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Intangible cultural heritage: Safeguarding for creativity

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ABSTRACT

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) concerns "*the practices*, *representations*, *expressions*, *knowledge and skills*" that belong to communities and are held by specific members. It is not static, but it continually transforms and innovates. Elements of ICH are deeply rooted in territories and communities and represent critical factors for creating new global and competitive scenarios. How can this heritage be safeguarded and, above all, why is it important to safeguard it? By bridging past and future, ICH fuels social and economic creativity. Thus, this research will firstly stress the role of ICH as a source of creativity and innovation. Then, on the basis of different case-studies, we will explore various approaches to the safeguarding of this heritage, showing the limits of a protection system centered on individuals and creators and the challenge of a more extensive one, taking into account the specific nature of these skills, knowledge and cultural practices, constantly innovating, and nourishing creative processes.

Introduction

Many countries, familiar with a perception of heritage as being something material, monumental, and aesthetic, struggle nowadays with a new paradigm of cultural heritage, established by the Unesco Convention for the Safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage since 2003, and they hardly realize the importance of its safeguarding (Srinivas, 2008).

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) concerns "*the practices*, *representations*, *expressions*, *knowledge and skills*" that belong to communities and are held by specific members. It is not static, but it continually transforms and innovates. ICH elements are deeply rooted in territories and communities and represent critical factors for creating new global and competitive scenarios. Furthermore, at a time when the loss of diversity and cultural identity uniforms lifestyles, and when the relocation of manufacturing facilities and the dispersal of communities threaten the existence of non-material heritage, its protection becomes crucial. In fact, the safeguarding of these practices, representations, artistic expressions, knowledge and skills, dance, performing arts, as well as craftsmanship respond to the need of strengthening cultural diversity as "*a rich asset for individuals and societies. The protection*, *promotion and maintenance of cultural diversity are an essential requirement for sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations*" (Unesco, 2005, art. 2.6).

How does the Convention propose to safeguard intangible heritage and, above all, why is it important to safeguard it? By bridging past and future, ICH fuels social and economic creativity. Thus, this research will firstly stress the role of ICH as a source of creativity and innovation. Then, it will explore different approaches to the safeguarding of this heritage, principally in the field of traditional craftsmanship, showing the limits of a protection system centered on individuals and creators and the challenge of a wider one taking into account the specific nature of these skills, knowledge and cultural practices, constantly innovating, and nourishing creative processes.

ICH as a lever for creativity and innovation

What are creativity and innovation?

The starting point for the study of the contribution of ICH to economic and especially sustainable development should logically be the definition of both creativity and innovation. Here, the economic perspective is still deeply marked by Schumpeter vision for which the central concept is innovation, namely the ability to generate new ideas, products or processes. This polarization emphasizes the role of a strategic player, the entrepreneur, both as risk

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taker and organizer. However, this theory of economic development shadows the process of distillation of "new ideas", what specifically deals with creation.

Trying to deepen the origin of creativity, not only from an economic perspective, some studies emphasize that only people touched by divine inspiration or benefiting from an exceptional QI can be creative. However, these considerations are restrictive, since the forms of creativity are multiple and do not reflect the same source. For Csikszentmihalyi, 1994 creativity will emerge from the interaction of three components: the individual who has mastered some discipline or domain of practice; the cultural domain in which the individual is working; the social field that may facilitate access to new opportunities. This means that, whatever the variety of the individuals, all varieties of creativity depend on abilities like constructing metaphors, reinterpreting data, connecting unrelated area, understanding aspects of inner thoughts. Thus, creativity provides solutions to problems and a creative environment can be defined as a "milieu" that produces and disseminates projects regardless of their field of application.

Other researches argue that the essence of creativity comes from crisscrossing references, paradigms and values. This means that by observing areas external to their traditional activity, some people will find out the desired solution. Thus, creativity rises from these overlapping of domains. The history of science supports this hypothesis: most of the inventions and creations have resulted from a combination of intellectual references to exceed specializations by the existing fields (e.g. Leonardo da Vinci, Newton, Pasteur). This way of thinking allows responding to unpredictable events that overthrew the established knowledge. Therefore unpredictability and synergy can make appear new possible trajectories of development and, potentially, any association of thoughts and hitherto separate knowledge will enable hybridization desired between explicit and tacit, common and local knowledge.

