‘Super-diversity’ and the Changing Face of Intangible Cultural Heritage: the Case of West-Kruiskade, Rotterdam

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ABSTRACT

'Super-diversity' presents the *Intangible Heritage Convention* with new dilemmas for safeguarding intangible heritage. The large influx of migrants in Western Europe has completely altered the ethnic composition of all the major cities. It completely overturns the notion of community and thus also of intangible heritage. Starting from a specific case study, the super-diverse city district of West-Kruiskade in Rotterdam, the author argues that super-diversity creates new forms of social belonging in which the diversity of intangible heritage is celebrated as something to share. In Rotterdam, ethnic or religious festivals such as *Diwali, Keti Koti* and the Chinese New Year have evolved into communal festivals shared by all, in a constant 'interactive creation of space'. Super-diversity dynamises the concept of intangible heritage and the notion of community which, more than ever before, should be interpreted as a complex interplay of different stakeholders in a dynamic, culturally-diversified environment.

Keywords

The Netherlands, super-diversity, multiculturalism, migration, urban development, the West-Kruiskade, Alliance West-Kruiskade, *National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Netherlands, Rotterdam, Diwali, Keti Koti,* Chinese New Year, 'Black Pete', Shared Past Shared Future.

Introduction

One of the policy goals of the Netherlands is that the *Dutch Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage* should reflect the diversity of intangible heritage in the Netherlands. It should include all the regions in the Netherlands, an equal distribution of rural and urban areas, the social practices of young people as well as 'traditional' social practices and, last but not least, social practices that reflect the (old and new) ethnic diversity, including the intangible heritage of (descendants of)

migrant groups. The Dutch Centre for Intangible Heritage, which coordinates the *National Inventory*, was thus very pleased that *the intangible heritage of the West-Kruiskade* was put forward, as it is a highly ethnically diverse city district in Rotterdam. But it also posed a dilemma for the DICH, because: what is intangible heritage in such a super-diverse city district with more than 160 ethnicities? And what can and should be safeguarded? And how can this be achieved given the enormous level of diversity? The challenge of West-Kruiskade is not unique. In Western Europe most of the larger cities are trying to come to grips with processes of migration which have completely altered the composition of the population. It raises the question of social cohesion and community and thus also of intangible heritage, because in the UNESCO *Convention* communities are paramount in the definition, and in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

The procedure in the Netherlands is that communities, groups and individuals that practise intangible heritage can fill in a nomination file. An independent audit committee looks at the file and considers whether it meets the criteria. Is it intangible heritage in the sense of the UNESCO *Convention*, that is: passed on from generation to generation, and does it give the nominating communities a sense of identity and continuity? Is the nomination put forward by the community that is actually involved in this social practice? An important part of the nomination file is always the safeguarding plan, in which the community charts the strengths and weaknesses of the social practice and thinks of safeguarding measures to counter the challenges which might stand in the way of the future of this *element of intangible heritage*. All these benchmarks are derived from the criteria used for nominations for the international UNESCO *Lists of the Intangible Heritage,* in which community involvement and a programme for safeguarding measures are also acknowledged. Last but not least, the element should be described in an intelligible way, so that people who are not familiar with this form of intangible heritage understand what it is about.

What the Alliance West-Kruiskade put forward were social practices that, in their view, reflected the cultural diversity of the district, social practices with which the community of the West-Kruiskade identifies itself. The social practices were mainly a number of events or festivities that are celebrated annually: the celebration of *Keti Koti*, the Chinese New Year celebrations and the Hindu feast of *Diwali*. The last two festivities have a specific ethnic or religious background. *Keti Koti* is the annual celebration of the abolition of slavery in 1863 in the former Dutch colonies of Surinam and the Dutch Antilles. It is especially popular with Dutch people who have a Surinamese or Antillean background.

