*. Before the first *Proclamation*, UNESCO stated:

Each submission of candidature will include the necessary documentation for its evaluation, including maps and photographs, slides, audio and audiovisual recordings and any other useful material, together with a sound analysis of the reference works accompanied by a comprehensive bibliography. (UNESCO 2000: point 8)

The call for the second *Proclamation of Masterpieces* also required a professional-quality video, no longer than 10 minutes, presenting the most significant aspects of the nominated heritage, to be shown to the members of the international jury (UNESCO 2001: point 14c). Interestingly, in the instructions for nominations to the Representative and Urgent Lists for year 2009, UNESCO still listed five media for documentation: photographs (max. 30), video (max. 60 minutes), sound recording (max. 60 minutes), maps (max. three) and books (max. three).<sup>67</sup> The same applied for the next two years, but for 2012 the nomination forms and instructions only listed photographs<sup>68</sup> and a video film.<sup>69</sup>

The latter was a novelty in relation to the World Heritage List and can be understood as a substitute for *in situ* visits by UNESCO evaluators. As a result, oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, traditional craftsmanship and knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe are also presented in film. Thus, filmic documentation and representations of cultural practices are an integral part of the safeguarding intangible heritage (Erlewein 2015: 26), and they are also very important for communicating knowledge about heritage to the public. As a matter of fact, in this respect UNESCO reflects the general trend of media saturation of contemporary world and also accelerates it. Most people do not encounter

66 This strategy may have been influenced by the UNESCO *Memory of the World* programme (Internet source 81). Since 1992, it has protected the documentary (written, printed, visual) heritage from oblivion by preserving it and making it accessible, including through digitization (Prodan 2013; cf. Internet source 82).

67 See the nomination form 'Representative List ICH-02-2009-EN' among the archived forms (Internet source 83).

68 The role of photographs is dealt with by Miglena Ivanova (2018) and Anja Jerin (2012).

69 See the form with instructions for preparing a nomination for the 2012 round 'Representative List ICH-02-2012-instructions-EN' (Internet source 83).



intangible heritage in its original performances by local communities, but rather as mediatized virtual heritage (Lipp 2013: 138):

Relatively few people are able to witness intangible heritage practices in real time because these practices are often carried out only during special times of the year and/or in geographically remote areas. Thus for most people it is the audiovisual representation that shapes their understanding of these practices and has an impact on global cultural memory. (Lipp 2013: 142)

Living forms of heritage are therefore still reserved primarily for heritage bearers, local communities, field researchers and, depending on the type of heritage and community interests, for a smaller or larger circle of visitors. Therefore, media representations of intangible heritage can become significantly more important than actual phenomena, practices, events and persons. However, images are “murderers of the real, murderers of their own model” (Baudrillard 1994: 5), and our virtual worlds devour the real (*ibid.*: 81). Jean Baudrillard used the concept of simulacrum to describe the postmodern acceptance of simulations of reality (hyperreality) that often appear to individuals and society as more real than reality, which leads to the loss of the sense of reality (*ibid.*: 144). Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995: 375–378) noticed early on a great emphasis on the virtuality of heritage, as if it were a matter of collective hallucinations and simulations offering virtualities in the absence of actualities (*cf.* Muršič 2005: 37).

The characteristic of any representations in any media and of meaningful exchanges are explicated in Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model of communication. It is based on the premises that people constantly produce and exchange meanings in live personal communication and also via representations in various media that circulate within a culture and also between cultures. Meanings are not inherited in things and events in the external world, but are created by people through signifying practices. These denote the formation of concepts, ideas and emotions in symbolic forms that can be communicated to other people using common “cultural codes” – members of the same culture or group share ideas, concepts and images which allow them to interpret the world in similar ways. Participants in any meaningful exchange use common linguistic codes as a representational system, and language is here understood very broadly: it can be aural (talking, music), visual (writing, painting, photography, film, fashion, exhibition) or material (artefacts, monuments, cultural landscapes). Language is not “owned” by the sender nor by the receiver of meanings, but it represents a shared cultural space of meaning production

between the two of them. In practices of representation, the flow of meanings is successful when meanings are encoded by the sender and decoded by the receiver. The speaker and the listener, the writer and the reader, the filmmaker and the viewer are active participants in processes of representation that may or may not be two-way, interactive and dialogic. It is more productive to think about meaning in terms of an effective exchange that enables cultural circuit, rather than in terms of “truth” or “accuracy” (Hall 1997a: 2–11).

Societies and domains tend to imprint their dominant cultural orders on their members with preferred meanings that are encrypted into messages. Authors encode messages in such a way that on the other side of a communication process they would be decoded as close to “preferred reading” as possible. However, the receivers decode the messages diversely due to their subjective capacities – they are embedded in different sociocultural positions, such as gender, class, and “race”, and they embody various experiences and ideologies (Hall 1980: 123–124). Stuart Hall defined three hypothetical positions and ways of reading televisual messages which can be applied to communication processes in any medium: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional. In the dominant-hegemonic position, the viewers accept the hegemonic code and cooperate with the dominant discourse. Viewers who do not belong to the hegemonic ideology question the dominant code and meanings. In a negotiated position, they understand the hegemonic code and selectively accept or reject meanings according to their specific social experiences and identities, while in an oppositional one, they fully reject the hegemonic meanings and assert an alternative frame of reference and understanding (Hall 1980: 125–127).

“Heritage is globally and locally mediated through the signifying practices of film, video and television, as well as through the Internet” (Erlewein 2014: 3). The question thus arises, what is characteristic of the signifying practices of texts and films on the UNESCO website that avail cultural circuit of intangible heritage? The texts in the UNESCO nomination forms are highly codified, as the drafting group need to present the element and demonstrate that it meets the criteria for inscription on the selected list (UNESCO 2008/2024: 6–7). Their authors encode them so that the evaluators will decode the “preferred reading” of their argumentation: that the element deserves to be officially recognized. However, not all nominations are confirmed for inscription. To give an example, in 2018 the evaluators gave assessments on 49 nominations, and at the Intergovernmental Committee session, 30 elements were confirmed to be inscribed on the Representative List, seven on the Urgent List and one in the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices (together 38 or 78%). The rest were not inscribed, either not meeting the criteria at all, or the files were

referred to the submitting states to be supplemented and resubmitted in the following years (UNESCO 2018b).

As a matter of fact, the texts in nomination forms address the UNESCO bodies well, while they are not of much interest to the general public. In contrast, the films are watched by numerous online viewers (UNESCO 2015: point 120), and in general they mostly carry a positive message of the nominated element. Regarding their signifying practices, there are two thought-provoking cases reported, one on influencing how the film production was brought closer to the dominant encoding, and the other one on decoding the film in an oppositional manner, even though the “preferred reading” was accepted by UNESCO. The question of female participation was illuminated in both cases.

According to Marcus Tauschek, during the production of a film about the Belgian *Carnival of Binche* (Internet source 84), the national cultural policy required the filmmakers to edit out a statement by a male carnival participant that women had no role in it. Although the characters in traditional costumes were all male, his statement could have compromised the inscription of the element, as was suggested by the head of UNESCO’s intangible heritage section who visited the carnival in 2003. The global interpretation, channelled through national officials, thus prevailed over the local one, revealing the unequal power relations between the various actors of the safeguarding paradigm (Tauschek 2012a: 8, 13; 2015: 300–301). Sheenagh Pietrobruno pointed out that the Turkish film *Mevlevi Sema Ceremony* (Internet source 85) did not comply with the definition of intangible heritage as living heritage that was subject to change and promoted cultural diversity (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1). It shows male whirling dervishes and a male audience, thus excluding other communities and women’s groups, while filmed ceremonies with female performers and spectatorship can be seen on YouTube (Pietrobruno 2013: 1259–1266, 2014, 2016). Again, those were initial experiences in time of proclaiming masterpieces (2001–2005), and later UNESCO criticized the invisibility of women in heritage events and in the production of nomination files, encouraging the participation and visibility of women, children and youth (UNESCO 2015a: point 33; cf. Blake 2018; Janse 2023).

The UNESCO website, as an example of mass media, provides the cultural circuit on the elements inscribed on the UNESCO lists by publishing all components of the nomination file: a short description of the element, photographs, film, nomination form and consents from communities, groups and individuals. UNESCO also enables access to the Intergovernmental Committee’s decision, thesaurus concepts, sustainable development goals and

intangible heritage domains. This ensures the transparency of processes, while at the same time cross-referencing (Hartley 2004: 126) also serves as an additional promotion of UNESCO and its safeguarding paradigm.

Bruno Latour wrote that scientists mastered the world when it was captured in a two-dimensional inscription, and therefore every index card, grid, graph and map was only a theory. These visual inscriptions translate the three-dimensional world into two-dimensional representations that require a unification of the view, but a map is not yet a territory (Latour 1995: 24, 29, 38). Similarly, UNESCO lists are not yet heritage, and moreover – regardless of previous contexts – everything on the list is placed in relation to other elements of the collection enlisted (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 57; 2006: 179; Hafstein 2009: 93). The codes and protocols of researchers always do harm to local contexts, because local people are returned their knowledge together with the external conventions and standards that have been imposed (Goodwin 1994: 628; cf. Polanyi 1962: 67). For this reason, Cristina Grasseni (2011: 41) calls on anthropologists to investigate the codes, protocols, conventions and standards that are embedded in their routines and representations for the transmission of knowledge. Similarly, it is necessary to study the codes, standards and routines embedded in the UNESCO paradigm, recommended representations in three official media, and also in the structure of the website.

UNESCO determines the sequencing of elements by year and list, as well as the levels and structure of data in the presentation of each element on its website, while “the comment function has been disabled by UNESCO’s External Relations and Information Division” to “avoid managing the political aspects of posted text comments” (Pietrobruno 2014: 753). This represents the centralized control over the database, its presentation and the mode of access. An online archive is connected to the traditional one by authorized top-down control (Pietrobruno 2017: 15–17). As claimed by Jacques Derrida, the archive combines the commencement (the originary), and the commandment (the authority) that exercises power and consolidates the social order (Derrida 1995: 9–10).

It is widely accepted that the intensive representation of society through media, characteristic of the postmodern era, changes the processes of knowledge formation and transmission. When the Internet became accessible to everyone, individuals, groups and institutions could produce and publish their own representations in their chosen media, and in this sense the media space was democratized (Erlewein 2015: 33–34; Valentinčič Furlan 2015b: 102). Despite the initial optimism, the so-called digital divide has to be acknowledged,

too – the growing differences in accessibility to photographs and films in different cultural environments or between various social groups (Van Deursen and van Dijk 2014: 1; Ivanova 2018: 98). Besides, digital media are not *per se* participatory and democratic, as there are “power imbalances entailed in any act of representation” (Grasseni and Walter 2014: 2).

The introduction of new media influences the shaping of cultural production, which in turn influences the choice of media; the constant dialogue of content and modes of presentation in different media was summarized by Marshall McLuhan (1964: 1) in the simple formula “the medium is the message”. The contributions to the *Routledge International Handbook of Ethnographic Film and Video* (Vannini 2020) reveal that authors choose media and technologies according to their needs and topics, while at the same time the media, with their affordances and limitations, to some extent determine their approaches and methods. Among all the authors, only Mark Westmoreland (2020: 260–261) reports how he deliberately bypassed the manufacturer pre-sets of the 360-degree camera and editing programs he used in order to bring the media representations closer to the ethics of visual anthropology, and thus to its purpose of understanding and presenting the lives and views of Others.

Thorolf Lipp claims that media and technologies are extensions of the body, through which stories, knowledge and skills are documented and stored independently from the human body as data on storage carriers, which may later regain the status of personal knowledge through the re-embodiment by reading, watching and listening. It is difficult to mediatize implicit knowledge and embodied skills in such a way that they could be re-embodied flawlessly. Moreover, media representations of embodied knowledge in texts or films can even be detrimental to the collective memory of a community, because they are always constructed with a closed structure, while cultural processes and human interactions remain dynamically open-ended (Lipp 2013: 140). The new media environment could mean that apprentices no longer focus on observing, imitating, repeating, memorizing, and physically performing embodied skills, but prefer to discuss data in digital media, which would not allow the embodiment of practices (ibid.: 141).

However, the ability of film to show what cannot be expressed in words is very important for the mediatization of cultural practices, as it contradicts the famous claim “*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*” (Wittgenstein 1922: 84, Tractatus 5.6; italics in the original). The film can be used to document tacit and embodied knowledge transmitted in the shared activities

in life (MacDougall 1998: 264, 273; 2006: 5). Even though practitioners cannot describe the sequence of procedures, we can film the tasks they perform, be that practices that they have learned by imitating family members and people in their community, or handicraft skills that apprentices have acquired by observing and following their masters. Moreover, film can also document and transmit the worldviews of film subjects, thus enabling viewers to understand their cognitive, moral and aesthetic stances (Grasseni 2009: 75).

If any documentation means freezing a certain moment or procedure in time and space in order to be recorded in a chosen medium and saved on a suitable carrier (stone, paper, film, tapes, DVD disc, USB stick or more recently “in the cloud”) (Lipp 2013: 137, 140), then practices need to be documented regularly (Engelbrecht 2015: 48). In this regard, it is good to distinguish between the visual documentation of heritage, which is extensive and precise, intended primarily for insiders and researchers, and ethnographic films and documentaries which address both insiders and outsiders (Husmann and Postma 2008: 12–13), if bearers want to convey their heritage and views to a wider audience. It is crucial that heritage bearers participate constructively in the creation of representations in various media (ibid.: 13), otherwise filmmakers’ interpretations may prevail with (sub)conscious ideological, aesthetic, moral or commercial interests (Križnar 1996: 119).

### *Examples of Documenting and Representing Heritage of Indigenous Peoples*

Laura R. Graham (2009) critically reflected the dimensions of power and control in documenting and disseminating the intangible heritage of Indigenous peoples, as well as who the performances and the documentation are made accessible to. The Yuchi people (Oklahoma, USA) were highly sceptical of the linguistic documentation of their language as a means of revitalizing it, while the Xavante Etenhiritipa people of South America demonstrated great enthusiasm for the filming of their rituals as a support for their preservation and a way of representation to themselves and the outside public. None of the cultural practices described were officially listed as intangible heritage by UNESCO, but were retrospectively denoted as intangible heritage by Graham.

The representatives of the Yuchi people and the director of the Yuchi Language Project, the anthropologist Richard Grounds, wanted to use linguistic documentation from the turn of the millennium as an aid to pass their language to young people (Grounds 2007). When they visited the archives of



the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, they were only able to partially photograph the card records of words, morphemes, and sentences, due to time and financial constraints, and they were unable to obtain audio recordings, as they had not yet been digitized at the time. Back home, however, they found that such documentation was not useful for their efforts, and that the language was best transmitted through personal interactions between the elders and future Yuchi speakers (Grounds 2007; Graham 2009: 189–191).

The linguistic documentation was intended exclusively for scientific use (Internet source 86) – the linguists did not provide access to local communities (cf. Sherman 2008). This case perfectly illustrates the difference between the research models of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, which were aimed at creating documentation of disappearing traditions and languages, and the model of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, which seeks to preserve living traditions by supporting appropriate conditions for their cultural reproduction in communities. For the record, the Yuchi people succeeded in transmitting the language of the last speakers to the subsequent generations of children, demonstrating that live communication is the best way to preserve language vitality in a community. Although Graham noted that the Yuchi did not value technological intervention at that time, it is clear that today they also support language viability with videos and a website (Internet source 87), but now they themselves control the production of knowledge in these media.

Laura Graham was personally involved in the process of documenting and presenting the intangible culture of the Brazilian Xavante Etenhiritipa community, from their complete media dependence on outsiders to their relative independence (Graham 2009: 186–187). When she first arrived in this community in 1982, elder Warodi saw an opportunity to present their culture through her work to a wider audience to whom they had no access. Warodi wanted to tell her the legend of the Star Woman, their creation myth, and, because she did not understand their language, he transformed the oral tradition into a live performance in which the entire community participated (ibid.: 192–193). Warodi was thus able to translate traditional oral knowledge into a representation that was more suitable for recording in new media, so that it would reach much wider social circles and, in the long term, future generations.

When Graham came to research the same community the second time, Warodi and Xavante people had already planned the new performance to be documented with a camera and tape recorder (Graham 2009: 193–194). In the 1990s, she introduced them to video equipment and linked them with the

non-governmental organization Video in the Villages (*Video nas Aldeias*). The community chose Caimi Waiasse as their filmmaker, which was the first step towards local control over the means and methods of documenting culture. His recordings of local events enabled shared viewings with conversations and socializing. At this stage, the media images were intended only for insiders, until Tutu Nunes from Video in the Villages encouraged Waiasse that his footage be edited into a film for public screenings, for Xavante and for an external audience. Nunes interviewed Caimi about his filming methods and topics, and his statements became the backbone of the film *One Must Be Curious* (*Tem Que Ser Curioso*, 1996). The film transformed Waiasse's emic footage into an objectified representation accessible to outsiders at ethnographic and Indigenous film festivals and in university lecture halls. Early Indigenous experiences with film were necessarily collaborative, involving much guidance from visual anthropologists or filmmakers (Graham 2009: 194–195).

Ten years later, Waiasse and Jorge Protodi, a filmmaker of the non-governmental organization Our People (*Nosso Tribu*), made the film *Darini: Spiritual Initiation of Xavante Children* (*Darini: Iniciação Espiritual das Crianças Xavante*, 2005). The filming of the rite of passage, which is performed approximately every 15 years, was encouraged by the elders, who knew that they would probably not be alive for the next Darini, and thus the film would teach future generations how to perform the ritual. Graham observed a change in the filming of the ritual: while the Xavante people had previously avoided eye contact with the camera and kept their focus on the event, in that filming the elders and some young men decided to speak directly to the camera. In this way they broke the frame of the ritual and stepped into the frame of the film to address the future viewers with a metanarrative that would help them to make sense of the filmed event (Graham 2009: 196).<sup>70</sup>

Laura Graham introduced technologies and media to the Xavantes, which was an ethical exchange: she received data for her research from them, and they learned about media from her. I have noticed, in regard to Goodwin's (1994) cautiousness towards scientific protocols, that the Xavante people first learned how to behave when filming using the observational method (the filmmaker does not interfere in the action or direct it, and the film subjects behave as if there were no camera, especially they do not look towards it), and then with participative filmmaking they learned how to intervene interactively during filming of the ritual, thus addressing the future audience with their interpretations

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70 Will the film now cause that the participants of the next Darini will take the frame of film into the frame of ritual providing their reflexive comments?

of the event. Taking charge of media production provides means for empowerment of Indigenous people and for revitalization of their cultural practices, but it can also create new forms of dependency, as film production may be characterized by differences in knowledge, skill and access to resources, technologies and representational venues (Graham 2009: 196; cf. Ruby 1991: 56). However, the aim should be media sovereignty of Indigenous peoples, with their capacity to control their own images and words in independent film, radio and TV production, distribution and archiving (Ginsburg 2016).

### *The Methods and Ethics of Visual Ethnography in Filming Intangible Heritage*

As films on intangible heritage can be inspired by vast experience of visual ethnography with regard to filming people and their cultural practices, and the related discussions can rely on theory and concepts from visual anthropology, I briefly summarize the history of visual anthropology and the methods of visual ethnography.

The origins of ethnographic film date back to 1895, but visual anthropology as a discipline is much younger. The term visual anthropology was coined by Margaret Mead, because her initial denotation of “nonverbal” anthropology was not well received by her colleagues (Pink 2006: 131). In the 1930s, Mead and Gregory Bateson systematically used film and photography in their research in Bali and Papua New Guinea to present the “intangible aspects of culture” (Bateson 1942: xi) through a combination of texts and visual records. They followed the salvage paradigm and positivist models of film, while in the 1960s and 1970s dialogic, participatory, and reflexive methods were introduced (Rouch 1975; MacDougall 1975). Respect and ethics are of paramount importance in observational and participatory film, and thus anthropologists should only film people and communities for whom they feel empathy (Young 1975: 76–77). With the invention of a camera that synchronously recorded sound, an omniscient commentary or “voice of God” was no longer appreciated in ethnographic film. Visual anthropologists stopped talking about or instead of Others, but rather “gave” them a voice and enabled them to express their own views (Ruby 1991) – this was the reinvention of visual ethnography (Ginsburg 1995: 261).

The book *Principles of Visual Anthropology* (Hockings 1975) established visual anthropology as a distinct field of anthropology with its own methodology and epistemology. When filmmakers abandoned their authoritative position, they created a space for the construction of new knowledge in the encounters

with the community under study (MacDougall 1975: 119), and therefore it is also necessary to illuminate the research contexts (Banks 2001: 45). At the third corner of the triangle of knowledge construction is the film viewer, and the plurality of perspectives, participatory approaches and open structure of an ethnographic film (with the absence of commentary) enable more complex forms of film communication (MacDougall 1978: 422; 1998: 193; 2019: 153). In the late 1990s, visual anthropologists no longer accepted the primacy of texts and their principles of knowledge production (MacDougall 1998: 254–274; Taylor 1996: 86), and began to warn against the fear of images, or “iconophobia” (Taylor 1996: 67; Carta 2015: 31).

There is no firm definition of ethnographic film, as the term covers “extremely diverse efforts in the cinema and social sciences” (MacDougall 1978: 405), so I list some practical, methodological and ethical characteristics that can also be valuable in filmmaking about intangible cultural heritage. First, there is no screenplay written in advance, as the ethnographic method is based on exchanges with the film subjects while filming. An ethical approach requires a respectful attitude towards the community under study, and since it is particularly important that the film does no harm to them, they are the first audience (Heider 2006: 119; Križnar 1996: 101–102; van Zanten 2012: 92; Wolfram 2020: 200–201) and their feedback is taken into account. In participatory and collaborative film productions (Ruby 1991: 56), film subjects are actively involved in all phases of filmmaking (MacDougall 1998: 91, 150–164). Another ethical and methodological imperative is that the statements of the film subjects are heard in their languages, and the translations of these are given in subtitles (MacDougall 1998: 165–177; Henley 2021; cf. UNESCO 2015: point 118). Visual anthropologists very often work as researchers and filmmakers in one person (Mead 1975: 7; Rouch 1975: 87–88, 91; in practice David MacDougall, Ana Grimshaw and Slovenian visual anthropologists) to minimize the influences of filming on the cultural practices under study. On the scale between professionalism and artistic interventions, ethnographic film favours the former, and therefore it is intentionally ascetic, because every added layer, such as music, commentary or intense aestheticization, distances the viewers from the authentic<sup>71</sup> situation in the field (Husmann and Postma 2008: 13).

Another important fact for the topic under discussion is that European visual anthropologists, led by Jean Rouch, wanted to institutionalize ethnographic

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71 In visual ethnography, the adjective authentic denotes situations that are not staged for filming nor reconstructing long gone ways of living. Any re-enactments that are presented are supposed to be disclosed in the film (Heider 2006: 11–12, 22–23; Henley 2020: 113–130).

film after World War II, and therefore, under the auspices of UNESCO, they founded first the French and then the International Committee of Ethnographic Film (Comité international du film ethnographique, Internet source 88). Although UNESCO, after two decades of intensive cooperation (1952–1972), stopped supporting the Committee’s efforts to establish institutions for ethnographic film production, film archives and educational programmes (de Heusch 1962, 1988, 2007), the Committee did in fact connect visual anthropologists around the world and helped to institutionalize visual anthropology (more in Valentinčič Furlan 2024: 89–98).

Unfortunately, when UNESCO institutionalized the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in the twenty-first century, its associates did not invite visual anthropologists to form basic guidelines for the filmmaking, and the result is that the films on the UNESCO website largely reproduce outdated logocentric top-down approaches. The subordination of the visual to words was characteristic of the second phase of silent film, when cameras did not record synchronous sound, while in the process of editing the film it was possible to add commentary and music. Towards the end of the twentieth century, however, visual anthropologists rejected the primacy of textual principles of knowledge construction in their films, and this can serve as a good example to improve new film productions on intangible cultural heritage.

### *Film as Support for the Safeguarding, Visibility and Transmission of Intangible Heritage*

A valuable overview of approaches to engage (young) people with their cultural heritage through film productions was prepared by Metje Postma (2012), for a practical and theoretical training course on documenting and representing heritage through film.<sup>72</sup> She analytically distinguished three functions and aims of using film in intangible heritage projects – for the purpose of safeguarding, visibility and transmission – and for each of these she envisaged production strategies and film approaches adapted to the context and target groups (Postma 2012: 34–35).

The safeguarding and preservation of intangible heritage can be supported by “cultural records” – minimally organized documentation of cultural practices in their original social context, such as the material techniques of skills,

72 This was organized by the International Research Centre for the Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI) in Tokyo and Tsuruoka. Postma does not discuss the films that are part of nomination files that I deal with in the next section.

body techniques, rituals and social practices. Their narrative structure is usually determined by the chronology and choreography of the filmed events and processes. The filmmaker determines if actors or events should be central in filming embodied knowledge and oral history, or both. It is essential to build up mutual trust before filming and to negotiate the questions of ownership, consent to publication and eventual protection of secret knowledge in advance. The footage can be several hours long, and it is important that it is accessible to the related community (Postma 2012: 36–38).

To increase the visibility and recognition of heritage inside and outside the community, as an acknowledgement of local traditions, and to enhance a sense of pride, Postma recommends documentary genres with a narrative structure. A documentary is a feature-length audiovisual production with realistic depictions of the social world. Its production requires a good knowledge of the heritage and the community, and negotiation with all participants in often dissonant communities on how to depict traditions and whose skills to show (Postma 2012: 39–40). She distinguishes three approaches: expository film, participatory-observational film, and participatory video.<sup>73</sup>

Expository documentaries are mostly made for educational purposes and to inform viewers about a particular tradition, but do not allow them to “experience” the practice. Typical examples are programmes by TV channels like Discovery and National Geographic, in which extensive contextualization is provided by first- or third-person explanatory comments by anthropologists (Postma 2012: 39; cf. MacDougall 1998: 87). Participatory-observational film is the most widespread approach of ethnographic film, in which the researcher films social realities experientially, without directing them (Postma 2012: 39; cf. Crawford 1992: 75). The presence of the filmmaker in the film is often revealed, and dialogical exchanges with film subjects during filming are also possible, and thus the engagement of the viewer with film subjects and their life practices is stimulated. The training in Japan enabled the production of the latter genre, as local people were trained to document their cultural practices in participatory videos. Visual anthropologists, non-governmental organizations and local museums support the activities of community members with the necessary equipment, archiving the footage and documenting the project.

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73 At the conference *Participatory – What Does It Mean? Participatory Cinema – Participatory Video under Consideration* (Internet source 89) held in 2012 at the Göttingen International Ethnographic Film Festival, it was decided that participatory video should refer to film production in which the film subjects themselves manage the technique, otherwise it is a collaboration in the production of participatory film (Beate Engelbrecht; cf. Bayre, Harper, Afonso 2016: 8; Gruber 2016).



Participatory videos strengthen the control of local communities over the representations of their heritage (Postma 2012: 40; cf. White 2003; Gruber 2016).

Artistic, poetic and fiction films, in which aesthetic interpretations and imagination dominate, also contribute to increasing visibility. For the safeguarding and visibility of intangible heritage, insider perspectives are of the greatest value, as local artists can translate traditions into contemporary forms and negotiate local identities in new ways. For Indigenous and marginalized communities, “the decolonization of imagination may only be possible through reconnecting to traditional forms” (Postma 2012: 40). The established label for these products is Indigenous media (Ginsburg 1989, 1991, 1995; Turner 1991, 1992), and they are created as independent productions that should not be confused with participatory video, although sometimes the distinction between the two genres is not entirely clear. The feature film *Atanarjuat, the Fast Runner* (2001) was created in an Inuit community based on their myths and archival research, and the production process was a social and educational project, as numerous cultural practices that had disappeared were reconstructed for filming (Postma 2012: 41).

Regarding the third function of film – the transmission of intangible cultural heritage – Postma argued that

one of the main reasons of stagnation of cultural practices can be found in the gap in knowledge that occurs through processes of modernisation and globalisation of the youth, carried especially by institutional education and social media. (Postma 2012: 34)

The generation gap is often widened when teenagers start attending nationally homogenized schools, where local traditions and languages are discouraged, and as a result they may become ashamed of their local identities (ibid.: 40). To get them excited about heritage again they need to be addressed with media that are attractive enough for them, or even better, engaged in their production: in addition to documentaries, feature films, multipurpose and multimedia projects of negotiating identities, today’s social media and other applications can also be supportive, such as online interactive games, workshops and the possibilities of posting on the Internet, YouTube, Facebook, and so on. However, films cannot replace live interaction with skilled people (Postma 2012: 41; cf. van Zanten 2008: 1).

Finally, Postma stresses that it is also possible to reconstruct practices on film in cases where cultural practices are no longer performed, but either embodied knowledge or archival footage is still available (Postma 2012: 37). For example,

the series about the Netsilik Eskimos was based on a re-enactment of their culture before contact with white people (Balicki 1975; Internet source 90).

Towards the end of the twentieth and in the twenty-first centuries, reconstructed performances of past customs and farm chores for the purposes of making a film or a village festival also became widespread in Slovenia. To give an example from the Karst area, people from the village of Volčji Grad reconstructed farm life and work in the first half of the twentieth century for the production of the film re-enactment *Tku je blo na Volčjem Gradi* in 2005 (Fakin Bajec 2011: 57–60). The initiators claim that the reconstructions are primarily addressed to the younger generations, but often they are eager to nostalgically revive the past way of life and reactivate parts of their skills and habitus that have become dormant due to socio-economic changes. Some researchers define such films as a tool for preserving cultural heritage (Križnar 2018), others as folklorization (Fakin Bajec 2011: 283), and still others as “structural nostalgia”<sup>74</sup> (Herzfeld 2005: 147; Grasseni 2017: 20). Skilled practices and meaning-making in everyday life also fuel the identification and emplacement processes (Grasseni 2007b: 10). The initiators of the filming thus revive their skills and practices, but also strengthen their common belonging to their particular community and locality.

However, reconstruction and archive films are not desirable in the context of inscribing intangible heritage to state registers and on UNESCO lists, because the presentation of actual living heritage practices is emphasized.

## Films on Intangible Cultural Heritage on the UNESCO Lists

The most characteristic films within the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm of intangible heritage are the videos<sup>75</sup> in the nomination files, published on the UNESCO website after the elements are inscribed on the lists.<sup>76</sup> I argue that UNESCO made a good choice of film medium with regard to its potential,

74 “Structural nostalgia is the longing for a past characterized by mutual respect and reciprocity, or by other forms of harmony and balance, and is also structural in the sense that it remains as an institutionalized ache from generation to generation” (Herzfeld 2004: 227, note 12).

75 “Video” is used by UNESCO, while in Slovenia we find the term “film”, denoting a form of audiovisual representation, more appropriate, due to its research-documentary basis and fundamental function of transmitting knowledge about intangible heritage and its bearers to the evaluators and online viewers.

76 Some States Parties produce also films on elements in national registers, which are less burdened with codes, protocols and standards.

although in practice there are relatively few examples that make full use of it. Experiential films, participatory methods and collaborative productions are thus recommended in order to overcome the limitations of the prevalent illustrative film approaches.

### *The Guidelines for the Production of Films on Nominated Heritage Elements*

Today's UNESCO documents do not define the roles and target audiences of such films, whereas at the time of the *Proclamation of Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* (2001–2005) it was explicitly stated that videos were provided for the international jury (UNESCO 2001: points 14c and 19). It was at the request of its members that the UNESCO Secretariat asked the submitting states to send videos in April 2001. The jury then watched them together and also referred to the information in them when deciding whether the nominated elements were to be proclaimed heritage or not (Sicard 2018: 61). Thus in 2001, the members of the international jury were clearly aware of the power of films that provided insight into community activities in local environments. The joint viewing of films was a productive educational environment that enabled the evaluators to extract data from films of different genres.

