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# Re-Localising Cultural Economy through Heritage Building

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**Abstract:** In this article I consider contemporary heritage building as a productive process helping the re-localisation of cultural economy in a post-crisis context. I recall the debates concerning cultural development in economic anthropology, showing how heritage building processes have become a widespread manner of fuelling the local economy. As a social-cultural anthropologist, I use the data collected during my fieldwork to show that the transformation of festive rituals into local economic resources also has a deep influence on the complex structures and meanings of local traditions. This eventually creates the opportunity to compare 'traditional' and 'modern' ways of thinking about the place of festive rituals in the economy. First, I use examples of festive rituals that have been granted the status of intangible cultural heritage in France by UNESCO, to show what economic effects were desired by local practitioners of the rituals when they proposed their candidature, and what real effects can be observed ten years later. Second, I document some British festive rituals that have not asked for intangible cultural heritage status and explain how they nevertheless have a strong relationship with the local economy. Third, I focus on Italian festive rituals that have asked for intangible cultural heritage status but which have not yet received it. Through these various examples I try to understand how local practitioners use the UNESCO candidature process itself as a means to re-localise regional cultural economies.

**Keywords:** Festivals, commodification, intangible cultural heritage, anthropology, cultural economy, Europe

In this article I would like to consider contemporary heritage building as a productive process that helps the re-localisation of cultural economy in a post-crisis context. Economists have traditionally tried to think about cultural development at a global level, emphasizing the role of cities and central marketplaces as motors

for the production of wealth. However, in the 1970s, the oil crisis gave birth to some alternative theories on local development and the place of local resources in the economy was re-evaluated. A few decades later, heritage building has become a widespread manner of fuelling the local economy. I would like to focus on a few examples in Western Europe (France, Scotland and Italy) where local actors and practitioners of festive rituals have recently revitalised local festive practices in order to build them up as cultural heritage in the hope of boosting local growth and development. Studying the effects of such processes on the economy is not an easy task, and it often comes to making simple economic assessments on the 'positive' versus 'negative' aspects of the commodification of traditions. As a social-cultural anthropologist, I will use data collected during my fieldwork to show that the transformation of festive rituals into local economic resources also has a deep influence on the complex structures and meanings of local traditions. This article will ultimately give the opportunity to compare 'traditional' and 'modern' ways of thinking about the place of festive rituals in the economy.

First, I will explain the context of the scale changes in economic development theories. Second, I will use examples of festive rituals that have been granted the status of intangible cultural heritage in France by UNESCO experts, to show what economic effects were desired by the local practitioners of the rituals when they proposed their candidature, and what real effects can be observed a few years later. Third, I will document some Scottish festive rituals for which local actors have not asked for intangible cultural heritage status and explain how they nevertheless have a strong relationship with the local economy. I will then focus on some cases of Italian festive rituals where the actors have asked for intangible cultural heritage status but where this status has not yet been granted. Through these different case studies I will try to understand how local practitioners use the UNESCO candidature process itself as a means to re-localise regional cultural economies.

## Theory and Context

In order to understand better why cultural heritage appears today as a new means to boost the local economies in a post-crisis context, it is important to propose first some elements connected with the theory. The idea is not to discuss theories which would be cut-off from the social practices recovered by the term "cultural heritage". Rather, I would like to emphasize the ways cultural heritage has been more and more used as synonymous of a productive process in the local economy.

Cultural heritage, in the common sense, is mainly thought of as a stock of items historically inherited from the past. In this sense, it is connected with preservation policies and with the monuments or museums that basically refer to this past. However, from an anthropological perspective, cultural heritage has another

meaning. It is connected with a productive process, based on choices and selections operated in the present, through which communities claim their past and can therefore be in competition with each other. Indeed, authors such as Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) have suggested that cultural heritage, in the form of 'traditions', could be 'invented' rather than 'inherited'. This perspective has opened the door to interpretations of traditions and cultural heritage as being actively produced in the present rather than passively inherited from the ancestors. For a lot of sociologists and semioticians (Davallon 2000; Micoud 1991), cultural heritage has little to do with the past and has to be analysed as a modern feature. I tested this hypothesis during fieldwork in France and found that the older popular festivals were called 'traditional' whereas the newer ones were called 'cultural heritage'. In this respect, cultural heritage features modernity rather than tradition (Fournier 2005). If 'tradition' refers to the inheritance of past customs or practices, 'cultural heritage' is more turned towards the present and the future because it is a pretext by which to actively claim present values.

