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Networked practices of intangible urban heritage: the changing public role of Dutch heritage professionals

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the changing roles of heritage professionals by focusing on the participatory practices of intangible urban heritage. Developments towards democratisation in the heritage sector led to a growing expectation that heritage professionals would work with local publics. This democratisation is manifested in (1) the use of digital media for grassroots heritage practices, (2) the broader scope of what is defined as heritage, and (3) a focus on communities in UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Heritage professionals are thus challenged to develop inclusive heritage practices, particularly in cities, which are characterised by a dynamic nature and cultural diversity. In this article, I analyse how urban heritage organisations and professionals have responded to these developments. Drawing on interviews and a qualitative content analysis of these organisations' policy documents, I examine the ways in which heritage professionals reconsider their public role through what I define as networked practices of intangible heritage. This concept captures the networked structure in which heritage professionals increasingly work, and also demonstrates how heritage is given meaning through public practices that take place in both the physical and virtual realms of contemporary cities.

Introduction

This study examines the changing role of heritage professionals by focusing on three developments that have followed on from processes of democratisation in the heritage sector. First, urban publics increasingly use digital media to participate in the preservation of the urban past. Second, the scope of what is defined as heritage is becoming broader, and third, there is a strong focus on communities in UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). These developments mark a transition towards changing conceptions of heritage and the more active involvement (i.e. participation) of the people to which it belongs. This challenges heritage professionals to reconsider their public role (Blake 2009; Meijer-van Mensch 2011).

The ICH convention is a response to the criticism that the 1972 World Heritage Convention privileges Western understandings of heritage by stressing the material and the monumental (Smith and Akagawa 2009). ICH, in contrast, is the 'living heritage' of communities, which is manifested in the following domains: oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship (UNESCO

2003, 2 §2). Communities who feel connected to this heritage play a central role in the convention, and the bearers of ICH are encouraged to participate in its safeguarding, because they can ensure the future existence of particular forms of ICH through active transmission (Blake 2009).

The participation of the public is further enhanced by the move towards digitisation in the heritage sector (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2011). Online media like blogs enable communities to archive, document and present their own understandings of urban heritage. This lay participation in heritage practices arguably challenges the position of heritage experts (Schofield 2014; Verboom and Arora 2013). Meanwhile, in established heritage organisations, new media have spawned a burgeoning number of experiments on co-creation and public engagement (Livingstone 2013; Verboom and Arora 2013).

The dynamic urban environment poses particular challenges to the professionals responsible for the participatory practices of intangible heritage. Currently, urban forms of ICH are underrepresented in the Dutch inventory of this form of heritage (De Leeuw 2015), and the safeguarding of traditions is more likely to be associated with rural life than the dynamic nature of urban cultures. Indeed, it is a challenge to identify the bearers of intangible heritage in an environment characterised by more fleeting contacts. Furthermore, the cultural diversity of contemporary urban life demands that heritage professionals develop inclusive practices (Edwards and Bourbeau 2008; Jigyasu 2014). This calls for research on how the ICH convention is implemented in urban contexts and the role that heritage professionals play in this process (Van der Zeijden 2015; Van Oers 2015).

The purpose of this study is to examine how heritage organisations and professionals deal with requirements to actively involve their audiences. Although the importance of community work is underscored in treaties such as the Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH (UNESCO 2003) and the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Council of Europe 2005), there is still a lack of knowledge of how heritage professionals actually reassert their public role in this changing policy context. I therefore pose the following research question: how do the Dutch heritage professionals and organisations that are responsible for participatory practices of intangible urban heritage define their public role? In this explorative study, urban ICH will be understood as the living heritage of urban publics, with a focus on the memories, social practices and histories they share in participatory heritage projects. As the findings will demonstrate, a common theme in the projects analysed is cultural diversity, with the practices studied concerned with preserving the intangible heritage of diverse ethnic groups in cities.