In 2002, the UNESCO Secretariat prepared the first guidelines for the production of films, for the second *Proclamation of Masterpieces*. These defined the technical specifications of the film, advised against “videos for tourism promotion” and recommended a four-part script that 1. describes the subject of the candidature file and shows the cultural expression in its social or natural context; 2. explains the exceptional value of the cultural expression; 3. explains why it is in danger of extinction; and 4. presents the action plan for its safeguarding (UNESCO 2002: 2, underlined by N.V.F.). Language analysis shows that the authors overemphasized the descriptions of the heritage element and the adopted safeguarding measures. These guidelines paved the way for illustrative films (MacDougall 1978: 413), which rely on explanations in off-commentary. Even after two decades, some films still show a “tendency to repeat the text from the nomination form in the film” (Srećković 2018: 83). Linguified films can point to film illiteracy or even iconophobia – the fear of the power of images (Taylor 1996: 67, 86; Carta 2015: 31).

While films were of decisive importance to the jury during the *Proclamation of Masterpieces* and in the first cycles of nominations for inscription on the intangible heritage lists, they have gradually become relatively marginal to

evaluators compared to the texts of the nominations (Sicard 2018: 59–62). In recent years, the decisions of the Evaluation Body have been mostly based on data from the texts of the nomination forms, while the publication of films on the UNESCO website has greatly increased the worldwide visibility of heritage elements and ensured that the general public is informed about them (ibid.: 66–67). UNESCO has reminded States Parties that, after the inscription of an element and the online publication, videos become “the most visible part of the nomination” (UNESCO 2015: point 120).

Until recently, UNESCO’s guidelines for making a film when preparing a nomination were very basic: the video

should represent different aspects of the element in its current state, focusing in particular on its role within the community concerned, how it is transmitted and any challenges it faces. The use of archive images [...] should be avoided. (UNESCO 2022: point 16)<sup>77</sup>

The next point emphasizes that nominating states should allow the related communities, groups and individuals to present the heritage themselves in the film, and advises against third-person commentary. Point 18 requires the granting of rights to UNESCO, point 23 specifies the technical characteristics and length (5 to 10 minutes) of the film, while point 24 states that a video can be submitted either online to Filedepot or on a USB key, external drive, Blu-Ray disc or DVD (UNESCO 2022: points 17, 18, 23, 24).

The Intergovernmental Committee and UNESCO bodies have recommended, in the *Aide-Mémoire* (UNESCO 2015), that nominating states should submit quality film that “treats the different aspects of the element in its complexity” (UNESCO 2015: point 118). Viewers will better understand the social role of an element if the video depicts practices “of intangible heritage in their normal context rather than those staged in order to be filmed” and “ordinary members of the communities that practise and appreciate the element [...] and not only emblematic figures or celebrities” (point 119). It is very important that the video clearly shows community participation, and therefore States Parties should

employ to the greatest extent possible the approach of allowing the communities, groups and individuals concerned with an element to speak about it on their own behalf, rather than relying only on third-person narration. (UNESCO 2015: point 121)

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<sup>77</sup> The latest instructions do not define the content of film at all (UNESCO 2025a).

Information about interviewees, performers and events should be given in video captions, and translations of what is said should be provided in subtitles so that the language of the community can be heard (UNESCO 2015: point 118). These data are the signifiers of the practitioners' and community's identities, emphasized in the basic definition of intangible heritage in the *Convention* (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1).

UNESCO has mostly transferred these recommendations into the regularly updated guidelines on videomaking, but the recommendation to use a soundtrack in the original language along with subtitles instead of a voice over has not been consistently implemented, as we still read about videos "with an English or French soundtrack and/or subtitles" (UNESCO 2025a: 6). Here, "English or French soundtrack" means a voice over, and indeed UNESCO receives the majority of such films with an English or French voice over, and only one-seventh with subtitles (Sicard 2018: 65; Sousa 2018: 25). The greatest irony is that the nomination form for the 2011 cycle, in its annex on technical specifications, already recommended the submission of videos with "soundtrack(s) [...] in original languages" and "subtitles in English and/or in French" (Sicard 2018: 63; see 'ICH-01-2011-EN-ver-02-1' form, Internet source 83).

The last point of the recommendations encourages the "coherence between written texts and audiovisual documents" throughout the nomination, while at the same time stating that "the video should make use of image and sound to complement the written text with sensory experiences that cannot easily be captured in words" (UNESCO 2015: point 122). In other words, the complementarity of representations in the two media, using common data, but conveying them in accordance with their own specifics and potentials, is recommended (cf. van Zanten 2012: 87–88; Valentinčič Furlan 2015b: 105). It was noted that UNESCO's 2015 recommendations on how to construct knowledge in films are similar to the fundamental guidelines of visual ethnography and anthropology (Valentinčič Furlan 2015b: 101).

### *Analyses of Films on the UNESCO Website*

UNESCO associate Wim van Zanten, an ethnomusicologist experienced in making films about traditional music, was the first to point out the poor quality of the films, offering some recommendations for their improvement. He analysed videos on the 19 elements inscribed on the Representative List in November 2011 and was quite critical of the majority (van Zanten 2012:

87–88). Video is not as precise and analytical as the text in the nomination form, but “audiovisual material offers the advantage of presenting a more holistic view of what is at stake, such as movements, spoken words, music, other social interactions, natural surroundings, etc.” (ibid.: 89). He detected little respect for the “cultural flow of time” as experienced by the participants in the heritage element, and in particular criticized the use of artistic approaches and video clips with extremely short shots (ibid.). He also noted that in some films the excessive use of spoken text with an abundance of information overwhelms viewers so they cannot simultaneously pay attention to the images (ibid.: 90).

Van Zanten highly valued the original soundscape of an element and opposed to its masking by adding sounds in the editing process, since any addition of contemporary or “national” music obscures the original soundscape of the event (van Zanten 2012: 91; cf. Rouch 1975: 95–97; Heider 2006: 53–54). In the Portuguese film *Fado, Urban Popular Song of Portugal* (Internet source 91), the English voice over does not allow viewers to hear the *fado* singing properly. The social context of the heritage is important – and interaction between performers and audience is an essential element of music and theatre performances (van Zanten 2012: 90–91). Van Zanten praised the Turkish film *Ceremonial Keşkek Tradition* (Internet source 92), which presents the preparation of a ceremonial meal for weddings and religious holidays through observational footage, without added statements, commentary, explanatory captions, or subtitles (van Zanten 2012: 91). Last but not least, he recommended showing the film to the “members of the community concerned and to ask them whether they find themselves and their element of living culture ‘properly represented’ by this film” (ibid.: 92). Van Zanten thus set out some basic guidelines for improving these films and their production processes, but unfortunately his article went largely unnoticed, even by those working for UNESCO.

Sheenagh Pietrobruno and Filomena Sousa highlighted the problem of silencing community voices. Pietrobruno (2016) analysed the videos of the elements inscribed in 2015 and found out that English dubbing predominated, which resulted in the loss of community voices. In the 2016 cycle, the vast majority of the information was provided in third-person etic commentaries by filmmakers or experts, and only five films out of 37 used translations of statements in local languages in subtitles and not in voice over (Sousa 2018: 25). Regarding the audibility of the local languages, the starting point should be UNESCO’s position that language is “a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage” (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.2). But in practice, how often do the members of the UNESCO Evaluation Body and the participants in the



Intergovernmental Committee's sessions hear the languages of the heritage communities and their opinions? In the nomination form, their language is "translated" into the professional-political discourse of the safeguarding paradigm, while films can convey the language of the community in an embodied state. "Until language is objectified in the written text, speech is inseparable from the speaker's whole person" (Bourdieu 1977: 236, note 41). If the film does not communicate the opinions and language of the community, the evaluators and the international online viewers have distorted access to the living practices and to practitioners' cultural identities.

UNESCO's stance on the mandatory participation of practitioners in the safeguarding of their heritage is not transparent in the films hosted on the organization's website (Sousa 2018: 25–26). As such, the declarative nature of the *Convention* does not correspond to the manifest level of the safeguarding paradigm. The question thus arises: "Is there an incorrect approach to the video [production due to] lack of competence and lack of sensitivity to ethnographic and participatory methodologies?" (Sousa 2018: 26). It could be argued that a lack of film literacy is characteristic of the UNESCO officials who wrote the instructions for filmmaking, and of States Parties officials who commission filmmakers not educated in ethnographic filmmaking. Consequently, they make use of top-down linguified films with third-person commentary, close to the genres of touristic film and TV reportage.

As Thorolf Lipp has argued, the global cultural memory on intangible cultural heritage is dominated by films made by commercial TV producers, whose main goal is to entertain viewers. They enforce a top-down authorial approach that underestimates viewers, and narrows and embellishes the view of heritage (Lipp 2013: 142–143). TV documentaries thus have similar characteristics to the authorized heritage discourse (Smith 2006: 4) – they reproduce established social meanings and power relations (Valentinčič Furlan 2018a: 25). As TV documentaries dominate the global mediascape (Appadurai 1996: 298–299), it is necessary to reveal the codes and standards inscribed in representations (Goodwin 1994). The binding routines of TV editors and filmmakers are like glasses that are put on practitioners during the training of their eyes and hands, so their practices become ideological and hegemonic (Grasseni 2007b: 7–8; Ruby 1996: 197–199).

TV documentaries then determine the perception of the general public worldwide and impose their patterns on the production of films about intangible heritage on the UNESCO website. Although UNESCO recognizes the important role of practitioners in identifying, safeguarding, managing and

transmitting their intangible heritage, it only envisages the inclusion of their statements in the film, which is soft agency (Ortner 2006: 134–136). The recommendation that heritage practitioners should be actively involved in the planning, production and decision-making on the use and accessibility of films was first stated in the edited volumes *Documenting and Presenting Intangible Cultural Heritage on Film* (Valentinčič Furlan 2015c) and *Visualising Intangible Cultural Heritage* (ibid. 2018b). They promoted participatory methods and collaborative film production with shared authorship and responsibility (Erlewein 2015: 33–35; Valentinčič Furlan 2015b: 103; van der Zeijden 2018).

In fact, all the films in the nomination files are “authorized heritage films”, as they were at some point approved by experts and practitioners in the State Parties (Valentinčič Furlan 2018a: 26). However, there are various ways of constructing knowledge in films. Some film productions are distinctly authoritative, made according to the old top-down system, representing the etic view of the safeguarding experts. An example of this is the film *Mongolian Traditional Practices of Worshipping the Sacred Sites* (Internet source 93): its soundscape is based exclusively on third-person commentary and added generic music, while the heritage practitioners have no voice, nor do we hear any sounds of the shamanistic rituals (Valentinčič Furlan 2018a: 29). In this logocentric and illustrative film, the image is subordinated to the commentary that directs the structure of the film. The knowledge construction was in fact established before the filming, so the film presents an experience-distant (Geertz 1983: 57) view of heritage, based on the text from the nomination form.

On the other hand, there are films that are produced with participatory and collaborative methods and emphasize the emic perspectives of the heritage practitioners. Dutch film *The Craft of the Miller* (Internet source 94) is based on synchronous image and sound – the explanations of the heritage practitioners are filmed in the same context as the activities, and the sounds of the work processes and the natural environment are heard (Valentinčič Furlan 2018a: 30). No commentary or music was added to the film during the editing process (van der Zeijden 2018: 49–54). The experiential film presents the heritage element in an experience-near manner (Geertz 1983: 57). This is a case of epistemic justice (Fricker 2007; Pantazatos 2017), as the heritage practitioners were equally included in the joint production of knowledge.

The film *Tinian Marble Craftsmanship* (Internet source 95) balances emic and etic views of the heritage element. A Greek ethnologist visited the Art School and local handicraft workshops in Pyrgos, as well as the master craftsmen who were restoring the Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis. Their statements

about their work, skills, tools and the transfer of knowledge are connected by three first-person comments by the ethnologist, which are etic and partly emic (he says that Tinos is his native island, and it is clear from the communication that he knows his interlocutors well). The ethnologist is a film guide who introduces the topic, leads the audience from location to location, interviews the interlocutors and concludes the film. The researcher and the heritage practitioners contribute knowledge equally, so this is also an epistemically just film production and an experiential film.

Eva Klekot analysed films about pottery-making and praised two processual and experiential films on the Urgent List: *Earthenware Pottery-Making Skills in Botswana's Kgatleng District* (Internet source 96) and *Bisalhães Black Pottery Manufacturing Process* (Internet source 97), while she critiqued the structuring of the three illustrative films on the Representative List: The first sentences of third-person commentaries connect the most distant history of tradition and contemporary heritage practices. Short statements of the practitioners are subordinated to the voice over – they illustrate or confirm the explanations just heard. The sounds of filmed processes are not audible, due to the additions of characteristic “national” music of the nominating states. The films with dynamic editing devote more time to the aesthetic and decontextualized presentation of musealized and commercialized products and contemporary uses of pottery than to the techniques, skilled practices and working processes that are the essence of intangible heritage (Klekot 2018: 115–116).

When examining the films of the 42 elements from the UNESCO website that were inscribed on the lists in 2017, the most noticeable feature is that they contain a lot of talking. Only one tenth of the films construct knowledge in an experiential manner, half are based on illustrative approaches, and the others are closer to illustrative films, as the off-commentary still establishes the basic (closed) structure of the film. The dominant promotional approaches based on words have thus become a visual dogma on the UNESCO website.

Films allow the viewers to gain direct access to the embodied experiences of the film subjects (MacDougall 1998: 264, 273), thus discovering the meaning themselves, while didactic oral commentary may limit both the potential of the images and the understanding of the viewers (Carta 2015: 10–11; cf. Martinez 1992: 135). The sensory and experiential representations activate the viewers' empathy for the subjects and events, by addressing both reason and emotion, and blurring the dichotomy between body and reason, feeling and intellect (MacDougall 1998: 77).

### *On the Production of Films for Nominations to UNESCO Lists*

Revealing the social contexts of film production can often provide a broader picture of the visualization of intangible heritage (Banks 2001: 11–12). In visual ethnography, knowledge is constructed in a dialogue between the researcher and film subjects, while the production of films for nominations is influenced also by the UNESCO *Convention, Operational Directives*, guidelines and values, as well as by the views of the working group, whose members often have little experience in film production and may resort to stereotypical approaches they have seen on the UNESCO website, or to the dominant TV formats.

The practical experiences of producing nomination films were revealed in two anthologies on filming intangible heritage by the members of working groups (Valentinčič Furlan 2015c, 2018b). The contributors to the first book had been involved in filmmaking in the planning phase (pre-production), which rarely continued with filming (production), but more often jumped directly to the editing process (post-production), which means that parts of existing films were recycled into a new film. In Slovakia, films on traditional music were edited from excerpts from older documentaries (Hamar and Voľanská 2015a: 67–70). In Croatia, due to the simultaneous production of 14 nominations in 2008, most of the films on music, dance, customs and crafts were made from excerpts of TV programmes (Hrovatin and Hrovatin 2015: 75–80). Both teams relied mainly on the illustrative film approach, and heritage practitioners were mostly not involved in the filmmaking.

Mirela and Darije Hrovatin also wrote about how they supplemented the nine-minute film of the multinational nomination *Mediterranean Diet* (Internet source 98) with a new sequence on fishing (Hrovatin and Hrovatin 2015: 80). In 2010, the element was inscribed by Spain, Greece, Italy and Morocco (Bortolotto et al. 2020: 75), and in 2013, Cyprus, Croatia and Portugal joined. The authors did not mention the structure of the film – it is essentially a long tourist commercial with extremely short shots of selected geographical areas and traditional foods. Such an approach is not appropriate in the safeguarding paradigm, as we cannot ‘experience’ the heritage nor hear the practitioners.

Tamara Nikolić Đerić cooperated with the local community in making the film *Community Project of Safeguarding the Living Culture of Rovinj / Rovigno: The Batana Ecomuseum* (Internet source 99) for inscription into the UNESCO Register of Good Safeguarding Practices. The film, which makes use of participatory and sensory ethnographic strategies, is a bricolage (Lévi-Strauss 1966:

24–33) of footage produced by professional and amateur filmmakers, digitized old photographs and historical maps, local music traditions, testimonies and off-commentary (Nikolić Đerić 2015: 89–91).

Albert van der Zeijden was part of a working group that produced the aforementioned film *The Craft of the Miller*, and the visualization was discussed by all the group's members – representatives of the millers' guilds, the Ministry of Culture and the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the filmmakers Jos Kuijer and Caspar Haspels. They decided that the film should present the craft through the stories of two millers and an apprentice, who were chosen on the basis of trust by the members of the guilds. The film was made with shared authority, as a co-managed co-production and co-creation, which places it in the field of "dialogical heritage" (van der Zeijden 2018: 49–54). The dialogical model of heritage requires ethical relationships and respect for different perspectives, significantly strengthening the participation of heritage practitioners in the decision-making processes (Harrison 2013: 223–226). This film production is a very good example of a collaborative film that showcases the heritage of millers, while the working group decided not to present the safeguarding measures. I support this decision, as the safeguarding is presented in the nomination form, so the film can focus on the heritage and its practitioners.

In Slovenia, the film *Bobbin Lacemaking in Slovenia* (Internet source 34) was made in a postmodern manner, based on the stories of 16 practitioners from all over the country, as the heritage is spread throughout it, and we had 14 hours of high-quality recent footage available that was filmed for the documentary series by Magda Lapajne, produced by Radiotelevizija Slovenija. The 10-minute film, made in cooperation among the filmmaker, heritage practitioners and the working group, shows the activities and emic views of the practitioners with no sound layers added. The film subjects are presented with their names and surnames, roles in lacemaking societies or schools, and places of residence, with an English translation given in subtitles (Valentinčič Furlan 2018a: 35–36). Although I agree that film viewers can more easily identify with three or four film subjects (van der Zeijden 2018: 48), in films for nominations the selection and number of film subjects depend on the geographic and social distribution of heritage, possible competitive relationships among groups, and also on the footage available (Valentinčič Furlan 2025). In the case of a new film production, a smaller number of protagonists would be documented.

In 2017–2020, Slovenia coordinated the multinational nomination of eight European countries *Lipizzan Horse Breeding Traditions* (Internet source 36),

and I coordinated the production of the joint film. The knowledge construction was formed in five steps. Since the members of the working group reported limited filmmaking experience, I outlined the basic starting points of the film. I encouraged the filming of activities and statements of practitioners in the same contexts, so that the unity of place and time would be preserved (Valentinčič Furlan 2018c: points 1, 2).<sup>78</sup> The second step was carried out by the national coordinators and filmmakers in the participating states, with choices of which locations, events and people they would film. In the third step, either the national coordinators or the film editor Žiga Gorišek and I selected characteristic shots and statements from the footage,<sup>79</sup> which he then edited into audiovisual sequences. In the fourth step, the order of sequences was determined in the editing studio, by Gorišek, Janez Rus – the professional manager of the Lipica Stud Farm and expert adviser – and me. The fifth step was the result of feedback from the international working group and film subjects. The narrative structure of the film was drawn from the basic work in state and private stud farms to the sporting and social roles of horses in performances, annual customs and forms of therapy. The main threads of the film are the human-horse relationship and the ways of transmitting knowledge and skills. While a third-person commentary would have allowed for a more unified film style, it inevitably leads to a grand narrative of experts (Lyotard 1979). In 39 sequences, the experiential film presents the embodied practices and skills, the emic views and voices of the heritage practitioners, as well as the white horses in their natural and cultural settings in eight European countries (Valentinčič Furlan 2024, 2025, forthcoming).

The production of films on intangible heritage in the context of its safeguarding and enlisting can be classified as an applied approach of visual ethnography produced for the benefit of communities and (inter)national cultural politics, according to the categories set by the Society for Visual Anthropology at the American Anthropological Association:

research footage and documentation that adds to the historical and/or ethnographic record [...]; ethnographic media that contribute to theoretical debate and development; innovation in new media forms; media designed to enhance teaching; media produced for television

78 I wanted to avoid visual stereotypes, such as statements by experts filmed in university libraries that in the editing process would be “covered” with footage of activities in stud farms or in open spaces.

79 The footage and data is kept in the Department of Ethnographic Film at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum.



broadcast and other forms of mass communication; media made with and/or for the benefit of a particular community, government or business. (SVA 2001; later the categories of curating film festivals and exhibitions of ethnographic visual media were added)

## Online Publications and Other Uses of Films, their Audiences and Copyright

After discussing the first two aspects of knowledge tradition (body of knowledge about the nominated heritage, film as medium for its transmission, Barth 2002: 3) – an analysis of the third one – social circles in which knowledge is disseminated – is required.

Who are the films in nominations of the elements to the UNESCO lists aimed at? Visual anthropologists and safeguarding experts have identified five audiences. The first viewers are the film subjects (van Zanten 2012: 90) and members of the working group preparing the nomination. The second group is the Evaluation Body assessing if the nomination corresponds to the UNESCO criteria (Hrovatin and Hrovatin 2015: 81; Srečković 2018: 89). The third audience is (or rather, was) the participants in the sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee, as well as online viewers of these sessions, and the fourth is the worldwide audience watching the films on the UNESCO website or on the UNESCO YouTube channel (Valentinčič Furlan 2015a: 18; Hamar and Voľanská 2015a: 64; Srečković 2018: 89). There is also a fifth audience, as UNESCO has secured the right to distribute films to “third parties”, such as for educational and exhibition purposes (Sicard 2018: 72).

Regarding the reception of such films, Hugues Sicard, then an engineer in information management at the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Section, surprised readers with data on the importance of nomination films for both the professional and general public. An expert, who indexed 470 elements on the UNESCO Intangible Heritage Lists in 2018, reported that in determining the key concepts, the films, rather than the texts of the nomination forms, were the most useful source of data on inscribed elements. On UNESCO’s YouTube channel, films on intangible heritage were viewed by an average of 30 times more users than other UNESCO recordings, such as interviews, sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee and promotional videos (Sicard 2018: 69–71). The high level of visibility is also evidenced by

the more than 17 million views that the film *Kalbelia Folk Songs and Dances of Rajasthan* (Internet sources 100 and 101) has received. It is therefore justified to point out the special role that films on the UNESCO website play in creating a global cultural memory about intangible heritage and its cultural diversity (cf. Lipp 2013: 146).

Films on elements on the UNESCO lists are freely accessible on the UNESCO website, since the instructions for completing the nomination form state that the rights to all submitted visual materials be granted to UNESCO (UNESCO 2022: point 18). The granting of rights for films is drafted in the same way as for photographs:

1. I, the undersigned, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby grant to UNESCO the non-exclusive rights to use, publish, reproduce, distribute, display, communicate or make available to the public, in any language or form and by any means including digital, the following material(s), in whole or in part. I grant these rights to UNESCO irrevocably, for an unlimited period of time and for the entire world. 2. I further grant to UNESCO the non-exclusive right to sub-license third parties to use the material(s), in whole or in part, solely for non-profit educational or public information uses.<sup>80</sup>

Some filmmakers misinterpret this document as meaning that they transfer not only material but also moral copyright, and as a result they do not provide their names in the closing credits (e.g. in *The Craft of the Miller*). In Slovenia, as in many European states, moral and material copyright are separated. According to the Slovenian Copyright and Related Rights Act (ZASP-NPB11), filmmakers can grant material copyright (waiving compensation for the use of an audiovisual work), but the moral copyright of attributing the authorship of the film is inalienable (ZASP-NPB11: Articles 69–70). And to clarify one more misunderstanding: the non-exclusive granting of rights to UNESCO means that filmmakers and film producers can continue to use their film in addition to the UNESCO Secretariat and third parties (cf. ZASP-NPB11: Article 74).

The process of film production has been presented via the triangle of knowledge construction that occurs between film subjects, filmmakers and film viewers (MacDougall 1978: 422). The filmmakers construct messages by assembling audiovisual sequences in film, and on the other side of the communication process, the meanings are deciphered by the viewers who synthesize

80 See form 'ICH-07-video' on the UNESCO subpage with forms (Internet source 61).

what they have seen and heard. This requires a certain amount of film literacy from all parties concerned (MacDougall 1998: 254).

While at the time of the *Proclamation of Masterpieces* films addressed an international jury, in the last decade their main function has become to inform the widest public online. Bearing the new function and target audience in mind, it is necessary to reconsider how to structure films and what stories to convey. Recycling the texts of nomination forms into illustrative films is not productive, while experiential films can help the viewers to better understand the life worlds of heritage practitioners in their cultural environments.

## Second chapter

# Dry Stone Walling

The case study follows dry stone walling in Slovenia from a cultural practice in decline through its revitalization and inscription to the Slovenian Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage and on the UNESCO Representative List, to study also the consequences of global recognition for the practice. In all phases, the focus is on the knowledge and skills in these processes, the media for their transmission, the social circles in which the knowledge is disseminated, and power relations (Barth 2002). Several theoretical concepts are applied to determine whether dry stone walling corresponds to the observations of theorists about the processes of heritagization and media representations, or deviates from them and why.

I consider dry stone walling as an assemblage of humans and non-humans (Deleuze and Guattari 1980; Harrison 2013), in which the agency is distributed between actors and actants. The actors are the heritage bearers, representatives of responsible institutions, workshop participants and members of the working groups for the preparation of the multinational nomination. Among many actants are stone as a building material, dry stone buildings, working tools, natural and cultural settings, landscapes; knowledge, practices and invested work; publications, films, thematic trails and websites; trees, animals and the weather that influence the construction, dismantling, renovation and workshops on dry stone walling; and finally the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm itself, that has triggered intense heritagization all over the world, as well as European projects that promote the revitalization of heritage. All

these actors and actants are intertwined in a structure of multidirectional relations. The presented case study on dry stone walling connects communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98) in the Karst and Istria, Slovenia, and in another seven European countries, with the UNESCO epistemic community (Jacobs 2017). The latter also includes applied ethnologists and cultural anthropologists, who translate between discourses and bridge the tension between the declarativeness and the living practices.

## Dry Stone Walling as a Cultural or Community Practice

Skills are sets of attitudes, emotional traits, cognitive and bodily strategies and ways in which relations are imprinted in people's memory; and on the other hand, their worldviews, identities and cultures are also reproduced in the natural and cultural environment of everyday practices (Grasseni 2008: 168). "[O]nly by participating in a skill can one detect it and appreciate it, and only by watching attentively and repeating mimetically can one properly pick it up" (ibid.: 164). These observations are the starting points for the presentation of dry stone walling in the lives of five interviewees, official bearers of intangible cultural heritage in the Slovenian Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage, whom I will first briefly introduce.

Rudi Bak (1940–2021), born in Ljubljana, encountered dry stone walling as a young shepherd in the village of Škoflje. He learned from other shepherds and older people, especially his unmarried uncle. During his employment in the local mine and at Yugoslav Railways (1960–1990), he also worked on his own farm and in masonry, and after gaining knowledge by working in groups of builders he built the house for his family and then two more for the families of his daughters. In 2000, he and a group of villagers repaired some collapsed dry stone walls in Škoflje to improve safety and make the village tidier (Rudi Bak; Internet source 2).

Zdravko Škrli, born in 1948 in Škoflje, was trained as a mechanic and employed in several companies in Sežana and Divača from 1968 until his retirement in 2007. He got acquainted with dry stone walling in his childhood, when he helped his father to clear meadows of stones and rocks and maintain boundary walls around their plots. He learned the skill from his father and by experimenting. After 1974, the villagers bought tractors and removed dry stone walls so that they could cultivate their fields and meadows with machinery. As a result, dry stone walls were preserved mainly on remote hayfields in the Škoflje area (Zdravko Škrli; Internet source 2).

Boris Čok was born in 1951 in Bazovica, which was then part of the Free Territory of Trieste, but when Zone A was annexed to Italy in 1954, the family moved to his grandfather's homestead in the village of Lokev in the then Yugoslavia, today's Slovenia. He graduated from trade school and worked as a manager and in tourism from 1973 until his retirement in 2012. He is an avid amateur researcher of folk tradition, local history and Karst cultural landscape. In 2009, he obtained a licence as a local tourist guide for the Karst and Brkini, and the following year he prepared three thematic trails. As a child, he learned how to build dry stone walls and shelters for shepherds – called a *hiška*, or *hiške* in plural<sup>81</sup> – and in the 1990s started to repair both kinds of structures (Boris Čok; Internet source 2; Čok 2014a, 2014b).

Mitja Kobal, born in 1963 in Šempeter near Nova Gorica, worked as a tool-maker for ten years and then retrained as a bricklayer due to demand in nearby Italy. In 2002, he and his wife bought an estate in the village of Branik, surrounded by dry stone walls in rather poor condition. He and his father repaired the dry stone walls as self-taught builders and also enthusiastically built a *hiška*. Kobal makes stone vessels, trays and vases, having obtained a certificate for art and craft products at the Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia. In recent years, he has also included dry stone walling among his masonry services (Mitja Kobal; Internet source 2).

Dejan Zadavec was born in Koper in 1957, graduated from the School of Economics and Business in Ljubljana and then moved to Puče in the Istrian hinterland. He cooperated in the construction of the Istrian shepherd's house *kažeta* in the Koper Regional Museum, and in the organization of several educational and practical workshops on dry stone walling. He is the founder and president of the Society for the Preservation of Traditional Building and Craft Skills of the Slovene Istria Jugna<sup>82</sup> (Društvo za ohranjanje tradicionalnih gradbenih in obrtniških znanj slovenske Istre Jugna, 2013). He participated in the cross-border projects *REVITAS I* and *REVITAS II* and in the establishment of the National Vocational Qualification, Dry Stone Waller, at the Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (Dejan Zadavec; Internet source 2).

Bak, Škrlić and Čok picked up dry stone walling skills as children, while Kobal and Zadavec learned it during their vocational retraining. What were the specifics of the learning processes of the first three interviewees, and of the last two?

81 The architects also preserved the Slovene term (pronounced 'hishka'), which literally means little house.

82 In Istrian dialect *jugna* means a gathering place of villagers under a linden tree or by a water source.





Figure 1: Rudi Bak, 2014 (Eda Belingar).



Figure 2: Zdravko Škrlj (in blue jacket), 2014 (Darja Kranjc).





Figure 3: Boris Čok and Dušan Okoren finishing the roof of *biška*, 2014 (Eda Belingar).



Figure 4: Mitja Kobal, 2016 (Eda Belingar).



Figure 5: Dejan Zadavec in front of an Istrian *kažeta*, 2013 (Sergij Palčič).



## *Learning Dry Stone Walling in Communities of Practice*

In the film *Dry Stone Walling* (*Suhozidna gradnja*, 2017), Rudi Bak explains the general attitude toward this practice in his youth after World War II:

*As for walling, I've been doing it since 1960. When we children used to graze cows, we also mended the dry stone walls and we threw little stones on them. That's what our parents taught us. "Pick up a stone and put it on the wall. The meadow will be pleased"<sup>83</sup> and the wall will be mended and look nice." You have to like this sort of work. If you don't, nothing comes of it, like with any other work. (Rudi Bak)*

When asked more specifically about the methods and teachers, Bak said that they had experimented a bit on their own, and they had also been shown some procedures by old masons who used to build houses using the dry stone technique. They were taught how to lay stones in a dry stone wall: the stone should always hang slightly inward, and should not lie flat or hang outward. The stone also does not need to be broken or shaped, it can be used as it is, but it must be well supported with gravel to make it stable. Later he learned by practising and observing the stone and surrounding space (Rudi Bak).

Zdravko Škrlić said that his father had not had time to show him any techniques, but he had explained the meaning of dry stone walling.

*If you know how to build and stack logs of firewood, then you can stack stone, too. You have to be careful, the wall must have a slight slope to prevent its collapsing, and the stones must be well connected. We build up to one-metre-high walls so that they prevent the livestock from jumping over. [...] There were no high-quality stones available here, and dry stone walls were created because people were clearing their meadows and fields. My father told me that my grandfather used to dig rocks at moonlight to improve their fields, because it was much too hot during the day. According to the elders, they made mounds of excess stones called *grobļe* and walls, mostly boundary walls between land parcels of different owners. (Zdravko Škrlić)*

Škrlić emphasized that in the area surrounding the village of Škoflje, the problem had always been the shortage of raw material, stone. Besides, after the war there were no quarries, and when people needed gravel to asphalt

83 Bak personified the meadow in the statement; cf. the expressions “face of stone” and “face of wall” in statements by Škrlić and Čok.

the roads, they crushed stone with special machines. From 1955 to 1965, stone crushers were simply brought to the plot to crush all the stone, leaving behind only the boundary walls separating the plots of different owners. At that time, stone did not mean much, and then in 1965 some local quarries were opened (Zdravko Škrlić; Belingar and Kranjc 2019: 74).

