Gastronomic heritage elements at UNESCO: problems, reflections on and interpretations of a new heritage category

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ABSTRACT

The 2003 UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* paved the way as the first international and binding instrument to safeguard 'intangible cultural heritage'. ICH is a relatively newly-defined concept by UNESCO, differentiated from the category of UNESCO World Heritage related to the 1972 *Convention*. This shift of paradigm – from tangible to intangible, from 'cultural objects' to 'cultural processes', and from protecting to safeguarding – constitutes a renewal of the definition and management of immaterial manifestations as well as their inscription on the UNESCO *ICH Lists*. In 2010, the *Traditional Mexican Cuisine*, the *Mediterranean diet* and the *Gastronomic Meal of the French* were inscribed on the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*. These inscriptions represented a step forward in UNESCO's recognition of new heritage categories and, more specifically, the consideration of gastronomy with regard to its symbolic, identity and ritual role in societies. From 2010, more gastronomic elements made it to the *List*. Nevertheless, academic research on food heritage mainly analysed case studies about cuisine and food instead of providing theoretical perspectives, and the effects of food heritagisation on the UNESCO *List* are far from having been thoroughly studied and evaluated through fieldwork. The aim of this paper is to explore the ways in which heritage is constructed 1) starting by defining cultural heritage, Intangible Cultural Heritage and gastronomic heritages, 2) continuing to challenge the actual feasibility of heritagising gastronomy and the social practices associated therewith, via UNESCO, and 3) ending with some reflections on the reasons for the great interest in inscribing food heritage with UNESCO.

Keywords

gastronomy, gastronomic heritage, patrimonialisation, heritage construction, UNESCO, food heritagisation, social practices.

Introduction

Excursus on the notions of 'heritage' and 'patrimonialisation'

Cultural heritage does not exist, it is made (Bendix: 2008, p.255).

Studying and analysing cultural heritage means immediately recognising its artificial nature. Cultural heritage stems from a socio-institutional construction and process called 'patrimonialisation', the same construct that is acquiring new category traits over time – e.g. the shift of attention from tangible to intangible elements – and multiple meanings in terms of content, such as gastronomy as a social practice, or the heritage of war in the form of historical buildings worthy of safeguarding for memory's sake, and as warnings not to repeat past atrocities. As cultural heritage does not exist alone, it is of utmost importance to introduce, and understand, the notions and evolution of 'heritage' and 'patrimonialisation' through a brief historical *excursus*, before delving into the matter of UNESCO intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and the recent inclusion of gastronomic heritage on the UNESCO *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.*

Heritage is nowadays a notion easy to use and mobilise, despite the difficult task of defining it. Multiple theories on the origins of the notion of heritage are as plausible as they are interesting, but we will only examine two of them for the purpose of this article. As a first theory, Jean-Pierre Babelon and André Chastel state that the premise (not yet the conceptualisation) of the notion of cultural heritage dates back to medieval times when the fact of safeguarding and preserving certain objects translated into the modern idea of granting a special value to them (1994), in other words, acknowledging their 'existence value'. This was the case for saints' relics, regalia or religious libraries for religious objects, and archives, ancient monuments or royal collections for royal objects (Le Hégarat: 2015). From another viewpoint (second theory), Krzysztof Pomian identifies the Italy, and later the France, of the Renaissance as the geographic incubators of the notion of '(European) cultural heritage', notably in its artistic treasures and rich private collections (1990). Although the notion of heritage was born and has developed as something, like a religious building, that has to be intrinsically attached to a certain socio-cultural value, its fruition and property at that time was only seen from a private standpoint, and did not correspond to the idea of collective heritage, heritage of a public nature: visible, enjoyable and, possibly, intelligible by everyone. To corroborate the private ownership claim, it is useful to cite the absence of any protection given by the monarchy to, among other things, castles and monuments, as they were totally or partially destroyed to answer spatial or material needs; likewise the case of the clerics who demolished pagan buildings and erased everything troubling to their idea of sacred.

It is only post-World War II, from the late 1960s to be precise, that the concept of 'a common heritage of mankind' emerged, shifting the private nature of heritage to the public sphere and attracting international attention. This, in the context of the Cold War and decolonisation (Smouts: 2005) but also, and foremost, as a result of the well-known international Nubian campaign launched by UNESCO, appealing to countries to save historical monuments in Nubia (Egypt) from being flooded by the waters of Lake Nasser. Dismantling the Abu-Simbel temple, stone by stone, symbolised a new approach to safeguarding heritage via international efforts and common interest, because heritage has been regarded, from that time onwards, as common and collective, for all humanity. For the celebration of its 70th anniversary, UNESCO wrote:

> *World Heritage is a simple idea, but a revolutionary one – that the world hosts cultural and natural heritage of universal value, which humanity must protect together, as its indivisible legacy* (UNESCO: 2019).

