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La transmission du patrimoine culturel immatériel. Réflexion sur l’importance d’une médiation culturelle.
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Digest

By signing the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage\(^1\), each State Party committed itself to take the necessary measures to ensure the viability of oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, traditional knowledge & craftsmanship, and everything which should be transmitted as such or as an addition to natural, movable or real-estate heritages present within its territory.

In the Convention, “Safeguarding” means “measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage”. To ensure identification with a view to safeguarding, each State Party should draw up, in a manner geared to its own situation, one or more inventories of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory.

My dissertation was first dedicated to editing a database about French-speaking Belgian intangible cultural heritage. However, as no general theoretical studies exist on the validity of inventory and safeguarding, my thesis progressed into a discussion about the issues, conditions and practices of transmission. Various interdisciplinary approaches – anthropological, historical, sociological, ethical, political and even sometimes linguistical, musicological, medical or juridical – resulted in blended viewpoints.

My research is as theoretical as it is pragmactical. It comes after thirty years of pratical experience and observations, of filming and recording the oral and non-verbal traditions in the small communities of Wallonia, as well as experiences elsewhere.

My basic assumption is that the existence of an intangible cultural heritage specific to each sociocultural community (of any size or composition) which, inspite of the threat of cultural globalization, allows this community to socialize, instead of cutting it off from the others. To highlight this heritage does not mean to withdraw into oneself or one’s past but to make way for cultural diversity, without ranking.

This dissertation does not claim to solve, in 415 pages, all the theoretical problems raised by transmission and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. It suggests a first reflection about the contents, the aims, the means of transmission and the useful mediators for sustaining cultural diversity. It shows that the permanent evolution of the patrimonial values results from the social and economic situations where they are found and that it is pointless to supervise the transmission if holders of the heritage do not themselves support, consciously or not, the transmission process.

\(^1\) Convention adopted in the International UNESCO Conference, 2003, on October, the 16\(^{th}\). It became established on 2006, April the 20\(^{th}\), three months after its ratification by thirty member States. Belgium, through its three linguistic Communities, signed on 2006, March the 24\(^{th}\).