Moreover, cultural heritage can be analysed as a productive process that helps the re-localisation of cultural economy. Each local community, as soon as it is present in the global cultural market, is called to define its own cultural heritage. In the market economy, everything is susceptible to being sold and bought, even culture. Cultural heritage has then become a new form of cultural good, which can be related to other sorts of cultural good. Cultural institutions, from local museums and associations to global institutions such as UNESCO, push cultural heritage forward to bring in new values to local communities. According to UNESCO, cultural heritage is a means to reach a better balance between different countries. If a country has few economic resources, they might be compensated by a rich culture. In this respect, cultural heritage can be understood as a new means to fuel local development and projects, using local amenities to give some added value to poorer countries. This is why, unlike the economy, cultural heritage is better balanced between the different countries of the world.

In order to understand the stakes of this debate fully, it is important to think of the economy from an anthropological perspective. It is then necessary to look at the economy in an empirical way instead of following abstract models. From the beginning, anthropologists have insisted on the fact that traditional economies are deeply embedded in social structures. According to famous classical anthropological works (Malinowski 1922; Mauss 1924), market exchanges in the traditional societies are always connected with 'spiritual' notions such as gift and prestige. Things circulate independently from their exchange values. They are connected with the beliefs of the partners participating in the exchanges. In this way, profit can be symbolic as well as commercial. In the classical potlatch example, Indian chiefs give most of their wealth to their people because they use it only in order to

increase their prestige. The more redistribution they practice, the more powerful they will be considered. In such traditional systems, the economy obeys complex cultural laws, and the market serves local collective values more than it enables individuals to accumulate money. Anthropologists interested in economic matters have differentiated formal and substantive economies (Polanyi 1944). In the first case the form taken by the exchange is the most important, but in all other cases it is the substance that is predominant, which means that the economy cannot be separated from its social, cultural and symbolic subtracts. Looking at this problem on a global scale enables us to understand that the great majority of human societies are caught in substantive economies, whereas only the Occidental modern society follows the formal model.

In this situation, anthropologists can very easily criticise formal economy and recall that our market-based liberal model is far from the only one. Indeed, most of the traditional economies studied by anthropologists present cases of embedded and substantive economy, and it would be rather ethnocentric not to consider these traditional economic systems. I suggest that the notion of 'cultural economy' and the economy of cultural heritage is a means to better connect the modern market economy and the ideal of a more traditional economy. In fact, three different stages can be distinguished when looking historically at economic theories. The first stage is connected with the theory of globalisation. This assumes that bigger cities are the best central market places and that they are the major motors in the production of wealth. According to this theory there is a hierarchy between centres and peripheries. The economy is driven by the centres and the peripheries have only the secondary role of following what is decided in the central market places. According to this theoretical model the economy is a global necessity to which every country must contribute. This model was dominant from the end of the 18th century to the middle of the 20th century. This model was formalised by Adam Smith (1776) and largely developed in the context of the industrial revolution, leading to global enterprises such as Henry Ford's car factory in the USA. Neo-liberal economists still believe in the efficiency of this model of capitalism today.

However, the global market model has also been criticised as overly abstract. At the end of the 19th century, Karl Marx's proposals on the value of human labour indicated another possible way to think of the economy globally. According to Marx (1867), the market is something fictional and the economy should be theorised in relation to the concrete actions of individuals rather than the value of goods, which is always highly variable. Concerning development theories, Marxism has led to the postulation that the more developed countries manage to develop, the less the underdeveloped countries manage to do so. This second model is also an abstract one, as it supposes that the earth is a unified place where economy has the same global rules and where human work has the same value for everybody.