In the next section of this paper, I discuss the literature on the changing public role of heritage professionals, before moving on to the methodological aspects of the study and a description of the projects and organisations analysed. To understand how heritage professionals have reconsidered their public role, I will define their activities as networked practices of intangible heritage. As I will discuss, this concept underscores the attention paid to public engagement, the roles of on- and offline networks in these practices, and the growing importance of collaboration with organisations outside the heritage sector in order to foster more inclusive heritage work. What I find is that these networks are used to develop new programs of public outreach in cities and through social media. Moreover, as a consequence of this community work, heritage practices tend to increasingly focus on more contemporary understandings of heritage. Finally, I discuss the skills and challenges that working in a networked structure implies.

The changing public role of heritage professionals

Every profession comes with expectations about its characteristics, objectives and working methods. These relatively stable notions of what a specific social position entails are defined as 'roles' in the sociological literature (Turner 2001). Roles enable professionals to structure their tasks and socialise them into the norms and conventions of their profession. People working in the heritage field are thus socialised in, for example, conservation practices through training and education. Over the years, these ways of working lead to widely shared understandings of a profession. Nevertheless, roles are dynamic (Turner 2001). Indeed, as I will now discuss, the democratisation of cultural heritage leads heritage

professionals working in urban settings to reconsider their public role vis-à-vis their publics and the very objects they are preserving, with these professionals challenged to provide more representative accounts of the urban past. A concern emerges from the literature reviewed about heritage practices that are not only defined by experts, but also represent the voices of the actual heritage bearers. This shifts the attention from the material, grand and monumental aspects of heritage, to what communities themselves consider to be meaningful in their engagement with the urban past.

The democratisation of cultural heritage

Processes of democratisation are first manifested in the digitisation of cultural heritage, which has significant consequences for the public role of heritage organisations and their employees (Giaccardi 2012; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2011). Digital media such as social networking sites facilitate new forms of dialogue and collaboration with the public. Writing about the growing attention paid to questions of participation, Livingstone (2013, 26) notes that 'public, private, and third-sector institutions have all responded with vigor, reorienting themselves to a newly visible public, developing consumer-facing strategies and social media platforms'. These developments enable communities to increasingly participate in the construction of heritage narratives, while heritage institutions attempt to actively involve people in order to enhance their legitimacy and role as a public body (Reijnders 2010). Meanwhile, urban residents use social media to start their own local heritage initiatives, with examples being Facebook groups where historical photos are shared (Freeman 2010) and blogs dedicated to the urban past. Heritage institutions and new media thus provide more opportunities for people to play an active role in the engagement with heritage (Giaccardi 2012).

As heritage organisations become more open to participatory practices, the public role of heritage professionals changes (Schofield 2014). The consequences of these processes have been studied extensively, particularly with respect to museums (e.g. Gielen 2013; Verboom and Arora 2013). According to Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel (2011, 160): 'Museums […] are experiencing the need to open their collections, exhibitions and educational work in order to better fulfil their role as a public institution within the democratic framework'. Writing about media, Carpentier (2015) makes a helpful distinction between minimalist and maximalist forms of participation that can also be applied to these developments in the heritage field. In the case of minimalist forms, participation mainly serves the interests of organisations, as professionals retain their control and authority. In contrast, when it comes to maximalist forms, organisations instead try to give the public more control over the process and outcomes of participatory activities.

A second development affecting the role of heritage professionals is the broader scope of what is defined as heritage (Harrison 2013a). New forms of heritage are increasingly finding their way to museums and archives, with examples being the cultural heritage of popular culture (Hoebink, Reijnders, and Waysdorf 2014) and the objects and stories associated with digital cultures (De Lusenet 2007). As a result, new publics and stakeholders are entering the field of cultural heritage. In the case of popular music heritage, for instance, collectors, fans and non-professional archivists participate in the 'heritagisation' of this cultural form (van der Hoeven and Brandellero 2015; Cohen 2013).

Finally, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH also contributes to the participation of communities in heritage and a broader understanding of what it means (Harrison 2013b). In recognition of the importance of 'living heritage', UNESCO (2003, 2 §1) uses the following definition of ICH: '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 convention puts the communities to which these forms of ICH belong at the heart of heritage practices, and stipulates that communities must play a central role in their implementation, as they are the ones transmitting these living heritages to future generations (UNESCO 2003, 15). Indeed, according to Blake (2009, 65, 66), the participation of communities implies that heritage professionals must reconsider their current working practices:

> They need to move away from the traditional top-down approach of governmental cultural heritage organisations where the institutions are acting as custodians of the national cultural patrimony and where decision- and policy-making are the domain of the government and its representatives. ICH thus prompts heritage professionals to redefine how they engage with communities.