Boris Čok began to herd cows at the age of six and a half, and one of the shepherd's commandments given by his grandparents was: "When you go down the cart track, you pick up a stone and put it on the wall, no matter to whom the wall belongs." The shepherds' first task when they came to the pastures was to examine the walls. He mastered the technique at the age of eight. They maintained dry stone walls on their farm until 1969, when they sold their cows and gave up grazing (he was 18 at the time). When he was still herding cows as a secondary school student, he used to build castles, *hiške* and bunkers using stones as if he were putting together Lego blocks. The knowledge of dry stone walling was passed down to him by shepherds and members of the older generations. He descends from a stonecutters' family, so his father and grandfather knew how to handle stone, and also taught him where and how to hit it (Boris Čok).

*Sometimes in the winter, if there was no snow, my father would say on a Sunday morning: "Let's go look at our parcels." On the way, he said "Look, the wall is damaged here, you know how to rebuild it, don't you?" "Yes." "Well, let me see," and I began to stack stones. "Yes, yes, this is OK, you lined the stones up nicely." The stone must not rattle<sup>84</sup> – if it rattles, it's not fixed, so you lay smaller stones under it. When you touch the stone in the wall, it shouldn't move at all. You placed stone gravel in the middle of the wall, and you could always find stones with faces that had some flat surface to keep the wall levelled at least on one side, but it was not necessary to build the wall nicely aligned on both sides. The difference between walls in pastures and the ones in gardens was that the first were built more roughly, because people broke huge rocks into pieces and carried them to the boundaries between the plots, so these walls were also boundaries between parcels of different owners. Garden or field walls, closer to the village, were made from shaped stones, which was much more interesting. However, the technique of pasture walls was more challenging: you needed to find the right face and shape of stones, and then you filled rather big crevices between them with smaller stones. [...] The more decorative*

84 In dialect *sketljati*: a rattling stone rocks and rumbles, as it is not well anchored in the wall. See the dictionary in the handbook on maintaining walls (Čok 2014a: 18).

*walls in the village were designed nicer and covered with large stones across the entire width of the wall (vršniki), to show you were a good householder. These were top walls, because the stone cover prevented leaking rainwater into the wall and demolishing it. Even if a deer or a person jumped over such walls, the cap would hold up, while in ordinary walls, the edge stones could have fallen off and therefore we mended them more often. (Boris Čok)*

Čok's account shows that the function of dry stone walls around houses and gardens was to make the village environment more visually appealing. Nevertheless, the biggest challenge was to build a *hiška*, because heavy stones had to be lifted high – shepherds could only build one when they had grown and become stronger, at the age of 15 or 16. As children, they learned to make miniature *hiške* by building ovens in which they baked potatoes, corn, turnips and sometimes also dormice. It was essential that they learned the proportions for building a *hiška*.

When the Karst people stopped grazing cows, the pastures began to become overgrown. To avoid hard labour, they also started to heat and cook on gas, coal or oil, so they no longer regularly cut down bushes and trees around the boundary walls, and their roots grew and collapsed the walls, which led to a catastrophic situation. People also preferred to build houses with bricks and mortar, which took less time and effort. When Čok's family built a new house in the 1970s and then renovated the walls in the surrounding plot, he and his father used concrete because it was affordable and everyone used it – the villagers' guiding principle was "*cement, cement, what use is it to build the walls the old fashion, why would you toil and moil?*" In the 1990s, Čok slowly changed his mind and began to realize that dry stone walls are their heritage based on the work and knowledge of their ancestors. After his father's death, he gave up running and cycling and started repairing walls in the former pastures, and he also mended them on the plot around the house.

According to Barth's definition of a tradition of knowledge, the three interviewees learned how to "interpret the world and act in it" (Barth 2002: 1, 3) from other shepherds, parents, uncles, grandparents and elderly people. They received information about stones and types of dry stone walls, along with views about the natural and social worlds, and above all, they learned the skills in shared, embodied practices. The media for the transmission of knowledge and skills of dry stone walling were everyday work routines of shepherds and



also their playing.<sup>85</sup> Experiential learning was a combination of observation, imitation, experimenting, oral instructions and messages. Such transmissions of practical knowledge in everyday life were defined as “situated learning” and “legitimate peripheral participation”, in which the novices slowly progress from simple tasks to increasingly complex ones until, over time, they pass the knowledge to younger people (Lave and Wenger 1991: 29–41).

The shepherds acquired skills and techniques through a mixture of work obligations and play. As children, they learned the correct proportions and how to build a roof by overhanging stones while building simple stoves, and as older teenagers, they used this knowledge to build *hiške*. Repeating the routines made practical knowledge embodied and part of their habitus. If Čok’s statement that dry stone walling is “in the genes, we were a stonemason family, it’s intuition”, is interpreted with the concept of habitus, then his knowledge is the result of early education – socialization and enculturation that shaped his habitus which still supports his reproducing of skills decades later. However, in their mature years, the interviewees also demonstrated their own agency by observing the characteristics of stones, walls, their structures and the surrounding natural environment, and by individual testing and verification of validity. Habitus does not blindly reproduce the practices of predecessors, but rather invents new ways to fulfil old functions in new situations (Bourdieu 1990: 291, note 3; Ličen 2012: 15), which is why people adapt practices to new needs and functions, and over time they may also attribute new meanings to them.

An important transmitter of knowledge is oral tradition, closely linked to experiential knowledge. Oral tradition can be distinguished into cognitive knowledge about dry stone walling and folk social knowledge. Only Boris Čok described how he received explicit cognitive knowledge about stone, wall types and building techniques from his father, including a message about the quality of dry stone walls with *vršniki* on the top, and even lessons in repairing walls. His father and grandfather acquired practical and cognitive knowledge about the stone, types, techniques and functions as stonemasons in the Trieste region, which is why Čok today has an extensive vocabulary related to dry stone walling, while other interlocutors use a smaller set of words, which is typical of tacit or implicit knowledge (Polanyi 1962).

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85 Cristina Grasseni realized what a powerful medium for the experiential learning of skills and values play is when she studied the practices of livestock breeders in the Taleggio Valley. During play, children imitated their fathers’ activities with the help of plastic cows, miniature models of competition winners (Grasseni 2007c: 64). This was an education of attention in a community of practice (Grasseni 2007b: 7; 2008: 151; 2009: 168).

Oral tradition also transmits social knowledge and community values. All three interviewees learned, from the guidance and stories of their parents, uncles or grandparents, about the importance of dry stone walls for organizing the living and farming environment (Rudi Bak), and about the existential necessity of cooperation between villagers and solidarity in the community (Boris Čok). In the past, such knowledge guided people in the countryside towards strategies that enabled the survival of the community. Until the decades after World War II, the people of the Karst region made their living mainly from breeding livestock, agriculture, viticulture and growing fruit. Messages about such work from parents and grandparents were often imbued with emotions and memories in order to encourage and even oblige children to continue the established practices, like the story of how Zdravko Škrlič's grandfather dug stones at night under a full moon to improve their fields.

In the mid-1990s, a few decades after dry stone walling in the Karst had been almost completely abandoned, Boris Čok changed his attitude and began to recognize dry stone walls and the related skills as his ancestors' heritage. He also adjusted his behaviour and started to repair walls and *hiške* on former pastures and around his home – thereby reviving a past cultural practice, now slowly revalued as heritage. He said that restoring these was initially mostly an individual activity, and he began to think about the community when he published a calendar with photographs of *hiške*, which is why the year 2003 seems to be a turning point in his activities. Tradition becomes heritage when it is no longer transmitted in everyday life, and its use is distanced from the socio-historical context (Kockel 2007: 20).

The social circle that largely determined the lifestyle of the three interviewees in their youth was the village communities of Škoflje or Lokev. Through transmission of tacit and embodied knowledge in personal and relatively permanent contacts in communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98) people also develop a sense of belonging (Polanyi 1962: 55). The interviewees were born between 1940 and 1951, and they learned and practised dry stone walling in the decades after World War II. Dry stone walling skills were mostly distributed among the male population, although girls and women helped with lighter work in repairing walls (Rudi Bak; Zdravko Škrlič; Boris Čok).

How did natural and material circumstances influence the knowledge and skills of dry stone walling in the Karst region, extending from the Gulf of Trieste to the Vipava Valley in the north, and from the Soča Valley in the west to Brkini in the east? The Karst land was full of stones, which the inhabitants

removed to acquire and improve meadows, fields and pastures and to demarcate plots of land. Until the mid-twentieth century, the best stone was used to build houses, while the lower quality stone was stacked in mounds, walls, *hiške* and other structures (Boris Čok). Although the villages of Škoflje and Lokev are only six kilometres apart as the crow flies, the interlocutors noticed how the local characteristics of the stone and natural landscape influenced the adaptation of techniques and buildings to the quantity and quality of stone. In Škoflje, there is much less stone compared to the central Karst plateau, so the dry stone walls were filled with a mixture of gravel and soil that binds the stone structures (Rudi Bak). Only three *hiške* are remembered in the surroundings of the village (Zdravko Škrli), while there is an abundance of stone in the Lokev area, which is why a strong tradition of *hiške* could develop. After World War II, there were more than 100 *hiške* in the wider area (Boris Čok), thus it is not surprising that Čok strives to preserve the skills, techniques and *hiške* so passionately.

How did power relations and external knowledge systems influence dry stone walling? After World War II, the Yugoslav socialist government promoted post-war reconstruction and rapid socio-economic development with the industrialization, urbanization and modernization of life. During the socialist era, the attitude towards the local past and ancestral traditions was often obstructive – local building styles and techniques were abandoned and rural elements and objects were destroyed (Fakin Bajec 2007: 53), thus demonstrating a negative attitude towards traditions and heritage (Bogataj 1992: 15). Many people from the countryside moved to towns, and many migrated daily as they found employment there, so agriculture became a supplementary activity. Due to modernization in agriculture, many dry stone walls around the villages were removed to enable access for tractors and machinery (Zdravko Škrli). When pastures were no longer in use, they were overgrown with bushes and dry stone walls began decaying. People built houses with bricks and mortar, and made concrete walls around them to save effort and time, and also as a sign of modernity and status (Boris Čok). Dry stone walling was seen as a symbol of past times, backwardness, poverty and hard labour, and therefore it was marginalized (Fakin Bajec 2011: 213).

According to Balinese philosophical tenets, “everything in the world is in a state of flux and if its current instantiation drifts too far towards one extreme it may flip to the opposite extreme” (Barth 2002: 8). This principle also applies to the attitude towards dry stone walling, which began to change in Slovenia in the 1990s, coinciding with Slovenia’s independence and its departure from socialism.

### *Self-Initiated Learning of Dry Stone Walling in Adulthood*

Mitja Kobal and Dejan Zadavec learned dry stone walling under quite different circumstances to the first three interlocutors. Kobal, the youngest among the interviewed dry stone wallers, born in 1963, retrained as a bricklayer due to cross-border demand. On their home plot in Branik, he and his father, a carpenter, started renovating dry stone walls as absolute beginners (Mitja Kobal).

*My father and I began to repair and restore these walls as self-taught builders. My father read some books, but we didn't get very far with this theory, so I said, "Dad, throw these books away, we will try to rebuild the walls on our own." And so we began and quickly figured out how a dry stone wall should be constructed, and, based on practical experience, we also understood the theory. So we went around the estate and slowly rebuilt all the dry stone walls. As there was a lot of talking about hiške, my father came up with the idea to find out how to build the roof. Once we had mastered the walls and escarpments, we built the hiška in the corner that still stands. (Mitja Kobal)*

The Kobals therefore realized that cognitive and theoretical knowledge in books did not enable them to learn the art of dry stone walling, similarly to the Cretan artisans (Herzfeld 2004: 112). While dismantling old walls they analysed how they were built, and then tested how to stack stones to make the walls stable. They thus became self-taught dry stone wallers on the edge of the high karst region, although Mitja Kobal admitted that his masonry skills gave him some basis for dry stone walling.

Dejan Zadavec, a graduate economist by education, needed a change to escape the constant stress after years of working in foreign trade. First he set up an herb garden, then he became fascinated with stone and dry stone walling. In 1988, he was offered the opportunity to take a group of students to Croatian islands to collect herbs.

*We rented a big house from a local, and he said: "Well, instead of paying rent, you can fix the breakwater wall for me, you guys are strong." So we built it, and that breakwater still stands. I have lived more or less always in Istria, both Croatian and Slovenian, and I learned from the locals how to stack stone and what to look out for to make it statically stable. An older man taught me how to hit a stone to break it properly. Before, I had kept trying, but it always "went its own way", as the locals say. Well, and*

*then he showed me the principles; once it gets into your blood, everything is easy.* (Dejan Zadavec).

Zadavec points out the differences in dry stone walling in the Karst and in Istria, a peninsula on the north-eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea that is mostly divided between Slovenia and Croatia, with a small part that belongs to Italy. In the limestone Karst, they mostly build from raw stone, while in Istria where flysch or sedimentary rocks prevail, they use a lot of hewn stone. In the Karst, *hiške* are mostly small, and in Istria, *kažete* are bigger so that the shepherd could spend the night there, together with his flock of sheep or goats. The roofs of *hiške* are built in corbelling style, by circular overhanging stones or slates, while *kažete* are square, and covered with flat stones on oak beam roofing. When the fields were cleared in Istria, the best stone was taken to the villages until the mid-twentieth century, because there was no other material for houses and stables. In Slovenian Istria and in the Karst, at least 30% of old houses are still dry stone constructions, although many are now in ruins. Zadavec renovates buildings and builds new retaining and free-standing walls, stone shelters for people and livestock, houses, pavements, roof cornices, stairs, fireplaces, hearths, and stone furniture, such as tables and benches.

The influences of the natural and material characteristics of the Karst and Istria on dry stone walling can be interpreted as the agency of inanimate agents in the assemblage of dry stone walling. In the past, people adapted to the natural features of the local stone and landscape out of existential necessity, but today they do so out of respect for tradition and pursuing ecological and sustainable principles (cf. Gowlland 2024: 75). In 1987, the concept of sustainable development was introduced with the claim:

Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987: 16, point I.3.27)

However, dry stone walling certainly met all the parameters of sustainable development long before the concept was introduced, just as it still does today, and it will also be beneficial for future generations.

Kobal and Zadavec learned to build dry stone walling primarily through practice and experimentation. Kobal is a largely self-taught dry stone builder,

while Zadavec also found informal individual teachers in Slovenia and Croatia. In contrast to the first three heritage bearers, their learning did not begin with play and stories imbued with feelings, emotions, memories, and messages from their relatives and ancestors, but instead was a free choice to engage in lifelong learning (Falk, Dierking and Adams 2006: 324–326). For Kobal, the social circle of learning practice was his father, but it was not a vertical transfer of knowledge, as they were both beginners. Kobal later also participated in workshops and restoration campaigns of the Partnership for the Preservation and Popularization of Karst Dry Stone Walling, bringing his knowledge closer to heritage.

Zadavec began learning dry stone walling in the 1990s, and Kobal in the twenty-first century, when society started to revalue traditional building materials and skills. In this period, dry stone walling was not so much in service of agricultural activities and plot demarcation, but mostly in preserving common heritage and keeping the living environment in villages and the landscape in good condition. In the second phase, these skills also became part of their profession.

Can we talk about *habitus* in the cases of Kobal and Zadavec? Yes, because a sufficiently large number of repetitions creates a *habitus*. Kobal mentioned that he got “a certain feeling” through practice, while Zadavec used the phrase “once it gets into your blood, everything is easy”. Both can be understood as synonyms for *habitus*, “second nature”, and both interlocutors showed hard agency (Ortner 2006: 134–136) in individually acquiring and using skills – *habitus* flexibly adapts to new circumstances, needs and values. Their *habitus* differs from that of the three older Karst mentors precisely because of their two-track operation: on the one hand, they are part of the heritage community, when they participate in or organize voluntary workshops, and on the other hand, they include dry stone walling commercially in their professional work, as a way to earn a living.

Is it heritage in their cases? Kobal participates in *pro bono* restoration campaigns and workshops of the Partnership for the Preservation and Popularization of Karst Dry Stone Walling, while Zadavec organizes and participates in workshops of the Society for the Preservation of Traditional Building and Craft Skills of the Slovene Istria Jugna. They were both involved in revitalization projects, and are recognized heritage bearers in the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage.



## The Revitalization of Dry Stone Walling – Heritagization and Mediatization

The revival of dry stone walling in Istria and Karst began after Slovenia became an independent state in 1991, which was also a response to its marginalization in the previous socio-political system. It coincided with the rise in attention being paid to heritage (Dicks 2003; Lowenthal 2009: 5; Harrison 2013: 79, 227) and the retraditionalization of society (Boissevain 1992; Nikočević 2012: 17). Also characteristic of that time was a rising ecological awareness of sustainable development and a revival of interest in traditional handicrafts, which had been buried by the euphoric industrialization of the 1960s and 1970s (Ličen, Tomšič and Planinc 2012: 75). As Michael Herzfeld claims, mass industrial production caused the deskilling of artisans and society in general (Herzfeld 2004: 137–138).

Dry stone walling began to be revived in the Karst after a break of about 30 years, and in Istria after almost five decades. One thing in its favour was that older people still retained embodied knowledge and skills, while younger people learned them anew, although all of them had to fight against the negative social opinion that stone is a symbol of poverty and hard labour. How did this change in the attitude towards dry stone walling skills and dry stone buildings come about in the Karst and Istria?

First, it was individuals (Boris Čok started rebuilding dry stone walls and *hiške*), village communities (in Škoflje, they repaired some walls in 2000), and heritage institutions (Škocjan Caves Park started with spring repairs of the dry stone walls in 2003) that altered attitudes and activities (Darja Kranjc; Belingar and Kranjc 2019: 78). Researchers from Primorska and architects from the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Ljubljana began to study and document dry stone walling, techniques and skills together with knowledge bearers.

However, awareness-raising activities and the promotion of dry stone walling were needed to change the attitudes of the wider society, which were carried out through two research projects, as well as through the agency of a charismatic individual.

### *The Contribution of an Engaged Individual with the Butterfly Effect*

Boris Čok launched an interesting series of in-person and media events with the publication of the calendar *Shepherds' Hiške* (*Pastirske hiške*, 2003). The photographs of *hiške* and text about shepherding work, games and shelters in

the Lokev area aroused a lot of nostalgia in the local community, which spread to Ljubljana and Trieste:

*The elders said it was “grease for their souls and their memories”; they had tearful eyes of nostalgia when asking me to sign the calendar for them. This gave me a new impetus. [...] My friend Jadran Sterle came up with the idea to make a film on hiške.<sup>[86]</sup> My relationship with dry stone walling has been very emotional, because I have always remembered how my father and grandfather spent 28 days mowing one ograda [parcel surrounded by dry stone walls]. I could simply not imagine abandoning all their toil; forgetting it would seem a very cruel attitude towards our ancestors. (Boris Čok)*

In the documentary film on shepherds' *hiške* in the Karst, Čok presented his calendar and the process of building a *hiška*, and among many other film subjects, Borut Juvanec from the Faculty of Architecture commented on vernacular architectural objects (cf. Juvanec 1996, 2015). Two years later, Juvanec and Domen Zupančič organized the architectural project *Dry Wall Karst 2011* with several interdisciplinary workshops on dry stone walling and buildings of this kind, together with an international conference, *Kras 2011*, held in Lipica (Zupančič 2012). One of these workshops was joined by the Scottish dry stone waller Norman Haddow,<sup>87</sup> who spent a month working with Čok and other builders renovating *hiške* in the Lokev area and building two new objects. Haddow inspired the Karst garden designer Borut Benedejčič to prepare Pepa's Story (Internet sources 104 and 105) for the Chelsea Flower Show<sup>88</sup> horticultural exhibition in London in 2012. It presented a Karst pasture with characteristic vegetation, dry stone walls and a *hiška*, built by Čok and his friend Vojko Ražem from Bazovica (Boris Čok). They won a medal, and the international recognition echoed in the Slovenian and Trieste media. Čok believes that this event and the positive media coverage were a turning point, changing the attitudes of Karst people

86 *Pastirske hiške na Krasu*, 2008, by journalist and screenwriter Jadran Sterle, produced by Television Slovenia.

87 In 2010, at a conference of the Dry Stone Walling Association (Internet source 102) in Cumbria, Great Britain, he listened to Juvanec's presentation of *hiške* and asked if he could connect him to a practitioner in Slovenia who mastered the skill. Two hundred years ago, British beehives were built this way, but later the skill was forgotten (Internet source 103).

88 International exhibitions are a typical example of how, due to the globalization and homogenization of the world, various organizations seek answers in the specifics and freshness of local heritages, which they organize according to uniform principles; this is a case of “global systems of common difference” (Wilk 1995: 110).

who then saw the potential of dry stone buildings in modern society, especially in tourism.

The importance of external, foreign and especially international recognition of the distinctive qualities of cultural elements in heritagization has been repeatedly demonstrated in professional and scientific literature. As the Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo said: "Often it is the alien gaze that returns beauty and integrity to places" (in Hafstein 2012: 511). The effect of the outsider's gaze has already played an important role in the Karst. The locals revalued the Karst architecture and cultural landscape in the 1990s, after settlers from central Slovenia respected and worked to preserve the aesthetic and cultural values of traditional houses and stone as a building material, which had been neglected during the Yugoslav era (Fakin Bajec 2011: 210–215). "In the modern world, stone no longer represents poverty, but is an important identification sign that enables an imaginary feeling of belonging to a collective Karst identity" (ibid.: 213).

"Identifications are to be found and negotiated at their boundaries, in the encounter between internal and external" (Jenkins 2004: 22), insiders and outsiders. Cultural identity is a constant search for balance between one's own views of the community and heritage and the views of other people – outside, external, foreign, professional and tourist views that hold up a mirror. The relationship between insiders and outsiders and their diverse interests is usually complex. People from the urban centres bought houses in the Karst as second homes in the peaceful countryside with unspoiled nature. There they could afford to cherish the aesthetics and nostalgic memories of an idyllic past, while the locals needed to equip their only house to meet the more functional, modern ways of everyday life (Fakin Bajec 2011: 127, 212). In addition, it is also a question of who can financially afford to renovate an old house in the Karst and preserve the traditional elements – Jasna Fakin Bajec (2011: 85) was unable to get a clear answer as to how much cheaper it is to build a new house in the Karst than to maintain an old one. Similar tendencies are also known elsewhere – Japanese country houses are bought by city dwellers and stylized "into timeless tradition and the pristine well-spring of national consciousness and virtues" that have also become status symbols (Brumann 2014: 177).

A number of very important external perspectives come from various disciplines: ethnology, anthropology, architecture, history, archaeology, geology, biology, and so on. Boris Čok felt the need for responsible institutions to recognize and protect *hiške*, so in November 2009 he sent an initiative to the

Ministry of Culture and the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia in Nova Gorica to officially declare them protected heritage in the Register of Immovable Cultural Heritage (Karst Dry Stone Walling 2015: 8; Dry Stone Walling 2016: 5). He was aware of the importance of official validation by authorized professional institutions (cf. Muršič 2005: 35; Hafstein 2018b: 80). In general, local people often perceive external recognition from experts, visitors, and tourists as confirmation that they have a valuable and authentic culture or unique heritage (Brumann 2014: 181).

In 2010, Boris Čok prepared two thematic trails about shepherds' *hiške* in the Lokev surroundings,<sup>89</sup> created a blog about *hiške* (Internet source 108) and the website My Karst (Moj Kras, Internet source 109). He cooperated in making a film on how they moved a *hiška* in Medvejk to a new location (*Selitev kamnite hiške na Medvejku*, 2015). In this and other efforts he chooses the media and forms of presentation that he considers most suitable for spreading knowledge and enthusiasm (Boris Čok). He is proud of the cultural landscape created by his ancestors, and actively helps to preserve it for posterity. He describes himself as a connector between the experts and lay people, which he defines as his mission. He addresses various social, professional, and scientific circles, and learns the criteria of validity for conveying knowledge in the media and social organizations of knowledge that are new to him.

By spreading his message about the importance of dry stone walling, and especially of *hiške*, Čok engaged more and more friends and addressed an ever wider circle of people. He reached thousands of addressees, readers, listeners and television viewers through live contacts, public media in Sežana, Koper, Ljubljana and Trieste, and online tools. This confirmed the importance and modernity of dry stone walls and *hiške* at the local, regional, national and international levels. As a charismatic individual (Belingar and Kranjc 2019: 78) with many connections, Boris Čok knows how to inspire others in the community, and he thus helped to change attitudes to the tradition of dry stone walling in society. The sum of small actions can lead to rather big changes, as seen in the "butterfly effect" (Podjed 2011: 71; Eriksen 2012: 348). However, in the same years, the positive social climate was also influenced by the revitalization of dry stone walling skills and buildings, which was a joint effort of the researchers and skilled people.

89 The Shepherd *Hiške* Trail – East (Internet source 106) and The Shepherd *Hiške* Trail – West (Internet source 107) do not have interpretive apparatus (Foucault 1980) that would create independent heritage sites. They can only be visited with Čok as a guide, which is an ecological and sustainable approach.

### *Revitalization Within Cross-Border European Projects*

The cross-border projects *REVITAS – Revitalization of the Istrian Countryside and Tourism in the Istrian Countryside* (2009–2012, 2013–2015) and *Living Landscape of the Karst* (2012–2015) contributed greatly to the revitalization of embodied skills and cognitive knowledge of dry stone walling in Istria and in the Karst. When the *Living Landscape of the Karst* project application was submitted to the Interreg tender, the Karst researchers were not yet aware of the Istrian project, which indicates the concurrency of social activities and initiatives in both areas of Primorska.

The active agents in the projects were three researchers, my interlocutors: Darja Kranjc, Eda Belingar and Eda Benčič Mohar. Darja Kranjc, from the Public Institution Škocjan Caves Park, Slovenia, is committed to applied ethnology, especially the preservation of cultural heritage in the Karst. She was confronted with the mending and reconstructing of dry stone walls in the park in 2003, when her colleague Črtomir Pečar invited skilled people from Škoflje to help maintain dry stone walls in the park area. In 2011, she systematically catalogued dry stone walls in Škocjan, Matavun and Betanja, analysed their origin, functions and typology, and also studied the legal basis for their preservation and conservation (Kranjc 2013). Between 2012 and 2015, she researched dry stone walls in the cross-border project *Living Landscape of the Karst*, and coordinated the revitalization of dry stone walling skills and constructions.

Eda Belingar has been employed by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, Regional Unit Nova Gorica, since 1987. In her opinion, she had not acquired much knowledge on the conservation and protection of immovable heritage during her studies of ethnology, which she compensated for by engaging in experiential learning at the Institute, based on seniors passing their practical knowledge to younger colleagues. The conservators participate in the preparing of administrative grounds to protect buildings, areas and cultural landscapes as immovable heritage. In the *Living Landscape* project, she focused on the material and spatial aspects of dry stone constructions, as well as on the intangible dimensions of these, in terms of people's stories and memories. She identified and documented dry stone buildings in the Karst (Belingar 2014, 2015).

Eda Benčič Mohar was employed by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, Regional Unit Piran between 1988 and 2023. She was responsible for buildings, settlements and the cultural landscape of the

Istrian hinterland. She learned about traditional construction techniques and materials from colleagues at the Institute, master builders, from literature and by participating in workshops. Between 2009 and 2012, she participated in the revitalization of Istrian dry stone walling and buildings of this type in the cross-border project *REVITAS I – Revitalization of the Istrian Countryside and Tourism in the Istrian Countryside*.

In project documentation, reports and articles, the term *subogradnja* (dry construction) was used in Istria, and *zid na suho, suhi zid* (dry wall) in the Karst. They also wrote about cultural heritage, while the adjectives ‘living’ and ‘intangible’ were absent. They started to use the phrase ‘intangible cultural heritage’ in 2016, when they began preparing an inscription to the Slovenian Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage and a multinational nomination for the inscription of the element on the UNESCO Representative List.

The regional unit of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Piran was a partner in the cross-border project on the revitalization of the Istrian countryside and tourism, in which ten institutions, communities and administrative units from Slovenian and Croatian Istria participated.<sup>90</sup> The goals were to create a model for revitalizing the interior of Istria, which would thus become a recognizable cross-border tourist destination, to develop an Istrian identity based on a common history and cultural heritage, and to raise awareness among local people about the value and uniqueness of the Istrian interior. Eda Benčič Mohar joined the project with the aim of documenting the immovable rural heritage, popularizing it, and preparing a handbook for its restoration. She defended the position that the tourist offer in the Istrian hinterland should be based on preserved immovable heritage, especially anonymous heritage,<sup>91</sup> such as settlements, homesteads, individual buildings, and the cultural landscape with dry stone buildings. Anonymous heritage contains rich testimony about the population, both about our ancestors and ourselves, but it is the most overlooked and deteriorating part of immovable heritage (Eda Benčič Mohar).

90 *REVITAS* (2009–2012, Internet source 110). The leading partner was the Municipality of Koper, the partners were the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, the municipalities of Izola and Piran in Slovenia, and the County of Istria, the Tourist Board of the County of Istria, the Municipality of Svetvinčenat and the cities of Poreč, Buzet and Vodnjan in Croatia (Benčič Mohar 2013: 174). Dejan Zadavec participated in the *REVITAS II* project (2013–2015, Internet source 111), too.

91 Architects use this term as a contrast to the architecture of well-known architects, and synonyms include vernacular and nonpedigreed architecture (Rudofsky 1965; Chanis 2023). Slovenian architects became interested in the most widespread architecture during the rise of intangible heritage (Tomšič Čerkez 2014: 122).



The *REVITAS* project offered the opportunity to present cultural heritage as a potential actor of local development, especially of quality tourism. Realizing this, the society and state may finally be encouraged to actively protect the heritage. We were also given the opportunity to revive the almost completely extinct knowledge of dry stone walling. Our target audience was primarily domestic residents, architectural planners and renovation/construction contractors, as well as local communities. (Benčič Mohar 2013: 174)

In Slovenian Istria, they focused on the renovation of dry stone retaining and boundary walls, and the municipality of Koper included the purchase and final phase of the renovation of the Bržan homestead in Smokvica in the *REVITAS II* project (Eda Benčič Mohar; Dejan Zadavec). In 2012, the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage published a book on the revitalization of the cultural heritage of the Istrian countryside (*Revitalizacija kulturne dediščine istrskega podeželja*, Zupančič and Benčič Mohar 2012), a research study on developing a model for the revitalization of Istrian countryside (*Razvoj modela revitalizacije istrskega podeželja*, Drempetić, Zupančič and Benčič Mohar 2012) and a bilingual handbook on dry stone walling (*Priročnik za suhogradnjo*, Orbanić, Zupančič and Benčič Mohar 2012). The latter is complemented by an educational film (*Suhogradnja* 2011) which documents the meaning of dry stone walling in the past and today, with examples of preserved walls, houses, pavements, walled water sources, shelters and other buildings in Istrian villages and landscapes, while in the second part the dry stone waller Sergij Palčič presents a local quarry, tools and the process of building a free-standing dry stone wall, applying Istrian methods. The film finishes by showing some cases of inadequately renovated walls and a *REVITAS* workshop with a lecture by the Croatian dry stone waller Branko Orbanić.

Dejan Zadavec founded the Society for the Preservation of Traditional Building and Craft Skills of the Slovene Istria Jugna (2013), which united 30 interested individuals, and Vinko Zupančič established Traven, the Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage and Rural Development (Traven, Zavod za ohranjanje kulturne dediščine in razvoj podeželja, 2013, Internet sources 112 and 113). They organized a number of workshops to renovate dry stone walls and buildings in poor condition. As part of the project, the economist Vinko Zupančič proved that Istrian dry stone constructions, if properly built, are cheaper and more durable than the concrete ones (Zupančič and Benčič Mohar 2012: 61–74; Orbanić, Zupančič and Benčič Mohar 2012: 28–29; Benčič Mohar 2013: 175).