Therefore, a third development theory appeared later on, in the 1970s. This theory is a local development theory and considers that each place has its own wealth to develop. The oil crisis gave credit to this theory and in the last decades the places that local resources have in the economy has been significantly re-evaluated. Local development theories believe that each region is specific and has its own resources which can be developed in an endogenous manner. It is a model within which each region is economically creative through the principle of specialised flexibility. Micro-regions can specialise as industrial districts in very specific production and conquer the world market through this specificity. Such a way of thinking has given much credit to the local scale of the economy and has pushed forward the ideas of "creative economies" and "local productive systems" (Pecqueur 1990). Of course, looking at local amenities would then be a way to balance the effects of the global crisis and to come back to more traditional ways of thinking about the economy.

In this context, cultural heritage building and the emphasis put on local cultural resources has become a widespread manner of fuelling local economies. Anthropologists have analysed the transformation from mass tourism systems to local cultural tourism (Boissevain 2013). They have shown that a small cultural resource might be more attractive, due to its specificity, than a natural landscape which could easily be found in other places. Such a way of thinking has led to the emphasis of local cultural projects and, for instance, to the creation of local museums to enhance the local culture and boost the local economy. Knowledge related to local traditions can therefore be valued as a means to enforce the attractiveness of a given region. In this respect, the notion of cultural heritage, which is becoming more and more developed, is not disconnected from economic considerations and from the idea of bringing more money to the local economy. These local economy centred models then become more useful than global development models in the search for sustainable development strategies and respect for local environments.

That being said, I would like to focus on some examples of festive traditions in Western Europe within which local actors have invested in revitalisation processes in the past decades and have built up their traditions as cultural heritage in the hope of boosting local economies.

## The Effects of Heritage Building

In this section I would like to insist on a twofold process that combines quantitative and qualitative aspects. When looking at the effects of heritage building, a first perspective can be purely economic. This perspective is connected with the quantification of the effects of a given cultural heritage policy. Indeed, it is possible to make assessments on the 'positive' versus 'negative' aspects of the commodification of traditions. Direct quantitative indicators can simply count the number of

people attending a given festival and get an idea of the attractiveness of the event. However, this approach raises a lot of questions because the more people attend a traditional cultural event, the more this event is considered modern and commoditised. In this respect, a 'positive' effect using quantitative criteria might also be a 'negative' effect in terms of genuineness and authenticity. There is a risk that the advertisement and the commodification process would ultimately have a negative effect and would be off-putting for visitors looking for cultural authenticity. Moreover, it is difficult to count the audience of a traditional festival except if there is an entrance fee.

When there is no entrance fee and when the traditional festivals are free of charge for the audience, which is most often the case, it is necessary to use indirect indicators to quantify the effects of heritage building. Indirect indicators can be measured through hotel and restaurant turnover and through the journeys made to come to a particular place. Building a traditional festival as a new cultural heritage event could then help re-localise the economy, but it is quite difficult to know up to what point the local economy is fuelled by a cultural heritage policy because it is difficult to establish a strict separation between the market generated by the festival itself and the local market as a whole.

This is why the economic perspective is not sufficient to understand the effect of commodification. In the traditional festivals I have studied in France, I have found some differences between the ones where the organisers used global strategies to present their festivals as cultural heritage, i.e. through the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage label, and the ones where the organisers simply decided to promote local cultural heritage without getting any formal recognition from outside cultural institutions. At this point of our reflection, it could be interesting to use the example of a real local festival, the Tarasque Festival in Tarascon-sur-Rhône (in the Provence region of Mediterranean France) to understand better what is at stake when speaking of heritage building processes.