What it is possible to extrapolate from these first paragraphs is that heritage definitions are multiple, not only because of the historical and geographical evolution of the term but also because of its meanings and uses. Even a manual on heritage would not suffice to provide a thorough definition as, like any definition, it would only be a snapshot of that notion at a given point in time. The first major studies on heritage took place in the 1980s. Thibault Le Hégarat (2015) calls this period *extension patrimoniale* ('heritage extension') or *tout-patrimonial* ('everything heritage') because almost everything could, potentially, be granted heritage status following an institutional process that Nathalie Heinich identifies as a 'production chain' (Heinich:

2009), referring to the state-controlled process of institutionalising heritage. An example is provided by the race UNESCO Member States ran in submitting application files to have their (trans-) national heritage sites inscribed on the *World Heritage List*. From a sort of holistic perspective, heritage takes an adjectival form – not only cultural and natural heritage but also industrial heritage, immigrant heritage, urban heritage, and many others – and evolves as much in its material as in its immaterial spheres.

In a tautological concept, heritage is everything worthy of attention (safeguarding, conservation, protection, transmission, and so on) and everything may potentially become heritage. From here, it is quite easy to introduce the patrimonialisation discourse, which is more related to the result of a specific process leading something to gaining heritage status, rather than to the heritage object itself. If the neologism 'patrimonialisation' only appeared around three decades ago, its formal conceptualisation dates to more recent times (Davallon: 2015). The term 'heritagisation' entered common parlance because of the continuous expansion of the contemporary movement of patrimonialisation. This movement has been highly orchestrated, and often hyper-commercialised, with cultural and natural heritage sites or intangible manifestations inscribed on the renowned UNESCO heritage *Lists* – the 1972 UNESCO *Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* and the 2003 UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Patrimonialisation is intended as the process through which cultural (material and immaterial) or natural elements are granted the status of heritage worthy of safeguarding by a collectivity called the 'heritage producers', or rather in UNESCO terms, the 'heritage bearers'. Henceforth, the said collectivity (or community) becomes responsible for the protection, and takes custodial care of the newly-valued heritage practice, as well as for its transmission in order to keep it living and 'usable' by future generations (Skounti: 2010).

The sociologist Emmanuel Amougou (2004) interprets patrimonialisation as:

> *A social process through which legitimate social agents (or actors, if we prefer) want … to confer a set of properties or recognised "values" on an object, an architectural or urban space, a landscape or onto a social practice (language, ritual, myth, etc.). These values are shared by these agents, in primis, and transmitted to the public via institutionalising mechanisms granting protection to such heritage, in secundis.* (My translation)

Already in 1992, Jean-Michel Leniaud provided an avant-garde answer to the selection dilemma with regard to what does not become heritage (exclusion), and which social groups decide what should become so (inclusion). He reckoned that objects having lost their value could acquire a new nature, the heritage-value, via a process of appropriation and according to certain criteria applied to that not-yet-heritage by its practitioners. This process goes under the name of patrimonialisation, and the final recognition is the heritage status of the object.

Following this introductory section, the focus of this article will be on the trajectory the concept of ICH has had with UNESCO, and on a new category considered as worthy of patrimonialisation, i.e. gastronomic heritage. The main objective of this paper is to provide an overview of food intended as a new category in the framework of the inscriptions of intangible cultural heritage on the *Representative List* that issued from the UNESCO *Convention* of 2003. This reflection will build on the exploration of the pathways the concept of ICH has taken to reach UNESCO, the focus on the construct behind food heritage, and the description of the journey gastronomy-related elements have followed to become ICH. Finally, possible reasons behind the 'mass-patrimonialisation' of gastronomy on the UNESCO ICH *List* will be identified.

A 'universal(ising)' paradigm was born: the notion of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage

In the introduction to issue no. 40 of *Ethnologie Française*, dedicated to *patrimoine immatériel de l'Amérique Française*, Laurier Turgeon writes of intangible cultural heritage as a 'new heritage regime' (*nouveau regime de patrimonialité*) (2010). This differs from what we may consequently call the 'old heritage regime' or Laurajane Smith's 'Authorised Heritage Discourse' (tangible heritage) in that intangible cultural heritage, compared to its tangible counterpart, lays

more stress on objects' affective and memorial values, and their main features are not anchored in authenticity or 'Outstanding Universal Value' (one of the essential conditions without which a heritage, monument or site, could not have entered the *World Heritage List*), but on dynamism, transformation, re-creation, promotion and re-vitalisation of the said ICH by collective groups (the 'communities') practising the intangible element.