Similarly, Perkin (2010) calls for heritage practices that consider the needs and motivations of the communities involved, noting that existing top-down models in the heritage sector often fail to take local communities seriously, leading to reduced community engagement and ownership.

Intangible urban heritage

Particularly in an urban context, the processes of democratisation mentioned above provide a challenge for people working in the heritage field. The ICH convention presumes that 'stable' communities represent a particular form of heritage (Blake 2009). Yet communities in cities are often more flexible and dynamic in nature (Delanty 2009), with an example being how they are temporarily brought together by shared interests such as music, lifestyles or sexual orientation. As a result, instead of using the term communities, De Lange and De Waal (2013) employ the concept of 'networked publics' (Boyd 2011) to capture the dynamic nature of social life in contemporary cities. They define this as:

> Groups of people who convene around a shared 'matter of concern' in entities that may be more fleeting, composed of differences rather than being based on sameness, and organized in distributed networks rather than in 'natural' social bonds of locality, class, ethnicity, cultural identity, and so on. (De Lange and De Waal 2013)

The term networked publics is also an alternative to notions like 'consumers' and 'audiences', because their connotations of 'passiveness' and mere consumption are at odds with the increasing attention paid to participation (Ito 2012).

In diverse urban settings, it can be difficult for heritage organisations to define the publics they are addressing. This particularly affects the inventories of intangible heritage that state parties have to produce as part of UNESCO's ICH convention. The Dutch Council for Culture (2014) has argued that in the Netherlands the national inventory of intangible heritage might be biased towards well-organised groups, because they have the resources and willingness to complete the paperwork required for official recognition of their heritage. The Dutch Minister of Culture (OCW 2015) has acknowledged that the national inventory of intangible heritage does not yet adequately represent contemporary intangible urban heritage, such as youth cultures and the heritage of migrants. Indeed, as cultural diversity is a pivotal aspect of the UNESCO convention (Aikawa-Faure 2009), the minister emphasised that more needs to be done to raise awareness of urban forms of intangible heritage.

The developments discussed above demonstrate that heritage professionals are being challenged to produce inclusive ICH practices for the diverse networked publics in cities. International treaties that seek to foster the democratisation of heritage practices, such as the Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH, urge heritage professionals to support the active participation of heritage bearers. Yet earlier research on ICH shows that public involvement is actually one of the main difficulties when it comes to implementing the ICH convention (Neyrinck 2014). Arguably, this is particularly so in urban settings, where the publics are often more volatile and temporary. Meanwhile, urban residents initiate their own heritage practices independently of museums and archives. All of these developments contribute to a situation whereby 'bottom-up heritage' garners support and professional expertise is increasingly challenged. I will therefore examine how heritage professionals negotiate their public role in response to these challenges.

Studying the public role of heritage professionals

I began the study described in this article with a qualitative content analysis of the websites, policies, annual reports and business plans of organisations and projects involved in ICH activities in the Netherlands. This allowed me to explore and compare their objectives, activities and strategies inductively. I also held interviews with heritage professionals to get background information on these

documents. Heritage professionals are defined here as people who have a role in a formal organisational structure, which excludes those who engage with heritage on a voluntary basis or as a hobby.

Nevertheless, within this framework, I aimed to include a broad range of heritage practices in the sample of projects and organisations analysed, and therefore applied maximum variation sampling to select the cases used. This is important, because many studies in the heritage field predominantly focus on established institutions like museums and archives, even though it is vital to also examine new and smaller-scale initiatives, as these diversify heritage practices in terms of what is kept and how this is done (van der Hoeven and Brandellero 2015). As a result, I looked at established organisations, such as museums, as well as other initiatives by cultural entrepreneurs. The final sample for the content analysis included: Verhalenhuis Belvédère (i.e. the House of Intangible Heritage in Rotterdam), Imagine IC (an organisation focusing on contemporary heritage in Amsterdam), Ongekend Bijzonder (an oral history project that aims to document the experiences of migrants in Dutch cities), Rotterdam Vertelt (i.e. 'Rotterdam tells', an organisation collecting stories in the city of Rotterdam), Stichting Cultuurbehoud Breda (a foundation based in Breda, focusing on ICH), the Traditions in Overijssel project, the Amsterdam Museum, Museum Rotterdam, the Historical Museum of The Hague and an independent heritage consultant.