Concerning the tacit knowledge approach, here knowledge is considered essentially personal in nature and difficult to extract from the heads of individuals. Therefore, the knowledge in and available to an organization will largely consist of tacit knowledge that remains in the heads of individuals. Its dissemination will be accomplished by the transfer of people, as "knowledge carriers", from one part of an organization to another. Hence, learning in this case occurs when individuals come together under circumstances that encourage them to share their ideas and to develop new insights that will lead to the creation of new knowledge. Actually there was a deeper thinking when this approach was elaborated. Central to Michael Polanyi's research was the belief that creative acts (especially acts of discovery) are shot-through or charged with strong personal feelings and commitments. Science is not value-free, but resulting from creative tension, a concern with reasoned and critical interrogation with other more "tacit" forms of knowing. For Polanyi, guesses and imaginings are mainly motivated by passions, and "*we can know more than we can tell*" (1967, p. 4). This pre-logical phase of knowing is named "tacit knowledge" and the real issue of creativity will then be the knowledge of approaching discovery. In this sense, holding knowledge is bound to the conviction that there is always something to be discovered.

A remarkable contribution to the matter of creativity is Granovetter's paper *The Strength of Weak Ties*, issued on American Journal of Sociology in 1973. This work has given an impetus to the analysis of both creativity and social network analysis, making a distinction between strong and weak ties. Strong ties are related to higher frequency interaction, more emotional involving, more intimate, and wider reciprocal service. Weak ties are designed through lower frequency interaction, less emotional involving, less intimate and narrower reciprocal service. Strong ties sustain relations within the group or the organization, while weak ties can build bonding relations between groups or organizations and gain easily access to non-redundant information unavailable through interaction with strong ties. Therefore weak ties produce new shared information, which can generate creativity through new ideas and processes. The difference between strong and weak does not result from a value judgment but from a four-criteria analysis of the process through which people connect together: the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal service. Why are weak ties so relevant? According to Granovetter, weak ties are more likely to link members of different small groups than are strong ones, which tend to be concentrated within particular groups, and then are very rapidly redundant. Through strong ties the information disseminated is always the same; through weak ties, this information is new and rich (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1376; Granovetter, 1982). Exposure to newer ideas comes from interaction with those with whom we are weakly tied, because such individuals travel in different social circles and thus have access to information and resources that we do not know.

These different approaches to creativity lead us to consider that the origin of creativity is not only related to specific, exceptional and individual characteristics. Creativity can be the result of sharing personal and tacit knowledge embodied in people, of unexpected meeting and discussions, of weak ties created between individuals, of synergies risen by the exchange among individuals, their environment, the social context. Thus, the simple fact of working together can have an impact on creativity. Two arguments are generally asserted: working together a group expresses what he wants; working collectively a group spreads his works to others and disseminates informally the information. Sometimes this trend that appears as problem solving is designated as a user-led innovation. This debate is nowadays actualized by the increasing role of the mediated communities on Internet (Greffe, 2011). In this perspective, it is widely recognized that e-mail, blogs, forums, Internet and all the other possibilities opened up by Web 2.0 and mobile phones create links that bring together new communities which, by their very nature, rise above any kind of physical determinism.

In this general framework concerning innovation, creativity and their origin, our aim is now to discuss how intangible cultural heritage can contribute to economic development.

How does ICH engine creativity and innovation?

Creativity can be explained from different perspectives and former explanations offer a matrix to precisely define

the role of ICH. However, it would be very formal to try to illustrate the contributions of each of the issues previously identified. Thus, we can say at once that ICH incorporates two characteristics that make it very relevant for creativity and innovation: its ability to synergize various fields of knowledge, as well as its capacity to distillate and disseminate a cloud of tacit and explicit information that permeate individuals and enterprises to knowledge exchange. These two dimensions, technical and social, can explain the contribution of ICH to creativity and innovation.