Starting from the 1990s, there was an inflation of conventions, actions and policies, from the local up to the international level, whose main object or study was intangible heritage. Without doubt, the leading international and binding instrument to define and safeguard intangible cultural heritage is nowadays the 2003 UNESCO *Convention*, defining ICH as:

> *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 recognise as part of their cultural heritage. 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).

This definition is general because of the breadth of its international application (as of 2019, 178 out of 193 UNESCO Member States had ratified the *Convention*) and the difficulty, nay the impossibility, of setting the parameters of the category. Beyond commenting on the definition itself and drawing comparisons between the 1972 and the 2003 conventions, the historiographic evolution of the concept of ICH and its route through UNESCO up to the gigantic task of all UNESCO Member States ratifying the *Convention* with a universal definition, is often left behind and deserves more attention.

The concept of ICH at UNESCO is a product of the intermingled influences of different countries, primarily Japan (this statement will be explained in a few paragraphs). The process of 'Making Intangible Heritage' (Hafstein: 2018) may date to two founding moments: a letter to UNESCO and a mobilisation in Morocco. As per the first hypothesis, and the most credible story, a well-known letter with a detailed memorandum attached was sent to the UNESCO Director General, René Maheu, by the Minister of External Relations and Religious Affairs of Bolivia in 1973. In this letter, the Bolivian Minister urges international support by nations worldwide to *take action to protect folklore – folk music, folk dance and craft – against exploitation and misappropriation* (Hafstein: 2018), while suggesting the creation of an instrument to list these cultural expressions and protect them from abuse (commercialisation, exportation, appropriation by third parties). While this letter to UNESCO could be seen as the first intention and call to protect and classify ICH at UNESCO, it remained far from the spotlight until recent times. A number of other linked events and personalities could be the origin of the ICH category at UNESCO. In fact, the second founding moment is said to date to modern times, to be precise in Morocco in 1997. The Spanish writer, Juan Goytisolo, and civil society mobilised to save the square Jemaa el Fna, in Marrakesh, which was threatened by the pressure of urban and economic development. The place is known for its concentration of storytellers, acrobats, musicians, snake charmers and many other performers. The fight to protect this cultural space, but also Goytisolo's and the residents' international call for action, are reputed to have been fundamental to the setting up of the UNESCO programme for the 'Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity' as an attempt to identify and safeguard the world's traditional cultural expressions (Skounti: 2009). Acting as the jury president, Goytisolo used these words in his speech delivered at the opening meeting for the first proclamation of the new UNESCO programme on May 15, 2001:

> *The spectacle of Jemaa el Fna is repeated daily and each day it is different. Everything changes — voices, sounds, gestures, the public which sees, listens, smells, tastes, touches. The oral tradition is framed by one much vaster — that we can call intangible. The Square, as a physical space, shelters a rich oral and intangible tradition.*

From 2001 to 2005, three proclamation meetings (in 2001, 2003 and 2005) and a total of 90 Masterpieces (respectively, 19, 28 and 43) were proclaimed. These 90

proclamations would be the last inscriptions inscribed as 'Masterpieces'. In fact, a resolution adopted at the 31st Session of UNESCO's General Conference had already recommended the *preparation of a new international standard-setting instrument for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage* to be submitted at the 32nd UNESCO General Conference (UNESCO: 2001). For this reason, we may say that the programme for the 'Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity' was the ancestor of the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* adopted on 17 October 2003 by the 32nd session of UNESCO's General Conference and coming into force on 20 April 2006, three months after the 30th instrument of ratification was deposited (UNESCO: 2006). Of course, the 90 previously proclaimed Masterpieces, now called 'elements' according to the 2003 *Convention*, were featured on the new *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*.

Having briefly outlined the way UNESCO adopted its flagship instrument to safeguard ICH, and the 'gestation period' of the 2003 *Convention*, it is now possible to conclude this chapter with a section concerning the reasons and needs behind a shift in the heritage paradigm, i.e. from an idea of cultural heritage related primarily to the monumental (historic centres, such as Florence) to the concept of living heritage, say the 'human towers' (*castells*) in Catalunya. This vision has been 1) diplomatically and economically influenced by Japan seeking to become a leading UNESCO Member State (it provided up to $3,200,000 allocated to, among other things, experts' meetings for discussions on ICH and for drafting the text of the 2003 *Convention*), 2) driven by the then UNESCO Director General, the Japanese diplomat Kōichirō Matsuura, to adopt a legislative framework to safeguard ICH (see his emblematic assertion at the end of this chapter), and 3) inspired by the cultural importance, as well as the legislative and institutional incorporations of intangible practices in Japan, represented by the Japanese government's Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties (1950)[1] protecting 'Intangible Cultural Properties' (*mukei bunkazai*, 無形文化財) (Bortolotto: 2013). Thus, it is not possible to understand the way ICH came into being at UNESCO, and the institutional adoption of the category of ICH via a cultural convention, without recognising the leading role Japan played.