All these festivities are strongly linked with specific ethnic communities in the West-Kruiskade and give them a strong sense of identity and continuity, thus fulfilling one of the requirements every nomination file should meet. What is remarkable is that the social practices were not put forward by the specific religious or ethnic groups that brought the traditions to the West-Kruiskade, for instance, the ethnic Chinese or the Hindus. These feasts and celebrations were put forward to represent the cultural diversity of West-Kruiskade as a whole. Festivals such as *Diwali* and *Keti Koti* have evolved into popular festivals that are celebrated by all the people living in the West-Kruiskade and which reflect not one specific ethnic group but the cultural diversity of the area. The same applies to the different food cultures in the West-Kruiskade which were also included in the nomination file. In this case it was not one specific ethnic food culture which was referred to, but the total diversity of food cultures which is so visible in the local shopping mall there with all its different food shops and restaurants. This is an interesting phenomenon with huge implications for the way in which intangible heritage is appropriated and experienced.

The purpose of the nomination was to safeguard this cultural diversity. It focuses on social cohesion and the promotion of exchange, so that the city district as a whole can continue to identify itself with this cultural diversity. This means an open and inclusive approach which gives room and space to possible newcomers. The Alliance West-Kruiskade has a special policy of attracting new ethnic entrepreneurs who can contribute to the ethnically diverse flavour of the district.

Super-diversity and intangible heritage

West-Kruiskade is a city district in Rotterdam that harbours more than 160 ethnicities. I will use Steven Vertovec's concept of super-diversity to interpret West-Kruiskade as a cultural space in which intangible heritage is embodied as in an interactive creation of space. Super-diversity calls for a more 'liquid' interpretation of communities, as volatile networks that involve many different stakeholders.

West-Kruiskade, located near the central railway station in Rotterdam, is a thriving shopping street in 'the Old West', that, because of the diverse background of its inhabitants and the multicultural atmosphere of its shops, reflects the cultural diversity of Rotterdam: 70% of the shops are run by newcomers from diverse backgrounds. Also, the number of Chinese shops is striking and constitutes a Rotterdam Chinatown in itself. In the 'Old West' (*het Oude Westen*) there is no dominant ethnic group: 27% of the population are indigenous, 15% Surinamese, 14% Turkish, 13% Moroccan, 7% Cape Verdean, and 3% Dutch Antillean (figures from 2007- https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-30995-30-b5.pdf). The ethnic composition of West-Kruiskade makes it hard, even impossible, to speak of one homogenous 'traditional' community, with a clear set of 'traditional' traditions. Intangible heritage is important, but in a somewhat different way than is usually perceived. Newcomers, be they economic migrants or refugees from all over the world, brought along their traditions when they came to the West-Kruiskade, giving it a specific 'transatlantic' flavour. In the fifties and sixties economic migrants came from a limited number of nations, mainly from Turkey, Spain and Morocco, but this changed with the refugee crises from the nineties onwards. Nowadays there are newcomers from all over the world, from the Balkans, following the crisis there, to the Ethiopians and Syrians who came in the wake of more recent crises. It totally changed the picture of what was formerly known as 'multiculturalism', in which it was thought that different 'ethnic communities' lived more or less peacefully alongside each other, each cultivating 'their own' culture and at the same time enriching Dutch culture. In city districts like West-Kruiskade there is no clear majority of any of the groups but an enormous number of different ethnicities, all of them small minorities, including the original Dutch one.

For this new situation, which is common to all large city conurbations in Western-Europe, Steven Vertovec introduced the concept of 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007; see also Geldof, 2016). According to Vertovec, super-diversity is not just the superlative degree of 'multiculturalism', which just means more ethnicities which are mutually enriching. It also has huge implications for how we live together and for the dynamics of culture, in the context of an increasingly globalised society. Although in the past there was already a huge amount of contact and exchange, nowadays it is the standard. Post-colonial thinkers such as Homi K. Bhabha use the metaphor of the stairwell as a 'third' space, where people of different backgrounds meet on the stairwell as an interactive social space (Bhabha, 1994, p. 5; see also Bhabha, 2011). The shared social spaces are especially to be found in large city conurbations like Rotterdam, which Bhabha interprets as 'contact zones'.