According to Eda Benčič Mohar, the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Istrian countryside can only be successful if the development perspective is supported by a national strategy for sustainable rural development with effective control over cultural heritage and spatial interventions, and financial support for owners and investors. Licences for qualified cultural heritage restoration practitioners should be introduced, and the state should help resolve the complex legal ownership situation that significantly hinders rural development in Istria (Benčič Mohar 2013: 175–176).

The project *Living Landscape: Research and Educational Project in the Field of Recognition and Valorisation of Cross-Border Heritage and Environment* (2012–2015)<sup>92</sup> was aimed at evaluating and promoting the common cultural and natural heritage of the Slovenian-Italian Karst landscape from the perspective of cultural, social and environmentally sustainable development. The University of Primorska researched the symbolic, mythical and historical dimensions of the Karst landscape,<sup>93</sup> while the Škocjan Caves Park and the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia in Nova Gorica studied dry stone walling practices and related buildings.

Darja Kranjc<sup>94</sup> joined the project in order to connect the scattered initiatives of various actors of dry stone walling in the Slovenian and Italian Karst into a common revitalization of knowledge and skills. The Škocjan Caves Park is not legally responsible for the safeguarding of cultural heritage in the entire Karst, but only in three villages above the Škocjan Caves system in the municipality of Divača, while it also takes care of water quality in the area of influence, which includes the Reka River basin. In the UNESCO *Man and the Biosphere Programme* (Internet source 115), the park coordinates participatory

92 The leading partner was the University of Primorska, while other partners were the Škocjan Caves Park and the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Slovenia, and the Supervisor for the Historical, Artistic and Ethnoanthropological Heritage of Friuli Venezia Giulia (Soprintendente per i beni storici, artistici ed etnoantropologici del Friuli Venezia Giulia), the Province of Trieste, and the Municipality of Devin Aurisina / Nabržina in Italy (Internet source 114).

93 Among the results were a book on intangible landscape of the Karst (*Nesnovna krajina Krasa*, Hrobat Virloget and Kavrečič 2015) and another on the use of Karst natural and cultural resources in the Modern Age (*Kulturna krajina in okolje Krasa: O rabi naravnih virov v novem veku*, Panjek 2015), as well as conceptual designs for mythical parks in Gropada, Italy, and Rodik, Slovenia (Hrobat Virloget 2019).

94 She filmed spring repair actions in the park in 2009 and 2011, and edited the film on maintenance and construction of dry stone walls (*Vzdrževanje in gradnja subih zidov*, 2012), which is on display in the renovated J'kopin barn as part of the ethnological collection of the Koper Regional Museum.

approaches to the sustainable development of the Karst biosphere reserve, which includes parts of the municipalities of Ilirska Bistrica, Postojna, Divača and Hrpelje Kozina. As the manager of the UNESCO location, the Škocjan Caves Park encourages the preservation of dry stone walling and the maintenance of dry stone walls and other buildings in the Karst (Darja Kranjc, in the film *Subozidna gradnja* 2017; Debevec and Kranjc 2016).

As a conservator, Eda Belingar is dedicated to identifying, evaluating and documenting architectural heritage, and preparing cultural protection acts in the case of interventions on objects or areas that are protected as immovable cultural heritage. While researching dry stone walling, she was surprised by how many walls, *hiške* and also more elaborate things, such as roads, paths and bridges, have been preserved in the Karst (Eda Belingar). For the preservation of dry stone buildings, it is important that “typical land use, parcelling, typical vegetation, spatial dominants, the relation between settlement and open space, places of memory, and typical topographical names” are protected by the Cultural Heritage Protection Act (*Zakon o varstvu kulturne dediščine*, ZVKD-1: Article 132).

To produce good professional and scientific grounding they researched and documented the phenomenon from several perspectives: geology, archaeology, history, ethnology, architecture, biology, education, and protection of natural and cultural heritage, as well as the practice of dry stone walling with various methods and techniques (Darja Kranjc). The Škocjan Caves Park published an interdisciplinary collection of articles on dry stone walls (*Zid na suho: Zbornik strokovnih spisov o kraškem suhem zidu*, Kranjc 2014b) and a three-part handbook on Karst dry stone walling (*Priročnik kraške suhozidne gradnje*, Belingar 2014) with the pocket booklets on the maintenance and construction of dry stone walls and *hiške* (*Vzdrževanje in gradnja prostostojećih in podpornih kraških suhih zidov*, Čok 2014a, *Vzdrževanje in gradnja hišk*, Čok 2014b). Based on several meetings and workshops, an educational programme on dry stone constructions was prepared with the EKometer Institute (*Izobraževalni program na področju suhozidnih konstrukcij*, Erhart 2014).

Karst people on both sides of the border were educated and trained in workshops for various groups: the authors of the studies and skilled practitioners of dry stone walling provided four-hour theoretical and 18-hour practical training for adult beginners (Darja Kranjc). Boris Čok led workshops on the basics of building (*Spoznavanje osnov gradnje*) for elementary school children, and Karin Lavin prepared workshops on the holistic experience of the Karst landscape and dry stone walling as a value (*Celostno doživljanje pokrajine s ciljem usvajanja kraškega subega zidu kot vrednote*) for preschool children.

After the end of the *Living Landscape* project, in February 2015, the park established a voluntary and non-profit association called the Partnership for the Preservation and Popularization of Karst Dry Stone Walling with ten scientific, research and educational institutions, three municipalities, three regional management bodies, two architectural bureaus, a civil association and 13 individuals from both sides of the border as founding members (Partnership 2015a). The network organized the activities in four working groups: for research and development, for education and training, for spatial management, and for informing the public and raising awareness (ibid.: 15–16; Belingar and Kranjc 2019: 81–83).

According to nature and cultural protection legislation, dry stone walls and the skills of their building are required for

ensuring the protection of the cultural landscape, heritage and monuments, the mosaic character of the landscape, habitats and thus biodiversity, and indirectly also to prevent pollution with non-autochthonous rocks. Outside the legal framework, they are needed to maintain the quality of the living environment, respect and healthy contact with one's identity, community, ancestors, nature, etc. (Belingar and Kranjc 2019: 80)

Based on the analysis of the formation of the cultural landscape through the cultivation of soil, vegetation and stone, it was concluded that the identity of the landscape expresses the culture of its inhabitants (Belingar 2015: 715). As Barbara Bender (1993: 3) argued, “the landscape is never inert, people engage with it, re-work it, appropriate and contest it. It is part of the way in which identities are created and disputed, whether as individual, group, or nation-state.” In a poetic description of the relationship between the Karst inhabitants and their landscape, Boris Čok opposed the generalizing external categorization by visitors and described his own identification of the Karst cultural specifics as follows:

*Our ancestors transformed this land of ours into a cultural landscape. The Karst would not be the same Karst without all these walls, cart tracks, escarpments, groblje, hiške, vineyards, patches of fields, plantations, old groves of oaks, and rocks. When someone thinks of the Karst as “Teran, pršut, burja”,<sup>[95]</sup> I say, “No, no, no, first and foremost it is a cultural landscape that our ancestors made so beautiful that they did not*

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95 A specific Karst red wine, specially dried ham similar to *prosciutto*, and the strong Bora wind.

*harm nature, they just embellished it a little to improve their living conditions.*" (Boris Čok)

The main objectives of both cross-border projects were similar: revitalization of the cultural tradition and cultural landscape from the perspective of sustainable development and tourism, and raising awareness among local people, experts and administrative bodies. Both projects emphasized interdisciplinary research, joint cross-border education, cultural exchange, popularization of dry stone walling and buildings of this type, and professional guidance for people who want to acquire the related knowledge and skills. Among the functions of dry stone walls, the uses in animal breeding, agriculture, olive growing,<sup>96</sup> and viticulture persist, while the uses in arranging village environments and organization of cultural landscapes are enhanced, and the new function is for touristic purposes (Eda Benčič Mohar; Darja Kranjc; Eda Belingar; Boris Čok; Dejan Zadavec).

In the cross-border projects on revitalizing dry stone walling, the researchers were not only concerned with cognitive knowledge, but also acquired skills and techniques in practical workshops (Eda Benčič Mohar; Darja Kranjc; Eda Belingar). Cristina Grasseni similarly trained her attention in the same way apprentices do in the communities of practice, and in the process she also learned about their aesthetic preferences and moral considerations, which she defined as a skilled vision (Grasseni 2004: 16–17). Eda Belingar claims that as a conservator, skilled in practical dry stone walling, she became a more competent interlocutor of masons and other professions involved in the restoration of protected architectural heritage.

When one comes into contact with the Karst bearers of dry stone walling skills, one inevitably senses their great pleasure in building in the "dry style" and the infectious intellectual challenge that this work actually represents for them. One also feels their desire to show their skills, knowledge and tricks to an interested observer, who almost without exception soon becomes a fellow builder. This segment of the Karst cultural heritage is highly contagious. (Kranjc 2014a: 6)

In her description, Darja Kranjc approaches Barth's definition of knowledge as feelings, attitudes, information, embodied skills, taxonomies and concepts, i.e. all the ways of understanding used to interpret our reality and to act on

96 There is a story of a novice farmer in the hills of Istria who turned his olive terraces into sloping embankments so that he could use the machinery. To his misfortune, a storm swept half of his olive trees and the soil downhill. This taught him the lesson of respecting the traditional knowledge of sustainable farming (Dejan Zadavec).

the world (Barth 2002: 1). Emotions and enthusiasm are important motivators of human action (Smith 2006: 57; Hafstein 2018b: 106; van de Port and Meyer 2018: 23). Kranjc used the etic, professional term “bearers of skills”, while they call themselves *mentor* (Rudi Bak; Zdravko Škrlj; Boris Čok), *majstr* or *mojster* (Rudi Bak; Mitja Kobal; Dejan Zadavec). In the interviews, the term “heritage bearer” was used by Darja Kranjc and the representative of the Coordinator and the Ministry, and this is an etic designation of Slovenian experts and officials.

Media are essential in preserving, representing and communicating the knowledge of a group within the group and to the outsiders. In Barth’s sense, such media includes both interpersonal forms with live communication, such as rituals and storytelling in oral cultures, and also workshops, as well as modern digitized media and mass-media which are mostly characterized by one-way communication (Koch 2013: 171). I will first analyse the modern digital media in the cross-border projects, while in the following section I revisit the characteristic media of eyes-on and hands-on learning with live communication – workshops and restoration campaigns.

Regarding Barth’s bodies of knowledge, representations, media, and social groups, the *REVITAS* and *Living Landscape* projects have disseminated cognitive and some practical knowledge to the public in bilingual anthologies and handbooks. The Istrian anthology and research study were intended for experts, architectural planners, restorers, administrative structures (Benčič Mohar 2013: 174–175),<sup>97</sup> and participants in the National Vocational Qualification (Dejan Zadavec). The Karst interdisciplinary anthology addressed the professionals and participants in the non-formal education system within the Partnership (Darja Kranjc). The handbooks and educational film are a guide for locals who want to renovate or build new dry stone buildings. Together with the workshops, they disseminate practical knowledge, increase the desire to restore dry stone buildings and also inform the local authorities (Benčič Mohar 2013: 174–175; Darja Kranjc; Eda Belingar).

The authors of the anthologies and handbooks collected the available knowledge of different disciplines and translated the knowledge and embodied skills of practitioners into an explicit form by articulating, systematizing and specifying them (Ličen 2012: 14); they also visualized them with drawings,

97 Project descriptions define the “target audience”, but in fact we do not know whether the intended audience has actually read the book, nor whether other groups have used it. In contrast, presenting a book or a film and organizing a workshop makes it possible to observe the participants’ responses and dialogical exchanges.



photographs and films showing tools, methods, techniques and phases of work. I traced no reinterpretation of knowledge, values and identities in objectifying the embodied and tacit knowledge, as the researchers and skilled wallers wrote the handbooks in close collaboration and based on practical experience. Eda Benčič Mohar, Darja Kranjc and Eda Belingar learned the skills mimetically through observation and participation in the practices, which facilitated the description of the embodied knowledge.

Among the eight heritage bearers in the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Boris Čok was the one who readily shaped the knowledge acquired in his youth into presentations for a calendar, film, handbooks, lectures, thematic trails and online media. This demonstrates his ability to construct knowledge and his symbolic power to convey his views of the world to others. In addition to the heritage of *biške*, he also promotes the old faith (*staroverstvo*) or natural faith (*naravoverstvo*) (Čok 2012).<sup>98</sup> Researchers close to the experience ensured that Čok's knowledge of past practices and beliefs did not remain a silent discourse, as his books and articles have been published by the Publishing House of the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Čok 2012), the Škocjan Caves Park (Čok 2014a, 2014b) and the Publishing House of the University of Primorska (Čok 2015).

The joint production of anthologies, handbooks, films, workshops and restoration campaigns demonstrates epistemic justice (Fricker 2007; Pantazatos 2017). Knowledge constantly circulates – from knowledge and skill bearers to the researchers and from both back to the local communities, on the one hand, and to the experts and the general public, on the other (cf. Tschofen 2012: 29, 31; Brumann 2012: 12).

Cross-border development projects financed by the European Community are usually focused on the preservation of cultural heritage, social cohesion, intergenerational cooperation and sustainable development. Applicants adopt the vocabulary of the call for proposals to obtain funding, and this discourse consequently influences the language of the community and its notions of heritage (Fakin Bajec 2011: 87). Tenders, with their dominant discourse (Smith 2006: 4–5), impact the knowledge construction and vocabulary of people, who also adapt their activities to the tender conditions: for example, the Slovenia-Croatia cross-border cooperation programme was explicitly focused on sustainable tourism.

98 See the ceremony of consecrating the *biška* in the film on the relocation of one in Medvejk (cf. Čok 2014b: 14). Other heritage bearers and researchers were not familiar with this ceremony (Rudi Bak; Darja Kranjc).

On the one hand, the European Community tenders strongly refer to UNESCO cultural heritage and its values, while on the other, the Interreg tenders for the years 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 did not include the notion of intangible cultural heritage at all (Internet sources 116–118). The authors of contributions to the publications thus mainly wrote about cultural and natural heritage. However, the adjective ‘intangible’ was used in the *Living Landscape* project in connection with the symbolic and mythical aspects of the landscape in the anthology on the intangible landscape of the Karst (Hrobat Virloget and Kavrečič 2015).

### *Workshops and Restoration Campaigns as Media for the Transfer of Skills*

It is becoming increasingly clear that workshops are a typical and probably the most widespread medium for the transmission of practical skills, both in contemporaneous community practices and in intangible heritage, exploiting the performative nature of social practices and heritage (Smith 2006: 66–67; Muršič 2006: 53). In Istria, workshops are seen as the best way to transfer practical knowledge to people with little or no previous experience, and invitations are published on the websites of the municipalities of Koper, Izola and Piran.

*It doesn't matter how much one knows: when you show how to stack stones, they quickly catch up and it doesn't take much so that they start working properly. Last year we organized a workshop for elementary school pupils in Gračišče, and this year we have prepared a set of stones for kindergarten children so that they can stack them correctly. [...] For adults, we first give a lecture on what to watch out for, on safety at work – because stone is heavy and accidents can happen quickly – and the basic characteristics of the wall or whatever object we're going to repair. And then we're constantly there and monitor how they work. On the fly, we teach them based on mistakes and corrections. [...] There's a lot of demand from the villages to repair walls, they want our help and advice. In some cases, people attended two or three workshops, and we even went to help them mend their walls. (Dejan Zadavec)*

The Istrian experience shows that workshops are mostly attended by those who are interested in heritage and rebuilding their dry stone walls. By engaging children in kindergartens and elementary schools, the youngest generation comes to understand that dry stone walling and buildings of this type are our heritage, worthy of preserving, and, in addition, they spread

their enthusiasm to their parents (Dejan Zadavec). A conservator of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Piran received several formal applications for the restoration of dry stone walls on agricultural parcels, and many people expressed an interest in such work. Among their sources of information about dry stone walling and buildings of this type were the manual, participation in workshops and word of mouth from other participants. All this has contributed to the positive reception of dry stone walling in Istria (Eda Benčič Mohar).

The Partnership for the Preservation and Popularization of Karst Dry Stone Walling has prepared several documents, including a programme on how to organize restoration campaigns and what their goals are.

Dry stone walls are primarily maintained, preserved and built in accordance with tradition, i.e. with the aim of demarcating agricultural and other areas and thus preserving their original function, which is inextricably linked to their nature conservation function. Due to their special value or aesthetic function, they are maintained, preserved and erected in public spaces or protected areas. In addition, new functions are being sought and defined in order to utilise the advantages of traditional Karst dry stone walling. Thus, they are built to prevent the spread of fires from known causes, as noise barriers along roads, as retaining walls, as water source enclosures, ... (Partnership 2015b: VIII)

Along with the traditional functions of dry stone walls and other buildings in agriculture and animal husbandry, the Partnership also emphasized the importance of an orderly and aesthetic living environment. The tendency to aestheticize life, art and media increased towards the end of the twentieth century (Baudrillard 1994), and is also characteristic of heritagization, so that heritage can more easily attract capital (Hewison 1987: 83; Walsh 1992: 136). The document on the organization of restoration campaigns (*Organizacija in izvedba akcij obnov suhih zidov in hišk*) highlights the importance of knowledge and knowers:

The cornerstone of the Partnership are the bearers of knowledge about dry stone walling techniques who want to transfer this knowledge to others. They are mentors in our restoration campaigns of dry stone walls and/or *hiške*. Without them, our movement would not exist. Our mentors are people with rich life experience, living human treasure troves of local knowledge, who deserve the full respect of the Karst people. (Partnership 2019a: 1)

The programme of the practical restoration campaigns on dry stone walling is in two parts: the evening before the campaign, one of the mentors presents the typologies of Karst dry stone structures and building techniques, and the next day a hands-on learning campaign is conducted, with one mentor for each five to seven participants. One of the mentors inspects the location beforehand and suggests which wall or *hiška* is most suitable for restoration. He also advises on the tools to be used, such as picks, shovels, mallets, buckets, wheelbarrows, handsaws and vineyard scissors (Partnership 2019a: 1–2). Restoration campaigns are intensive practical courses with a theoretical introduction, on which participants spend approximately eight hours. Mentors participate in 10 to 15 restoration campaigns and workshops per year, mostly in spring and autumn, although also in winter if there is no snow; in summer it is too hot for such work (Boris Čok).

The restoration campaigns are available to the Karst village communities, while the popularization workshops are adapted to the target groups, e.g. to children and educators in kindergartens and elementary schools, professors and students in secondary schools, adult residents, pensioners, as well as experts and students of architecture, construction, landscape architecture, restoration, ethnology, anthropology, archaeology, history, agriculture, forestry and biology from all over Slovenia and the Trieste region (Partnership 2015b: xx–xxi). In October 2019, so many Karst village communities expressed a desire to organize restoration campaigns that the mentors simply could not cope with the demand (Boris Čok). This was a consequence of the increased interest following the inscription of dry stone walling on the UNESCO Representative List in November 2018 and intensive media coverage.

Habitus is social knowledge inscribed in practice in the body, and practice is a circular factor of socialization (Muršič 2006: 52), which means that people usually pass on their skills and practices to others in a similar way to how they acquired them. Mentors also pass on their skills similarly to how they learned them. I observed two approaches during the filming of the *School of Renovation: Dry Stone Walling* in October 2016, one that focused on the social aspects and another that focused on the technical ones. Rudi Bak transmitted the practical knowledge in a gentle, patient manner, as good cooperation and solidarity within the group were very important to him.

*It's good to look broadly, at everything, not just at work. In a group, you cannot simply work on your metre of dry stone wall, you have to look at how others are doing and aid them. You always stack big stones in pairs, together with a fellow waller. And you have to help each other, you have*

*to think about several things, even plan a little bit ahead, so that you can reach the end.* (Rudi Bak)

Mitja Kobal, on the other hand, is goal-oriented when it comes to creating stable and aesthetic dry stone objects.

*This wall stands with the first stone, and if the first stone is not laid properly, it is only a matter of time when all stones above it will be on the ground. In my experience, it's best to demolish the wall, remove all the stones and sort them: stones with faces, stones for the centre, slates and corner stones. [...] Then we lay the foundations and the stones should always hang to the centre of the wall a bit.*

He takes a critical view of promotional workshops, because it can happen that the participants lay the stones badly and the wall is not stable: “*If someone comes and wants to try, I can't tell them for every move that it's wrong.*” As he incorporates his dry stone walling skills into his work as a professional mason, he would also be interested in conducting slightly longer courses for the professional level (Mitja Kobal). To sum up, Bak's attitude is characterized by soft agency with the stable reproduction of tradition (Ortner 2006: 134), while Kobal and Zadavec combine soft and hard agency (ibid.: 134–136): on the one hand, they preserve tradition by using local materials and techniques, and on the other hand, they introduce a new profession. “*For me, dry stone walling is a tradition and a step forward*” (Mitja Kobal).

According to Darja Kranjc, the most important criteria for selecting mentors are skills and knowledge, the desire to pass these on and enjoyment of the work. While it is good if people have a background from childhood, they have recently been working with middle-aged individuals who have been trained in workshops or are self-taught and have perfected their techniques. Their products are of such high quality that they simply cannot be overlooked as mentors and knowledge bearers, if only they are willing to pass on their skills to others (Darja Kranjc). Practical learning in workshops is thus moving away from situational and unorganized learning in a community of practice and towards relatively structured and organized action learning *in situ* (Ličen 2012: 10, 16–21).

I claim that the use of different approaches to passing on dry stone walling skills can enrich workshops, as the participants can choose to work with a mentor who is more focused on either the social or technical aspects of dry stone walling, or learn from both, whichever suits their learning styles and

motivation. In October 2016, I also filmed some statements of workshop participants. A participant from Kropa was particularly interested in comparing the skills and techniques in the Karst and Gorenjska. An ethnologist from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Ljubljana intended to use this knowledge as a basis for dialogue with the restorers of the architectural heritage. Two brothers from the Karst were already using their practical knowledge to reconstruct walls on their home plots.

The organizers and mentors see the workshops primarily as an informal, hands-on way of learning dry stone walling, while at the same time acknowledging that the participants come with different motives: besides those who intend to use the skills for private or professional purposes, some participants want to connect to the traditions of the regional space, some want to see if they would enjoy dry stone walling, some take the workshops as recreation in the fresh air or relaxation from their everyday routine, and one of the motives can also be to enjoy the traditional *jota* with sausage in a nearby inn (Mitja Kobal; Darja Kranjc).<sup>99</sup> In addition to learning new skills or the “known unknowns”, participants may therefore also be concerned with consciously or subconsciously strengthening their emotional and intellectual ideas about themselves, their values, attitudes and identities, thus confirming their “known knowns” (Žižek 2006; Smith 2015: 479).

Due to the complexity of the participants’ motivations, it is important that the mentors are fond of dry stone walling. “*I enjoyed it [dry stone walling] so much back then*” (Rudi Bak). “*It seems to be in the genes, the love of stone. Old people used to say: ‘Either you fall in love with the stone or you throw it away’*” (Boris Čok). “*We are very happy that the workshops are connected to us, the local population. [...] Whenever they call us, we cooperate, we gladly give a hand. [...] There is joy with the workshops*” (Zdravko Škrli). “*We work together with my younger son [...], he*

99 Kristina Kovačič, a teacher of the Slovenian language, history and geography in a Slovenian school in Italy, participated in several workshops with the aim of learning how to maintain dry stone walls on her parents’ estate, but also to get to know the heritage of the common cross-border region better. To her, it was a very interesting experience to work in a group where a connection was formed without anyone worrying about being paid or how many hours they had already worked. When engaged in repairing dry stone walls, she remembered that she had become fully aware of the beauty of the “white lace” walls in a green environment and the homeliness of the Karst landscape when returning from abroad. She did not move large stones in the workshops, but was engaged in finer work, such as collecting gravel, filling voids in the wall, and clearing the meadow of stones. She cooperates with Irina M. Cavaion from the Institute for Linguistic Studies of the Science and Research Centre Koper in creating a model for Italian participants of dry stone walling workshops in the Karst to learn the basics of the Slovenian language and getting to know the heritage of this area (Cavaion 2025) (Kristina Kovačič, EM, August 15, 2025).



*enjoys dry stone walling and may continue this profession*" (Mitja Kobal). In their words, I can recognize the love for stone, the joy of the work, the respect for their ancestors, the responsibility towards the younger generations, the fear of losing the tradition, and the pride that they can contribute to the preservation of the common heritage (cf. Tolia-Kelly, Waterton and Watson 2017a: 4). Enthusiasm and eagerness for dry stone walling are valuable components of the mentors' practices and communication, as they motivate the participants to learn the skills.

Restoration campaigns and workshops are also a means of acting on the world, as the experiences and skills remain in people and the results are visible in the landscape as a long-term effect, bringing pride, confidence and self-esteem (cf. Hafstein 2015: 152) to the participants, mentors, organizers and village communities, while also encouraging them to continue in this work. If we multiply the number of people in a workshop by the number of campaigns and workshops in the Karst and Istria in 14 years, at least 6,000 people have learned the basics of the craft so far, and a total of more than six kilometres of dry stone walls and 60 *biške* have been renovated, with two having been built from scratch (Boris Čok). However, kilometres and kilometres of walls have been built in the Karst and Istria over the centuries, so they cannot all be restored in 14 years, and it is precisely for this reason that the renovation of walls and objects in the residential areas is prioritized (Dejan Zadavec).

In traditional dry stone walling, tacit and embodied knowledge was transmitted experientially and situationally as part of people's way of life (Lave and Wenger 1991; Ličen 2012), while during the revitalization, ethnologists and heritage bearers objectified it into explicit, cognitive knowledge in publications, and they also organized the framework for the experiential transmission of skills and practices in workshops and restoration campaigns. The skills of dry stone walling have not changed significantly – to date, there is no possibility of machine or robot-assisted production of dry stone walls that would facilitate, accelerate or automate the manual work processes. Observation, imitation, repetition, testing and some oral instruction are methods of knowledge transfer that remain similar to as in the past. In both Istria and the Karst, one of the basic recommendations in all restorations is the mandatory use of local stone and traditional building techniques (Boris Čok; Dejan Zadavec; Darja Kranjc; Eda Belingar; cf. Gowlland 2024: 75 for Switzerland).

In contrast, the media used for knowledge transfer (Barth 2002: 3) or heritage genres (Hafstein 2015: 146–150) have been updated, with workshops and restoration campaigns complemented by books, handbooks and films. The oral

tradition has been replaced by a lecture the evening before the restoration campaign or an introduction to the workshop (Boris Čok; Dejan Zadravec; Darja Kranjc; Eda Belingar). On a broader level, some modern tools have been introduced into practical work (e.g. the chainsaw), and the means of transport and communication have also been modernized, e.g. announcements on websites and in online social media, communication by phone and email. As claimed by Hafstein, “Don’t be fooled by the talk of preservation: all heritage is change” (Hafstein 2012: 502; cf. Bortolotto 2025: 23). New social organizations for the long-term dissemination of knowledge have emerged in both areas: the Jugna Society in Istria, and the Partnership in the Karst. Heritage preservation organizes communities through a combination of social institutions and heritage genres (Hafstein 2015: 146–150; 2018b: 155) that promote social networking and present dry stone walling as a value.

Moreover, there are two essential differences in the transmission of skills, the temporal dimension and the structure of knowledge. In the past, children observed and imitated the knowers over a longer period of time, measured in years, whereas today a workshop lasts approximately eight hours. Today people have a fundamentally different attitude to planning their activities, and therefore seek concentrated, structured knowledge that leads to the optimal utilization of time (Darja Kranjc). However, there are no shortcuts to learning dry stone walling:

*Maybe it’s good that you need a lot of practice to really master the skill. From whatever point you look at it, you still need observation and that mixed approach. If you have someone explain it to you, you cannot build yet, you still need a lot of exercise, practice, experience. I ask questions at the workshops and it gets easier with every workshop; but still, it takes time to master new things. Basically, it’s an improvisation: the stones are different, you can’t set a recipe, and in the end, you have to find your way resourcefully. (Darja Kranjc)*

There is also a noticeable difference between the attitude to time of older mentors, who work at a moderate pace and nurture a good atmosphere in the group, and those who are professionally motivated to build as much as possible each day, as this increases the likelihood that their clients will decide to have them build dry stone walls around their houses (Mitja Kobal).

How different is the social organization of traditional and modern dry stone walling? Traditionally, knowledge and skills were passed on within the family and village community (Rudi Bak; Zdravko Škrlić; Boris Čok; Darja Kranjc),

as a horizontal exchange between men and also as a vertical one from the older to the younger. In the cross-border projects, workshops have been developed for local communities and specific groups of users in kindergartens, primary, secondary and higher education and at the Slovenian Third Age University, while restoration campaigns in the Karst are primarily organized for village communities. They are both attended by already formed groups (village communities, pupils, students, pensioners), while workshops with an open call attract heterogeneous groups. The workshops are led by male mentors, and women participate in the organization, coordination and implementation. The Partnership has not yet selected women as mentors,<sup>100</sup> while among the official knowledge bearers in the Register there is Irina Jež from Istria (2024). The participants in the workshops are men and women; in addition to Istrians and Karst residents, the workshops with an open call are also attended by individuals from other parts of Slovenia and the Trieste region (Rudi Bak; Mitja Kobal; Dejan Zadravec; Darja Kranjc).

Both revitalization projects engaged with the cross-border communities of the Karst and Istria, due to the requirements of the Interreg tenders. After the end of the project, cross-border cooperation did not formally continue in Istria, while in the Karst the Partnership still nurtures it intensively. One of the characteristics of international projects is their limited duration, so in the Karst and Istria they considered how to organize appropriate bodies and officially recognized knowledge transfers that would enable the professional livelihood of local entrepreneurs (Darja Kranjc; Dejan Zadravec). In 2020, Zadravec was already earning most of his income from public contracts for the renovation of dry stone walls and other structures in coastal Istrian towns. Kobal includes his dry stone skills in the professional masonry service in the Goriška region (on both sides of the border) and in the Karst. He notes that the profession of dry stone waller is undoubtedly commercially interesting, but the price is not affordable for everyone, as it is simply not possible to build a lot of high-quality dry stone wall in one day. This statement well illustrates the transformation from embodied cultural capital (skills, practices) into an objectified state (dry stone walls) and the exchange rate into economic and financial capital (payment) – the universal equivalent and measure of all equivalences is precisely the labour time invested (Bourdieu 2005: 105–106). As Mitja Kobal puts it: *“In fact, the most important factor is accessibility: dry stone walls are ordered by people who can afford it.”*

The promotion of dry stone walling and buildings of this type in newspapers, television and radio broadcasts, on websites and in social media has ensured

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100 There are two active dry stone wallers in the Karst, one comes from the Italian part (Boris Čok).

that very general knowledge about this heritage is also known in the wider society (cf. Koch 2013: 176). Increased awareness of dry stone walling has meant that people also take better care of dry stone walls on their agricultural land. For example, they repair boundary walls between plots and retaining walls, especially on terraces of vineyards and olive groves (Dejan Zadavec; Boris Čok). The feedback effect of heritagization is that the *habitus* in cultural practices has also been revived. As such, habitual culture and reflexive heritage can no longer be demarcated as two phenomena (Tauschek 2011: 56; Tschofen 2012: 29; Grasseni 2017: 164). The mending and rebuilding of retaining and boundary walls on agricultural land remains primarily the responsibility of landowners, while village communities are mostly motivated to keep their villages well-arranged and to preserve the common heritage in their surroundings. They almost always cite tourist visits as arguments in favour of these actions (Eda Benčič Mohar; Darja Kranjc; Boris Čok; Dejan Zadavec).

Dry stone walling is an integral part of karst biotopes and represents a unique added value and recognition of products and services in agriculture, crafts and especially in tourism, enabling the survival of local knowledge and related professions (bricklayers, stonemasons). Without karst dry stone walls, the karst landscape becomes similar to countless other areas in the world. It loses its “soul” and with it, among other things, its true development potential and attractiveness, both for visitors and for local people. (Partnership 2019b: 2)

The authors define the uniqueness of the local landscape with a soul, an “aura” (cf. Benjamin 1969: 223, 226), which is part of the self-identification of the Karst people when presenting their culture to the outside world. When the local community emphasizes identification symbols with which it wants to place its area on the world tourist map, this is the so-called glocalization of traditions (Robertson 1995: 35). Tradition is a value and a means of identity politics, as well as a strategy for strengthening the sense of belonging and achieving very different goals (Poljak Istenič 2012: 77).