During a roundtable at the *Maison des cultures du monde* in Paris, celebrating the first decade of the 2003 UNESCO *Convention*, Chérif Khaznadar, President of the *Maison*, answered a question concerning the patrimonialisation of ICH:

> *This Convention has been created to rebalance things at international level because there was a convention inscribing marble and stone monuments … essentially located in the Western world. … There weren't any in Africa, nor in Asia … but there is something different in all those countries with the same importance: their music, their performances and their rituals* (Bortolotto: 2013). (My translation)

In UNESCO *fora*, ICH is definitely a heritage category that was created as a reaction to the excessively Eurocentric approach of the 1972 UNESCO *Convention* which applied European concepts and interpretations to cultural heritage, and inscribed World Heritage Sites of 'Outstanding Universal Value', abounding in Western countries but considered lacking in the majority of Asian and African nations. This is why most of the support for the adoption of the 2003 UNESCO *Convention* came from non-Western countries; this was proven by the unprecedented speed of the ratification of this international treaty (less than three years) and by the willingness and need of certain countries to have a binding multilateral instrument protecting their intangible cultural heritage, which was so much at risk due to globalisation and the negative aspects of international socio-economic and cultural integration (Proschan: 2007). The vast majority of countries that first ratified the *Convention* were Asian or African; in order: Algeria (1), Mauritius (2), Japan (3), Gabon (4), Panama (5), China (6) and the Central African Republic (7). As already anticipated, the second reason for the speedy ratification, and the subsequent adoption of the *Convention*, was the influence of UNESCO Director General Kōichirō Matsuura who asserted, in a speech delivered during the 4th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage gathered in Abu Dhabi on 2 October 2009:

> *As soon as I arrived at UNESCO in 1999, I made the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage one of the priorities of the organisation* (Section of Intangible Cultural Heritage: 2009).

The recognition of gastronomic heritage elements at UNESCO: a 'domino sequence'?

As of 2019, 508 elements, nominated by 122 countries, are inscribed on the UNESCO *ICH Lists*[2], and five broad domains of ICH (plus 'other(s)') within the 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* have been proposed, and must be identified by Member States in nomination files for candidature to UNESCO:

1- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage
2- Performing arts
3- Social practices, rituals and festive events
4- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
5- Traditional craftsmanship
6- Other(s)

With regard to the identification of the heritage component, an ICH element may not be limited to one single manifestation but can pertain to multiple domains. Although definitions of what each domain comprises are provided, heritage is far more complex, and its conception, interpretation and expressions by different cultures are so diverse that UNESCO recognises that *the boundaries between domains are extremely fluid and often vary from community to community* (UNESCO: 2019). For this reason, it is possible to 'tick' several domains in the nomination file, and it is interesting to note that an extra domain (the sixth) is provided. This is what UNESCO calls 'further domains' or 'new sub-categories to existing domains' and for which it provides a few examples, i.e. traditional play and games, culinary traditions, animal husbandry, pilgrimage and places of memory. It is at this point that we intend to introduce the broad concept and the recent patrimonialisation(s) of food heritage by UNESCO.

Food heritage comprises knowledge of food and culinary skills that communities consider as their shared legacies and common social practices. It encompasses a wide range of socio-cultural aspects, from agricultural products, different dishes and cooking utensils, to manners of eating, drinking and sharing meals (Bessière and Tibère: 2010). Vanhonacker *et al.* (2010) consider traditional gastronomy as:

> *A product frequently consumed or associated to specific celebrations and/or seasons, transmitted from one generation to another, made in a specific way according to gastronomic heritage, naturally processed, and distinguished and known because of its sensory properties and associated to a certain local area, region or country.*

Gastronomic heritage made its entrance into the UNESCO *ICH List* less than a decade ago, and an official definition of gastronomy as intangible cultural heritage has not yet been developed by UNESCO. Chérif Khaznadar also states that there is no category at UNESCO for gastronomy (*Edible Geography*: 2010). As a result, misinterpretations or mis-perceptions concerning the element inscribed are common. As has previously been stated, heritage does not exist; it corresponds to communities' social recognition and institutions' activation processes. Thus, food heritage has to be intended as an historical and socio-cultural construction and, as such, *one can only understand food heritage by the role it has been granted and the interests it serves* (Espeitx: 2004). In order to understand why food has become worthy of patrimonialisation, the first proposals, rejections and inscriptions of gastronomic heritage into the *Representative List of ICH* are introduced with the aim of understanding their 'heritage construction'.

The Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, meeting for its fifth session in Nairobi (Kenya) in November 2010, accepted and inscribed three candidatures related to gastronomy: the *Traditional Mexican Cuisine - ancestral, ongoing community culture, the Michoacán paradigm* (Mexico), the trans-national *Mediterranean diet* (Greece, Italy, Morocco, Spain) and the *Gastronomic Meal of the French* (France). Their inscription on the UNESCO *Representative List* represented a 'shift in outlook' (De Miguel Molina *et al.*: 2016, p.295) by UNESCO towards a new recognised, formalised, yet not defined, category: gastronomic heritage. According to point C.3. of the dossiers' *Domain(s) represented by the element*, all three nomination files have in common two domains, falling within *Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage* (1), and *Social practices, rituals and festive events* (3). None of them had specifically identified gastronomy, food or culinary

heritage as a sub-category in point 6 'Other(s)', nor did other gastronomy-related nomination files that were later inscribed. Although the 2010 nomination files were accepted, their 'gestation period' was longer than average as UNESCO took time to accept this newly-proposed category, finally intended and interpreted mainly as a social practice incorporating traditions, knowledge transmission, craftsmanship and other aspects of the communities (all the country's inhabitants?) in the countries proposing the dossiers.

The first UNESCO Member States presenting their culinary traditions for inscription on the *List* were countries for which food already represented a relevant 'pull-factor' for the tourism industry (for example, the renowned, but often generalised and stereotyped, Mediterranean cuisines), and a cultural trait and attraction, e.g. French nouvelle cuisine post-1970. The means through which these pioneer countries proposed their gastronomy and constructed the heritage narrative behind it would have been limited without the support of different stakeholders beyond the political influence of the States concerned, e.g. academia, gastronomy experts, chefs, and tourism promoters via marketing strategies. Despite these efforts, the earliest food-related nominations were mainly denied on the grounds of their *uniqueness, excellence and superiority on the global scale* (Matta: 2016, p.341), and echoed more the criteria necessary to be inscribed on the 1972 UNESCO *List* (authenticity and the OUV) rather than reflecting the purposes of the 2003 *Convention*. For this and other reasons (the novelty of the food heritage category and the top-down approach that created the candidature dossiers), the first food-related nominations proposed before 2010 were initially rejected by UNESCO experts in their evaluation phase. In fact, the Mexican dossier *People of Corn. The Ancestral Cuisine of Mexico. Rituals, Ceremonies and Cultural Practices of the Cuisine of the Mexican People*, submitted in 2005, pertained principally to the symbolic role of maize as a staple of Mexican national identity. Mexico's nomination was in fact refused but in its evaluation it also revealed *Mexican cuisine's tendency to conceal ethnic heterogeneity by promoting a fictional homogenous nation-state* (Moncusí and Santamarina: 2008). Concerning the aims of the first French dossier in 2008, it seemed that the interests behind the inscription were those of demonstrating that the French cuisine was the 'best gastronomy in the world', as former French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, stated (Sciolino: 2008), more than inscribing an element to safeguard it or to ensure respect for the ICH concerned, as cited in the purposes of the *Convention*. The Mediterranean diet candidature had a steeper path to climb, given the trans-nationality of the nomination (four countries) and the difficulty in reaching a consensus relative to the definition of the element. During the first international, interdisciplinary and preparatory meeting for the nomination of the Mediterranean diet in Rome in 2005, scientists were more inclined to name this heritage 'traditional' (almost ancestral) 'Mediterranean' (pertaining to the Mediterranean basin) 'diet' (reflecting medical and nutritional aspects conceptualised by the physiologist, Ancel Keys, in the 1960s). On the other hand, anthropologists tended to prefer the term 'alimentation' to encompass the social and cultural aspects of the Mediterranean *díaita* – from ancient Greek δίαιτα, way of life – as incorporating the changes, evolutions and re-creations by the local communities involved. Anthropologists also opposed the use of 'traditional', being a concept constructed by the medical field in the case of Mediterranean alimentation.