The interactive creation of space

What is striking is that in this new context of so many different ethnicities, intangible heritage takes on a different meaning in which diversity, not homogeneity, sets the tone. What we can observe in the case of West-Kruiskade is that diversity is something which you can share. Cultural roots remain important but colourful festivities such as *Diwali, Keti Koti* and the Chinese New Year, and also the different food shops and restaurants, have evolved into communal events and icons that everyone can share and which reflect the diversity of West-Kruiskade. It is no coincidence that mainly public events were put forward for the Dutch Inventory. *Diwali, Keti Koti* and the Chinese New Year are all festivities that take place in public spaces where everybody can join in. Rotterdam is not an isolated example. The process has already been described for cities such as Paris, by the Swiss-based ethnologist Monika Salzbrunn who researched the super-diverse Parisian city district of Belleville (Salzbrunn, 2015). Salzbrunn also notes the development of new communal festivals such as the colourful *Barbès Tour*, as a new type of multi-ethnic event which celebrates diversity. That this new festival was strongly inspired by the London Notting Hill Carnival indicates that the trend can be seen all over Europe. In this context, Salzbrunn introduced the concept of the *interactive creation of space,* useful for a better understanding of intangible heritage formation in a super-diverse city district such as West-Kruiskade in Rotterdam.

Our first observation about intangible heritage in a super-diverse context is that to qualify as 'intangible heritage of the West-Kruiskade' it should be diverse and include the possibility of sharing in the public space of West-Kruiskade and/or be visible as such. We can even put this in stronger terms: the possibility of sharing becomes a prerequisite of every aspect of intangible heritage in the West-Kruiskade that wants to qualify as 'intangible heritage of the West-Kruiskade'. Intangible heritage can be characterised as a specific aspect of 'embodied space', to borrow the concept of Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003).

This is in line with a growing awareness in cultural studies that space and place still matter: it is addressed by anthropologists working in the field of the Anthropology of Space and Place. This concept of 'embodied space' is especially welcome when dealing with intangible heritage because intangible heritage is always embodied in social practices (Wulf) taking place in concrete and specific cultural spaces - as is also the case in West-Kruiskade. As is shown in the example of the West-Kruiskade these processes always take place in a specific social context, *the cultural spaces associated with intangible heritage* as it is called in the text of the UNESCO *Convention*.

The interactive creation of space always involves many different stakeholders. This can be illustrated by the nomination file of West-Kruiskade. The nomination file was put forward by the Alliance West-Kruiskade, a joint venture of the City of Rotterdam, the Urban Space Committee (*gebiedscommissie*), Woonstad Rotterdam and the shopkeepers' association. This shopkeepers' association, which in fact carried the nomination for the *Dutch National Inventory*, was represented by some of the ethnic entrepreneurs in the West-Kruiskade.

More specifically these were Jinai Looi, Fred Fitz-James and Guno Zwakke. Jinai Looi organises cookery workshops in the West-Kruiskade to *bring together different international cultures to become acquainted with each other*, as it says on her website www.hetzesdegeluk.com. Fred Fitz-James, with his Fred Kulturu Shop Institute, wants to disseminate information on Surinam cultural heritage, and as an entrepreneur works on commercial projects connected with this. Guno Zwakke and Wim Reijnierse brought in *Keti Koti*, the yearly celebration of the abolition of slavery. They represent the foundation Shared Past Shared Future, focusing on strengthening the historical awareness of a shared past to enhance a shared future. The 'interactive creation of space' should thus be interpreted as a process of evolving cultural dynamics in which many different stakeholders take part.

All these different stakeholders come together in the Alliance West-Kruiskade. As will be shown later, this is not always a smooth and obvious operation. Processes of this type always involve strife and confrontation. This is the reason that some form of 'cultural brokerage', to use the concept we introduced within the UNESCO *Convention* in a themed issue of *Volkskunde* (Jacobs, Neyrinck and Van der Zeijden, 2014), seems to be inevitable. In West-Kruiskade this role was played by the city government, especially by Alice Fortes. She represents Woonstad Rotterdam which aims at making the Kruiskade more attractive for its inhabitants. She acted as project leader of the Alliance West-Kruiskade. She brought everyone together and organised things. Cultural brokers are needed to bring the different stakeholders together and facilitate processes of exchange in the negotiating of identities.