This festival is an old Christian ceremony dating from the Middle Ages, featuring a battle between a dragon called the Tarasque and a little girl, St. Martha (Dumont 1951). The local legend says that each year the inhabitants of Tarascon had to give six of their best youngsters to the dragon, until St. Martha who delivered them from their fate and managed to kill the dragon. In the legend, the dragon was awfully harmful to the local economy as it killed six men every year. The legend is a civilisation myth from the time when Christianity succeeded over Paganism. Without having to give its sons to the monster, the city eventually became prosperous in modern times. Until the end of the 20$^{th}$ century the festival and its connected rituals remained the same in the context of an increasingly secularised society. However, these festivals progressively faded out with the global economic crises when people began to flee Tarascon for bigger cities to find jobs and better lives.

In this case the decision to build up the city festival as a heritage feature comes from the wish to revive it and to attract a touristic audience. In this respect the 'traditional' festival has been transformed into a new 'heritage' celebration, connected with other dragons in other European cities through a new UNESCO network. Interestingly, the decision to make the festival into new cultural heritage has been followed by the production of small by-products sold by local shopkeepers. In terms of cultural economy, it is important to note the presence of specific keyrings, mugs, and little objects featuring the dragon motif that bring some income to tourist shops. This specific tourist economy can be quite significant although it raises the question of where the artefacts are fabricated, in order to know if the local economy is really benefitting.



Fig. 1. The Tarasque monster in the city of Tarascon, France.
Photo: L. S. Fournier, 2009.




Fig. 2. Keyrings featuring the Tarasque monster, Tarascon, France.
Photo: L. S. Fournier, 2009.

The impact is not limited to this new tourist economy. Commodification and the building up of a traditional festival as cultural heritage also give rise to other consequences influencing the structure and meanings of the rituals. In Tarascon I have noted for instance that the dragon has become much more visible than in the past since the decision to emphasize it as a major heritage motif (Fournier 2011). Usually hidden in the past, the dragon was suddenly shown everywhere. At the same time, it became much quieter and gentler with the people, unlike in the past when it used to be scary and dangerous. The effect is then more in the image of the festival than in the economy itself. In the same way, the dates of the festivals often change to reach a touristic audience. Festivals are organised at weekends instead of on the traditional day of the Christian celebration. In Tarascon, a new medieval festival has even been added to the local festive calendar, using the dragon as a central feature, but without any explicit reference to the older local legend. In this case, the local dragon joins the global dragons as successful features that are able to reach a global imaginary.

Using the example of Tarascon-sur-Rhône, it is possible to modify our questioning. Instead of analysing the added value of commodification and asking "how much money does it bring in?", it seems better to ask "when a festival enters a commodification process, what changes, and how?" It is then more interesting to study the qualitative dimensions of the effects of heritage building processes on local festivals, than to consider their quantitative aspects. In terms of methods, social and cultural anthropology will give better results than economy here, using surveys and fieldwork studies instead of tables and figures. But this methodological note

also affects epistemological thought, as it leads us to compare the traditional and the modern ways of thinking and the place of festive rituals in the economy. One more time, it is important here not to remain ethnocentric, and to remember that in traditional societies the economy is deeply embedded in the social structure as well as in local cultural values. In this respect, it is necessary to differentiate between traditional societies, where the local communities used fairs and other occasions for economic exchange, usually adapting them to the ritual occasion, and modern societies, where it works the other way round with communities increasingly adapting rituals to the market's needs.

To put it in other words, it is impossible to use the lenses of our capitalist economy to understand the complex role played by cultural goods in past societies. Looking at traditional festivals and rituals, it would be an error to look at them as having a simple economic function in their cultural context. Rather, they have to be understood in the frame of social and symbolic relations between the different parts of society. The situation is different in our globalised world, where the market has become a shared value enabling the valuation of any cultural good, even the most symbolic ritual.

## Towards a General Comparison

In the previous section I have suggested that qualitative approaches are important in order to understand the most concrete aspects of the economy of traditions. This is due to the fact that traditional economy is always an embedded economy. It cannot be reduced to quantitative data and has to be extended to analysis of the social and symbolic values of the societies to which it is connected. That being said, it is possible to open the discussion to a general comparison concerning the relations between heritage building processes and local economies.