From the nomination files' point of view, the first gastronomy-related candidatures showed more market development-oriented and international prestige-leading characteristics. From the point of view of UNESCO, as many authors underline (Matta: 2016; Moncusí and Santamarina: 2008; Medina: 2009 and 2017), the reluctance to inscribe gastronomy-related elements was due to 1) the high probability of the misinterpretation of culinary heritage (how can this heritage, so personal and of everyday usage, be evolutionary and re-created by communities? What is the 'traditional' alimentation feature of the element inscribed and how could it be safeguarded?), 2) the spatio-temporal and conceptual breadth of the category of gastronomic heritage (for instance, which food is more, or the most Mediterranean, for which community and according to which social practice? What illustrates the 'mediterraneity' of the Mediterranean diet in the countries inscribed? What about the representativeness of the non-inscribed countries?), and 3) to the eventual nations' race to inscribe their gastronomy in a sort of 'domino' sequence (will all world cuisines become ICH? Will there be as many nominations as there are UNESCO Member States that ratified the 2003 *Convention*?).

Following the first failed attempts to inscribe gastronomy on the *ICH Representative List*, three meetings are emblematic and retain our attention as they may represent what paved the way for the acceptance of alimentation as Intangible Cultural Heritage at, and by, UNESCO. First, after the refusal of its nomination file by UNESCO, Mexico organised an international and scientific meeting in Campeche in 2008 to enhance and promote the heritage value of cuisine. The objective of the meeting, titled *La cocina como patrimonio cultural: criterios y definiciones*, was to provide UNESCO with some recommendations, gathered in the so-called *Declaración de Campeche*, to sensitise the organisation to culinary- and gastronomy-related candidatures. A second and similar initiative took place in Barcelona in 2009, when countries interested in presenting the Mediterranean diet dossier adopted the Barcelona Declaration (Medina: 2017). Last but not least, in November 2008 the Peruvian delegation at UNESCO, supported by France and Mexico, pushed for an expert meeting during the third session of the Intergovernmental Committee in Istanbul. The *Expert Meeting on Culinary Practices* was scheduled to take place in April 2009 in Vitré (France) to discuss the role of culinary practices in implementing the 2003 *Convention* (UNESCO: 2019). As a result of the meeting (4-5 April 2009), not only the Bureau of the 4th Session of the Committee, officially motivated by the refusal of prior culinary nominations due to the incompleteness of the files, rather than by their (temporary) ineligibility at UNESCO for the reasons outlined in the previous paragraph, but the expert meeting itself, paved the way for the acceptance of culinary nominations and inscriptions by UNESCO in 2010 – Mexican cuisine, Mediterranean diet, French traditional meals, and Gingerbread craft from Northern Croatia, the latter not directly related to gastronomy but to traditional craftsmanship using food. The acceptance of the new category boosted and led nation-states to propose their cuisines at UNESCO in the already-mentioned 'domino' sequence of gastronomy-related nomination files. Today, the gastronomy inscriptions range from the Japanese *washoku* and the Korean *kimchi* to the Armenian *lavash* and Arabic and Turkish coffee, not forgetting calls, proposals and attempts from countries interested in inscribing their national cuisines (the Peruvian cuisine), a national typical food (the French baguette) to trans-national dishes (couscous proposed by the Maghreb countries).

Despite the fact that gastronomy is now an acknowledged UNESCO (sub-?)category, the challenge of setting the boundaries of this ICH element, potentially concerning millions of people, and the nomination of which is basically open to all interested nations, has not yet been met, nor has an answer to identifying the 'traditional' aspects of the elements inscribed and their representativeness been clearly established, a task that may be easy for the relative specificity of the Croatian *licitar* (gingerbread) but an arduous, nay impossible, mission for the Mediterranean diet. Still, countries have proposed and continue to propose their typical gastronomy and their food practices to UNESCO in order to acknowledge local particularities and, according to recent research (Caldwell: 2002; Karaosmanoğlu: 2007; Hiroko: 2008; DeSoucey: 2010), to counteract the effects of global commercial integration and food circulation, as *governmental and private institutions ... work to stabilise, promote and manage the particularities of 'national' foods and cuisines and the image of the countries themselves* (Matta: 2016). The response to forces of globalisation could be provided, or at least conceptually launched, by the patrimonialisation of these 'at risk' elements of ICH by UNESCO – at risk in the sense that they risk being flattened, homogenised and bent to conform to global culinary practices and food consumption. One of the main risks is also that countries propose gastronomy-related nomination files where the cultural heritage in question acts as a nostalgic reminder of past and local practices before a globalised present (this has been criticised multiple times concerning the patrimonialisation of the Mediterranean diet). Unknowingly, states may act in concert with this gastronomic social awareness-raising, and UNESCO could be acting as a cultural mediator and a universal vehicle of expression in this international and common forum via the 2003 *Convention* and its *Lists*.