Of course cultural brokers have an agenda of their own and this is clearly the case in Rotterdam. For the city government there is much at stake. In the late twentieth century West-Kruiskade had developed into a district that was exposed to high levels of crime. It became a haven for drug dealers and drug users, which caused a lot of inconvenience. It constituted a problem area for Rotterdam that needed to be addressed. The idea was to transform West-Kruiskade into a district of leisure and consumption with a high ethnic profile. This policy goal focuses on urban regeneration and revitalisation, not uncommon in other cities in western Europe faced with the same problems and which also use ethnic entrepreneurs as a key component in their urban policies (Van Liempt and Veldboer, 2009, pp. 81-99). The Alliance West-Kruiskade operates as a powerful network of different stakeholders with a common objective: working on urban improvement, with the city government itself in a steering role. There is also a practical side to this because sharing and exchanging always needs some form of facilitation. This is the reason that representatives of the local city museum and representatives from schools and libraries were also asked to join in the nomination, because they are responsible for cultural policies in a broader sense and because they can provide shared spaces to exchange shared experiences.

Negotiation

An approach concentrating on the interactive creation of space focuses on *political arenas where inclusion/exclusion and transformation processes are negotiated* (Salzbrunn, 2015, p. 186). An important observation is that what is included in the nomination and what is not can change, and in this West-Kruiskade also proves to be an interesting example. It shows that it is always a negotiation process, which already starts with the decision about which stakeholders are to be admitted to the negotiation table. Last year the Dragon festival would not have been selected alongside *Keti Koti* as a communal festival. The Dragon festival, which celebrates the Chinese New Year,

presently counts as an ethnic festival popular with all the inhabitants of the West-Kruiskade, but in 2015 it had to be cancelled because of lack of funding. It was organised once again in 2016 so it can now be included again.[1] Graffiti might well be another example. The possible inclusion of graffiti might be interpreted as a bid for public space by new and aspiring newcomers. That this will perhaps need some deliberation and persuasion might well be the case. Most people would probably consider graffiti as something negative, a threat to the heritage of our monumental buildings. But it can also be interpreted as something with a value in itself, perhaps even as intangible heritage (Burdick and Vicencio, 2015). In the West-Kruiskade it was the foundation of Cretopia, a network of artists *with guts for entrepreneurship*, that drew attention to graffiti. It did this by transforming Toko 51, a specific location where Cretopia organises workshops and other projects, into the Graffiti Tempel Rotterdam.[2] In a way this signalled the acceptance of graffiti in the public space, and thus graffiti might well be included next time in the nomination of the West-Kruiskade for the *Dutch Intangible Heritage Inventory*.

Negotiation also means possible disagreement. This can be illustrated by the examples of *Keti Koti* and Black Pete, who represents the opposite of *Keti Koti*. The celebration of *Keti Koti* is a powerful example because it is a festivity that takes its shape from opposition to a formerly dominant interpretation of Dutch history and unmasks it as one of the negative aspects of Dutch history, namely the slave trade in which the Netherlands was so deeply involved. *Keti Koti* has evolved into a powerful symbol with which the Surinam and Antillean Dutch strongly identify. Even more interesting is that it has a counterpart in the wish to abolish the figure of Black Pete in the celebration of the traditional Dutch children's feast of Saint Nicholas. It shows that creating intangible heritage can also create confrontation. During a conference in the West-Kruiskade organised by DICH, the representative of *Keti Koti* asked me why the feast of Saint Nicholas was included in the *Dutch National Inventory* despite the fact that the black-faced helper of the Saint is considered by many to be a derogatory stereotype of black people in this country (See Van der Zeijden, 2014). It should make us attentive to the fact that heritage formation is always a process of inclusion from which others might feel excluded. The fact that Pete was allowed to retain his black appearance during the official welcome ceremony in 2014 in Rotterdam was celebrated as a victory by the right wing politicians of Leefbaar Rotterdam who had organised a demonstration introducing black dolls in a symbolic action to preserve the traditional Black Pete. A year later, in 2015, the decision of the School Board BOOR to advise the schools to alter the appearance of Pete was welcomed by others. BOOR is an umbrella organisation for more than eighty schools in Rotterdam.