[T]radition is used as a strategy to either improve one’s own economic position or to enhance the development of the local environment as a whole. It is most often used in tourism, acquiring new forms and functions (i.e. being revived as folklorism). (Ibid.: 83)

In the Karst, dry stone walling is promoted as a value, as an integral part of the identity of the Karst area and community, and as a way of promoting tourism. Walls and *biške* are mostly renovated by the local population, using local stone

and building techniques, so only the construction of new *hiške* comes close to folklorism. Due to the changed way of life, these no longer have the original function of protecting shepherds from rain, wind and natural forces (Belingar and Kranjc 2019: 77), but have been given a new life as heritage that also serves tourist purposes, for example in the thematic trails of Boris Čok. From the emic perspective of the local community, folklorization is usually viewed as a positive process of creating something new, when past traditions are carried into the present and adapted to their new needs (Poljak Istenič 2008: 88; cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995).

Based on conversations with interlocutors, field observations and the analyses of articles, films and media releases, I assess that the heritage bearers, researchers, communities and sympathizers of dry stone walling have cooperated in its revival very successfully. Although it was an unofficial heritage until 2016, they have already formed a “heritage community” of people who value cultural heritage and want to preserve it for future generations (Council of Europe 2005: Article 2b). Of course, the dry stone walling community is embedded in the wider social environment and many older people, construction companies and architectural planners still believe that building with concrete is cheaper and faster (Dejan Zadavec). Moreover, some road companies, electricity distributors and the Slovenian Forest Service destroy dry stone walls during their work interventions and do not repair them (Partnership 2018: 1; Boris Čok). The dry stone heritage community thus also experiences friction and dissonant views at its boundaries, as is generally the case with all heritage, if we inspect it closely enough (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996: 21; Smith 2006: 80; Ashworth 2011: 28–31).

## Educational Modules and National Vocational Qualification

In addition to informal methods of transmitting dry stone walling skills in the form of organized and slightly structured learning (Ličen 2012: 11), in the Karst and Istria they also wanted to ensure a formalized and officially recognized transfer of these skills with appropriate verification. Their efforts began before the official safeguarding, and then ran parallel to it for several years, but in terms of content, quite independently of it.

As a partner of the *Living Landscape* project, the Škocjan Caves Park and the Partnership were already interested in establishing a National Vocational Qualification for dry stone wallers at the Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training in 2013. However, during the designing of the educational programme, and considering the competencies of the

bearers of practical knowledge, they focused instead on the informal transfer of skills to younger generations (Darja Kranjc). In the Karst, they committed to education at the *School of Renovation: Dry Stone Walling* and popularization workshops, and also collaborated with the Higher Vocational College Sežana and the Edilmaster Construction School in Trieste as member organizations of the Partnership. At their initiative, the module for training experts in Karst dry stone walling should be implemented by the Higher Vocational College Sežana, where they have a Centre for Working in Stone and are registered to carry out educational activities (Darja Kranjc). In June 2021, they realized a module for practitioners (Internet sources 119–121), however, the theoretical part did not follow the scheme in the *Educational Programme in the Field of Dry Stone Construction* (Erhart 2014), and will be improved in the coming years (Darja Kranjc). In November 2021, a dry stone walling training area with three piles of stones was set up at the Living Museum of the Karst in Sežana. Here it is possible to carry out workshops and practical training in dry stone walling for various groups (employees in construction companies, students of architecture and civil engineering, secondary school students, pupils), as well as cultural programmes and professional meetings regarding the development of the dry stone walling heritage (Lavin 2021).

Endeavours to implement a standardized vocational National Vocational Qualification were then continued in Istria, primarily by the Jugna Society and Traven Institute. The Centre for Vocational Education and Training was first provided with calculations on the cost-effectiveness and durability of dry stone buildings (Zupančič and Benčič Mohar 2012: 61–74; Orbančić, Zupančič and Benčič Mohar 2012: 28–29). In connection with the National Examination Centre, they established a commission for the verification and validation of the National Vocational Qualification, and appointed consultants and a company that would carry out the qualification process (Dejan Zadravec). The Karst Partnership, ethnologists from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, and the architect Borut Juvanec were invited to the scheme. At the initiative of the National Examination Centre, Zadravec passed the consultant exam, founded the Dry Stone Wall Institute for Education and Preservation of Traditional Building and Craftsmanship Skills (Suhi zid, Zavod za izobraževanje in ohranjanje tradicionalnih gradbenih in obrtniških znanj, 2019), and rented the Bržan Homestead in Smokvica from the Municipality of Koper. There, candidates can view various types of dry stone buildings and present their skills in the training area with the aim of meeting the criteria from the catalogue of knowledge and professional standards for dry stone wallers. In April 2020, a National Vocational Qualification



for dry stone waller was officially established (Internet sources 122–123). The first five candidates obtained their licences in 2022, and ten more in the following years (Dejan Zadavec). Investors can now hire qualified and certified contractors to restore dry stone objects in protected areas (Dejan Zadavec; Eda Benčič Mohar; Eda Belingar).

The National Vocational Qualification certificates are internationally recognized, while the Sežana certificates of practical training in dry stone walling are only valid in Slovenia (Dejan Zadavec). By the end of 2024, two holders of National Vocational Qualification certificates were registered as bearers of dry stone walling. In Switzerland it was observed that the revitalization of the practice in the 1980s accelerated the professionalization of dry stone walling. The Swiss Federation of Dry Stone Masons provides practical training – a course with four modules (one of which is dedicated to the ecological importance of dry stone walls), leading to an examination and certification (Gowlland 2024: 78, 80).

The objectification of cultural capital in the form of vocational qualifications is, according to Bourdieu (2005: 100, 102), a “social alchemy”, dependent on cultural fields that interact hierarchically. State institutions create fields of power or meta-fields that shape the relations and practices of subordinate fields (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002: xii). The power of state institutions was experienced by the promoters of dry stone walling on the long journey from the idea to the actual establishment and implementation of a National Vocational Qualification. Another type of social alchemy institutionalizes cultural practices into official heritage in the States Parties and, in a second step, possibly into the authorized heritage on UNESCO’s lists. UNESCO regulates ‘the game’ in the States Parties, and then the latter in their own territories, which means that UNESCO forms a meta-meta-field. How have the social alchemy (Bourdieu 2005) or metacultural production (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006) of dry stone walling played out in Slovenia, and after the multinational nomination of eight European countries was sent to UNESCO?

## Dry Stone Walling as Official Heritage

Dry stone walling entered the sphere of political governance to be inscribed into the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage and on the UNESCO Representative List in 2015, when Darja Kranjc learned from the Croatian cooperative Dragodid (Internet source 124) that a multinational nomination was being prepared (Darja Kranjc; Eda Belingar), which people from the Karst

wanted to join. However, here it is time to introduce the last two interlocutors, the representatives of the Coordinator and the Ministry of Culture that are the two main bodies of authorized heritage production in Slovenia.

The Curator of the Department of Intangible Cultural Heritage at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum is the only employee in the museum engaged specifically to perform the tasks of the Coordinator for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, while other curators do it in addition to their other responsibilities. An ethnologist and cultural anthropologist with a master's degree by education, they document heritage elements, their bearers and their activities in the field. They coordinate inscriptions to the register and usually support or supervise the drafting of nominations to UNESCO lists. They also engage in preparing digital contents for the Coordinator's website (Internet source 9).

Ksenija Kovačec Naglič has been employed at the Ministry of Culture since 1995 in the Information and Documentation Centre for Heritage, which manages the Register of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Internet source 7). Professionally, she was introduced to intangible cultural heritage in 2008, when the Act on the Ratification of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (MKVNKD) was adopted, which transposed the UNESCO *Convention* into Slovenian legislation. She actively participated in forming the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the procedures for inscriptions to the register and proclamation of heritage of special importance by a decree.<sup>101</sup> She is a member of the Working Group of the Coordinator (Ksenija Kovačec Naglič).

The process of the inscription to the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage is carried out in two steps: first, the bearers, village communities, local museums or town administrations send an initiative for inscription, which is then considered by the Coordinator's Working Group.<sup>102</sup> If approved, the text

101 This instrument was transferred from the sphere of immovable heritage, and so in Slovenia the proclamation of intangible heritage of national importance was a necessary step before sending the nomination to UNESCO. The Coordinator campaigned against this decree, as it imposes a safeguarding regime and inspection over heritage practices, which could cause freezing of intangible heritage, and moreover, it contradicts the *Convention* (Židov 2018: 51). It is supposed to be abolished in the revised legislation.

102 It consists of the curators of the SEM, representatives of regional museums, the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Faculty of Arts, the University of Ljubljana, the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology SRC SASA, the Institute of Ethnomusicology SRC SASA, the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, the Ministry of Culture and the Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO (Internet source 125).

of the inscription is prepared either by regional researchers, the Coordinator or specialists for certain cultural spheres, in cooperation with bearers, and the unit is then inscribed by the Ministry of Culture.

### *The Inscription of Dry Stone Walling to the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage*

Darja Kranjc and Eda Belingar submitted the application form for the inscription of the *Kraška suhozidna gradnja* (Karst Dry Stone Walling 2015) to the Coordinator in September 2015 (Darja Kranjc). In November 2015, the Coordinator's Working Group confirmed that the element met the criteria for inscription to the register and recommended preparing a joint inscription of dry stone walling in the Karst and Istria. Although the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia proposed separate units due to the regional specifics of stone and dry stone walling techniques, at a meeting of the Ministry of Culture, the Coordinator, and representatives of the Institute, it was decided to inscribe one unit called *Suhozidna gradnja* (Dry Stone Walling Minutes 2016).

In the proposal or initiative for inscription to the Slovenian Register, the bearers and experts together define the heritage and identify the bearers. In the text, Darja Kranjc and Eda Belingar used the experience-near expressions (*Kraška suhozidna gradnja*, *zid na suho*) and not experience-distant ones (*živa* or *nesnovna dediščina* – living or intangible heritage). Cultural practices are most often associated with first-order identities close to experience, which are formed in the family, community and circle of friends. When the Coordinator and the Ministry of Culture unite the initiatives of several communities or areas into a single entry in the state register, and when they coordinate the preparation of nominations for inscription on the Representative List, they implicitly connect the heritage with second-order identities acquired in school, the mass media and in contacts with the state apparatus (Muršič 1997: 230), and these are experience-distant. For heritage bearers, this can lead to tension between the identities of the two orders, as regional *istrska suhogradnja* and *kraški zid na suho* become subsets of neutral dry stone walling, pointing to the national identity. As such, authorized heritagization can have a feedback effect on the identifications of practitioners.

In the case of dry stone walling, the strategy of the Coordinator was to engage regional ethnologists and anthropologists to write the text of the inscription, while its representative monitored the procedure and suggested possible formulations and expressions close to the UNESCO paradigm and Slovenian

safeguarding system.<sup>103</sup> Eda Belingar wrote the text of the inscription, Darja Kranjc, in cooperation with the bearers, prepared presentations of four Karst mentors, and Eda Benčič Mohar added the characteristics of Istrian dry stone walling and the presentation of two bearers from Istria. Eda Belingar reported that writing the inscription to the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage was quite a challenge for her, because at the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia they prepare completely different texts on heritage in the Register of Immovable Cultural Heritage, as they deal with protected objects and areas, not with the skills and activities of people, so the drafting of the text was directed by the representative of the Coordinator.

*Dry Stone Walling* (Internet source 2) was officially entered into the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage<sup>104</sup> in May 2016 with four heritage bearers: Boris Čok, Rudi Bak, Dejan Zadavec and Sergij Palčič. They were proposed by the researchers who had long collaborated with them in the revitalization projects, and together they prepared descriptions of their activities. In the following years, Eda Belingar no longer considered new bearers, Eda Benčič Mohar did have a few candidates in mind, but they did not want to become officially registered bearers, and Darja Kranjc prepared descriptions for identification of Dušan Okorn, Ivan Pavlin, Mitja Kobal and Zdravko Škrli in 2018, and for Vinko Mahnič in 2025. In 2024, the Istrians registered Simon Zadavec and Irina Jež. The practitioners with permanent residence in Italy, active in the cross-border Partnership, could not become official bearers in the Slovenian Register. The Karst Partnership connects and socially activates a unified community of practice on both sides of the border, while the *Convention*, with its territorial organization of safeguarding by the States Parties, sets the state border as the boundary.<sup>105</sup>

103 In cases when the elements have not been researched yet, they may engage more actively, however, they do not learn the practice themselves. Learning the skills during the revitalization was a personal agency of Primorska researchers who thus got to understand values, aesthetic codes and professional identities of practitioners (cf. Grasseni 2004: 16–17). Heritage institutions on the periphery are much more embedded in the local environment than central ones, and they mostly take care of one or a few elements, while the Coordinator's representatives monitor the situations of 133 elements throughout Slovenia and annually inscribe eight to ten new ones.

104 At that time, it was still called the Register of Living Cultural Heritage, and the name changed with the *Act on Amendments to the Cultural Heritage Protection Act* (ZVKD-1D 2016).

105 Based on the *Convention* (UNESCO 2003: Articles 2.5, 11–13), the legislation of the States Parties defines insiders of the safeguarding paradigm in an individual state (nations, ethnic and Indigenous communities, foreign national minorities) as well as the outsiders (their own national minorities in neighbouring states). This is an external categorization of the responsible body, which in turn influences the self-identification of heritage bearers. Kristin Kuutma and Elo-Hanna Seljamaa (2025) write of the “representational silences” of minorities.



Figure 6: Characteristic photograph of dry stone walling in the Karst, 2014 (Eda Belingar).

An analysis of the inscription text<sup>106</sup> shows that it is listed under the category “knowledge about nature and the environment” with two subcategories “knowledge of space” and “handicraft and craft skills”. It is rather unusual that the competent institution for this heritage element is Koper Regional Museum, and not the Škocjan Caves Park and the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia that were the essential institutions for the revitalization of the practice, as well as for the inscription to the Slovenian Register and on the UNESCO Representative List. Dry stone walling is defined as

a skill of building without the use of a binding material, where different types of solid stone buildings are constructed by selecting available local stone obtained by cleaning and arranging land plots

106 In 2023, the Ministry of Culture reorganized the display of elements in the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage as uniform subpages. In the original document, there was also a list of 27 protected dry stone buildings in Istria and Karst in the Register of Immovable Cultural Heritage (Dry Stone Walling 2016: 3, point 8). The document can be retrieved from the old domain of registered units (Internet source 8), which continues to exist, as PDF documents need to be sent together with the nomination to UNESCO.



and while understanding the concept of building by stacking. (Internet source 2)

After enumerating common characteristics of the practice in the Karst and Istria, the composition of local stone and adjusted building techniques of both areas are emphasized that contribute to their specific cultural landscapes. The fourth paragraph describes the typology and functions of dry stone walls (enclosure, pasture, vineyard, boundary, cart-track, support, windbreak and fire-break walls) and other buildings:

escarpments, shelters from the Bora wind, support for vines, *groblje* (mounds of excess stone), walled water springs, ponds, wells, reservoirs, ice houses, sand traps, lime kilns, paths, bridges, railway embankments, ovens, trenches, *hiške*, pigsties, staircases [... and] walls protecting against fire and the Bora along railway lines in the Karst [...]. (Ibid.)

“In the past, dry stone walling was also known in some other parts of Slovenia, but it was most common in the Karst and Istria, where it has been present since prehistoric times” (ibid.). After World War II, traditional agricultural and animal husbandry practices were slowly abandoned and dry stone walls lost their significance and one of original purposes. The safeguarding guidelines define the basic safeguarding measures for intangible cultural heritage,<sup>107</sup> and the protection of cultural spaces linked to the heritage.

The justification of the inscription states that the Karst and Istrian cultural landscapes are the result of the human use of space from prehistoric times to the present day, and that the skill of dry stone building, among other things, enabled the survival of the inhabitants of these areas. Dry stone walls and other structures, which have proven to be solid, sustainable and aesthetic, show the efforts of the inhabitants to improve land for agricultural uses and make the Karst and Istrian landscapes more attractive. Today, the primary uses of dry stone walls are losing its importance, while the aesthetic and sustainable values are growing. It is concluded that the knowledge and skills of dry stone walling enable the maintenance and renovation of the existing walls, thus

107 The regulations on heritage domains and safeguarding measures (*Pravilnik o seznamih vrsti dediščine in varstvenih usmeritvah*) define measures to ensure the preservation of heritage, which include “identification, documentation, research, protection, promotion, improvement and revitalization of various aspects of this heritage” (Regulations 2010: Article 8.1; cf. UNESCO 2003: Article 2.3). “Basic information about heritage includes identification, description, dating, location, characteristic photograph or film of the heritage element, their author, safeguarding guidelines and the relation of the heritage unit with other units” (ZVKD-1: Article 66.2).



also preserving the characteristic landscape and reviving the traditional use of space for the future. However, the dissemination of knowledge of dry stone walling is very important, so that local people and the younger generation in particular will understand and appreciate this skill (*ibid.*).

Both the inscription and the interlocutors (Rudi Bak; Boris Čok; Dejan Zadavec; Darja Kranjc) emphasize that in the past, houses, farm buildings, walls and ponds in villages were dry stone structures, and many are preserved till today. It is thus surprising that the description of the original functions of dry stone walling does not also mention its importance for the organization and arrangement of the living environment in the settlements.

The inscription identified individual heritage bearers with descriptions of their skills and activities, including their addresses and photographs. The short descriptions of the bearers' activities also include some more personal parts that summarize their motives: "The aesthetics of dry stone walling fascinated him and immediately touched his heart" (Dejan Zadavec). "During his walks, he likes to observe old dry stone walls and admire their builders" (Dušan Okoren). "He prefers to restore old, ruined dry stone structures, as he feels more satisfaction when rebuilding them than when constructing new ones" (Ivan Pavlin). "He says that once you make a vow to stone, it is forever" (Mitja Kobal). These descriptions come closer to the bearers' emic views and allow us to feel what attracts and excites them about dry stone walling, as emotions are an important motivator of heritage activities. These are experience-near passages in an otherwise experience-distant text of inscription, and they create a sense of intimacy (Crawford 1992: 71), similar to the quotes from interlocutors in articles, books and films (MacDougall 1998: 69).

When identifying the bearers, the Slovenian experts and officials limit these to active bearers of practical knowledge and skills. When inscribing dry stone walling to the register, they listed four (and later seven more) individuals, but not the Partnership for the Preservation and Popularization of Karst Dry Stone Walling (2015) or the Society for the Preservation of Traditional Building and Craft Skills of the Slovene Istria Jugna (2013), not even after its inscription on the UNESCO Representative List, when the Ministry of Culture, with the consent of the Coordinator, presented facsimiles of the certificate to the organizations and not to the individuals (the original document is kept by the Ministry of Culture). Apparently, the bearers and actors of the heritage do not feel the need for this (Dejan Zadavec; Darja Kranjc).

According to Barth's three faces of knowledge (2002: 3), the inscription in the register contains a corpus of cognitive data on the practice and heritage bearers,

and some rather specific data, such as identification numbers, safeguarding measures and geolocation codes. If the description of the element resembles a short review article without references, some points clearly indicate integration into the database system of the Information and Documentation Centre for Heritage of the Ministry of Culture. It also contains a characteristic photograph of the heritage and photographs of the bearers, and allows for display on a map of Slovenia. There is one more specific feature of the inscriptions, namely the anonymity of the text, following the example of nominations to UNESCO lists.

Which social, professional and administrative groups make up the social circle of this inscription to the register? First and foremost, of course, the heritage bearers, researchers, experts and officials who prepared it, and on the other side of the communication process, all of its users: bearers of other heritage elements, professionals dealing with heritage, architecture and spatial development, researchers, students, journalists and curious people who find it on purpose or by chance. There is one more potential addressee of this document: when preparing a nomination for inscription on the UNESCO lists of intangible heritage, a document proving the inscription in the national register and a translation must also be included in the nomination file (UNESCO 2022: point 11; cf. 2025a: point 5).

There are twelve photographs published on the website of the Ministry (Internet source 2) and the Coordinator's site (Internet source 3). How do these contribute to the knowledge of the element? The central photograph shows a dynamic Karst landscape, interspersed with grey boundary walls, without any heritage bearers present. Eleven photographs present official bearers, individually or in a group, who are building dry stone walls (nine cases), a Karst *biška* (two cases) or an Istrian *kažeta* (one case). The Register on the Ministry's website provides information on the authors of the photographs and the year they were taken, while on the Coordinator website there is also information on the heritage bearers and the content of the photograph, which provides richer data (displayed when the photograph is clicked).

My interlocutors – the knowledge and skill bearers – assessed that the inscription of dry stone walling into the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage did not affect their knowledge and skills (Rudi Bak; Boris Čok; Dejan Zadravec), and Eda Belingar also supported their claims.<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, the inter-

108 It became evident that this was because the research and the revitalization of dry stone walling had been done in previous years. It would be worth analysing what happens in cases when the research and revitalization process start together with the initiative to inscribe the endangered element to the register or on the Urgent List.

locutors emphasized that the inscription primarily affected the social aspects of heritage and safeguarding: heritage bearers in the Karst and Istria, who previously operated relatively separately, got connected; researchers from both areas began to cooperate, and they formed a working group with the representatives of the Coordinator and the Ministry of Culture (Eda Belingar; Ksenija Kovačec Naglič).

### *The Construction of Knowledge When Filming Dry Stone Walling and Editing the Film*

This subsection will be a rather personal and auto-reflexive account of my filmmaking. I have built my knowledge and practical skills of ethnographic filming on visual anthropology and visual ethnography, based also on the education in ethnology, cultural anthropology and museology that I received during my studies and my work in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, as well as when preparing reviews of Slovene ethnographic films and cooperating in international festivals of ethnographic films. In 2011, when the museum started to coordinate the safeguarding in Slovenia, the UNESCO paradigm and the instructions of Ministry of Culture brought some additional directions. However, the practical examples of films on the UNESCO website mostly used a patronizing attitude towards heritage practitioners, as the films were based on etic commentaries and not on emic voices. There was no reflection on the films available back then.

Slovenian visual anthropologists mostly research our own culture, and there is a strong tendency to minimize the influences of the film crew on the situations filmed, so I am a researcher, filmmaker and film editor in one person (cf. Mead 1975: 7; Rouch 1975: 87–8, 91). My films are ascetic, with no music or commentary added (cf. Husmann and Postma 2008: 13). Slovene visual ethnographers have very often documented annual customs and work procedures – how different objects and exhibited musealia are or were made (Križnar 1995: 77; 1996: 102; Valentinčič Furlan 2024: 289–290; cf. de Heusch 1988: 124, 130). Dry stone walling, in terms of the structure of the event, falls into the category of work procedures and also workshops, which is a new category with rather complex relations among the organizers, mentors and participants (Valentinčič Furlan 2024: 338–339).

Since it was already clear that Slovenia would participate in the multinational nomination, the film production was planned for the purposes of visualizing the element in the Slovenian Register and also for sending it to

the editor of the joint film for the nomination of eight countries. I asked the researchers from Primorska to inform me about the workshops in the Karst, as I understood they are the most widespread medium for transferring knowledge to all those interested. I considered how to choose a good location and visually recognizable Karst environment for filming. I wanted to avoid workshops anywhere near a road with heavy traffic, so that the sounds and images of other activities would not intrude on the footage of dry stone walling, and it would be possible to edit a film with a clear message.

When the invitation came for the two-day professional training titled *School of Renovation: Dry Stone Walling*<sup>109</sup> in the Škocjan Caves Park on October 27 and 28, 2016, I immediately knew that this was a great location, as the Škocjan Caves and the surrounding area are characteristic and visually recognizable Karst terrain, which would also function representatively in the film. The first day of the *School of Renovation* was dedicated to theory and cognitive knowledge, with nine presentations of dry stone walling, its history, methods and techniques, geology, architecture, organized knowledge transfer in the Škocjan Caves Park and in the National Vocational Qualification. The second day was focused on practical work – the renovation of the dry stone wall in Jakopin's Field (that is now a meadow), between the villages of Škocjan and Matavun.

On the first day, I documented the natural and cultural space of the Škocjan Karst area, as well as the lectures and the audience. When reading the schedule of the *School of Renovation*, I got the idea to choose Boris Čok as the main protagonist of the film. He was announced as the only registered bearer of dry stone walling among the lecturers, and as one of the mentors of the hands-on workshop.<sup>110</sup> He was immediately ready to participate, and in the afternoon we filmed the most characteristic stone structures in the Karst landscape: *groblje* (a pile of stones), a single (supporting) and double (freestanding) wall, and a *biška*, as well as his views on dry stone walling. We had agreed that he would comment on the work procedures at the workshop the next day, but he was unable to attend it due to illness, and thus my plans

109 It was organized by the Škocjan Caves Park, the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, Secondary School of Civil Engineering, Land Surveying and Environmental Studies in Ljubljana, the Association of Historical Sites of Slovenia, and the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Ljubljana. The practical workshop was led by mentors from the Partnership for the Preservation and Popularization of Karst Dry Stone Walling (School of Renovation 2016).

110 I decided that a narrative film on dry stone walling in Slovenia would be more easily understood by foreign viewers who encountered this heritage for the first time.

were thwarted. When filming in the field, we are constantly adapting to circumstances that can change quickly, which is why flexibility and improvisation is necessary (cf. Carta 2015: 4).

During the filming, I tried to get close to the practices of mentors and their mindsets, and how the skills were mediated to participants. Ethnographic filming is a way of eliciting knowledge and skills from research subjects and a kind of skilled vision (Grasseni 2004: 16–17): we document film subjects in selected authentic situations and, through a combination of non-verbal and verbal communication (MacDougall 1998: 64), encourage them to reveal their views during the activity. The advantage of filming is that the footage can be analysed several times and with different research questions (cf. Mead 1975: 10).

In the given circumstances, I filmed how the organizers, four mentors and 38 participants from different parts of Slovenia gathered and divided into two fairly large groups. I chose a viewpoint that provided a good position for filming, with a view of the Matavun church bell tower in the background as the dominant landmark. I simply trusted the workshop participants to either approach or move away from the camera.<sup>111</sup> At first, I noticed a slight chaos as the mentors and participants arranged themselves along the wall and discussed which parts to keep and which to demolish and repair. An alternative was also suggested – to demolish everything and rebuild it all anew. The observed group removed stones, sawed off overgrown bushes, cleaned the foundations and rebuilt the wall to approximately the same height and width, and slightly widened the gap for the machinery, which has become wider and longer over the years. People worked diligently, with occasional short dialogues to reach agreement on how to place the heavy stones, and especially the corner stones, as well as some joking. The participants also developed a rapport with homemade brandy and lunch in a nearby inn.

The filming was based on the participatory-observational method. I filmed without a tripod, so that I could move among the people and choose different perspectives. I followed the working processes of the mentors and participants, their communication and group dynamics. Since none of the mentors spontaneously explained the working processes or directed it, I filmed several short statements by the mentors, organizers and participants. The

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111 The camera changes the researchers' position in the chosen situation, because it reveals their direct observation and provokes different responses from people (Husmann and Postma 2008: 11), from spontaneous to performative conduct, from coming to the fore to a complete withdrawal from the situation.

mentor Rudi Bak spoke about how he had learned dry stone walling in his childhood, and that he was satisfied with the progress of work. Darja Kranjc explained how the workshop fit in the context of the Škocjan Caves Park's activities – as the managers of this UNESCO location (Internet source 5) encourage the preservation of dry stone walling and the maintenance of dry stone walls. The participants stated various motives for attending the workshop, from personal to practical and professional.

During the filming, I noticed that the builders were turning the stones a lot, trying to figure out how to lay them to fit well into the wall and to be fixed; when they were satisfied, they would pick up the next stone and once again tested how to best position it and make it stable. I noticed parallels with the work of a visual researcher, who uses her sight and hearing during filming, while also making use of touch and kinaesthesia to operate the camera, e.g. when adjusting the focus and framing the image, as well as when moving around the location with the camera to film the activity from different angles. Filming is an embodied experience (MacDougall 1998: 265; Carta 2015: 10), which is why it also makes it easier to intuitively approach the embodied practices of film subjects (cf. Vávrová 2021).

Later, my interlocutors confirmed that vision, touch, kinaesthesia and hearing come into play when testing in which position the stone is well anchored among other stones; if the stone rattles, then its moving and the sound it produces show that it is not fixed well enough (Rudi Bak; Zdravko Škrlić; Boris Čok; Eda Belingar). Both filming and dry stone walling thus involve a form of synaesthesia, and Grasseni calls the skilled perception of several senses “skilled visions”, in plural (Grasseni 2007b: 4–8, 16); the plural concept can also refer to the skilled visions of diversely skilled people (Grasseni 2008: 161), such as dry stone wallers and filmmakers. Sensory acuity or skilled visions play an essential role in filming, analysing footage and editing a film, e.g. when deciphering answers to research questions or in structuring the film narrative (cf. Grasseni 2004: 16–17, 29).

At the workshop, I noticed that the representative of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage was more precise about some details than the mentors. For instance, she insisted on rebuilding a drain at the bottom of the wall correctly, so that rainwater could run out from the road onto the meadow, and therefore they tore apart a metre of the wall that had just been rebuilt. I later found an explanation for this in the literature: skilled practitioners set their own standards and flexibly adapt them to the situation and to space, material and time available, while researchers assess their skills by



their professional standards (Polanyi 1962: 67). The mentors either did not notice the so-called rabbit hole or did not consider it important, because they were aware that it would not be possible to restore the wall in its entire length in one day (Rudi Bak; Mitja Kobal). In contrast, the representative of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage encouraged the precise performance of the details to professional standards for the sake of the participants' learning experience (Eda Belingar).

In the editing process, I reduced 150 minutes of footage into a ten-minute film, *Dry Stone Walling* (2017), which shows a high level of data reduction (cf. Marshall 1993: 72; Križnar 1996: 95–105; Heider 2006: 86).<sup>112</sup> I selected two short statements of Rudi Bak and one by Darja Kranjc, while the opinions of the participants were omitted due to the time limitation. The statements of two film subjects of different ages, genders, and functions concern the issue of “role casting” (Temaner and Quinn 1975: 61; Križnar 1996: 111; Piault 2006: 363). Had I realized the film according to the original idea, dry stone walling would have been presented with the emic voice of the heritage bearer. I added some information with captions, which in film are equivalent to the scientific apparatus in texts (Križnar 1996: 103, 105), e.g. references. I did not exclude the shots of the subject's gazes into the camera, as they are a sign of the reflexivity of ethnographic film. The film depicts an encounter between the filmmaker and film subjects – the participants of the theoretical and practical *School of Renovation* (cf. MacDougall 1975: 119; 1998: 86, 200–205).

While editing, I used sequential shots to build the unity of space and time. The film *Dry Stone Walling* opens with a total shot of the village of Matavun above a huge karst sinkhole. After a few vignettes of the villages of Matavun and Škocjan, one of the lecturers, Maja Capuder Štembal, is shown, along with the participants of the theoretical part of the *School of Renovation: Dry Stone Walling*, in the congress centre of the Škocjan Caves Park *Pr Nanetovh*. This is followed by a series of shots of the natural and cultural landscape with dry stone walls and a shot of the thematic board of the Nature Conservation Area explaining the structure and function of dry stone walls in the Karst. The last in the sequence was a shot of the double-sided wall that demarcates the road and Jakopin's Field, which announced the location of the renovation campaign the next day. In the background, the bell tower of the Matavun church is visible as a landmark. In this way, I set the spatial,

112 If editing an ethnographic film, the footage itself would define its length, while within the safeguarding paradigm and Slovene system I have got used to limiting films to 10 minutes.

cultural and social framework of the event depicted in the film, and connected the natural features and cultural characteristics of the Škocjan Caves Park.