Interpreting and reflecting on gastronomic heritage constructions

Segments of culture acquire cultural heritage status once particular value is assigned to them argues Regina Bendix (2008, p.258). From this assumption, it is easy to deduce that the condition to become cultural heritage, and the value the object acquires thereafter, is not something granted arbitrarily to a monument, a landscape or a traditional dance. According to Davallon

(2015), a number of 'actions' (*gestes*) are required, and assure the successful patrimonialisation of the newly-valued heritage object. Notably, these *gestes* are 1) the interest in the object by the heritage community or heritage bearers (there is no heritage without a community practising or recognising it as such), 2) the knowledge production behind it (nature and origins of the object or element), 3) the recognition of heritage status (heritage activation and formalisation), 4) the collectivity's access to the heritagised object or element, and 5) its transmission to future generations (temporal continuity past-present-future).

The researcher's attention should focus on the motivations behind the process of heritage construction and its recognition. In Western societies, the massive expansion and recognition of heritage was mainly motivated by a sense of urgency due to fear of loss (Peckham: 2003, pp.4-5), a loss of identity and disorientated cultural roots, especially after the two world wars, leading to a phenomenon called 'heritage inflation' to protect objects deemed to be of value, and to an increasing demand for patrimonialisation. Despite the increase in heritagised objects, it must be borne in mind that the heritage construction starts as a result of an inclusion/exclusion process. If it is true that heritage is everything worthy of attention (safeguarding, conservation, protection, transmission, and so on) and that not everything becomes heritage, then it is interesting to consider those elements evolving and entering into the realm of heritage, especially at UNESCO, and independently from their origin or nature, because they allow a deeper understanding of both the intentions and the process of heritagising and the meanings given to the heritagised object.

The 2003 UNESCO *Convention* sets out an international and binding framework to identify manifestations of intangible cultural heritage and its list of domains are aimed at including different categories of heritage rather than counting on their exclusiveness. Again, everything can potentially become heritage if 'well-constructed'. For this reason, certain elements once considered out of the heritage prism have recently been proposed for patrimonialisation. From 2005, food has become heritage, or better, worthy of patrimonialisation, and the race countries run to heritagise their culinary practices has not stopped yet. The interest in inscribing elements so attached to everyday usage (ingredients), so changeable (cooking and recipes), so broad in meaning (traditional cuisine) and so varied in manifestations (sharing the meal, animal husbandry, food crafts, fishing, etc.) in the UNESCO lists are multiple. This article has tried to understand and interpret the construction of gastronomic heritage through the first gastronomy-related nomination files, at first refused and then accepted and inscribed into the *Representative List of ICH*, after effective lobbying and (international) experts' meetings in order to ensure the formulation of food heritage dossiers 'fit' with the purposes of the 2003 *Convention*. The following three aspects behind gastronomy heritagisation are identified and conclude this article, as they represent the common characteristics of food-related proposed and inscribed nomination files: food heritage as an identity marker (1), as an economic asset (2), and as a political agent (3).

1. If the feasibility of inscribing food cultures with UNESCO has been proven, and UNESCO has recognised that gastronomic heritage is an expression of the cultural identity of communities, it is still hard to understand which communities the inscribed element encompasses, how social groups practise this intangible expression of their culture, and in which ways the ICH inscribed is manifested and how it is possible to understand how it is *constantly recreated and transmitted to future generations* (UNESCO: 2003). How is it possible to safeguard something the definition or delimitations of which are left so vague? From the scientific point of view, research, fieldwork and further reflections are still needed to shed light on this nebulousness. However, it is interesting to note from the communities' viewpoint how they have come to identify themselves with gastronomy in heritage terms – the way food is produced and consumed - even though the communities themselves do not necessarily know what intangible heritage is or are acquainted with the patrimonialisation process. Cultural identity is both a primordial and a decisive factor in the patrimonialisation process as it activates the cultural heritage construction process, in turn vitalised, nurtured and mobilised by the official recognition of the heritage element. This is why food is identified here as an identity marker, because communities now experience a strengthening of their sense of 'belonging' by sharing their gastronomic heritage, not only with a group of 'heritage bearers', but also internationally. The recognition of gastronomy has the power to encourage pride at the local level, while it

is also the vehicle of international renown. This sense of belonging sometimes goes even beyond pride – that could be the case with the French traditional meal or the Mediterranean diet – when gastronomy takes the lead in the panoply of territorial and regional claims. It may also be the case for Mexican cuisine, where indigenous knowledge plays a crucial role in the production of 'ancestral cuisine' or, more generally, in the case of the preservation of Latin America's indigenous cultures and food practices, now menaced by globalisation (Matta: 2016; Medina: 2017; De Garine: 1979, p.82). The emergence of food heritage, and its patrimonialisation by UNESCO, may be a direct response to the risks of cultural homogenisation brought about by globalisation and international socio-economic integration, and a way through which communities reassure themselves of their own identity.