The technical contribution

The technical contribution is related to the fact that ICH is knowledge carrier. Not only it incorporates a know-how, but it also incorporates experiences that have been responsible to bring this know-how to its present state. The permanence of these skills, knowledge and practices covers in fact a pathway of successive experiences: facing various challenges, this know-how have been obliged to redesign its processes and forms, to change the materials used, to conquer new markets, to develop new organization models. For this reason, it is difficult to identify an "initial state", as those who want to determine a system of intellectual property struggle to do. There is neither initial owner nor initial state. ICH practices keeps evolving and what appears today is a capacity to take into consideration new issues and to bring new solutions.

In this perspective, this incorporated potential will be creative if it is continuously transferred to new products, forms and sectors. This transformation can take place inside the habitual field of activity, and in this case we face a more traditional model: the innovation one. A potter will adapt his design to make other types of objects, that fulfill new dimensions or functions. A weaver will create new tapestry models, working tightly with artists and designers. Dress and fashion designers will produce new clothing using modern synthetic fibers and tissues, valorizing the specificity of these materials and adapting them to customer's needs. Moreover, recycled materials and natural colors and dyes, will permit them create long-lasting fashion products, respecting the environment (De Lassus, 2009). New technologies also contribute to foster innovation of traditional skills and knowledge embodied by craftsmen and practitioner. To give an example, in the field of restoration, computer assisted processes consent to reproduce exactly and rapidly the shape and the volumes of sculptures. These procedures do not substitute the work of craftsmen and their know-how, but significantly reduce the working time consecrated by sculptor to repetitive tasks, permitting them to decrease restoration costs, and to focus on more creative activities (Lasica, 2006).

Very often the innovation occurs within the traditional field of activity. Nevertheless, crisscrossing references, values and knowledge can also take place outside the considered sector. In this case, synergies are created between the incorporated knowledge and field of experience and needs that may be developed in another part of the society and according to different logics. Here, we really deal with the issue of creativity and the contribution of ICH is even more valuable, since it can bring solutions to problems not yet solved. In order to illustrate this process, we can consider the example of gold leave practices in some Asian countries. During a long time, this craftsmanship was dedicated to the ornamentation of Buddhist temples, and more precisely of religious statues. Due to the fall of religious practices (and probably of donations), this traditional use and market became narrower and narrower, and the artisans incorporating this know-how had to develop new uses for their corresponding competencies. To do so, they took into consideration new needs: some of them relatively close to the traditional domain of activity, such as the decoration of clothes, furniture, pens; and others much further and original such as medicine uses, where gold leave elements can be used as specific components of prosthesis. Another similar example comes from the porcelain practice, typical of the city of Limoges in France. The specific characteristics of this material and craftsmanship are nowadays better known, thank to the researches of the European innovation center of ceramic (Pôle européen de la céramique, 2012). In the last years, traditional knowledge related to porcelain has consequently been transferred to new domains and particularly to the medical sector, where porcelain components are used for the construction of prosthesis and implants. This represents a potentially very large market, since 1.5 millions of bony-transplants are realized every year in Europe. Thus, the enterprises specialized in prosthesis construction started to employ traditional craftsmen, holding the porcelain fabrication know-how, and to finance educational programmes to train future employees. These cases shows how ICH can effectively distill creativity by offering a tank of knowledge, more or less tacit, that can be exploited out of its traditional frontiers.

The social contribution

The social contribution of ICH deserves to be underlined too. This living knowledge benefits from contiguous exchanges into its proper social ecosystem. It permanently explores weak ties in order to define and adapt itself and to offer new solutions to pending issues. Thus, holders of ICH are in a continuous state of dialog, because they are forward-oriented and looking for quality progression. To illustrate this point, we can give a negative example of the loss of ICH, when this dialog is broken. In the city of Paris, the new urban design caused the expulsion the ICH holders specialized in artistic wooden furniture from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Consequently, the traditional place of discussion and information exchange between the "suppliers" and the final clients disappeared. Nowadays, artisans only interact with intermediaries that are more interested in quantity and costs, than in quality and prices. Progressively, many of the abilities of these ICH holders rarefied, due to the normalization of the products, and finally disappeared. In a sense, the pessimist forecast of Ruskin and Morris was verified.