After a fade-out and fade-in, which indicates a jump in time, the morning gathering of the organizers, mentors and participants is shown. Eight hours of their work is condensed into eight minutes of processual film. The structure of the second part follows the structure of the event and the process of restoring the wall, while at the same time the communication between the mentors and participants is also evident. The film soundscape is based on the natural and cultural soundscape of dry stone walling and the surrounding space, and no music is added (cf. Henley 2004: 107; 2010: 130). In this way, the film also conveys the atmosphere and energy of the event: a combination of the characteristic sounds of working with stone, dialogues about working methods, small talk and jokes.



Figure 7: The village of Škocjan, 2016 (image from *Dry Stone Walling*, Nadja Valentinčič Furlan).



Figure 8: The dry stone wall was dismantled, Škocjan, 2016 (image from *Dry Stone Walling*, Nadja Valentinčič Furlan).



Figure 9: The use of traditional and modern tools, Škocjan, 2016 (image from *Dry Stone Walling*, Nadja Valentinčič Furlan).





Figure 10: Learning from elders, Škocjan, 2016 (image from *Dry Stone Walling*, Nadja Valentinčič Furlan).



Figure 11: Cutting the edges of the stone to make it fit into the wall, Škocjan, 2016 (image from *Dry Stone Walling*, Nadja Valentinčič Furlan).



Figure 12: Rudi Bak comments on the work, Škocjan, 2016 (image from *Dry Stone Walling*, Nadja Valentinčič Furlan).

If the film is evaluated from the perspective of the definition that intangible cultural heritage means “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills and related tools, objects, products and cultural spaces that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage” (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1), then embodied knowledge and practices are shown, as well as tools, objects and the cultural space where the activity took place. Foregrounded are the mentors and a heterogeneous group of participants who acquired knowledge through organized hands-on learning, but not in the sense that mentors gave precise instructions. The information is not ‘served on a plate’ through live or off commentary explaining the technique, the tools, or who is who in the workshop. The film is focused on the selected workshop, and does not try to portray the whole phenomenon of dry stone walling in a master or grand narrative of experts (Lyotard 1979).

The personal identities of individuals are revealed by their figures, clothing, way of moving and working, gestures, faces, facial expressions and speech. The cultural identities of the place are revealed by the shots of the natural and cultural landscape, characteristic buildings, institutions and signs. The identities of the social group are also revealed by the language and manner of communication (cf. Ginsburg 1995: 266; MacDougall 2006: 55). In the first part of the film, the lecturer is in the foreground, while in the second part, the two speakers are highlighted in a group of approximately 20 people (another 20

or so people are seen a few times in the background, see Figures 8 and 12). The identities of the speakers are given by stating their names and surnames (cf. UNESCO 2015a: point 118). The intangible heritage element is identified by the title of the film and by stating the place and time of the event. The identities of the filmmaker and producer are defined in the final captions and by the logos of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and the Coordinator. The opening sequence, produced by the Coordinator for films about units in the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage, situates the film in the context of the Slovenian safeguarding of intangible heritage.<sup>113</sup>

*Dry Stone Walling* is an experiential film, and also a film of discovery, as I myself learned during the filming how the heritage of dry stone walling is exercised in the workshop through shared activities, and similarly, the viewers discover meanings when watching the film (Henley 2004: 107, 110). A ten-minute film is usually not presented to heritage bearers at a special event, and I sent it to the organizers of the *School of Renovation* via WeTransfer and took their comments into account; at that time, I did not have the contacts of the heritage bearers. When the film was published in the *Filmography* on the website of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum (Internet source 126) and the Coordinator (Internet source 10), the metadata was also listed under the video, so that an online search by film title, authors or keywords could lead potential viewers to the film. The *Filmography* also includes a short factual description of the film content, while on the Coordinator's website I regard that the context is given by a short description of the unit.

It is not easy to define the circle of users of the film: the film is published on the websites of the Coordinator, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and the Partnership for the Preservation and Popularization of Karst Dry Stone Walling. It was also sent to the Spanish coordinator of the joint nomination film, and presented in several museums during lectures, conferences, exhibitions and festivals.<sup>114</sup> This demonstrates the strong connection of intangible cul-

113 The footage and film are kept at the Department of Ethnographic Film in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum.

114 The film was screened (along with other examples) at the lecture *How to Film Intangible Cultural Heritage* at the Gorenjska Museum Kranj (2017) and the Goriška Museum Nova Gorica (2017), it was also shown at the ICOM conference *Intangible Heritage – The Challenge of Management and Collection Policy* in Ethnographic Museum Zagreb (Croatia, 2019) and in the film programme accompanying the exhibition on Slovenian intangible cultural heritage at the Institute and Museum of Bitola (North Macedonia, 2019). The organizers of the international festival *Days of Ethnographic Film* showed it when I received the Niko Kuret Award (Slovene Ethnographic Museum, 2019; Križnar 2019). It also introduced the event marking the tenth anniversary of the Partnership for the Preservation and Popularization of Karst Dry Stone Walling (Sežana, 2025).



tural heritage with the museums – heritage experts bring cultural phenomena and their bearers into the heritage sphere by applying museological concepts, methods, standards, values (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 161–162) and communication channels.

### *The Inscription of Dry Stone Walling on the UNESCO Representative List*

The initiative for cooperation in the multinational nomination of dry stone walling was conveyed to the Coordinator and the Ministry of Culture by Eda Belingar. In April 2016, the representatives of the Ministry of Culture and the Coordinator invited three ethnologists (Eda Belingar, Eda Benčič Mohar, Darja Kranjc), a biologist (Vanja Debevec Gerjevič, expert manager of the Karst Biosphere Reserve in the Škocjan Caves Park), two heritage bearers (Boris Čok and Dejan Zadavec) and two representatives of local communities (Danilo Antoni for the Karst and Vinko Zupančič for Istria) to the working group. Eda Belingar was selected as the national representative to participate in the second meeting for preparing the international nomination in September in Greece (Dry Stone Walling Minutes 2016: 2). The process was supervised by the representatives of the Coordinator and the Ministry of Culture.

In the preparation of the joint nomination, which was entitled *Dry Stone Craftsmanship* in August 2016, Slovenia joined Greece, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Italy, France, Spain and Switzerland. Bulgaria later did not continue, as the element was not inscribed in the national register in due time. The preparation of multinational nominations usually develops in such a way that the initiator sets the basic guidelines and invites other States Parties sharing the heritage element, and then they set up the further course of action at joint meetings. For individual criteria-based fields of the nomination form, countries prepare descriptions of their heritage, bearers, knowledge transfers, safeguarding measures and information on inscriptions in their registers, which are then edited into a single text by the main coordinators. The preparation is accompanied by many discussions and negotiations, partly remotely using electronic tools, and partly at live meetings in different countries. In these processes, the main emphases and the title of the nomination may change, the methods of description are coordinated, and the submitting countries also collect informed consents from the practitioners and other heritage actors, photographs and footage for the joint film, and grants of rights of the photographers and filmmakers. The Greek coordinators were well acquainted with the methodology for preparing the nomination, and brought the terminology closer to the characteristic UNESCO language.

How were heritage bearers involved in the drafting of the nomination text? The data were provided and the texts were read by Boris Čok and Dejan Zadravec as members of the working group (Boris Čok; Dejan Zadravec; Eda Belingar). Other heritage bearers and local communities were regularly informed about the development and the emphases of the nomination, and some of them signed letters of support. The bearers were involved, but they were not very responsive, as the drafting of the texts was a very abstract and dry matter that had to meet UNESCO criteria (Eda Belingar).

The nomination, finally entitled *Art of Dry Stone Walling, Knowledge and Techniques*, was submitted to UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in late March 2017 and discussed at the 13th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Port Louis, Mauritius, in November 2018 (UNESCO 2018a: 18–20). The Intergovernmental Committee commended the States Parties for “submitting an exemplary file, prepared with the utmost care, which testifies to the spirit of the *Convention* in terms of international cooperation” (ibid.: 20). After the confirmation of the inscription, the Greek chief coordinator expressed her gratitude on behalf of the eight states and invited other States Parties to join the nomination in the coming years. This demonstrates the democratic nature of dry stone walling, which dates back to prehistoric times and is widespread throughout Europe, as well as on other continents. A one-minute video was shown in which the members of the international working group for preparing the nomination thanked UNESCO for inscribing the element. This brought the safeguarding paradigm and its actors to the forefront, while the participants of the session did not see an excerpt of the film showing heritage and its practitioners.



Figure 13: The *Art of Dry Stone Walling, Knowledge and Techniques* was confirmed to be inscribed on the Representative List at the session of the Intergovernmental Committee in Port Louis, Mauritius, 2018 (Mirjam Bogataj Gnezda).



Figure 14: Slovenian representatives with the main Greek coordinator of the dry stone walling nomination: Eda Belingar, Špela Spanžel, Boris Čok, Villy-Stavroula Fotopoulou, Tanja Roženberger and Darja Kranjc, Port Louis, Mauritius, 2018 (Mirjam Gnezda Bogataj).

The meeting was attended by Eda Belingar, Darja Kranjc, Boris Čok, Špela Spanžel from the Ministry of Culture and Tanja Roženberger, the then director of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, from Slovenia. According to the interlocutors, Čok was one of the few heritage practitioners in the huge auditorium among political representatives and experts from numerous countries (Eda Belingar; Darja Kranjc; Boris Čok), and all three perceived the session of the Intergovernmental Committee as a very politicized event. This is not unusual, since these are highly codified institutional rituals led by individuals with a special status (Bortolotto 2015: 252). That is to say, the floor is assigned and taken by the chairperson, and the statements of state representatives are wrapped in ritual diplomatic discourse.

At the sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee, heritage elements are present only virtually (Bortolotto 2015: 253). The participants usually learn about the intangible heritage elements through the statements of the Evaluation Body that they meet the criteria for being added to the list, and during this discussion the statements and photographs are projected on two large screens. Some countries, after announcing that an element has been inscribed on the list, spend the allotted three minutes to expressing thanks; others divide the time between expressing thanks and the screening of a short excerpt from the film that introduces the heritage and its practitioners to the attendees; and still others record a special video for this occasion, expressing the gratitude of the working group and the submitting state(s). In the past, although very rarely, the inscribed folklore element was also presented with a short stage performance by the heritage bearers that had to be agreed in advance with the responsible people at UNESCO by the state representative (Bortolotto 2015: 253).

It is precisely at the sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee that we can witness the metacultural production of heritage (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006) or social alchemy (Bourdieu 2005), which requalify national intangible heritage into the heritage of all humanity. The venues of the sessions are typical examples of non-places, i.e. spaces of transition and temporality, such as shopping malls, hotels and airports, where people remain anonymous (Augé 1995: 78–115). UNESCO selects similar conference halls with the same characteristics and capacity to organize sessions in the States Parties interested, which is why the generic backgrounds of the session recordings are repeated from year to year (Bortolotto 2015: 253). Apart from the chairpersons and the rapporteur of the Evaluation Body, all participants in the session are anonymous, identified by the name of their State Party, while national insignia, such as flags, are not allowed (Darja Kranjc). Although the 2022 Intergovernmental

Committee meeting in Rabat, Morocco, was held in a large tent, no difference in the equipment of the space was noticed in the live broadcast (Internet source 60).

All elements of the nomination file on the *Art of Dry Stone Walling, Knowledge and Techniques* (Internet source 35) had been published on the UNESCO website from November 2018 to December 2024: a short description, photographs, film, nomination form (in English and French), free informed consents of the communities and groups in eight countries and inscriptions in national registers (in the national languages and in English or French). The thesaurus of concepts, the sustainable development goals and the types of intangible heritage are still available there after December 2024, as well as the decision of the Intergovernmental Committee on the inscription of dry stone walling (Internet source 127).

In December 2024, at the nineteenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee in Asunción, Paraguay, they approved the extended inscription with the new countries Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Ireland and Luxembourg.<sup>115</sup> The new title of the element was *Art of Dry Stone Construction, Knowledge and Techniques* (underlined by N.V.F.), highlighting the diversity of dry stone buildings and the sustainable development (Internet source 128). The film was extended to 15 minutes, footage from the new countries was integrated, the title was adjusted and the credits were supplemented with filmmakers from an additional five countries. The original film is still available on YouTube (Internet source 129), and also in the UNESCO video and sound archive (Internet source 130). The photographs were also replaced: there are ten new ones, while the original set is no longer available. However, it must be admitted that the new ones do have a greater emphasis on the work of practitioners.

### *The Analysis of Knowledge in the Nomination Form and the Film*

The nomination forms are precisely structured: almost every section has a maximum word count, and a lot of specific information is required. The submitted form *Art of Dry Stone Walling, Knowledge and Techniques* was 62 pages long, which is comparable to other multinational nominations that are usually two to three times longer than the nominations of individual States Parties (UNESCO 2015a: point 9). It first identified the nominating countries and

115 The Inscription on an Extended Basis form does not repeat the information from the original form, which is no longer available on the UNESCO webpage. I analyse the 2018 form because it contains data on dry stone walling in Slovenia.



the name of the element in English (there was also a French version) and in the languages of the eight countries, the heritage bearers, the geographical locations, the main contact person for the nomination and the contact persons in the seven other countries (Art 2018: 1–5).

In the following, I interpret the text through UNESCO's criteria for inscription of an element on the Representative List; in doing so, I emphasize that the nomination form devoted eight times more space to describing safeguarding at the national and international levels than to defining the heritage and its practitioners. The element and bearers are presented on seven pages, and 55 pages provide an assessment of the positive and negative impacts of inscription on the preferred list (R.2), describe safeguarding measures (R.3), prove inscriptions to the inventories in the submitting states (R.5), demonstrate the informed participation of the heritage practitioners and actors in drafting the nomination file (R.4), and provide the contacts of national coordinators and state representatives who personally submit the nomination to the UNESCO Secretariat in Paris.

In criterion R.1 (the element represents intangible heritage as defined in the *Convention*), dry stone building skills, knowledge transfer and practitioners are defined very broadly and cover all forms, techniques and functions of dry stone buildings in the past and present (Art 2018: 6). The common features of the element are much more emphasized than the differences between countries. Among the functions of dry stone buildings, the first stated is their role in the sustainable organization of rural space, for example in “preventing landslides, floods and avalanches; combatting erosion and desertification of the land; retaining water; enhancing biodiversity; and creating adequate microclimatic conditions for agriculture”; it is also noted how they shape diverse landscapes and form various modes of dwelling, farming and animal husbandry (e.g. terraces for cultivation, boundaries, shelters and sheds); and finally, they are also used in public works (for transport networks, waterfronts and water retention) (Art 2018: 6). The structure of the description shows that the working group has adapted the order to UNESCO's values, especially to the importance of sustainable development (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1; 2008/2024: 66–69, points 188–191).

Among the bearers and practitioners of dry stone walling skills, the form identified traditional builders in rural communities, where maintaining the anonymity of the builders is the rule, construction professionals and various national or international dry stone associations. They also included professional groups of architects, civil engineers, anthropologists, archaeologists,



environmental scientists, geologists and hydrologists; government departments for forestry, agriculture, spatial planning and cultural heritage; local and regional authorities; academic institutions, research centres, cultural organizations and youth groups (Art 2018: 6–7; see also criterion R.4).

The following section defines the methods used to transmit knowledge and skills: “The knowledge of dry stone technique has been transmitted experientially from generation to generation, through practical application adjusted to the particular conditions of each place” (Art 2018: 7). More recently, the knowledge and skills have also been transmitted through formal education, such as vocational training, and non-formal education, such as workshops, courses and work camps (*ibid.*). In the next paragraph, the text equates oral and informal transmission: “After Second World War, when the population in rural areas declined sharply, the oral/non-formal transmission of the element also reached a low point” (*ibid.*). Finally, “the invaluable role of dry stone technique in keeping the ecological balance” is highlighted, as well as the increased involvement of the non-governmental organizations and local authorities in the transmission of the element (*ibid.*).

UNESCO strongly emphasizes the social functions and cultural meanings of the nominated element, so the working group stated that the process of building dry stone structures contributes to the social cohesion of local communities, the strengthening of local and regional identities, and the creation of networks of cultural communities, which encourages mutual respect and the appreciation of cultural diversity (Art 2018: 8–9). The applicants therefore skilfully listed the meanings of dry stone walling from the local to the international level, and included the UNESCO values of mutual respect and cultural diversity (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1).

Criterion R.2 requires that States Parties present how the inscription of the nominated element

will contribute to ensuring visibility and awareness of the significance of the intangible cultural heritage and to encouraging dialogue, thus reflecting cultural diversity worldwide and testifying to human creativity. (Art 2018: 9)

In response to this, the states argued that as a “source of inspiration and reflection on the landscape, the habitat and the use of natural resources, dry stone forms a multivalent cultural link between tradition, innovation and creativity” (*ibid.*). The submitting states noted that diversity and creativity are visible in both traditional and new uses of the dry stone technique in contemporary

art, architecture, protection of biodiversity, and ecotourism, as well as in environmental and artistic education. They added that the activities inspire young people and encourage intergenerational connections and inter-sectoral cooperation (*ibid.*: 10). In doing so, they again used UNESCO's key values from the definition of intangible heritage – cultural diversity and human creativity (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1).

Regarding safeguarding measures (criterion R.3), the submitting states claimed that the viability and visibility of dry stone walling have been constantly increasing over the past two decades, and that the techniques are gaining value in preserving the ecological balance, which is also ensured by the transgenerational transmission of the skills (Art 2018: 10). Practitioners and communities safeguard (i.e. identify, document, research, preserve and enhance) their heritage through educational courses, books, manuals, documentation, promotion and awareness raising campaigns (*ibid.*: 11–12), which are characteristic UNESCO genres (Hafstein 2015: 146–150; 2018b: 155). All submitting states contribute legislative measures for the protection of the most prominent dry stone buildings, cultural landscapes and heritage sites, while the dry stone walling skills and practices are safeguarded by researching and documenting the technique, promotion and enhancement, as well as by formal education and vocational training (Art 2018: 12–13). In the future, the safeguarding measures will emphasize the use of local stone and the employment of human labour using no machines in cutting and placing the stones. The competent heritage bodies and educational institutions will ensure that the safeguarding activities comply with local practices, traditions, forms and building techniques, at the same time avoiding undesirable overregulation. They will continue with the awareness-raising activities, documenting the element, establishing the certification of skills and promoting international partnerships (*ibid.*: 14–15). A long list of community organizations concerned with the element is given, such as associations, clubs and guilds, from one in Croatia to 54 in Spain (*ibid.*: 17–29).

The main tool of safeguarding is the inclusion of the element in inventories in the submitting States Parties (UNESCO 2003: Articles 11.b and 12). Criterion R.5 requires data on the inscription of the dry stone walling in state registers: the element is included in one register in Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Slovenia and Switzerland, in three inventories in Italy, and in eight regional registers in Spain (Art 2018: 48–49).<sup>116</sup>

116 This demonstrates that the States Parties have organized quite diverse safeguarding systems in their territories, ranging from centralized to dispersed.

Criterion R.4 requests evidence that “the element has been nominated following the widest possible participation of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned and with their free, prior and informed consent” (Art 2018: 29). There is a duality in the strategies of states in preparing their consents, which stems from the instructions in the form. In point 4.a, UNESCO instructs States Parties to engage and list a wide range of participants in the nomination process to emphasize the broad social significance of the heritage:

States Parties are encouraged to prepare nominations with the participation of a wide variety of all parties concerned, including where appropriate local and regional governments, communities, NGOs, research institutes, centres of expertise and others. States Parties are reminded that the communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals whose intangible cultural heritage is concerned are essential participants throughout the conception and elaboration of nominations, proposals and requests, as well as the planning and implementation of safeguarding measures, and are invited to devise creative measures to ensure that their widest possible participation is built in at every stage, as required by Article 15 of the Convention. (Art 2018: 29–30)

In point 4.d, the form asks for detailed contact information for the community and non-governmental organizations concerned with the element, such as “associations, organizations, clubs, guilds, steering committees” (ibid.: 33), i.e. practitioners (in Slovenia, the bearers).

The submitting states identified one international organization (International Scientific Society for Interdisciplinary Studies on Dry Stone), Croatia and France each identified one body, Cyprus three, Switzerland four, Greece five, Slovenia and Italy 14 each, and Spain listed 102 entities (Art 2018: 33–47). Only Slovenia, in addition to the Partnership for the Preservation and Popularization of Karst Dry Stone Walling and Society for the Preservation of Traditional Building and Craft Skills of the Slovene Istria Jugna and eight municipalities, also listed four individual heritage bearers: Boris Čok, Rudi Bak, Dejan Zadavec and Sergij Palčič (ibid.: 36–37).

The aforementioned duality of states’ strategies is reflected in their free, prior and informed consents (in Slovenia they are called letters of support) that are attached to the nomination file (point 4.c): some countries limited themselves to consents from heritage practitioners under point 4.d, while others also added statements from “a wide variety of all parties concerned” under point 4.a. For example, the Swiss submitted signed consents from four actual

practitioners and two institutions (Art 2018: 32); other countries submitted from 18 to 62 consents from practitioners, professional and non-governmental organizations, municipalities or national authorities (*ibid.*: 31–32); the extreme outlier was Spain, with as many as 237 consents, eight of which were in the form of a video clip (*ibid.*: 32). Slovenia obtained 39 letters of support from heritage bearers, research institutions, administrative bodies and individuals who practice or simply value dry stone walling (*ibid.*). Among the bearers, statements of support were provided by the Partnership, the Jugna Society and Boris Čok, but not by the other three individual bearers listed in the nomination (*ibid.*: 36–37).

The states therefore understand “the widest possible participation” of communities, groups or individuals to range from the participation of actual practitioners to the inclusion of an extremely wide range of heritage actors. In 2018, the Evaluation Body considered the representativeness of consents in relation to the communities, groups and individuals concerned, and warned that, in some cases, important individuals or entities were selected to provide their consent on behalf of others, without explaining if they had capacity to do so (UNESCO 2018b: 14).

Sometimes, their relation to the element was not clear. Documenting the consent of traditional leaders or representative associations of practitioners is legitimate. However, the file should always explain why they were selected and whether they are authorized to speak in the name of the entire community. (*Ibid.*)

The forms of consent vary greatly and often do not even contain the words “free, prior and informed consent”, so they resemble letters of support. Consents and letters of support may be written or recorded in the native language and translated into one of the official languages, but other methods and means are also possible, according to the diversity of communities and the legal regimens of States Parties. “The Committee will welcome a broad range of demonstrations or attestations of community consent in preference to standard or uniform declarations” (UNESCO 2022: 6; cf. Art 2018: 31). For example, at the Intergovernmental Committee session in Bali (2011), they discussed whether a traditional arrow adorned with feathers of local birds from the Peruvian community of Santa Rosa de Huachipaire in the Amazon rainforest was an appropriate form of consent for the nomination of unwritten sung prayers (Bortolotto 2015: 262–264), and after a heated debate recognized it as tangible and credible evidence (UNESCO 2011b: 22; Internet source 132). UNESCO criticizes the use of impersonal uniform consents, and recommends

that submitting states give preference to an individualized evidence of community consent, expressing the personal sentiments of individual members, as it would be surprising if a community shares a unanimous opinion on their heritage (UNESCO 2015a: points 104 and 105). In consenting, UNESCO therefore encourages the emic views and feelings of practitioners with a personal touch. Slovenia, for example, added drawings by children from the Karst and Istria among its letters of support.

As UNESCO uses the neutral phrase “communities, groups, and in some cases, individuals”, not defining heritage practitioners, bearers or actors, the States Parties create a conglomerate of skilled practitioners; researchers and bodies that support the safeguarding of heritage and have primarily cognitive knowledge about it; sympathizers with an emotional relationship; and individuals and institutions that see heritage as a source of professional livelihood. This confirms that UNESCO and some of the submitting states attribute the heritage element to a significantly wider circle of professional, social and administrative-political entities that can actually practise it. However, cognitive knowledge about a particular heritage element does not in itself enable its viability or the transfer of practical knowledge and skills to other people and young generations (van Zanten 2008: 1; Postma 2012: 41; Lipp 2013: 140). When the heritage of individual groups and communities becomes a public good of all humanity through its inscription on the UNESCO list (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 170, 184–185), this is called communalization (Hafstein 2014a: 40–41, 54–55; 2018b: 122).

To sum up, the nomination forms are not precise in defining the type of knowledge (practical, cognitive), methods of transmission of skills (experiential, oral, etc.) and the practitioners or bearers of the heritage, so the submitting states can and do define all three rather differently. The *Convention* and other documents of the safeguarding paradigm also vaguely define the participation of groups and communities (Kearney 2009; Blake 2009: 63; Erlewein 2015: 29; Sousa 2018: 26; Bortolotto et al. 2020: 69), and free, prior and informed consent do not necessarily come in the form of consents – many instead resemble letters of support in both form and in content.

After reviewing the nomination text several times, I noticed another contradiction. When defining heritage, groups and communities, we read that “in all participating States, the bearers and practitioners of dry stone technique have been rural communities, where the element is still practised as part of their annual cycle of work” (Art 2018: 2), while among the threats to dry stone sites and buildings is mentioned “letting sheep, goats and cattle graze in and around

abandoned terraces” (ibid.: 15). Given that agriculture and animal husbandry are among the main origins and also contemporary sustainable functions of dry stone walling (ibid.: 6, 15), this is a humanocentric view that denies other living creatures the right to coexist in rural spaces. If we view dry stone walling as an assemblage of human and non-human collectivities (Deleuze and Guattari 1980; Harrison 2013), domestic and wild animals also fall within its circle of actors and actants. It is therefore more productive to encourage repairs and restorations of dry stone terraces, buildings and sites (Art 2018: 15).

There are certainly differences between countries, but I wonder whether the members of the working group for the nomination do not view rural areas with dry stone buildings through urban lenses, primarily as potentials for well-arranged cultural landscapes, serving tourism and recreation (Art 2018: 8). Tourism can influence the identity of a place by transforming towns and landscapes into objects for the “tourist gaze” and use (Urry 1990). Gregory J. Ashworth and Brian Graham (2005: 151) pointed out that the designation “heritage site” forever alters the character of an area, which “thus becomes monumental and historic with potential consequences for the sense of place held by insiders and outsiders”. Local people and farmers on one side and tourists, visitors and urban migrants on the other can value and use different aspects of the landscape (cf. Grasseni 2007a: 204; 2008: 159–161).

If the nomination working group members are physically or by their way of life and mentality distant from heritage sites in the countryside, they can also be considered outsiders of dry stone heritage. I therefore argue that when preparing nominations it is necessary to pay attention to the diversity of views of practitioners and communities, especially to the living, professional and existential conditions of local people in heritage sites, as well as the needs of fauna and flora (cf. Gowlland 2024: 79–81). In other words, nominators should get to know the views of heritage practitioners and local communities in order to balance them with the views of outside experts and officials. I have no insight into how much this was taken into account in other countries, but I can argue that Slovenia’s advantage here was that the researchers from Primorska were very familiar with the perspectives, endeavours and aspirations of the dry stone wallers.

In France, the “Sensory Heritage Law” protects the rural life of farmers and farm animals from the demands of urban migrants (neo-rurals) seeking peace and quiet:

Cow bells (and droppings), grasshopper or cicada chirps and noisy early-morning tractors are also now considered part of France’s



natural heritage<sup>117</sup> that will be enshrined in environmental legislation. (Bendix 2021: 47; cf. Internet source 133)

Some researchers write about the oblivion of farm animals and the ambivalent attitude of society towards them, when farmers have to literally hide them from the eyes, ears and noses of tourists and urban migrants to the countryside (Baskar 2023: 23–24).

On the UNESCO website, dry stone walling was presented with 24 recent photographs and the film *Dry Stone Walling, Knowledge and Techniques* (2017). Since the original photographs are no longer available, I cannot engage in content analysis. However, a general weakness of photographs on elements on the UNESCO website is that they are not equipped with full data on the groups of people and locations depicted. This hinders the understanding of the cultural identities of the elements inscribed.

The joint film *Dry Stone Walling, Knowledge and Techniques* (2017) was edited by the Andorran production company Mira Audiovisual from the films or footage of eight countries. The editors thus received very different forms of footage, showing dry stone buildings in many locations, people at work and numerous interviews. The narrators were mostly filmed while working at dry stone walling sites, which enriches the context data, and a few were filmed at home in their living rooms. Slovenia sent three films: *Maintenance and Construction of Dry Stone Walls* (*Vzdrževanje in gradnja suhih zidov*, 2012), *Moving the Stone Hiška on Medvejk* (*Selitev kamnite hiške na Medvejku*, 2015) and *Dry Stone Walling* (*Subozidna gradnja*, 2017), all of which depict practical work. The film editors selected sequences of work, a statement by Rudi Bak and the blessing of the *hiška* by Boris Čok; we hear the Slovenian language along with the languages of other countries. In March 2017, Joan Reguant Aleix explained the concept of the film and provided a link to the first version:

We have opted for a mixed story woven by the voice-over of the narrator and by the various statements of different bearers and practitioners of this technique. We believe that the result is optimal because it allows expressing and explaining to a significant number of practitioners (men and women) and at the same time the narrator [...] binds and gives consistency and solidity to the story. (Joan Reguant Aleix, EM, March 9, 2017)

117 It has to be noted that agriculture and animal husbandry are cultural interventions in nature, and therefore farming is a combination of cultural and natural heritage.

A linguistic analysis of the first sentence shows that the film was built on the logic of commentary and statements, so it is rather logocentric (MacDougall 1998: 84). The Andorran editors presented many of the aspects reported in the nomination form, both in commentary and the dynamic compilation of moving and still pictures. The film shows groups of people repairing walls or building new dry stone structures in different locations, and cultural landscapes with stone buildings. A sequence with a collage of photographs presents the richness of dry stone forms, functioning as walls, terraces, shelters, enclosures, wells, roads, bridges, arches or vaults. The film's soundscape combines the sounds of dry stone walling, short statements by numerous heritage practitioners in eight languages, third-person English commentary and piano music. The text is read by a deep male voice, reminiscent of the trailers for Hollywood feature films, one of the dominant film discourses in the global mediascape (Appadurai 1996: 298–299), elements of which are often copied in other genres. Commentary and music are the transport mechanisms (MacDougall 1978: 413) of a film with a relatively closed structure.

The film is structured into chapters, which are introduced by the titles: An ancestral technique, Know-how, Building the landscape, Environmentally friendly, Social role, Transmission, and Future. The information is provided by the captions: the title of the film, the names of the eight countries, and the chapter titles, which are displayed against the background of a slightly darkened image of a dry stone wall. The chapter titles and the voice commentary are digital film devices that distance the audience from the presented topic and film subjects (Crawford 1992: 71). The film opens with a meaningful quotation from the Croatian writer Predrag Matvejević (1987): “More sweat has been shed clearing slopes for vines than was shed building the pyramids. A stone wall is a monument to a strong will ...” Reviewing films on the UNESCO website and participating in the preparation of nominations showed that in nominations, practitioners, professionals and officials often cite widely spread proverbs and quotes from books, and sometimes even include excerpts from famous feature films in their own films, to show what a broad socio-cultural influence the nominated heritage element has, and how it resonates in art and mass media.

The interviews in the film are subtitled in English (a French version was also made), but there is no information about the people speaking.<sup>118</sup> The closing

118 After watching the first version of the film, I suggested that the speakers should be identified, but this was not feasible because some states were not able to provide names, surnames and locations; the compromise decision was to have the speakers' names given in the final credits next to the data on films.

credits begin with the name of the nomination and a subtitle that the element is nominated for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Then the participant States Parties are listed in alphabetic order (Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland), and with some states there is also a list of their related films, as included in the joint film with excerpts, while with the others the practitioner entities and numerous bodies responsible for the safeguarding are listed. As heritage believers (Brumann 2014: 173–174), the Andorran editors have therefore stretched the usual practice of film crediting (authors, producers, possibly also financiers) to the extensive data that the film is embedded in the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm.