I selected a subset of seven people from the sample above for my semi-structured interviews.[1] I agreed with these respondents to not mention their names in any publications so that they could talk freely about the strategies and concerns of their organisations. In each interview, I addressed the career trajectory of the respondents, the organisational context (e.g. funding, policies and objectives), the skills they consider to be important in their work, and their understanding of 'intangible heritage' and 'participation'. These topics were covered in each interview to make it easier to make comparisons. Nevertheless, in line with the semi-structured nature of the interviews, I also left enough room for the respondents to address other themes relating to intangible urban heritage and the specificities of their respective organisations.

All the documents and transcripts were loaded into Atlas.ti, which is a programme for qualitative data analysis. This final data-set contained seven interview transcripts, 10 policy documents and 24 documents with background information and screenshots taken from the websites of the different organisations involved in the research. Subsequently, all the data were coded to enable me to examine, compare and classify the information (Boeije 2010). I started with an open coding strategy by labelling the data in order to interpret it. In the next step (i.e. axial coding), the codes were grouped and merged by exploring their relationships. The central themes that emerged are the participatory practices that are used to negotiate a new public role (i.e. public engagement in the city, a focus on contemporary heritage and online participation) and the working methods and skills that are required to achieve these goals (i.e. collaboration, heritage professionals as mediators between different organisations and the importance of social skills). In the final step of selective coding, I developed the concept of networked practices of intangible heritage to explain the relationships between the different findings. These findings will be discussed in the remainder of this article.

Networked practices of intangible heritage

From the analysis, it emerged that professionals fulfil their public role through networked practices of intangible heritage. This concept underscores the notion that intangible heritage takes shape in the physical as well as the virtual networks of contemporary cities. Furthermore, the notion of practices points to the concrete activities that constitute ICH. Heritage narratives are negotiated in the present through concrete practices that give meaning to the past (Smith 2006). As Freeman (2010, 356) argues, ICH is not fixed but dynamic: 'Intangible heritage therefore takes place through practices in which people participate, their individual and collective expressions and the representations resulting from these activities'. Finally, the concept highlights that heritage practices increasingly take shape in a networked structure in which several organisations collaborate. As central nodes in the networks, heritage professionals become 'cultural brokers' (Lewis 2014) who aim to represent the diverse intangible

heritage of cities and mediate between different organisations. Based on these aspects, networked practices of intangible urban heritage can be defined as the on- and offline networks of the organisations, professionals and publics that participate in intangible heritage activities.

In the following sections, I will discuss this concept further by analysing what such networked practices of intangible heritage imply for the public role of heritage professionals. I first examine the actual *practices* that the urban heritage organisations studied engage in to reach out to their publics. I then move on to an analysis of the *networked* structure in which heritage professionals increasingly work.

Participatory practices

The analysis of the data collected revealed that heritage professionals use three main strategies in response to the call for more participatory practices. They seek to become more active in their present city, focus more on the recent urban past and contemporary understandings of cultural heritage, and draw on new media technologies. I will discuss these in turn.

Participatory practices in the contemporary city

As heritage professionals are challenged to work with urban publics, they initiate a wide range of participatory practices that are often no longer necessarily confined to the physical locations of, for example, museums and archives. These activities, through which people can collectively reflect upon the intangible heritage of cities, range from guided city tours and oral history training to discussion groups and educational programmes. The House of Intangible Heritage in Rotterdam, for instance, regularly hosts dinners where migrants cook meals that are traditional in their home country and tell stories about their heritage. This follows on from the organisation's main objective of making the people and communities of Rotterdam visible by means of art, culture and stories. In Breda, meanwhile, a city tour was developed to show off contemporary arts and crafts in the city. In many cases, these practices take places within a city, instead of behind the walls of heritage organisations. As the following quotation from the annual report of the Historical Museum of the Hague illustrates, heritage organisations actively go out to the places where urban heritage is taking shape:

> The museum is increasingly capable of reaching the capillaries of the cities and involving people in their own history. However, this is only possible when we actually go into the city and establish contacts with those whom it concerns. A contemporary city museum cannot function by staying in its building and presuming that people will eventually come to us.[2] (The Historical Museum of The Hague)

These participatory practices are in line with the increasing attention paid to intangible forms of heritage, as the focus is not so much on physical objects, but on social practices and the meanings given to the past. As the director of Imagine IC explains about its intangible heritage projects: 'We want as many people as possible to take part in, participate in, conversations about meanings and the meaningful aspects of everyday life'.

Similarly, the other organisations studied are also experimenting with new forms of public engagement. In their policies, they emphasise the importance of working with urban publics in order to gain access to local histories and objects. As an example, they let visitors tell personal stories about their precious objects, initiate storytelling websites and involve citizens in the development of exhibitions. The following excerpts taken from websites and business plans illustrate how heritage organisations put local citizens at the heart of their activities.

> A historical meeting point gets a new purpose from the bottom-up and with much involvement of the neighbourhood and the city. […] Here the stories and positive energy of people and communities will be made visible, experienced and passed on to the future in the form of meetings.[3] (House of Intangible Heritage, Rotterdam)

> A city is more than streets and buildings. Rotterdam is all *Rotterdammers* [i.e. residents of Rotterdam – author] together. Museum Rotterdam therefore collaborates with citizens and organisations who want to discuss life in Rotterdam.[4] (Museum Rotterdam)

Contemporary heritage

Following on from the attention paid to public engagement in cities, heritage professionals increasingly pay heed to the more recent past and contemporary heritage. Two of three city museums analysed in this study have recently changed their name to mark the shift to new understandings of heritage. Indeed, around 2011, the city museums of both Amsterdam and Rotterdam dropped the word 'historical' from their names. Their new titles – Museum Rotterdam and Amsterdam Museum – aim to underscore that these institutions not only deal with the past, but also the heritage of today and what may be the heritage of tomorrow. This means that they are increasingly 'collecting the contemporary' (Reijnders 2010) and focusing on the everyday lives of urban publics. As the director of Museum Rotterdam explains (van de Laar 2013, 42): 'The name change communicates that Museum Rotterdam is not just something of the past, but a gateway between the present-day city and its past through a dialogue with the urban communities that shape the future city'. In the work of The House of Intangible heritage and Imagine IC mentioned above, there is a similar engagement with contemporary urban life. As understandings of heritage are getting broader, heritage professionals thus become intermediaries between a city and its local publics. By redefining their position in such a way, these professionals can more easily argue that they are relevant in the contemporary city. In that sense, this is also a response to government policies that challenge cultural institutions to prove that they offer demonstrable benefits to society (Watson 2007).

The practices examined in this article are particularly focused on enhancing the participation of minority groups such as immigrants. By paying attention to the contemporary heritage of diverse urban publics, the organisations studied aim to make heritage collections more representative of the present sociocultural composition of cities. As one respondent put it succinctly, working with diverse urban publics is about capturing 'the present that will eventually become history'. A consequence of this is that the distinction between what is contemporary culture and what is heritage becomes more diffuse. Nevertheless, the rationale of the heritage organisations is that such an approach is necessary to redress the imbalance in existing heritage collections.

Participation through online media

Online media are an important tool for heritage professionals to give further shape to their public engagement in the city. Here, there is a distinction between organisations that use forms of social media such as Facebook and Twitter merely to inform the public, and those that take this a step further by also soliciting input from them through these media. The Amsterdam Museum, for example, is developing an online community platform where all its public engagement activities come together. As part of this, the museum facilitates local memory websites that are connected to particular neighbourhoods, and these enable citizens to share and discuss local memories. Another example is the 'Memories of the Hague' project, in which the local museum, archive and library collaborate to enable urban residents to develop short videos (i.e. digi-tales) about themes like immigration, local monuments and the Second World War.[5] In so doing, they use digital storytelling as a way to collect and present urban memories. Heritage collections are also increasingly digitised, meaning that people can access these from home and are able to comment on collections.