The examples of *Keti Koti* and Black Pete can only be understood if they are addressed from an international global perspective. According to Dutch American anthropologist, Jan Nederveen Pieterse, in his influential study *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*, the nation has become less important as a point of reference and is in the process of being replaced by other allegiances, such as gender, ethnicity or religion (Nederveen Pieterse, 2009, chapter 3). *Keti Koti* is an interesting example of Afro-European or transatlantic ethnic identification, also shared by black people in the Caribbean, as is shown in recent additions to the *Representative List* of UNESCO of the Afro-Brazilian Capoeira circle in 2014, and in 2015 of *Marimba music, as integral to the family and community fabric of people of African descent in the Colombian South Pacific region and Esmeraldas Province of Ecuador*. It is an interesting phenomenon that national loyalties are transferred into specific group loyalties. As the example of the West-Kruiskade shows, the local is also the global and *vice versa.*

That intangible heritage is never 'innocent' is demonstrated by the example of Black Pete. More generally, it is one of the paradoxes of super-diversity that only the formerly dominant culture cannot qualify as representing cultural diversity. Diversity can only be experienced in social practices which are experienced as culturally diverse. This puts the formerly dominant 'Dutch' culture, the *Leitkultur* as the Germans call it, in a peculiar position. This is one of the great paradoxes of superdiversity which really wants to avoid the old dichotomy of 'us and them', only to reintroduce it in a different, opposite form in which diversity is the norm and deviations must be rejected. It is not easy to see how to avoid this paradox which calls for a new answer as to how processes of social belonging function within the group of the former host culture. How can they feel at home in a diversified context? These intricate processes of social belonging might well be one of the most interesting topics for future research.

The implications of super-diversity

What are the implications for the *National Inventory* and – more generally – for the UNESCO *Convention* as a whole? What is intangible heritage in a super-diverse context and how can you safeguard it for the future? What should you define as a community in a way that is relevant for super-diverse city districts like the West-Kruiskade?

The first observation is that – in the case of West-Kruiskade – it is difficult to speak of a clearly defined community in a more or less historically-rooted social space. The situation is much more fluid. The traditions which the newcomers introduced to West-Kruiskade are indeed rooted in an historical past - but in historical pasts located in different regions of the world, depending on where the different ethnic groups originated. The different groups bring in different traditions, which give them a sense of identity and continuity, as it is called in the *Convention*. But in the new superdiverse context these traditions acquire new meaning as traditions reflecting the huge diversity of West-Kruiskade. With the enormous variety of different ethnicities, West-Kruiskade cannot be defined as homogenous, to say the least. Super-diversity means that communities have evolved into floating and volatile networks, loosely formed and loosely connected (see Bauman, 2007 and Dibbits and Willemsen, 2014).[3]

The second observation is that – in the case of West-Kruiskade - it is no longer possible to speak of a clear set of different ethnic cultures, with each ethnic group cultivating its own ethnic traditions in isolation. 'Cultures' are not something which you can put in different boxes and that remain unaltered. This means that 'intangible heritage' is never a set of different ethnic cultures, with every 'culture' having a clearly delineated set of traditions. The coming together of so many different ethnicities and traditions implies a new dynamic of social cohesion in which old and new traditions are appropriated in a new and diverse context. In the case of West-Kruiskade we have seen that these social practices should reflect the cultural diversity of the district and should be experienced as such.