2. In this over-patrimonialisation process aimed at stopping a (possible) process of heritage disappearance due to globalisation or destruction, culture has become an object to be exploited as an economic resource, especially in the tourism field. The UNESCO label represents a powerful 'pull-factor' in touristic terms, and the value of inscribed cultural heritages can be (ab)used in the promotional and marketing cocktail of tourism destinations. In particular, the patrimonialisation of food heritage encourages those countries having their gastronomy on the *ICH List* to sell their 'alimentary culture' as expressed in local products, cultural landscapes or via the creation of gastronomic routes and fairs. The tourist does not necessarily need to understand all the heritage constructs behind the art of the Neapolitan *pizzaiuolo* and the reasons behind its patrimonialisation. Instead, (s)he wants to live a 'unique' experience thanks to eating or tasting a 'traditional' food and following an 'authentic' social practice recognised by UNESCO. As already stated, even if the majority of people do not know what cultural heritage is, this concept tends to be associated with traditions, authenticity and community. And this is a valuable promotional brand. Moreover, the promotion of the triptych food-heritage-tourism usually stresses the nutritional (*The Mediterranean diet is the best dietary regime in the world*), the self-promotional (*The best gastronomy in the world*), and the environmental (*Eating insects in Mexico is good for the planet*). On large or smaller scales, each destination can differentiate and develop its touristic offer based on gastronomy and, as Gascón says in Medina (2017) *the patrimonialisation and the conversion of food into a tourist attraction could help the valorisation of the rural production model using raw materials*. This model has the potential to obtain higher quality products, exploits the ecosystem sustainably and is less polluting and product-homogenising than the agro-industry (2017). From this standpoint, food patrimonialisation is highly strategic and potentially profitable, beyond its cultural and heritage value.

3. The patrimonialisation of gastronomic heritage encourages communities' pride in themselves, and is a powerful means of attracting tourists, but first and foremost, it is activation. Of course, the initiators of the heritage construction process and their proposal for recognition may be members of civil society, but the proposal to put forward any ICH element as a candidate to UNESCO is sent by Member States at the end of the process, and, to pass, any patrimonialisation should serve political purposes stemming from the will to increase a country's reputation by fostering gastro-diplomacy. For example, the suggestion of inscribing Peruvian cuisine on the *ICH List is seen as the corollary of an ambitious developmentalist discourse promoted for a decade by governmental and private actors* (Matta: 2011). Thus, each ICH activation answers a specific selection, construction, proposal and activation – say patrimonialisation – process, validated by political support. No less important, is the fact that one of the most innovative aspects of the 2003 *Convention* is that states must provide legal protection for the element. In fact, the inclusion of heritage elements on the *Representative List* assures the creation of legal instruments of protection by the state proposing the file, and this must be done before the candidature of the element is presented to UNESCO.

Conclusion

Cultural heritage is a 'social agreement' (Medina: 2017) between different stakeholders, from institutions and political bodies to groups, communities, and many other social and cultural agents. The most renowned international instruments for recognising, protecting and safeguarding heritage are today the UNESCO cultural conventions, translating the contemporary protection needs cultural heritage requires, and acting as mirrors of the evolution which the concept of heritage

itself has experienced over decades. In particular, a shift of paradigm from the monumental and environmental to a living conception of heritage re-created by communities, has been formalised by the adoption of the *Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage* (2003). In the ICH patrimonialisation context, food is acquiring an ever-increasing importance at the economic, political, socio-cultural and tourism levels, and it seems that the patrimonialisation of gastronomic heritage represents the symbolic message contemporary societies are sending out: in a post-modern and more and more homogenised society, food consumption included, the need to differentiate, to share all sorts of cultural diversity and praise them through heritagisation, seems one of the most effective ways to survive culturally in the globalised world. After having spoken of the *tout-patrimoine* of the 1980s, should we start thinking of the 21st century as the *tout-immatériel* or, more specifically, the *tout-gastronomie*? In relation to different ways of searching for happiness, the philosopher and historian, Theodore Zeldin, writes: *Gastronomy is the art of using food to create happiness*. Can we say that heritagising gastronomy is the way through which contemporary societies revitalise their socio-cultural contentment while nurturing their identity, pride and self-reassurance, and the place where they find comfortable shelter in the globalised world?

ENDNOTES

1 According to the *Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties* enacted in 1950, cultural properties include not only tangible properties such as shrines and temples, but also intangible properties, e.g. skills, crafts or traditional festivals.

2 The *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding*, the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* and the *Register of Good Safeguarding Practices*.

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