It is evident that when ICH holders are involved in a culture or information exchange they strengthen their aptitude to take into consideration new issues, new needs, new perspectives. Thus, they become specialized in exploring and exploiting weak ties, and consequently able to adapt an answer that may be normalized and generalized. However, the seminal point resides here in their ability to be "problem solving" in fields were the absence of solutions and uncertainty are still prevailing. This does not mean that

they offer a creativity monopoly, but more simply that they are creatively efficient.

Safeguarding for creativity

After having surveyed and studied the major role played by ICH and the knowledge and skills at the basis of these practices in our contemporary creative economies, the following step will be to understand how this heritage can be more aptly safeguarded. The measures and study-cases presented in this section are mainly based on a fieldwork realized in France from 2008 to 2011, including 40 interviews with craftsmen and 20 interviews with policy makers, opinion leaders and organizations operating in the field of arts and crafts. The crafts practices analyzed are strongly rooted in their territory and associated with the traditional activity of the community and its history. Their specificity is of being both traditional, passed down through generations, innovative, able to adapt to different needs as they arise, and creative, since they foster new uses and practices.

The limits of an individualistic approach

In the last 40 years, the conjoint work of Wipo and Unesco has strongly contributed to the debate of ICH protection. In a first moment, the question has been treated as an Intellectual Property (IP) and folklore issue, stressing the necessity of identifying individual authors and creators, and to recognize them economic and moral rights. Following this approach, the diplomatic conference of Stockholm of 1967, added a new article concerning the protection of folklore to the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works (Stockholm Acts, 1967; Paris Acts, 1971, art. 15.4(a)). Later, the Government of Bolivia requested Unesco to include a protocol for the protection of popular arts and cultural patrimony in the Universal Copyright Convention of 1952. In 1976, Unesco adopted the Tunis Model Law on Copyright for developing countries, where article 6 was especially dedicated to the protection of national folklore. Since 1998, Wipo extended its field of research to traditional knowledge and genetic resources, and conducted several fact-finding missions trying to understand how to adapt existing IP systems to the specific needs of communities and practitioners (Aikawa-Faure, 2009).

These acts, researches, and models attempt to protect ICH through IP measures and therefore to promote its contribution to contemporary economies. Nevertheless, copyrights, patents, trade secrets and trademarks, commonly used to protect the holders of ICH, present some evident limits (Dutfield, 2002; Gibson, 2005). Firstly, how can we identify a single author or creator of a creative process that is transmitted from generations and shared within a community? Secondly, how can we limit the duration of the protection of expressions that are linked to people's identity and history to the life of a single creator? Thirdly, is it possible to fix non-material knowledge and skills on a material basis, without freezing their possibility to transform and assume multiple forms and dimensions?

It is evident that these artistic techniques and practices, shared source of creativity, cannot be reduced to an individual protection, since they express communities' identity, are dynamic and keep evolving. IP protection might even constitute a danger, when it aims at both baring and freezing a creative process rooted in a community since generations. IP rights have the positive effect to allow owners to control the use of their intangible resources and corresponding competencies, they contribute to the remuneration of the work of ICH holders, and they incentive further researches and creations. Despite the apparent efficiency of these measures, they risk, in the case of intangible cultural heritage, to privatize something that does not belong to a specific person, but rather to a community or group of people (Brown, 2005).

Fostering the community-based approach

The crucial role of communities and group is firstly stressed by the Unesco Convention of 2003 stating that "*communities*, *in particular indigenous communities*, *groups and*, *in some cases*, *individuals*, *play an important role in the production*, *safeguarding*, *maintenance and re-creation of the intangible cultural heritage*, *thus helping to enrich cultural diversity and human creativity*". The central role of communities in the safeguarding process recurs all over the text of the Convention. It is recognized as necessary for the implementation of safeguarding measures (art. 11), for the development of specific educational and training programmes (art. 14), and as a responsibility of State Parties that have *"to ensure the widest possible participation of communities [...] and to involve them actively in [ICH] management*" (art. 15).