The third observation is that the formation of intangible heritage is a complex process that involves many stakeholders, each claiming their share of the cake. In the case of the West-Kruiskade we have seen our four or five shop owners, who acted as spokespeople for the shopkeepers' association, and we have also seen a number of associations with a more-or-less ideological or charitable purpose. There are organisations such as the foundation Shared Past Shared Future, that promotes the celebration of *Keti Koti*, and also more commercially inspired organisations might join in, for instance festival bureaux that organise celebrations like the Chinese New Year. In 2016 the organisation of the Chinese New Year was in the hands of Rotterdam Festivals, an organisation that coordinates the events policy for the city government of Rotterdam. That means that local city governments are also playing an important role, for instance in organising things or in providing (some of) the funding. A community is a temporary alliance of stakeholders working on the same objective. Sometimes new allies come in, sometimes old allies will disappear. The outcome of which forms of intangible heritage are included and which are not, is always the result of deliberations and can even be the object of civil strife. That there can also be more ideological motives for including or excluding specific forms of intangible heritage was demonstrated in the example of Black Pete.

The fourth observation is that in a complex process of interaction with so many stakeholders there is a strong need for bringing all these stakeholders together for cultural brokerage. In the case of West-Kruiskade this was done by the city government, but there is also a role here for museums and other heritage institutions.

Super-diversity dynamises the notion of intangible heritage and the notion of community that, more than ever before, should be interpreted as a complex interplay of different stakeholders in a dynamic, culturally diversified environment. A network approach should be as inclusive as possible, always open to new and aspiring stakeholders.

Implications for the *National Inventory* in particular and for the UNESCO *Convention* in general

For the *National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Netherlands* this means we should be open to nominations of a diverse nature. This calls for more flexibility. Until now, most nominations for the *National Inventory* were specific traditions with an historical link to the social space associated with them. The Flower Parade in Zundert is, for instance, historically rooted in the community of Zundert and has a history at this location

dating back to 1936. The historical roots of religious traditions such as the *Boxmeerse Vaart* and Sint Maarten in Utrecht are even older. Superdiversity changes everything. The new summer carnival in Rotterdam, dating back to 1983, should be clearly distinguished from the traditional carnival celebrations in the catholic southern part of the Netherlands. This new summer carnival in Rotterdam, with a more Latin-American flavour, was originally perceived as belonging to the Antillean community in the Netherlands. It is now a tradition celebrating cultural diversity more generally, and is not just celebrated by the Antillean community but also by Turkish and Moroccan Rotterdammers. These new festivals demonstrate the dynamics of intangible heritage formation. West-Kruiskade poses an even greater challenge due to the adaptability of its traditions which are therefore open for extension. Communities are not 'fixed' objects that never alter. This applies also to floating populations of newcomers who do not always stay in the same place but could easily move to other cities in the Netherlands or even to other West-European countries. Transatlantic contacts have become usual through which migrant groups remain in contact with their families in their home countries, but also with relatives who have migrated to other European cities. As the Flemish sociologist, Dirk Geldof, tells us, this was made possible by, among other things, new social media such as Skype and Whats App which make contacts possible all over the world, and which means that these groups function in all kind of networks with which they share common cultural traits.

As Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa rightfully remark in the first edition of *Intangible Heritage*, experiencing intangible heritage has become part and parcel of the dilemmas of modern multicultural society (Smith and Akagawa, 2009, p. 5). For the UNESCO *Convention* it is a baffling perspective that requires serious scrutiny. As Cristina Amescua has noted, it still remains a largely uncharted field (Amescua, 2013). How does super-diversity affect the formation of intangible heritage and what are the implications for safeguarding? As I have shown, super-diversity calls for a new approach in which diversity, not homogeneity,sets the tone, in a constant, interactive creation of space.

ENDNOTES:

1 http://chinafestivalrotterdam.nl/ [Accessed 2 January 2016]. For the lack of funding in 2015, available from: http://www.rijnmond.nl/nieuws/120583/Chinees-Nieuwjaar-2015-afgelast-wegens-geldgebrek.

2 http://cretopia-rotterdam.nl/index.php/2015/10/10/opening-graffiti-tempel-rotterdam-in-toko51/

3 The concept of communities as networks of stakeholders is not new in the UNESCO *Convention*. It was introduced during an expert meeting on community involvement in Tokyo in 2006, available from: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/00034-EN.pdf: Communities are networks of people whose sense of identity or connectedness emerges from a shared historical relationship that is rooted in the practice and transmission of, or engagement with, their ICH. (p. 5).

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