



FRAMEWORK CONVENTION
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Learning from the past, to create a better future: Avoiding discrimination against refugee and migrant populations by creating a sense of belonging through Intangible Cultural Heritage - A case study from Greece

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This paper suggests possible ways that Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) can help displaced and vulnerable populations to create a sense of belonging and help in their integration in the host society, while ICH will also contribute to minimising discrimination against them by the locals. The first section illustrates how vulnerable populations (Jewish populations in Greece) are not completely accepted in Greece although they are Greek citizens and how cultural heritage is related to this. The next section demonstrates how recently arrived populations are in danger of facing a continued marginalisation if no action takes place, while the last section offers suggestions of how cultural heritage can contribute in the integration of the incoming populations. The data was gathered during ethnographic fieldwork at the Directorate of Modern Cultural Heritage (DMCH) of the Ministry of Culture and Sports as well as with heritage communities and NGOs which engage with heritage policies.

During the 1970s, European institutions started to discuss and create policies about a

common European heritage. However, alternative definitions emerged in the 1980s, and the focus from the European heritage passed to a heritage of European values which progressively also allowed the valorisation of local and minority cultural expressions. These definitions highlighted the diversity of cultural heritage. In the mid-2000s as a response to international migration, cultural diversity has been presented as both a value to be promoted and a challenge to social cohesion to be faced. However, the concepts of European heritage and European identity do not completely disappear from EU cultural policy. Regardless of what European policies for cultural diversity state, they often support ideas of a homogenised national identity which is opposed to cultural diversity (Karaca, 2009; Calligaro, 2014).

The Greek state has not ratified or signed the Faro Convention, although it implements the central principles of the Convention when it deals with Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and "movable (heritage) assets". More specifically, the Directorate of Modern Cultural

Heritage recognises the contribution of the Faro Convention. It informally implements the specific convention that permits the Directorate to act independently from the surveillance of the supervising structure. That means that the Faro Convention is not recognised in the policy-making decisions of the Directorate. Most of the time decisions influenced by the Faro Convention are presented as part of other Conventions such as the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. However, even in this case, as the director of DMCH highlighted: the "Faro [Convention] has a better approach.

Its [concept of] Communities of Heritage is broader [than the "communities" of 2003 UNESCO Convention]. At least it gives a definition, [unlike the 2003 UNESCO Convention] that never clarifies what a community is" (personal communication, September 2017). This informal implementation is not only applied to definitions but extends to the values of the Faro Convention that is mirroring the ideas of a common European heritage of human values. However, these values are not always applied by the Ministry of Culture as discussed in the following sections.

Looking at the past: Jewish populations and their erased cultural past

The Jewish population, as well as its heritage, is generally ignored in Greece. Greek state present itself as a neutral country in dealing with Jewish issues, although the Greek society, especially cities such as Thessaloniki are haunted by the memories of WWII and the Jewish past (Varon-Vasar, 2013). Furthermore, an obscured anti-Semitism can be found in the history of the modern Greek state and the current socio-political affairs (Margaritis, 2005). Regarding heritage, at the end of 1942, the Municipality of Thessaloniki approved the suggestion of the Nazi-representatives to destroy the Jewish cemetery of Thessaloniki which was one of the biggest and oldest in Europe (since the 1490s). Many of the marble tombstones of the cemetery were used by Nazis to create pools and ponds at the Jewish estates that were requisitioned by Nazis while others were destroyed by the occupying army before they left. In addition to the religious significance that tombstones had, they also included important socio-historical, linguistic and archaeological data in Ladino, Greek, and Hebrew about the Jewish populations living there as well as the ones who migrated at different points in history.

After WWII, the Greek state claimed most of the land of the destroyed Jewish cemetery in order to build the University of Thessaloniki and some remaining tombstones became building

building materials for restoration of the Church of Saint Demetrius, which was also recognised as a World Heritage Site in 1988. The story was forgotten by the non-Jewish population until 1981 when a few tombstones were found, then in 2012, 668 tombstones dated from 1665 was found by the police on a private estate.

These events are unknown to the majority of the non-Jewish people living in Greece which is related to the presentation of Greece as a homogenous country in school education which is also relates to the construction of Greek identity based on the tryptic that Greeks are those who are of Greek 'blood' (descendants), speak Greek, and are Christian Orthodox (Herzfeld, 1987; Danforth, 1995). Thus, Jews have difficulties to fit within this tryptic because of their religious difference and in the case of the Sephardic Jews, who lived in Salonica, due to their language (Ladino).

However, the non-recognition of Jewish people and their heritage is starting to change. In the last few years, the DMCH has promoted the recognition of Jewish heritage. In 2015, 68 items of folk life (such as Holocaust photographs, Ottoman papers related to the Jewish population, items of house worship, rabbi's clothing) created after 1930, were characterised as monuments - cultural assets.