In sum, in ten minutes the film *Dry Stone Walling, Knowledge and Techniques* provides a rich set of information about the heritage element and practitioners, while the identities of the people speaking and places filmed are obscured. The film is very much in line with the content of the nomination form, and even emphasizes the context of UNESCO safeguarding, which distances it from the lived experience of dry stone wallers (cf. Henley 2004: 111–113). However, I argue there is no need to present the safeguarding measures in the film, as they are well documented in the nomination form. Exploiting the complementarity of the two media is much more productive (Valentinčič Furlan 2015b: 105; 2025; cf. UNESCO 2015a: point 122).

If knowledge encompasses feelings, attitudes, information, embodied skills, verbal taxonomies and concepts (Barth 2002: 1), then the completed nomination form primarily includes information, concepts and classifications (cognitive knowledge), while the free, prior and informed consents and letters of support contain personal views and feelings. The film shows the embodied skills and feelings of people who build or narrate – pride, satisfaction, joy, dedication, enthusiasm and togetherness are recognizable on their faces, in their voices and in their performance. Their statements bring emic views on dry stone walling, while the third-person commentary is the etic view of experts and officials.

The text in the nomination form is structured bureaucratically, following precise instructions and word limits. It is characterized by UNESCO's language – there are no inappropriate expressions used, while many references to UNESCO's concepts and values are repeated from the basic questions of the nomination form, all of which brings it close to the authorized heritage discourse. The text of the nomination form is of course not intended to depict the experienced reality of the dry stone wallers, but to represent a complex

phenomenon in accordance with the *Convention* and its apparatus, which promote cultural diversity in a uniform pattern of representation (cf. Wilk 1995: 110; Appadurai 1996: 39).

Who are the knowers in the nomination process? Safeguarding experts, researchers and heritage practitioners from eight countries compiled the data in the nomination form, selected the photographs and collaborated in the production of the joint film. The main coordinator skilfully orchestrated the wishes and demands of heritage bearers, experts and administrative bodies in eight states, while for some members of the group this was the first experience of preparing a multinational nomination. In doing so, they took into account the situations of dry stone walling in each country, filtered through the sieve of UNESCO requirements, values and methods. The working group was very familiar with the nomination procedures, methods and strategies for writing the texts, which contributed to the successful inscription of the nominated element on the UNESCO list (cf. Románková-Kuminková 2017: 359; Židov 2019: 17). It was noted that heritage practitioners cannot prepare the nomination file themselves (Gilman 2015: 72). UNESCO demands that the file is officially submitted by the State Party (UNESCO 2022: points 3 and 4) and the official representative of the state also expresses gratitude at the session of the Intergovernmental Committee.

Who are the target social groups of the transmitted knowledge? The dossier was compiled in such a way as to convince the members of the Evaluation Body that the art of dry stone walling meets the related criteria, and through their evaluation also the representatives of UNESCO and States Parties at the session of the Intergovernmental Committee. In fact, it was the evaluators and participants in the thirteenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee in Mauritius who gave a decisively positive opinion. The Andorran film editors, who emphasized the safeguarding paradigm in the film, also addressed the UNESCO evaluators.

The participants in the Intergovernmental Committee session saw the pre-recorded thanking of the working group for preparing the nomination. This made the safeguarding paradigm more important than the element and its practitioners. Such a practice can also be interpreted as a strategy for the nomination drafters to step out of the anonymity of “ghost writers” (Phillips 2003: 164), while another way is to publish articles about the inscribed element and the process of preparing a nomination (Fotopoulou 2017; Hrovatin 2017; Fotopoulou and Kakampoura 2018; Polyniki 2019; Belingar and Kranjc 2019; Acovitsiōti-Hameau 2020; Bertolino and Corrado 2021; Theodosiou 2021;

Jiménez de Madariaga 2021; Grisoni 2022; Doneus, Doneus and Cowley 2022, Gowlland 2024, among others). I find the latter approach more productive, as it does not deprive people in the hall or online viewers of the Intergovernmental Committee session of getting to know the element.

I assume that the nomination form on the website is reviewed by experts, researchers and heritage practitioners from the submitting states, as well as from any other countries with such heritage that might wish to join the nomination, which indeed happened in the following years (Internet source 128). Then there are the bearers, experts and officials who examine the commended nominations in order to prepare their own nominations (cf. UNESCO 2015a: points 20–22), as well as researchers, students, journalists, architects and curious people.<sup>119</sup> The general public, however, is much more interested in films than in nomination forms (Sicard 2018: 70–72). The film *Dry Stone Walling, Knowledge and Techniques* had been viewed at least 142,000 times on the UNESCO YouTube channel by May 2025 (data below the publication, Internet source 129). It was also well received by Slovenian heritage bearers when they were awarded a facsimile of the UNESCO certificate at the Ministry of Culture in September 2019. After all, it shows them, their practices and statements in the company of dry stone wallers from other European countries.

The process of preparing the nomination of dry stone walling and confirming the inscription took place within the UNESCO epistemic community (Jacobs 2017), respecting UNESCO's criteria of validity, including established ways and media for representing the element, and a network of relationships and bodies with established positions of power and subordination. A parallel can be drawn with the impacts of European tenders (Fakin Bajec 2011: 87) that impose the dominant discourse, thus influencing the knowledge construction and vocabulary of people, as well as their activities, although the nomination form is even more directive and has a stronger impact on the safeguarding activities.

In Barth's sense, the session of the Intergovernmental Committee can be understood as a live medium for spreading knowledge, and a ritual for the public display of new inscriptions. In the case under study, two cultural fields with institutions, rules, rituals, categories, signifiers, hierarchies, discourses and activities were linked (Bourdieu 1977; Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002: 21–22): the field of dry stone walling and the field of nomination and inscription on the

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119 According to a survey by the Portuguese Digital Observatory of Intangible Heritage, among 246 users of online registers, 78% research intangible heritage for professional and academic purposes, 14.3% are practitioners, and 7.7% are interested in intangible heritage out of curiosity (Sousa 2021: 1).

UNESCO Intangible Heritage List, which is part of the even larger field of the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm. The first field was composed of heritage bearers in eight countries and, in Slovenia, also of researchers who participated in the revitalization of dry stone walling in Istria and the Karst. In the second field, groups of the UNESCO experts, States Parties' representatives and officials, applied researchers and some practitioners in the eight countries were most active.

Heritage bearers, experts and officials of States Parties are subject to UNESCO conventions, codes, protocols, values, language and hierarchies, if they want to participate in UNESCO's social alchemy, which transforms cultural practices from an embodied state (skills, routines) into institutionalized heritage<sup>120</sup> on the Representative List. Successful nominations thus require knowing the heritage element and communities of practice well, and being well acquainted with the administrative procedures and terminology of UNESCO's epistemic community. In my opinion, there was no need to conceal any aspects of dry stone walling in the nomination, which is facilitated by UNESCO's virtual heritage policy (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995: 369, 375–378; Bortolotto et al. 2020: 68).

In two decades, UNESCO has created an extremely influential institutionalized form of cultural capital with great symbolic power, which has been superimposed on the cultural capital of the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (UNESCO 1972) and the World Heritage List (Internet source 16). In the postmodern era, the power of international actors, such as UNESCO, has only grown stronger over the years. In Slovenia, the influence of UNESCO's safeguarding paradigm and its knowledge system is spread by the Ministry of Culture, the legislation, expert bodies (the Coordinator), heritage and research institutions (museums, institutes, faculties), heritage bearers, public media and various (national, European) tenders.

If the two dry stone walling revitalization projects connected individuals and institutions in the cross-border Karst and Istrian areas, the safeguarding in the first step connected heritage bearers and researchers in both areas of Slovenia and also with representatives of the Coordinator and the Ministry of Culture, while in the second step with related actors in seven European states (and in the years 2022–2024, with five additional States Parties). The drafting of multinational nominations is characterized by very intense social dynamics: a lot

120 Institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu 2005: 95) is the inscription of intangible heritage in national registers and on the UNESCO list, as well as dry stone buildings, sites and protected areas in national registers of immovable heritage and on the World Heritage List.



of coordination between the submitting states and a lot of translation from the (emic) language of communities of practice into the professional and political (etic) discourse of the UNESCO epistemic community is required (cf. Smith 2006: 38; 2012: 538; Bendix 2009: 265; Leimgruber 2010; Tauschek 2012a, 2015; Slavec Gradišnik 2014: 16).

### **The Impacts of the New Status on Dry Stone Walling in Slovenia**

The Slovenian heritage bearers were very proud, and the nomination drafters satisfied, that the dry stone walling heritage had made it to the Representative List (Kranjc 2020). Most of the bearers also attended the presentation of facsimiles of the UNESCO certificate to the Partnership for the Preservation and Popularization of Karst Dry Stone Walling and Society for the Preservation of Traditional Building and Craft Skills of the Slovene Istria Jugna in September 2019 at the Ministry of Culture (at the same event, lacemaking schools and associations also received facsimiles of their certificate).



Figure 15: Danilo Antoni, the president of the Partnership for the Preservation and Popularization of Karst Dry Stone Walling, Zoran Poznič MA, Minister of Culture, and Dejan Zadavec, the president of the Society for the Preservation of Traditional Building and Craft Skills of the Slovene Istria Jugna, Ljubljana, 2019 (Anja Jerin).



Figure 16: Members of the Partnership for the Preservation and Popularization of Karst Dry Stone Walling attended the presentation of facsimiles of the UNESCO certificate at the Ministry of Culture, Ljubljana, 2019 (David Terčon).

The heritage bearers considered how to use the UNESCO recognition for further promotion and their goals:

*The more people can see the point in dry stone walling, the more people will decide to repair walls in the old way. A lot has already been missed, but it will be welcome, if we can save a few more metres of wall. Dry stone walling needs to be advertised, made popular and modern.*  
(Mitja Kobal)

Kobal thus shares the opinion that possessing heritage and taking care of it is a sign of modernity (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 61; 2006: 183), while other bearers associated dry stone walling with cultural identity:

*This is our identity after all, and it makes sense to teach people so that they know how to appreciate and preserve it. Today, most of the older people in the villages still say: "Ah, this is worth nothing, you have to put cement in it." But they do not realize that these walls have lasted*

*for 500 years, and the concrete wall has not proven this yet.* (Dejan Zadavec; cf. Gowlland 2024: 73).

Dry stone walling has now been revitalized and promoted for two decades, after the previous three to five decades of negative attitudes, and UNESCO's recognition is a welcome encouragement for such work to continue (Zdravko Škrlič; Boris Čok; Mitja Kobal; Dejan Zadavec). The heritage bearers have therefore accepted the inscription on the UNESCO list as both recognition and a promotional strategy, with the hope that it would also have economic effects.

The inscription on the UNESCO list has actually increased the visibility and social respect for the heritage element in the Karst and Istria, as well as elsewhere in Slovenia, which has led to an expansion of the circle of those interested in dry stone walling at all levels. In the local environment, more people wanted to join the workshops, and many more local communities wanted to organize restoration campaigns in their villages (Boris Čok). In Istria, the number of public contracts for the renovation and reconstruction of dry stone walls has increased (Dejan Zadavec). If during the socialist era the use of concrete was a sign of modernity and status (Boris Čok), now having dry stone walls around a house communicates that the owners value the skill and have either mastered it or can commission a dry stone waller. Attitudes to the tradition of dry stone walling have thus swung from one extreme to the other in approximately three decades (cf. Barth 2002: 8).

In terms of financial incentives, municipal administrations responded faster than ministries. In 2018, the Municipality of Sežana published a public tender for subsidizing the restoration of karst dry stone walls in its area (Internet source 134), and in the following years other municipalities developed similar schemes (Belingar and Kranjc 2019: 82). In 2021, 11,725 kilometres of dry stone walls were documented in the area from Koper to Postojna and Tolmin using the lidar geodetic method of measuring surfaces with laser beams. This cadastre is the basis for using European Community funds in the financial period 2023–2027 through the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food (Iztok Škerlič,<sup>121</sup> EM, July 7, 2022; Internet source 135).

Since 2021, the Ministry of Culture has been preparing a Public Tender for the Selection of Public Cultural Projects in the Field of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Internet source 136). Inclusion on the UNESCO list brings additional points to the proposed projects and places the submitting bodies higher

121 Public Agency for Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Developing Projects of Municipality of Izola.

in the list. In 2021, funds from this call were used to realize a dry stone walling training area in the Karst, to organize workshops to transfer knowledge to young people, and to publish the book *Grandpa's Wall* (*Nonotov zid*, Volarič 2021) (Darja Kranjc; Lavin 2021).

International connections and exchanges could increase significantly with inscription on the UNESCO list, and Dejan Zadavec received many invitations for various workshops and projects in Canada, Great Britain and Australia, but could not accept them because he was fully engaged as a consultant of National Vocational Qualification and a training provider. In October 2020, Eda Belingar, Darja Kranjc and David Terčon attended the seventeenth International Congress of Dry Stone Wallers organized by the International Scientific Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Dry Stone Walling and the Cooperative Dragodid in Konavle, Croatia (Darja Kranjc; cf. Čeko, Bakota Švencbir and Kačar 2023). The Ministry of Culture and the Coordinator used the knowledge and experience gained in drafting the multinational nomination when coordinating the multinational nomination and film on the traditions of Lipizzan horse breeding, where Slovenia was the leading partner (Valentinčič Furlan 2025, forthcoming).

Darja Kranjc and Eda Belingar became members of the newly established Committee for Intangible Heritage at the Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO (2019), alongside representatives of other elements on the Representative List, such as the Municipality of Škofja Loka, the Federation of Kurenti Associations, Idrija Lace School, professional and administrative institutions and societies, such as the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Slovene Ethnological Society, Ministry of Culture and ICOM Slovenia (Darja Kranjc). In May 2019, Eda Belingar received the Stele Conservation Award (Internet source 137) for the successful preservation and promotion of dry stone walling knowledge in Slovenia, having been nominated by her colleagues from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia. The introduction of intangible heritage into the institutional work has clearly brought about a noticeable professional and methodological shift in the operation and habitus of the institution, which in the past was focused primarily on the conservation of architectural heritage. The research on the theory and practice of dry stone walling continues (Vinazza, Kranjc and Belingar 2025).

In sum, heritage bearers, local communities, municipalities, regions, the state, researchers, safeguarding experts and the general public all benefitted from the official heritagization of dry stone walling, in terms of wide recognition of the heritage element, promotion of local and regional identities, increasing

economic effects, obtaining new knowledge and awards, as well as expanding the network available to exchange information and develop professional and social cooperation.

At first, I was surprised that the inscription on the UNESCO list did not affect the skills of dry stone walling and the ways of transmitting knowledge (Rudi Bak; Zdravko Škrlić; Boris Čok; Mitja Kobal; Dejan Zadavec; Darja Kranjc; Eda Belingar). My thesis was that the UNESCO global paradigm of intangible heritage dissolves tacit and embodied knowledge and habitus, as in the processes of heritagization they become conscious, written down in ways that respect the UNESCO canon, and objectified (cf. Bourdieu 2005: 95; Polanyi 1962: 67). The research showed that in Primorska the knowledge bearers and researchers had already objectified the focal knowledge in manuals, books and films during the revitalization of dry stone walling, when it began to be defined as cultural heritage in the projects *REVITAS* (2009–2015) and *Living Landscape* (2012–2015). The adjective intangible was not used, as the Inter-reg tenders for 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 did not apply the phrase ‘intangible cultural heritage’ (Internet sources 116–118). However, the experts and practitioners began to systematically document, research, preserve, encourage, promote, educate and revitalize their practices, which are all also methods of safeguarding (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.3).

The inscription to the state register in May 2016 and to the Representative List in November 2018 affixed the sign of intangible heritage to dry stone walling. The research and revitalization of dry stone walling therefore outpaced its safeguarding and institutionalization by several years. In fact, the bearers were satisfied with the revived dry stone walling and, together with some researchers, they strove primarily for the establishment of vocational education and National Vocational Qualification (Darja Kranjc; Dejan Zadavec), so the multinational nomination at first attracted some researchers in Primorska and Slovenian experts for the safeguarding, rather than the bearers.

When I began to analytically distinguish cognitive knowledge from embodied skills, practical and tacit knowledge, it became obvious that official safeguarding did not affect the skills of dry stone walling, because the inscriptions to the state register and on the Representative List are focused on cognitive knowledge about the heritage element in question. The nomination form presents the heritage element in a structured, etic, abstract manner, not taking into account the embodied knowledge and skills, values and expectations of the heritage bearers. On the one hand, this is understandable, because it actually addresses a narrow circle of evaluators, and on the other hand, it reduces actual



living practices to UNESCO definitions, concepts and values (cf. Goodwin 1994; Grasseni 2011: 41). As a result, the heritage bearers do not identify with the text of the nomination form (Eda Belingar), while the film better addresses them because it comes close to their lived experiences, as was evident at the presentation of the facsimile of the UNESCO certificate at the Ministry of Culture. “A smile or a frown on the screen restores the living presence of man buried beneath the arid treatises which we are all guilty of writing” (de Heusch 1988: 135). Luc de Heusch’s observation originally referred to ethnographic films and anthropological texts, but it can easily be applied to the films and nomination forms of the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm, especially since the UNESCO form devotes significantly more space to the safeguarding measures than to the definition of heritage element and its practitioners.

The nomination deals with the broadest communities, institutions and public administrations that will help preserve living traditions “by supporting the conditions necessary for cultural reproduction” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 53; Blake 2009: 51; Hafstein 2018b: 103–104), i.e. through research, material support, organized education, promotion, exhibitions and tourism. In the process of nominating and inscribing dry stone walling, UNESCO was simply too distant and abstract to be able to influence the skills and practices of the bearers of dry stone walling in Slovenia. However, the inscription on the Representative List greatly strengthened the social and symbolic aspects of dry stone walling. To use Bourdieu’s concepts, when cultural capital in its embodied state is converted into an institutionalized one, this reinforces its social, symbolic and economic capitals, which might be further converted into financial capital (Bourdieu 2005: 95, 100, 102). The increased general awareness of the public (cf. Koch 2013: 176; Lipp 2013: 146) can be understood as the symbolic capital of dry stone walling.

UNESCO is an actor that operates “at a distance” through bureaucratic processes (Foster 2011: 90–93; Harrison 2013: 32; Bortolotto et al. 2020: 68), however, it is also a “significant other” (Friedman 1990: 321), which in heritagization processes can influence the understanding of intangible heritage and the identity processes of heritage practitioners (Hafstein 2015: 146–150). In the Karst and Istria, the UNESCO enigma was mitigated by the researchers, and in addition, the representative of heritage bearers attended the Intergovernmental Committee session and experienced the politicized mechanism of the safeguarding paradigm (Boris Čok; Eda Belingar; Darja Kranjc). Slovenian heritage actors are always invited to attend the session of the Intergovernmental Committee when the nomination of their heritage is discussed (Ksenija Kovačec Naglič), but for various reasons they do not always go (representatives of the Coordinator).



Finally, I also checked whether observations of critical researchers of heritage can be perceived in Istria and the Karst. Has official safeguarding transformed the relationship of subjects to their practices (through feelings such as pride and self-confidence), changed practices (by representing them with characteristic heritage genres) and ultimately reformed the relationship of practitioners to themselves (new social institutions formalize previously informal relationships and centralize previously dispersed powers) (Hafstein 2015: 146–150; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 161–162)? In the Karst and Istria, they have certainly been proud and confident of their new global status, but they have not introduced new heritage genres or forms of social organization, as they were satisfied with workshops and restoration campaigns, the Jugna Society and Partnership, and the introduction of educational modules and professional qualifications was already underway (Rudi Bak; Zdravko Škrlić; Boris Čok; Mitja Kobal; Dejan Zadavec; Darja Kranjc).

How has the multifaceted “UNESCO effect” (Foster 2011: 66; 2015: 89), caused by the global confirmation, played out in Slovenia? The Karst and Istrian practitioners and researchers have taken pride in their new international position, they have seen it as a way of encouraging public funding and tourism, but have felt no burden of the responsibility for preserving their tradition. Among dry stone wallers, there have been no dissonant views traced, if compared to the groups of Croatian bell ringers after their carnival heritage was inscribed on the Representative List in 2009, although the difference here is that the drafting of the Croatian nomination was carried out from the top down, as reported by Lidija Nikočević (2012: 10–18).

In Slovenia, the heritagization of dry stone walling had a rather “human face”, if compared to critical case studies (Foster 2011, 2015; Gilman 2015; Hafstein 2015; Lowthorp 2015; You 2015; Yun 2015), in which safeguarding reduced social power of local communities or even deprived the practitioners of it. I assess that this is a consequence of the fact that researchers in the Karst and Istria were mediators between the impersonal UNESCO paradigm and the bearers of heritage. Furthermore, in Slovenia the heritage bearers are attributed agency and given a constructive role by the Coordinator and the Ministry of Culture. In the Slovenian Register, only practitioners who master the skills and pass them on to others are identified, while in nominations the Slovenian officials and experts also pay attention to the broader social role of heritage, so practitioners are joined by a wide range of actors who research, promote, market or simply like heritage. This strategy can be reconsidered, as Switzerland, with its free, prior and informed consent from four actual practitioners and two bodies, was as successful as Spain with its 237 consents (Art 2018: 32).

UNESCO has apparently come to the same conclusion, as in the expanded nomination, criterion R.4 no longer distinguishes between points 4.a (the wide circle) and 4.d (the practitioners) (Art 2024: 8–10, points 4.1 and 4.3). Both the new and original submitting states and communities have agreed to limit the letters of consent to a maximum of 20 per state, in order to maintain coordination and balance between the practising communities (ibid.: 9). It seems everyone is aware that the re-extension will require the consent of existing practitioners and actors in 13 countries which is probably just a question of time, as dry stone walling is present on almost all continents.

How has dry stone walling in Slovenia been affected by UNESCO vague definition of “communities, groups, and in some cases, individuals” and the resulting broad understanding of social actors (Art 2018: 29–30, 33)? In the past, dry stone walling in Slovenia was a matter of families and village communities, who also determined the criteria for its validity and the direction of its development; in the revitalization processes, it referred to knowledge bearers, local and regional researchers, institutions and people who wanted to learn practical skills; after metacultural production, it became much more open to external actors: professional, scientific, educational and administrative institutions, the general public, tourism and marketers (cf. Hafstein 2018a: 132). If until the mid-twentieth century the social circles of dry stone walling were communities of practice, now they are only a subset; we can also add professional and scientific communities, the UNESCO epistemic community (Jacobs 2017) and the interested public. UNESCO broad conceptualization is close to the political definition in the *Faro Convention*: “a heritage community consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations” (Council of Europe 2005: Article 2b). As dry stone walling has been ascending vertically from the local and regional levels to the national (inscription to the register), continental (nomination of eight / thirteen European countries) and global (inscription on the UNESCO Representative List), the number of actors has multiplied. Upon entering the public domain, accessible to all humanity (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 170, 184–185), the communalization of heritage (Hafstein 2014a: 40–41, 54–55; 2018b: 122) and the possibility of its alienation (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 170, 184–185; Hafstein 2015: 156) were mentioned. This is true on a symbolic level, but how has it been manifested in Slovenian practice?

In Slovenia, after the inscription of dry stone walling on the UNESCO Representative List, no defamiliarization of heritage bearers from the practices or among themselves has been observed (Boris Čok; Dejan Zadavec; Darja

Kranjc). Since the heritage bearers and their organizations were fully functional, there was no alienation or appropriation by outsiders who would convert the heritage into economic capital (cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006; Hafstein 2018a: 134). I claim that the nature of the heritage also contributes to this – it is not easy to convert the embodied skills of dry stone walling into objectified forms (walls, escarpments, buildings) and these into financial capital (Mitja Kobal; cf. Bourdieu 2005: 105–106). In this sense, dry stone walling is by its character much more egalitarian than some other forms of heritage. Rather than physical labour, outsiders tend to appropriate folk stories,<sup>122</sup> songs and music,<sup>123</sup> folk theatre,<sup>124</sup> folk art<sup>125</sup> or traditional knowledge of folk medicine.<sup>126</sup>

In the twenty-first century, the modernity of gastronomic heritage (Bendix 2021) has led to increased competition among agricultural producers, and to the protection of food resources and products that families and villages make their living from.<sup>127</sup> There are limits to how much high-quality food can be produced in a certain area, and on the other side of the food supply chain, the farmers compete for a more or less limited pool of customers. In stony areas, such as the Karst and Istria, stone is a natural resource available to people for free, and, although it is less abundant in some microlocalities (Zdravko Škrli), there have never been any reports of “stone wars”. Dry stone walling has always been a sustainable practice and will continue to be in the future, as it can meet the needs of both present and future generations (cf. World Commission on Environment and Development 1987; United Nations 2015; Internet source 131).

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122 On folktales as sources for books by the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen see Hafstein 2014b.

123 Hafstein (2018b: 21–51) writes about copying, appropriation, and lawsuits over the song *El Cóndor Pasa*.

124 Traditional Sicilian puppeteers claim that *Opera dei pupi* has been devalued by amateurs who perform content-reduced shows for tourists, but they cannot take any action against them (Giguère 2014: 306–308).

125 The Australian Indigenous artist Balun Balun has successfully sued an Indonesian company that printed his painting *Geese and Water Lilies at a Water Spring* on T-shirts and marketed them in Australia (Pigliasco 2007: 405).

126 As Janyarak Suvapan (2016) argues, folk knowledge about the active ingredients of herbs in India is protected from exploitation by the pharmaceutical industry in the Digital Library of Traditional Knowledge.

127 In northern Italy, cheese wars are fought to limit the production areas, to preserve the purity of cheese-making traditions, or to respect the genealogy of cheese names (Grasseni 2017: 72). Among the social actors of heritagizing alpine cheese are not just “dairy farmers, cheese-makers, and refiners but also public administrators, consumer associations, and tourist entrepreneurs” who cooperate to “identify, describe, study, safeguard, extol, reproduce, and market specific items of tangible and intangible heritage” (Grasseni 2021: 83).

## Heritagization of Dry Stone Walling in Slovenia – An Exemplary Case

I will start with characteristics of the Karst and Istrian practices of dry stone walling and its heritagization, and then widen the scope to refer to Slovene ethnology and cultural anthropology that research heritage practices, as well as heritagization itself, and finally to the Slovenian safeguarding system.

If I rethink the positive circumstances that contributed to the fact that the heritagization of dry stone walling in Slovenia is a very good example of revitalization and safeguarding,<sup>128</sup> there is the already mentioned egalitarian and democratic nature of dry stone walling itself, which, due to natural conditions, was in the past known by the rural populations of most Slovenian regions. The skills needed to improve the land for agriculture and animal husbandry, and to keep the village spaces well-arranged, enabled farmers to better their livelihoods, so they were known to all members of rural communities. Children learned the practices in families or village communities, and they were also taught about the importance of dry stone walling for regulating the village and agricultural environment, as well as about the existential necessity of cooperation and solidarity. In short, dry stone walling skills and practices were common property, in contrast to craft skills in Crete, which were controlled and protected to prevent their spread and not to endanger the masters' livelihoods (Herzfeld 2004). There are no reports that dry stone walling communities in Slovenia had any professional secrets, and only relatively mild confrontations and conflicts have been reported in recent decades, with no heated debates or extreme competition, in contrast to the cheese wars documented in northern Italy (Grasseni 2017).

It is not negligible that the revitalization and heritagization of dry stone walling in Slovenia started in the period of the heritage boom (Dicks 2003; Lowenthal 2009: 5; Harrison 2013: 79, 227) and the reappréciation of traditional handicrafts (Ličen, Tomšič and Planinc 2012: 75), which means that society in general has become more receptive to heritage and crafts. Moreover, the rising ecological awareness of sustainable development forms a solid foundation upon which sustainable dry stone walling can be continued and promoted in the future (cf. World Commission on Environment and Development 1987; United Nations 2015).

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128 Eda Belingar and Darja Kranjc (2019) phrased it as a question in the title of their article "Dry Stone Walling Preservation in the Karst: A Good Practice Example?" Based on my research, I can claim this is definitely an exemplary case of revitalizing and safeguarding practice.

Although dry stone walling as heritage does have political, legal and economic dimensions, its bearers and researchers from Primorska connect it primarily to their local identities, education, research and social potentials – the engagement with heritage contributes to solidarity, joint actions, intergenerational cooperation, healthy physical activity in the fresh air, a neatly arranged environment, and sustainability (cf. Poljak Istenič 2014: 275).

Another favourable circumstance is that the initiatives for the revitalization of dry stone walling in Istria and the Karst grew in the field, from the bottom up. The researchers from Primorska cooperated extremely well with the bearers of skills and knowledge in reviving the practice, respecting community practices, values and traditional management systems (cf. Smith and Akagawa 2009: xiii), even learning the skills in practice. Together, they established good conditions for the transfer of knowledge and skills through publications and films, practical workshops and restoration campaigns, and later also through officially recognized transfers of knowledge and skills in professional training in the Higher Vocational College for Working in Stone Sežana and in the National Vocational Qualification Dry Stone Waller.

The initiative for the safeguarding of dry stone walling came from the Karst. Ethnologists from Primorska encouraged the active participation of the bearers in both research and the safeguarding procedures. The researchers and selected representatives of the bearers from both regions also participated in the preparation of the joint nomination of eight countries to the Representative List. The Ministry of Culture and the Coordinator for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage supported their initiatives with expert and political knowledge of the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm, and continued to facilitate the active role of the professionals and the practitioners from local environments.

The experience of the Public Institution Škocjan Caves Park in managing a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the UNESCO *Man and the Biosphere Programme*, which promotes participatory approaches to the sustainable development of the Karst Biosphere Reserve (Darja Kranjc), contributed to the inclusive safeguarding and to sustainable goals. It is significant that the Partnership for the Preservation and Popularization of Karst Dry Stone Walling operates as a cohesive cross-border network of individuals and institutions with a programme published on its website (Internet source 4). Moreover, it has strong professional and institutional support in the Škocjan Caves Park. They are well aware that the constant engagement of heritage bearers, local communities and the wider professional public is necessary in order to ensure the long-term transfer of knowledge to younger generations (Belingar and

Kranjc 2019: 74). They promote positive evaluation, respect and identification with both the dry stone walling practices and buildings made in this technique (*ibid.*: 80); thus intertwining intangible and tangible heritage.

Taking a wider perspective, Slovenian ethnology has always been focused on researching Slovenian culture, which provides a good basis for researching intangible cultural heritage in the state territory. Anthropologists do have a wider scope, and they also carry out research in other cultural environments; however, Slovenian visual anthropologists have mostly documented and presented the Slovenian culture and way of life with its festive and every day phenomena (Križnar 2001, 2007; Lunaček 2015; Valentinčič Furlan 2024).

The Ministry of Culture made a wise decision when it established the Coordinator for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage as a special professional body: in 2009, it authorized the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology SRC SASA, which laid the foundations of the safeguarding system in Slovenia (Križnar 2008, 2010a), and in 2011, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, which has since coordinated the safeguarding of intangible heritage. In some countries, ethnologists and cultural anthropologists are employed directly by the Ministry of Culture, which makes them subjected to political demands, expectations and practices that often strive for the good reputation of the state (Schreiber 2017: 448–450; Harrison 2013: 147–151). This increases the politicization of their work, often causing a greater distance from the grass-roots heritage practitioners.

We have developed a good safeguarding system in Slovenia, focused on co-operation with heritage practitioners. We inscribe the phenomena and, for most units, their bearers in the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage. “The element is primary, and the bearers are secondary, but still exposed, which requires close and regular contacts with the field” (Pukl and Jerin 2017: 151–152). The advantage of the dual approach is that it also takes into account subsequently submitted initiatives for identification of additional heritage bearers, as data are constantly updated (Pukl and Jerin 2018: 6). In June 2025, an intangible heritage unit had evidence of an average of three bearers (133 units, 394 bearers).

The Ministry of Culture and the Coordinator for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage rely on the expert opinions of the Coordinator’s Working Group (Internet source 125), which evaluates the suitability of the proposed heritage elements for inclusion in the Register. Representatives of museums, institutes and university departments, the ministry and the Slovenian UNESCO commission professionally cover both the thematic diversity



of heritage and its geographical distribution across Slovenia, while also taking in account UNESCO safeguarding. When forming its opinions, it refers to the *Convention* and the Criteria for Inscription on the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage (*Merila za vpis v Register nesnovne kulturne dediščine*, Coordinator 2021a), which were prepared by the first Coordinator and supplemented by the current one.