At this point of the discussion I contend that the UNESCO category intangible cultural heritage, which appeared with the famous UNESCO Convention (2003), is an interesting category to better understand the claims of the practitioners who try to gain financial benefits from their traditions. Researchers have suggested that the new UNESCO categories strongly influenced the local interpretations of global rights (Cornu, Fromageau and Hottin 2013), but how does this process work in practice? Here, I call practitioners people who are involved in the transmission and performance of local traditions. I use intangible cultural heritage as an extensive category fit to encompass not only the traditional elements already accepted on the UNESCO lists but also other elements that could ask for entry to these lists but have not yet obtained a UNESCO label. It is then possible to propose a longitudinal approach and to focus on three different situations: before, during, and after the institutional heritage building process. This way of sorting traditions enables

a comparison between the different possible situations, asking for each one what the role of economy is.

In the first case, the festive rituals have already been granted intangible cultural heritage status. Here, it is possible to examine again the case of the French Tarasque festival, which is part of the international Processional Giants and Dragons UNESCO file. This candidature was accepted in 2005 by UNESCO so it has been acknowledged as cultural heritage for nearly 20 years. I have already noticed that there were many changes in the festival as soon as it was promoted as cultural heritage. But beyond these changes in the meanings and in the image of the festival, what happened on a purely economic basis? Interviews with local stakeholders on this question have been interesting, as I was told more than once: "UNESCO doesn't give us any money, the label is only a chocolate medal". In this situation, the heritage building policy works as an incentive from the outside and developing on a global level, but it has little to do with the local economy. Locals are proud of being granted the new label, and this pride replaces the more traditional pride in organising the festival. The economy, in this case, develops in a modern way, i.e. in a sphere which is more or less separated from the traditional cultural sphere. It may use the new label, when related products are commercialised, but it is not directly connected with the label, which relates primarily to the cultural aspects.

The second case is when festive rituals have not yet been granted heritage status and when they don't even imagine asking for it. In order to document this case I would like to talk about the Scottish folk-football games, which I have already spoken about in previous publications (Fournier 2012). Fieldwork brings some evidence about strong links between these traditional rituals and the local economy. For instance in the small city of Jedburgh in the Borders Region, southern Scotland, several leather balls the size of tennis balls are ritually thrown to the crowd in February and March each year and they are awarded £20 each. The players have to bring back the balls to the persons who have thrown them, in order to win the game. The winners get the £20 award, which is an inside incentive to participate in the games. The award comes from local shopkeepers, from pub owners, or from people who celebrate a wedding anniversary and who are traditionally invited to throw a ball to the crowd for this occasion. Between the players and the people throwing the balls, there is therefore a customary relationship based on confidence as well as on money exchange. For most of the players, the £20 'contained' in the ball are not enough to cover their costs for coming to Jedburgh to play the game, but they still come because the game represents something more than just an economic activity. Moreover, massive crowds come to attend the game as a spectacle, which represents even more input in the local economy as all the people present in the streets of the city for the day eat, drink and buy things at the local shops. Interestingly, the local organisers of the game say they don't want to have any for-

mal relationship with intangible cultural heritage, in spite of some proposals that have been made to grant the game this label, because they believe that such a label might 'freeze' the ritual and standardise it. Against this eventuality, they feel the game has to be kept in its 'traditional' shape and shouldn't become commoditised. The game only remains alive because it maintains strong relations with traditional values and beliefs. If it was changed to become a tourist attraction and promoted as cultural heritage, it could lose its symbolical power and would bring less to the local community, both in cultural and financial terms.



Fig. 3. The game of handba' in the city of Jedburgh, Scotland.
Photo: L. S. Fournier, 2016.