Thus, the Convention emphasizes the role of community in the safeguarding of ICH and suggests to investigate new ways of governance, without clearing up how this heritage should be safeguarded. Nevertheless, the general insights of the Convention incite to considerate ICH neither as a private heritage, nor as a public one (Samuelson, 1954), but as a commons, and more precisely a knowledge commons (Ostrom,1990, 1994, 2005; Hess & Ostrom, 2007), meaning a resource shared by a group of people and vulnerable to social dilemmas. In this framework, new ways of governance might be explored alternative or complementary to privatization, open access, intellectual property rights and public intervention. On the basis of these considerations, a central question needs now to be tackled: how can ICH be safeguard?

Firstly, it is necessary to identify, in order to successively protect and valorize, the individuals, groups and communities that embody this heritage and ensure its production and maintaining. The inventorying and listing systems, that are the main measures of safeguarding designated by the Convention, contribute to select practitioners and to recognize the quality of their work, and also to create weak ties between ICH holders belonging to different domains. In spite of this, every selection process risk to advantage some professionals in preference to others, and to generate windfall effects, rent seeking and pressures for the expansion of inventories and lists. For these reasons, identifying ICH practices and their holders should be a starting point, but a broader policy is then needed to truly valorize ICH knowledge, skills and practices within contemporary economic and creative context.

Secondly, safeguarding measures should strengthen the link between ICH and creativity and innovation. In this perspective, local projects should involve the communities of craftsmen and the enterprises responsible of the creation and reproduction of this heritage and encourage dynamics fostering innovation within a particular sector, as well as in other sectors. In practice, this kind of projects are often related to a single visionary person, like the entrepreneurs that bear the risks of initiating a new activity or exploring a new field, but can be also actively supported by local collectivities or public programmes. To give an example, the R3ilabs (Réseau Innovation Immatérielle pour l'Industrie) is a project aiming at connecting different knowledge and skills with creativity, establishing new collaborations and new products, and developing further markets. Founded in 2010 by a group of textile industrialists, it has up to now contributed to create more than 30 partnerships between traditional, often narrowly focused, manufacturers, and young designers with fresh talents and ideas. Projects like this can thus incite enterprises to adequate their know-how to market demand and needs, but also to develop contacts with other sectors of activity, contributing to creativity. Another remarkable example comes from the glass-making hub in Lorraine. It consists of several well-known companies like Daum and Bacarat, as well as training and research institutes like CERFAV (European Centre for Research and Training in Glass Art) in Vannes-le-Châtel and CIAV (International Centre of Glass Art) in Meisenthal that seek to define new perspectives for the traditional glass sector, firmly rooted in the region. In this case, the creation of clusters or cultural districts contributes to boosts proximity and encourages mutual symbiosis and exchanges within different enterprises, institutes and sectors.

Finally, safeguarding can never be dissociated from transmission. Different mechanisms of transmission have being developed through the centuries, like the guilds system or the establishment of training institutions like the *Ecoles des arts et métiers* (engineering colleges) attempting at formalizing tacit knowledge commonly transferred in the framework of workshops and enterprises "on the job" (Chevallier, 1991). Nowadays, the French educational system in the field of arts and crafts is well structured and comes within the responsibility of diverse actors: the Ministry of Culture and Communication, the Ministry of Education, the Arts and Crafts Chambers and the private sector. Several training programmes of different quality and levels exist. Nevertheless, on the basis of the interviews realized with the professionals of the arts and crafts sector, two main problems came to light. On the one hand, the training programmes tend to become more and more general. They allow acquiring the most important skills and knowledge related to a crafts practice, but not the tacit knowledge and the ability to work in a workshop or in an enterprise. Moreover, craftsmen do not have enough economic and material resources and time to complete the educational process with a period of apprenticeship. On the other hand, the second problem concerns the fact that only some crafts skills and knowledge can be learned in the framework of official trainings. For many rare and highly specialized crafts practices it does not exist any formal learning. In some limited cases, this lack of official teaching is balanced by mechanisms inspired by the National Living Treasures of Japan, like the title of *Master of Art* (Maître d'art), that ensure the transmission of rare and threatened skills. Nevertheless, these experiences are very limited, and many crafts practices, 38% of the cases studied, are not concerned by any educational programme.