In addition to the members of the Working Group, the Coordinator may propose other museum curators and researchers specialized in various elements of heritage, such as folklorists, ethnomusicologists, ethnochoreologists, Slavists, dialectologists, and in certain cases also interdisciplinary groups, to write the text of the inscription. In this regard, the relatively limited territorial scope of Slovenia is seen as an “advantage in the study of intangible heritage and in the establishment of a transparent system for its management” (Križnar 2008: 23; 2012b: 146). A good overview of Slovenia’s intangible heritage and its safeguarding is also facilitated by the closely connected community of ethnologists, cultural anthropologists and other social scientists who research intangible heritage.

The Institute of Slovenian Ethnology SRC SASA, during its coordination of the safeguarding of intangible heritage (2009–2010), designed a visualization of intangible cultural heritage in the register with film (Križnar 2010b, 2011; cf. Valentinčič Furlan 2024: 273–300; Filak 2019). Both the first and second coordinators prioritized films made by heritage bearers or local communities, thereby supporting their self-identification and self-representation. In the last decade, films in the context of nominations to the UNESCO lists have been the focus, both in practice and in theory (Valentinčič Furlan 2015c, 2018b, 2024: 369–399). We are well aware that inclusive, participatory and collaborative film productions can enhance practitioners’ agency and their views on their heritage (Valentinčič Furlan 2025).

# Conclusion

## Vision, Viewing, Views

The book deals with heritage, but also with vision, viewing, views, senses, perception and knowledge. For anthropological practice, visions and views are important in at least two senses: as a theoretically dense metaphor for world-views or life philosophies and as part of the phenomenology of the senses (Grasseni 2007b: 16), which allows us to collect data during field research. Participant observation is an intimate participation in a chosen community while simultaneously benefitting from an ‘alien’ point of view (Grasseni 2017: 2). The external view in this case is the view of the researcher, who, through observation and participation, empathically approaches the emic views of the community; it differs from the view of the tourist who comes, consumes and leaves (Urry 1990).

It has been established that the one who looks and the one who is looked at are mutually connected (Berger 1972: 8–9; Willerslev 2009: 23–46). The latter usually returns the gaze, except in the case of covert observation, which is considered unethical by visual anthropologists (MacDougall 1975: 114–115; de Heusch 1988: 144), while a form of it was expected from the apprentices of Greek craftsmen (Herzfeld 2004: 107). In some cases, bilateral observation is not possible due to the great distance (and thus no contact) between the actors, as seen, for example, in the relationship between the UNESCO secretariat and the heritage practitioners around the world (Bortolotto et al. 2020: 68).

“Often it is the alien gaze that returns beauty and integrity to places”, noted Juan Goytisolo (in Hafstein 2012: 511; 2015: 293; 2018b: 94). In the first

phase, UNESCO's 'alien' gaze makes local heritage beautiful and attractive again with its inscription on the lists; however, if the practitioners begin to view their heritage through the imagined eyes of UNESCO, this can alienate them from their own practices (Foster 2011: 93; Hafstein 2015: 154; 2018a: 143; 2018b: 147, 166). UNESCO's distant and 'critical gaze' reminded the inhabitants of the Japanese island of Koshikijima of the outside world, and was a source of alienation, causing a defamiliarization with regard to their own heritage (Foster 2015: 89).

Views of culture and heritage can include, among others, the native's point of view (Geertz 1983: 55), the local view (*ibid.*: 215); the romantic view (Grimshaw 2001: 202); Indigenous, minority, Western, non-Western, egalitarian, dialogical views (Harrison 2013); inclusive (Kisić 2016), participatory or popular views (Jacobs 2017); and complementary pairs: emic and etic (Goodenough 1970), internal and external, insider and outsider (Graham and Howard 2008: 2–3; Bogataj 2011: 324), top-down and bottom-up (Smith 2006; Blake 2009), authorized, hegemonic, dominant and subaltern, alternative (Smith 2006: 4–11), uniform (Wilk 1995: 110; Hafstein 2014a: 55, 57) and dissonant (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996: 21; Smith 2006: 80); and four views perceived in Slovenian ethnology: romantic-nostalgic, negative, market-economic and professional (Bogataj 1992: 15).

The formation of personal and collective identities and identifications occurs as a constant search for a balance between one's own views of oneself and the views of others on them (Barth 1969: 9–10, 38). Like in all identifications, cultural identities are continuously complemented and modified by the fact that, on the one hand, members of a group or community search through their memories, experiences, history, heritage and aspirations, and on the other hand, in interactions with others, they perceive the views of significant others, neighbours, tourists, researchers and UNESCO, who hold up a mirror for them (Barth 1969: 14; Južnič 1993: 12; Muršič 1997: 227; Jenkins 2004: 123). However, as in any communication process, they do not necessarily accept the opinions of others, and besides, there are always dissonances among the group members' views (Deacon et al. 2004: 42; Burkett 2001: 242).

## Heritage, Heritagization and Identifications

Many researchers argue that heritage is a medium of cultural identifications and ongoing negotiations of shared identities (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004; Smith 2006: 300; 2015: 460; Albert 2006; Wulf 2011: 79, 84). The

UNESCO protocols place heritage at the centre of shared identities and self-respect (Lowenthal 2009: 5), so inscriptions to national registers and on UNESCO lists affirm and celebrate local, regional and national identities (Fikfak 2021: 19).

The *Convention* defines intangible heritage as a phenomenon that provides communities and groups “with a sense of identity and continuity” with previous generations (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1). Textual analysis has shown that agency is attributed to heritage, while the agency of things and phenomena is relational – it is made possible only in the neighbourhood of human agents (Gell 1998: 123). Heritage practitioners are subjects and active actors of heritage initiatives with their own agency and subjectivity (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 179). They themselves have decided that heritage has emotional, political and intellectual consequences in their lives (Smith 2012: 538), although they might not have realized the wide scope of meanings and effects in advance, as the categories of knowledge, identities and emotions are often reflected retrospectively, and are closely intertwined. Without practitioners, intangible heritage cannot exist, nor be passed on to future generations.

In the Slovenian safeguarding system, UNESCO’s loose definition of “communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals” (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1) has been translated into bearers of intangible cultural heritage (Križnar 2008: 27; 2010a; 2012a: 184, 188; ZVKD-1: Articles 20 and 98; ZVKD-1D: Articles 20, 40, 66; Coordinator 2021a). At the level of national safeguarding and inscribing heritage elements to the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage, only practitioners who recognize their cultural heritage in knowledge, skills, practices, representations and expressions, and pass them on to next generation, are identified as bearers. When preparing nominations for inscription on the UNESCO Representative List, due to the emphasis on the social aspects of heritage, UNESCO guidelines (UNESCO 2008/2024: 7; 2015; 2024: 31; 2025a) and examples from other countries, a much wider range of actors who manage, research, use and promote heritage, or are simply fond of it, are taken into account.

The analysis of the multinational nomination *Art of Dry Stone Walling, Knowledge and Techniques* (Art 2018) showed that criterion R.4 “The element has been nominated following the widest possible participation of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned” (UNESCO 2008/2024: 7; 2024: 31) was interpreted differently by the working bodies of the eight submitting states. Point 4.d asks about “associations, organizations, clubs, guilds, steering committees” (practitioners), and point 4.a about the wide range of “local

and regional administrations, communities, non-governmental organizations, research institutes, centres of expertise”, who participated in the preparation of the nomination or supported it (Art 2018: 29–33). It was established that Switzerland added six free, prior and informed consents of mostly practitioners, while Spain included 237 consents of a very wide circle of actors (Art 2018: 31–32: point 4.b), and the heritage of both states was successfully inscribed on the list. In the second case, the boundary between skilled practitioners and all other groups is blurred. The Evaluation Body warned that documenting the consent of an individual, group or organization needs an explanation in the file if they were authorized to speak in the name of the practicing community (UNESCO 2018b: 14).

The political definition of the heritage community in the *Faro Convention* (Council of Europe 2005: Article 2b) similarly includes those whose practical skills enable the active transmission of heritage to future generations, as well as those who do not know how to practise it, but value it highly (Delak Koželj 2013: 42). If researchers, managers, users, supporters, marketers and promoters of heritage sign free, prior and informed consents to nominations, this leads to the communalization of nominated heritage (Hafstein 2014a: 40–41, 54–55; 2018b: 122) and enables alienation from practitioners (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 170, 184–185; Hafstein 2015: 156). This discrepancy has been noted by UNESCO itself, which has considerably simplified the latest nomination forms and asks for one category only (see UNESCO 2025b: point 4.1).

I have used the concept of boundaries between communities, across which the identity processes of confirming similarities between members and emphasizing distinctions from outsiders is constructed (Barth 1969: 14; cf. Jenkins 2004: 22; Ashworth and Graham 2005: 151; Graham and Howard 2008: 5), to interpret cultural identifications at the local, regional, national and global levels. An ever-changing balance between heritage group members’ self-identification and external categorization by others (Cohen 1985: 12–15; Jenkins 2004: 22) is the result of dynamic interactions. Since Otherness is a constitutive element of all identifications, the majority of a certain community is often tempted to exclude Others or downplay them (Hall 1996: 4; Graham and Howard 2008: 5). In some heritage elements, such as the Aalst Carnival in Belgium, St Nicholas Celebrations in the Netherlands and in some Shrove-tide customs in Slovenia, ethnic minorities (the Jews, coloured diaspora, the Roma) experience racism and the reinforcement of stereotypes – they are denied the possibility of their own self-representation and instead negatively represented by the majority. However, there are also positive cases – where the Roma are well integrated into the village community and cooperate in

the organization of the Shrovetide event, they can choose roles as musicians, fortune tellers, negotiators for child benefits, chimney sweeps, policemen etc. (Pšajd 2024: 41). In the inclusive production of heritage, all groups have the power to represent themselves in line with their desires and aspirations (Hall 1999). As all rituals and symbols are constructed, they can be made more inclusive (Ross 2009: 2), as acknowledging the identities of another group does not make one's own identities any weaker (Ross 2007: 123).

The process of internal-external dialectics of cultural identifications also takes place between heritage bearers in the local environments and the distant UNESCO, which is not in direct contact with intangible heritage practitioners, but rather operates through the States Parties, which also engage the applied researchers. Ethnologists and anthropologists are able to explore how things are seen from other perspectives (Strathern 1987: 261; 2013), and translate between the emic viewpoints of people and the etic perspectives of experts, while in the safeguarding paradigm they also take into account UNESCO's ideological requirements. There are thus usually at least two intermediaries between heritage practitioners and UNESCO, which causes some of the identifications to be rather fragile. The lack of contact with heritage bearers is also regretted by employees of the UNESCO secretariat in Paris (Bortolotto et al. 2020: 68).

An important part of heritage communities' self-identification is the principle of the self-determination of heritage by its bearers in the *Convention* (Bortolotto 2015); however, in practice, their definition of their heritage is negotiated first with the safeguarding experts in the States Parties (cf. Luminara Festival, Bortolotto 2025: 24), and then it can be scrutinized by the experts in Evaluation Body and either confirmed or possibly questioned by the attendees of the Intergovernmental Committee session. The latter can state that the community's identification of their heritage does not meet the criteria, with two options: either the nomination is fully rejected (see the case of the sausage production, UNESCO 2015b: 37), or the nomination is sent back to the submitting state so that the identification of the heritage or other parts of the nomination are complemented or reedited. "The community has to reinvent itself as a heritage stakeholder in order to comply with the UNESCO regulations and execute a certain normative turn" (Kuutma 2019: 77).

In the safeguarding paradigm, UNESCO is a "significant other" (Friedman 1990: 321), influencing the cultural identifications of heritage bearers in heritagization processes, but it is also an actor that operates at a distance through bureaucratic procedures. This is the source of the "UNESCO effect", introduced



in the interpretation of the Japan nomination of *Toshidon* (Foster 2011: 66): here, the Japanese nomination drafters did not include the local community at Koshikijima in the process of drafting the nomination of their ritual, and upon the inscription, the islanders received no feedback from the national drafters, so it was left to their practical-evaluative agency (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 962, 971) to understand the possible effects and consequences of the inscription. Dissonant interpretations and various meanings were ascribed to the new status of their heritage by different local actors: some interpreted it through emotions and pride, some through economic opportunities, and some as a burden of moral obligation to preserve the *Toshidon* in some form, even though the intense depopulation meant that the ritual would lose its original meaning once there were no children on the island (Foster 2015: 89). This obviously happened, as the ritual was removed from the list and the local community remained faithful to their tradition and self-identification.

In cases when the practitioners were not actively involved in the preparation of the nomination file, they lost control over their cultural practices (Hafstein 2015: 156; Foster 2011, 2015; Yun 2015; Bortolotto et al. 2020: 66), which also affected their cultural identities. Those were mainly early safeguarding experiences, and it was very important that they were written about, so that UNESCO and safeguarding experts could recognize the weak points of the safeguarding paradigm as perceived in grass-roots communities, and could thus adapt the strategies as needed. In Slovenia, the heritage bearers are involved in the preparation of the nomination of their heritage, and their representatives are also invited to attend the processing of the nomination at the session of the Intergovernmental Committee – this was also the case in the nomination of dry stone walling. Researchers from Primorska communicated personally with people in the local environment, thereby alleviating the impersonal distance of UNESCO. They acted as mediators between communities of practice and UNESCO's epistemic community, and as translators between the language of heritage bearers and UNESCO political discourse.

UNESCO's view of intangible cultural heritage is instrumentalized, because the Evaluation Body gets to know the heritage and its bearers virtually, in the nomination form, in photographs and in film (digital media). The attendees of the Intergovernmental Committee session get to know the heritage through a short description of the nominated heritage (R.1) and the assessment of its compliance with criteria R.2–R.5 (the safeguarding measures and participation of the communities and groups on the state and international level), given by the speaker of the Evaluation Body, as well as through photographs and, in recent years, increasingly rarely through a short film excerpt. The text in the

form is adapted to the requirements and values of the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm, and therefore captures the external, etic view of experts and officials. When the emic views of the heritage bearers are 'translated' into UNESCO language, they may be partially changed in the process. If bearers and States Parties wish to inscribe a heritage element on the Representative List, they must describe it in accordance with UNESCO's instructions, standards and values, which can cause some alienation of the bearers from their heritage.

The people present in the large auditorium often do not get to see the heritage and its practitioners in the excerpt of the film, so their understanding of the heritage element is limited and very abstract, and they are given no possibility of emphatic identification with the practitioners. In cases when the submitting states choose to show a video clip of the working group preparing the nomination to thank UNESCO that the nominated element is inscribed on a list, the audience sees the nomination drafters instead of the heritage bearers.

This can cause a misidentification of the intangible heritage and the people who are in fact responsible for both its existence and how it is passed on to the next generations, even though it is precisely these people who should be celebrated and applauded on this occasion, despite being rarely present in the hall. We can understand that the heritage drafters want to step out of the anonymity of 'ghost writers' (Phillips 2003: 164), but in this respect writing an article or a book seems a more balanced option from the point of view of the heritage inscribed, its community of practice, the audience in the hall and those watching a direct broadcast of the session of the Intergovernmental Committee all over the globe.

Several authors highlight the potential of the *Convention* to democratize the practices and policies of intangible cultural heritage (Deacon et al. 2004: 11), but such democratization is often hampered by the imbalance in social power among heritage practitioners, UNESCO, States Parties and the researchers involved (Kearney 2009; Kurin 2004: 72; Erlewein 2015: 29). Democratization can be fostered by applying a dialogical model of heritage, facilitating public debate, including heritage bearers in all decision-making (Blake 2009: 63) and by participatory democracy (Müller and Stotten 2011: 5).

## Knowledge in Cultural Practices and in the UNESCO Safeguarding Paradigm

Dry stone walling in Slovenia was a good choice for a case study, as I could analyse how a cultural practice in decline was revitalized and heritagized in less

than two decades, and what changes were introduced in knowledge construction in these processes. The research only partially confirmed the thesis that the UNESCO global paradigm of safeguarding the intangible heritage irreversibly transforms the processes of forming and transmitting knowledge and disintegrates *habitus*. The body and type of knowledge of dry stone walling had already begun to change during the revitalization process in cross-border projects (2009–2015), when the bearers and researchers began to understand and define dry stone walling as cultural heritage. At that time, it was still unofficial, but due to the requirements of cross-border tenders and the modernity of heritage, it had already adopted some global principles (Shore and Trnka 2013: 18), such as the presentation of heritage in digital media and the transfer of skills in practical workshops and educational restoration campaigns. The broader influences of heritagization were therefore acted on dry stone walling several years before its inscription to the Slovenian Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2016) and on the UNESCO Representative List (2018).

On the other hand, *habitus* is durable and can coexist with heritage – it has been transformed into heritage only to a certain extent, while the feedback effect of safeguarding and inscription on the UNESCO list is often also a greater vitality of *habitus* in cultural practices. There is a dynamic relationship between *habitus* and heritage (Grasseni 2008: 165; 2017: 164), as the reflexive aspects created by metacultural mechanisms can transform back to *habitus* at the local level (Tauschek 2011: 56). It follows that a precise demarcation between habitual practices and metacultural heritage is no longer possible (Tschofen 2012: 29). People in the local environment still transmit knowledge and skills through embodiment in practice, while UNESCO's safeguarding paradigm primarily encourages the inscription of cognitive knowledge in nomination forms (cf. Connerton 1989: 72–73). UNESCO safeguarding thus pushes the relationship between the two types of knowledge and the ways in which they are transmitted and internalized towards memorizing cognitive knowledge in digital media, while somehow leaving skills and their embodiment beyond its horizon.

Applying the three faces of the tradition of knowledge – the body of knowledge, the media for its transmission and the social circles in which it is transmitted (Barth 2002) – and the analytical division into practical and cognitive knowledge (Ryle 1946; Koch 2013: 176), it is possible to determine changes in the transmission of both types. Skills are cognitive and bodily strategies, attitudes and emotional traits that shape the identities and worldviews of the bearers (Grasseni 2008: 168). Cognitive or discursive knowledge includes data on traditional practices and their history, the systematization of object types

and their functions, an overview of techniques, skills and tools, reflection on the advantages of traditional materials and approaches over modern ones, deliberation on ecological and financial sustainability, etc. There is no sharp delineation between the two types of knowledge: on the one hand, skills are transmitted together with some cognitive knowledge, and on the other, cognitive knowledge can also include descriptions and visualizations of embodied skills. Official safeguarding primarily promotes cognitive knowledge about practices in articles, books, films, exhibitions, nomination forms and on websites, but it does not in itself enable the transmission of skilled practices and embodied knowledge (van Zanten 2008: 1; Postma 2012: 41; Lipp 2013: 140) that are the core of intangible heritage (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1; Klekot 2018: 115–116).

Traditionally, knowledge of dry stone walling in the Karst was transmitted within the family and village community through experiential or situational learning (Lave and Wenger 1991; Ličen 2012) during shared farming chores and through shepherds' games, and was usually only partially verbalized. Meaning and values were transmitted through oral tradition and stories (Rudi Bak; Zdravko Škrlić; Boris Čok; Darja Kranjc), and only one interlocutor reported he received cognitive knowledge from his father and grandfather, who were stonemasons (Boris Čok). With the revitalization of dry stone walling, researchers and heritage bearers objectified existing knowledge in the form of cognitive knowledge in anthologies, handbooks and films, and practical knowledge and skills began to be transferred in workshops and restoration campaigns. The experiential transmission was and still is based on traditional methods of observing, imitating, testing and some oral instructions, as dry stone walling cannot be accelerated or automatized by using machines or robots. However, many contexts were changed, as workshops are organized and structured forms of hands-on learning (Ličen 2012: 11), limited in time to approximately eight hours. The social circles have also expanded: Karst restoration campaigns involve members of village communities, while workshops in Istria and the Karst are intended for groups of pupils, students, adults, and retirees, and some of them also to heterogeneous groups (Darja Kranjc; Boris Čok; Dejan Zadavec). Practical workshops with direct contact are a characteristic modern medium (Barth 2002) and a typical heritage genre (Hafstein 2015, 2018a, 2018b) for the experiential transmission of skills and embodied knowledge.

Practising a skill, on the one hand, and constructing expertise about heritage practices, on the other, involve knowledge of different epistemological and ontological orders (Polanyi 1962: 67). Practitioners flexibly adapt their

practices and standards to their life circumstances and ecological conditions, while researchers evaluate them according to expert standards and universal intents that may be experience-distant (Geertz 1983: 57). Practitioners' views are to some extent tacit and therefore, when researchers publish expertise about these practices, their intellectual efforts can override the views of practitioners (Polanyi 1962: 67). In general, researchers have greater social power than practitioners, and their objectified and published forms of knowledge reach a wider circle of people, thus having a more lasting impact on society (Assmann J. 1995: 126, 133; Falk, Dierking and Adams 2006: 323–336).

The research on dry stone walling confirmed the joint production of knowledge between heritage bearers and researchers from Primorska who also learned practical skills. During the revitalization of dry stone walling in the cross-border projects, they ensured its viability by documenting, researching, preserving, promoting, enhancing and transmitting, through education modules, which are all methods and means of safeguarding (cf. UNESCO 2003: Article 2.3). The knowledge, produced in epistemic justice (Fricker 2007; Pantazatos 2017), circulated between the practitioners and researchers, as well as back into the practicing communities and on to interested lay people and professionals (Tschofen 2012: 29, 31; Brumann 2012: 12; Hafstein 2018a: 134).

Nevertheless, the practitioners and researchers reported that the inscription of dry stone walling to the Slovenian Register and on the UNESCO list did not affect their skills and techniques (Rudi Bak; Boris Čok; Dejan Zadavec; Eda Belingar). The main safeguarding tools of the UNESCO mechanism – the inscriptions to the state inventories and on UNESCO lists (UNESCO 2003: Article 12, 16–18) – mostly do not address embodied skills, tacit knowledge and experiential transmission, so they cannot affect them.

It was established that in Slovenia the inscription of dry stone walling on the Representative List caused no defamiliarization of the heritage bearers from the practices or among themselves, and no alienation by outsiders who would appropriate the practice in order to make financial capital (cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006; Hafstein 2018a: 134). The reasons are that heritage bearers and their organizations have been fully functional, and that dry stone walling is an egalitarian practice based on hard work that cannot be easily converted into payment. Besides, it is one of the heritage elements that has always been sustainable, and thus can continue to contribute greatly to sustainable development in the future.

## Knowledge and Identities in Texts and Films of the Nomination

The knowledge in the nominations for inscription on the UNESCO intangible heritage lists is built on textual representations in the nomination form, and on visual representations in photographs and in film. The nomination form focuses on cognitive knowledge about the heritage element and primarily addresses members of the UNESCO Evaluation Body. The analysis of the texts in the dry stone walling form (Art 2018) showed that eight times more space is devoted to the description of safeguarding measures at the state and international levels than to the fundamental definition of the heritage element and its bearers. A visual analysis of the film *Dry Stone Walling, Knowledge and Techniques* (2017) revealed a word-and-sentence based structure (MacDougall 1998: 70; Grimshaw 2001: 158, 209) organized according to the etic commentary and emic statements of the bearers, while the footage and still pictures also provided rich information about groups of people at work, dynamic cultural landscapes and diverse stone buildings in eight countries.

When the UNESCO Evaluation Body assesses whether an element meets the criteria for inclusion on the list, the texts of the nomination forms are the most important source of information. In contrast, after the element has been inscribed and all the representations published on the UNESCO website, films in particular ensure the visibility of the heritage and inform the general public (UNESCO 2015a: point 120; Sicard 2018: 66–67). What was the attitude of the Slovenian dry stone walling practitioners towards the text of the nomination and the film? The Slovenian representative in the international working group for the multinational nomination preparation assessed that the text of the form did not appeal to the practitioners, because it was an abstract and dry matter that should meet UNESCO criteria (Eda Belingar). On the other hand, the film about practices and practitioners was well received by the Slovenian bearers, experts, officials and politicians when it was shown at the presentation of the facsimile of the UNESCO certificate at the Ministry of Culture in Ljubljana. And how do nomination texts and films contribute to the formation of expert knowledge about heritage elements? The UNESCO expert who extracted key concepts for 470 elements on the intangible heritage lists in 2018 relied much more on data in the films than in the forms (Sicard 2018: 69–70). The great importance of films for the general public, bearers and experts is an additional argument for filmmakers to focus on the heritage and its practitioners, while ignoring the visual dogma on the UNESCO website with the imposed structures of textual communication,



and instead to endeavour to exploit the potentials of the medium (Heider 2006: 113–114).

Within the safeguarding paradigm, the special potentials of the film are that it can capture and convey to viewers experiential, emotional, tacit and embodied knowledge (MacDougall 1998: 81, 84, 265), the emic views of film subjects and their voices (Grasseni 2004: 16–17), their cultural and personal identities (Ginsburg 1995: 266; MacDougall 2006: 55; Valentinčič Furlan 2016: 108), authentic soundscapes (Henley 2010: 138; van Zanten 2012: 91) and the energy of events (Valentinčič Furlan 2015b: 99). The analyses of films on the UNESCO website have shown that the potentials have not at all been fully exploited, and moreover, the requirement for the participation of practitioners and communities (UNESCO 2003: Article 15; 2008/2024: 7) is rarely evident in the films (Sousa 2018: 25–26).

Although the *Convention* safeguards the practices, skills and knowledge of practitioners, it does not treat them on an equal footing with the cognitive knowledge of experts and officials, which is part of the general tendency of the information society (Bell 1973) to value cognitive knowledge acquired in official education systems above skills and embodied knowledge (Herzfeld 2007: 211). However, cognitive knowledge in mediatized forms does not enable the transfer of skills to younger generations (Graham 2009: 189–191; Duvelle 2010: 7). Mitja Kobal and his father could not rely on the theory from a book when repairing dry stone walls, and they reinvented the practice by analysing the structures of walls and experimenting. Similarly, linguistic documentation on card records has not been useful for the preservation of the Yuchi language, while language skills have been successfully transmitted through personal communication between experienced speakers and beginners (Grounds 2007; Graham 2009: 190, 197). Direct contacts with people who master the skills of a chosen cultural practice or intangible heritage are therefore crucial, and no other medium can replace them, not even film documentation (van Zanten 2008: 1; Postma 2012: 41). In sum, skills are best learned experientially through observation and mimetic repetition in real-life contexts or in practical workshops.

The UNESCO safeguarding paradigm and inscriptions on the lists expand general knowledge about heritage and its diversity in the local, regional, national and global environment (Koch 2013: 176); they encourage the cooperation of individuals, groups and communities, as well as of safeguarding experts; they influence the stronger identification of social groups with heritage and strengthen their desire to safeguard and preserve it. Heritagization

transforms cultural capital in its embodied state (skills, practices, habitus) into an objectified state (cultural goods), and through social alchemy into an institutionalized state (official intangible heritage in registers and on lists), thereby increasing its social, symbolic, economic and often also financial capital (Bourdieu 2005). At the same time, intangible heritage, after metacultural production, is significantly more open to professional, scientific, educational and political institutions, as well as to the general public, marketers and tourism, often due to the neoliberal expectation that it can sustain itself (Kockel 2007; Hafstein 2012: 505–506; Bortolotto 2025: 23). However, UNESCO bodies warn against the excessive decontextualization and commercialization of the heritage in touristic projects (UNESCO 2018b: 10–11).

In my research, I questioned the protocols, standards, unwritten rules and outdated practices that are embedded in the UNESCO safeguarding and mediatization of heritage, and internalized by actors together with the rules of grammar and logic; this unreflected doxa (Bourdieu 1977) then determines the thinking and activities of actors in a particular cultural field. This also revealed the connections of knowledge and power (Foucault 1980) that need to be loosened if we want to approach dialogical, inclusive and participatory models of heritage through collaborative and participatory safeguarding and film productions, which are consistent with UNESCO declarative position on the mandatory participation of heritage bearers in the processes of safeguarding, in drafting the nomination files and in film productions (UNESCO 2003: Article 15; 2008/2024: 7; 2024: 31).

To conclude, knowledge production should be freed of power relations in research studies, heritagization processes and authorized safeguarding, as well as in all responsible institutions.



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<sup>130</sup> Abbreviations: CSICH – Coordinator for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; ICH – Intangible Cultural Heritage; ICHL – Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists; MC – Ministry of Culture; RICH – Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage; WHL – World Heritage Lists.



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## Summary

*The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* and UNESCO's safeguarding paradigm are rapidly transforming cultural practices into intangible cultural heritage. The author has explored the construction of knowledge and identities in cultural practices, intangible cultural heritage, as well as in the safeguarding processes, in theory and in an empirical case. UNESCO strongly promotes the mediatization of heritage: the members of the Evaluation Body do not get to know the heritage elements and their practitioners in the local environment, but only virtually – according to data in the nomination form, in photographs and in film. The construction of knowledge in the nomination form is based on cognitive knowledge, describing the element, its bearers, the safeguarding measures in States Parties, and the expected outcomes of international recognition. The predominant illustrative films on the UNESCO website are word-and-sentence-based, to the detriment of the varied potentials of film, and produced top-down. In contrast, experiential films can transmit the skilled practices and views of practitioners in their native languages, together with their cultural identities. It is recommended that the bearers are included in all phases of film production, from the planning stage on.

The case study of dry stone walling in decline, its revitalization and heritagization, has been conducted in the Kast and Istria in Slovenia. The research and revitalization projects were carried out as a joint venture of Primorska researchers and dry stone wallers as a case of epistemic justice. This was unofficial heritagization, paying attention to both practical skills and cognitive knowledge. The official safeguarding, with the main tool of inscribing the elements to the state inventories and on UNESCO lists, focuses on objectified



cognitive knowledge, while paying little attention to the embodied skills and tacit knowledge that are fundamental for the existence and viability of community practices and intangible heritage. As a result, practitioners and researchers in the Karst and Istria reported that the inscription of the *Art of Dry Stone Walling, Knowledge and Techniques* by eight European States Parties to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity had not affected their skills and practices. In Slovenia, there has been established no defamiliarization of heritage bearers from their practices or among themselves, nor any alienation or appropriation by outsiders. On the one hand, heritage practitioners and their organizations have been fully operational, and on the other, dry stone walling appears to be an egalitarian practice based on hard work that is not easily converted into economic capital.

However, the preparation of the nomination and the international recognition accelerated identifications with this heritage element, widening the circle of practitioners, researchers, enthusiasts and users of heritage. The new global status of dry stone walling expanded the general knowledge of this practice, promoted local and regional identities, and increased financial investments in the renovation of dry stone walls and in media for the transfer of knowledge and skills. It was established that practitioners, local communities, municipalities, regions, the state, researchers, safeguarding experts, and the general public in Slovenia benefitted from the inscription to the Representative List. This was an exemplary case of heritagization with minimal negative effects, so the case study is concluded by a reflection on the favourable circumstances and their causes.

Of course, it is important to monitor the further development of dry stone walling in Slovenia and internationally, and especially the impacts of its global promotion.

## About the Author

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Nadja Valentinčič Furlan is a curator of ethnographic film at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. Since the museum was appointed the Coordinator for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Slovenia in 2011, she has been responsible for film production and organized two international conferences on visualizing intangible heritage, resulting in two edited volumes. She holds a doctorate from the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, and has just published a Slovenian-language book on constructing knowledge and identities in films on intangible heritage with the Ljubljana University Press and the Slovene Ethnographic Museum.

She makes ethnographic films, film vignettes for exhibitions and short films on elements in the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage, while she also coordinates more complex film productions. She collects films on Slovenian intangible cultural heritage by other filmmakers, and arranges grants of rights from authors and producers for the use of their films in the context of exhibitions or safeguarding intangible heritage.

Her research interests include visual anthropology, film communication in museum exhibitions, and the visualization of intangible cultural heritage, as well as life stories, memories, identities, knowledge construction, and research ethics. She is the editor-in-chief of the museum's scientific journal *Etnolog* and a member of the editorial board of the online journal *AnthroVision*, published by VANEASA, the Network of Visual Anthropologists within the European Association of Social Anthropologists.