From all online practices, the local memory websites and Facebook groups dedicated to local heritage are most successful in terms of the number of responses they generate. These are lively platforms for the sharing of urban memories, and the fact that they are very accessible, informal and often not actively curated by heritage professionals seems to contribute to their success (Lewi et al. 2015).[6] These mediated participatory practices could therefore affect the authority and expert role of heritage professionals, because online networks are less hierarchical. As Russo (2012) argues about the digital content of cultural institutions that becomes available in the public domain:

> The authority of cultural institutions by virtue of their control of interpretation to their collections is challenged when collections are digitized: once cultural content is converted to digital media and distributed on multiple platforms, it is part of the public domain and accessible through several channels. (152)

Nevertheless, the circulation of heritage through different channels is not necessarily a challenge to the authority of institutions. Bottom-up heritage initiatives, such as Facebook groups where historical photos are shared and discussed, often draw on content and information from established bodies. Indeed, these social media practices contribute to the collections of museums and archives reaching a wider public. Social media is therefore a vital tool for reaching out to people who might be less inclined to visit, for example, a museum's exhibition. In other words, online activities complement and support existing heritage practices instead of challenging them.

Participation within the boundaries set by professionals

Considering the perspective of Carpentier's (2015) distinction between minimalist and maximalist forms of participation discussed earlier, the analysis revealed that the practices studied do not give maximum control over processes and outcomes to participants. Generally, there is a leaning towards minimal forms of participation, where heritage professionals still have a central role to play. Heritage organisations set the boundaries of the projects they initiate, decide on their aims and coordinate them, while urban publics have various participatory roles within those boundaries. In the lowest form of participation, only memories are contributed, while in the most advanced form the public has an active role to play in the execution of a project. A best practice example is the 'Ongekend Bijzonder' project, which is dedicated to the oral histories of refugees in four Dutch cities, with people from the actual communities concerned trained to conduct interviews and coordinate subprojects. Similarly, the Amsterdam Museum has largely transferred responsibility for its local memory websites to residents. Nevertheless, this quote from the business plan of the Amsterdam Museum illustrates how the focus remains on the interests of the organisation: 'Audience participation is a means to intensify the relationship with our audience and can contribute to a broader collection'.[7] In the networked structure of intangible urban heritage practices, then, the professionals working for heritage organisations become central nodes in the network. Indeed, they increasingly facilitate participatory practices, but also maintain their professional authority in this process.

Working in a networked structure

As heritage professionals involve their publics through the participatory heritage practices discussed in the previous section, it is possible to see changes in how their organisations operate and in the kinds of skill required from these professionals.

A dominant theme in the interviews and policy documents is collaboration, with the projects and organisations analysed operating in flexible networks with a wide range of partners. In fact, some organisations also actively present themselves as 'network organisations'.[8] This way of working shifts the attention to the connections between organisations and the benefits of collaboration. As Severo and Venturini (2016, 1617) argue about the need to involve a wide network of actors: 'ICH is created and sustained by vast and complex networks of institutions, associations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), groups, and even single individuals'.

Indeed, the organisations in this field do not work independently, but collaborate in their efforts to represent the urban past. This is supported by the current cultural policy of the Dutch government, which aims to foster connections between the cultural sector and other social domains.[9] Collaboration is seen as strengthening the public impact of the cultural sector. The various projects studied thus involve a wide range of partners such as archives, museums, housing associations, community developers and NGOs. Organisations can benefit from each other's expertise through collaboration within a network (Filkó 2014; Lewis 2014; Neyrinck 2014). These collaborations – be they long-term or temporary – give added value to projects, and by involving partners with different backgrounds, new meanings can be

added to heritage practices, making them more relevant to participating communities. The next quote, taken from a description of the oral history project mentioned earlier, provides an example of such collaborations within a network of organisations:

> A vital aspect of the project is cross-fertilisation between different fields (science, arts, journalism and the promotion of participation). The choice of the partners in the four cities (museums, city archives, libraries and organisations of and for refugees) and on a national level is connected to the main objectives of the project: collecting, archiving, making accessible and presenting.[10] (Ongekend Bijzonder)

The heritage activities become grounded in society through the participation of different stakeholders. Partners from outside the heritage sector, like welfare organisations and academics, ensure that the heritage practices are translated into meanings that go beyond the activity of collecting and representing the past. As Dibbits (2013) argues, the openness and dynamic nature of a network makes it possible for the actors in it to critically study and give meaning to heritage practices from their own unique position. Meanwhile, it allows these organisations to maintain their identity and autonomy.