To overcome these problems, some communities and groups of craftsmen have developed original projects to respond to educational needs, and to transfer their common heritage to future generations. The case of the master tailors, organized in the Tailor Training Association, can give some ideas and responses. In 2004, aware of the need of training apt to the profession's requirements, the members of this association decided to open a private course lasting 2 years, providing high quality training in basic techniques, without any form of general teaching, and focused on production and market needs. Since the beginning, this course had a great success. It permitted to tailors to collectively find a solution to their difficulties to train apprenticeship in their small workshop and consented them to employ, after their graduation, people ready to work and to sustain the production process. A second example concerns the production of tapestries in Aubusson (Cominelli, 2011a, 2011b; Limousin & et Moyen, 2007). The community of tapestry-makers is situated in the Creuse department of the Limousine region, a territory where the availability of water, fields for breeding, and wool production influenced the development of this activity since the XIVth century, and reaching its peak under Louis XIVth, when the Prime Minister Colbert assigned to Aubusson the title of Royal Manufactory. Throughout the centuries, the skills and knowledge necessary for creating these exquisite and renowned tapestries have evolved adapting to different needs, social habits, ways of living, and new technologies. However, since the 70s, the tapestry production in Aubusson has known an important decline due to economic crises, but no less for other reasons such as changing consumption habits and needs, the competitiveness of low costs products, the decrease of public intervention and demand, and the rupture of the strong relation that existed between the production activity and it's social and economic environment. In fact, less people were trained in this field and involved in the tapestry process, wool started to come from distant countries like New Zealand, and a part of the local manufacture was delocalized, in order to reduce production costs. This trend has changed since 2009, when the Aubusson tapestry has been added to the Unesco Representative List of the intangible cultural heritage of Humanity. This international recognition made local community more aware of the importance of this ICH practice and fostered the development of new projects gathering together the expertise of public and private actors. Thus, the International City of Tapestry and Woven Art has been created as a structure for the development of the Aubusson tapestry, including training, research, and cultural projects. This centre, not only ensures the transmission of the craftsmanship to new practitioners, but it also contributes to share the history, the materials, the objects, the documents related to tapestry within both community members and people interested in this activity. Thus, not only the skills and knowledge are safeguarded, but in a broader sense the history and the complex culture of this practice is kept alive within the community and this

formal and tacit knowledge is not lost, but can be further used to strengthen creativity.

Conclusion

In a global world where creativity appears very frequently as the result of very qualified partnerships between big companies and excellent universities, or between very important public markets and subsidies, ICH seems to play a strategic role, often barely recognized.

On the one side, the knowledge economy gives intangible factors a determining role in the design and production of new goods. This involves artistic traditions and practices in two ways. As a source of heritage that is continually renewing itself, they nurture creativity and they offer all economic sectors (from crafts to fashion and furnishings, to the automobile industry) a wealth of references in terms of signs, forms, colors and symbols. As an intrinsically creative activity, arts and heritage can define procedures or protocols for innovation that can be used in other sectors.

On the other side, the global economy increases opportunities for diversity by offering broader markets for specific products. Competition between products expands the outlook of an economy where mass consumption focuses on a few quasi-generic products. Moreover, for countries that have trouble remaining cost-competitive, it is only by being quality-competitive that they will find new markets or niches, recognizing that this quality of goods is increasingly determined by their aesthetic features. This demand for ever greater variety in products also points to another feature of the contemporary economy, that of post-modern consumer behavior: consumers seeks to differentiate themselves by appropriating the signs and values that mark specific products (Greffe, 2002).

The conjunction of these two traits produces an economic system that is different from those that have preceded it. As Scott (2000, p. 24) has written: "*whereas nineteenth century workshop and factory systems were able to produce variety of output but were limited in the total scale that they could achieve, and whereas Fordist mass production freed industry from quantitative restraint but at the expense of product variety, modern flexible production systems [...] are able to achieve considerable variety of output while they also often generate significant economies of scale*". And here emerge the role of ICH holders. They are flexible, they produce varieties and novelties, they offer new signs incorporating new values. They are certainly not the rear guard of the creative people.

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