This is part of efforts of DMCH to highlight the linguistic, religious and heritage plurality of populations in Greece. Still, different actors and institutions are against this agenda, and the recognition was opposed by different members of the Scientific Board responsible for the recognition of monuments. One of my research participants and civil servant of DMCH who was present at the meeting protested to me as we were discussing the case: "when we went to the board meeting they told us that they don't recognise folklorish items because if it becomes known to Arvanites, Vlachs and Sarakatsanoi {these are Greek ethnic groups}, they will also want to do the same... they just started to throw anti-Semitism poison and a phobia that you cannot imagine" (personal communication, September 2017).

Currently, these tombstones have been examined by the archaeologists of the Ministry of Culture and a translator assigned by the Jewish community of Thessaloniki to help them read them. The heritage community did not have any other involvement, however after the archaeological evaluation and their recognition as monuments are completed, the tombstones will be given to the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki to be used as the community wishes. The DMCH agenda also includes the inscription of the Sephardic musical heritage of Thessaloniki on the national list under the 2003 Convention for Safeguarding the ICH. However, they have not been able to motivate the heritage community to mobilise and start the procedure for it, which is required by the Convention for its inscription.

Creating a better future: refugees and migrants

A second very current and important topic for which Faro principles could provide significant guidance for supporting vulnerable populations is the 'refugee crisis' in Greece. More specifically, supporting refugee and migrant

populations to practise their ICH will help them to feel more at home, more accepted and re-establish their lives in Europe. This is also the official statement of the website of DMCH:

"Intangible cultural heritage helps coping with the trauma caused by conflicts. Practising elements of Intangible Cultural Heritage by refugees and uprooted people has in the past helped in their integration into the new places where they settled. Acknowledging the dynamics of Intangible Cultural Heritage in coping with traumatic circumstances following armed conflicts and expatriation (either due to war or climate change) we can contribute to the reinforcement of cultural diversity and peaceful reconstitution of communities that have suffered from violent conflicts, persecutions and uprooting."

(Directorate of Modern Cultural Heritage, 2017)

However, up to now, this strategy remains inactive, and refugees' heritage is a topic that is not even discussed in the offices of the Ministry of Culture. Based on the statement of one of my research participants and civil servant of the Ministry of Culture:

"is this due to the lack of staff that needs it to work with refugee populations? Is it because in

Greece nobody will understand its importance? Is it because that multiple Ministries should collaborate for it, such as Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Migration, and and and... it is... strange... if the collaboration between Ministries and institutions were simpler... and if we had some specialised staff and ... if the Ministry (of Culture) wasn't obsessed with just

inscribing (Intangible Cultural) elements (on the National and UNESCO lists, then...)” (personal communication, September 2017).

This quote highlights the difficulties in collaboration between different Ministries and the priorities of the Ministry of Culture. Still,

Conclusion

The paper looked at two very different populations; the Jewish community in Greece and the recent refugees. Both populations are far from homogenous and include smaller groups that should each of them be approached differently. Of course, these two populations have a different history and the Jewish communities benefit from being Greek citizens while refugees have an ambiguous and precarious legal status, but all of them are vulnerable populations. The trauma that the Jewish people suffered due to the Holocaust was never healed and this prompted me to think that potentially this might also happen to refugee populations that have arrived in the EU.

The DMCH has made some first attempts to contact the Jewish heritage community which was not enough to motivate them to become more extroverted and help them to attract the gazes of other Greeks at Jewish heritage. On the other hand, most of the refugees and migrants also live under harsh conditions in camps partially isolated from Greek society. In both cases, there is a need for intercultural exchange and heritage could be key for that. Supporting refugees to revitalise their heritage in public spaces, and engaging them in educating Greeks about their practices could offer a better understanding of refugees on the part of Greeks. Intangible Cultural Heritage could

until the December of 2017 that this paper was written, there were NGOs which were active in refugee camps and willing to engage in programmes related to heritage, but since they lack specialised staff, they had not established any related activities, at least in the camps for which I was aware of.

also work as a reminder of individual and national histories that can be kept alive through the people who practise it (Bryant, 2005). This could promote social cohesion and empowerment of these populations. The opposite, having refugees learn about European heritage could also allow them to integrate in their new home more successfully. This will also fight the natives’ narratives of incommensurability because of “cultural differences” (Stolcke, 1995, p. 4) and cultural heritage will become a way of adopting new cultural practices, especially in cases of individuals who want to demonstrate their Europeanness (Karaca, 2010).

Similarly, if Greek society becomes familiar with Jewish heritage, it will be a step forward in accepting that Greece never was a homogenous nation state and thus, also accept other non-recognised populations that existed in Greece before the establishment of the Greek nation state like the Jews. Therefore, further discrimination will be avoided, and social cohesion, cooperation and a sense of belonging will be promoted based on plurality and mutual understanding. Although this case study focuses on Greece, the same principles could also be applied in different regions in order to empower other vulnerable and displaced populations and promote social coherence.

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