The third case concerns the many festive rituals that have asked for intangible cultural heritage status but which have not yet obtained it. Thousands of rituals are in this situation and only a few hundred have so far been granted official UNESCO labels. Each state that is party to the UNESCO Convention has its own national inventory, from which only a few proposals are picked each year to receive UNESCO recognition. Looking at French carnivals for instance, several dozen local festive events have already been put on the national inventory list, although only one has been presented to UNESCO, the Carnival of Granville, in Normandy. For a lot of local festival organisers, obtaining the UNESCO label has then become a most desirable end, as they think that it will make the event they organise famous and that it will constitute a great added value both on a symbolic and on an economic level.

Here, I would like to use two Italian examples to show better the expectations local stakeholders have about UNESCO labels. In Verona, which is already famous as a destination for cultural tourism, a few years ago a local association launched a street games festival under the name of the Tocati Festival. This event gathers players of traditional games from all over Europe for one weekend each year in September when the different traditions can be compared through street practice, exhibitions, talks and conferences. The idea is to reiterate the value of local traditional games as important to hand down to the younger generations, in modern societies where most of the games have progressively been replaced by global standardised sports. According to the festival organisers, granting intangible cultural heritage status to this event would bring even more people to Verona city centre and would offer an alternative to classical tourism. There is in this case a true economic strategy connected with heritage building, as the festival would bring people to Verona out of the cultural season, adding a new audience to the people already coming in the summer for the opera spectacles or to visit the Romeo and Juliet house, a famous Verona attraction. This case is interesting as it shows the different possible acceptations of the word 'culture', which can either allude to the 'high culture' of the opera or to the 'popular culture' of street games. In a saturated cultural market, heritage building is a means to renew the image of a city and to add new amenities to the more accepted ones. Traditional popular culture can help re-localise cultural economy, extending the notion of culture beyond its usual acceptation.

Another interesting Italian case is given by the small village of Castiglione Messer Marino in the Abruzzi region, central Italy, where I did some fieldwork at the beginning of 2020 and where the local carnival costumes and celebrations have been documented by local anthropologists (Liberatore 2019). In this case the town council is struggling to keep people living in the village, which is in a remote mountain area more than 2,000 metres above sea level. Like this village, a lot of Italian villages were deserted due to emigration in the 20$^{th}$ century and are now trying to find solutions to avoid disappearing. Here, the material culture of the local carnival has been studied and identified as a strong local cultural resource. Intangible cultural heritage policies are then seen locally as a means to stop emigration and to attract new people to the community. In the eyes of the town council representatives, heritage building is a basis for the re-localisation of economy through the recognition of local cultural traditions. Interestingly, this positive vision of cultural heritage as a local resource is contrasted by Liberatore's point of view as he assess heritage building processes critically and points out the risks of local cultures becoming stereotypes. Looking at the economy from the local perspective eventually leads to a softening of the criticism usually addressed by anthropologists to heritage building processes. Anthropologists are reminded that they should help public development programs instead of criticising them (Giancristofaro 2020).



Fig. 4. Carnival caps in the village of Castiglione Messer Marino, Italy.
Photo: L. S. Fournier, 2020.

## Conclusion

Comparing all the different cases shows that heritage building can have very different meanings in the economy according to the place and to the local situation. There are for instance major differences between cases where the intangible cultural heritage label has already been granted, and cases where this label is not yet present. There are also major differences according to the regions observed, as the economy is not the same in urban and in rural settings. However, in spite of all these differences it has become obvious that local practitioners and tradition stakeholders use UNESCO labels as a means to re-localise regional cultural economies.

The different case studies eventually teach us that the economy of tradition is not only a question of money. Of course the local communities are happy if they get increased income from heritage building processes. However, the economy of tradition is more a question of creativity and of motivation for local practitioners. Indeed, in order to commoditise their traditional rituals, local stakeholders have first to document them, which implies that they ask anthropologists and folklorists to participate in the process. It is otherwise difficult to make money out of local traditions, as traditions always need knowledge and documentation to be fully understood. As soon as the local communities enter a heritage building process, they should be prepared to replace traditional values with new universal values associated with cultural heritage. There is no way to directly change tradition into money.

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## Bibliographical Note

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