The analysis demonstrates that established institutions often position themselves as central nodes within such networks. These organisations have the expertise and capacity to give projects sufficient impact. As a representative of one project explained about her work: 'This is all about process management. That's the professionalism you need, otherwise there is a risk that the project remains quite superficial'. Although the position of heritage professionals is changing through processes of democratisation and the digitisation of heritage, their expert knowledge remains vital to the quality of heritage practices. Indeed, these institutions have long histories and are thus able to give legitimacy to projects. Furthermore, their professional role entails the coordination of projects, the securing of the quality of heritage practices, the following of formal archiving procedures and dealing with financial matters. In many cases, these heritage organisations also become centres of knowledge and research in order to help smaller organisations. As the Historical Museum of The Hague states in its policy plan:

> The museum wants to be an initiator of collaboration in the cultural field. In so doing, the museum has the role of a knowledge centre on the history of The Hague, but also provides expertise concerning collection management, the organisation of exhibitions, audience participation, marketing and the use of social media.[11] (The Historical Museum of The Hague)

As part of these tasks, the museum supports migrant organisations in setting up and developing their own heritage practices.

Nevertheless, these smaller organisations also have an important role to play in the network. Organisations from outside the heritage sector (e.g. those representing minorities), as well as smaller bodies within the field, ensure that networks branch out to other domains of society and the urban sociocultural fabric. They facilitate outreach through valuable contacts in the city and its neighbourhoods. These smaller organisations provide connections to the many unknown stories and histories of which cities consist, ensuring that heritage practices represent the diversity of cities and are able to reach the rich variety of urban communities. This is vital given the aim of the ICH convention to actively involve heritage bearers (Neyrinck 2014).

However, attempts to involve urban publics are always constrained by wider sociocultural dynamics that could prevent some groups from participating. The willingness and capacity of people to participate depends on resources such as social capital, education and access to media technologies. The local memory website 'Memories of East', for instance, which has been initiated by the Amsterdam Museum, is widely considered to be a successful example of public engagement. Nevertheless, De Kreek (2014) observes that it remains a huge challenge for this project to be representative of the demographic composition of the borough that is the focus of the website. Indeed, without active interventions to involve minority groups, the websites tend to be biased in favour of the stories by elderly participants who have grown up in the neighbourhood and have a Dutch education background.

To be able to facilitate networked practices of intangible heritage that are open and inclusive, professionals responsible for such projects need to have specific competences (Burnström 2014). When I asked the director of Imagine IC what she considers to be important skills for the professionals in her team to possess, she responded that they must know 'what's the buzz' in the city. She also told me that

one of the team members spends a lot of time at street football pitches and is very good at engaging people in discussions about heritage without actually boring them by using the term 'heritage'. She used this example to explain that dealing with contemporary urban heritage implies that heritage professionals must have a good sense of what is going on in a city and be familiar with new urban trends. This follows on from the growing attention paid to what is considered to be heritage in the present, instead of focusing on the distant past.

As heritage organisations are expected to become more active in cities and aim to facilitate inclusive practices, they seek to establish rich contacts with a wide range of urban publics and organisations. In his work on bottom-up initiatives in urban settings, Uitermark (2014) observes that when organisations are too homogeneous in their sociocultural composition, the activities they develop are also less diverse. He argues that it is the task of professionals to ensure that networks are open to people from different sociocultural backgrounds. In so doing, they can avoid practices that exclude people or lead to segregation. They also need to have diverse teams to be able to represent the sociocultural pluralism of contemporary cities. Heritage professionals function as cultural brokers who try to translate the interests of different partners within the heritage networks (Dibbits 2013; Meijer-van Mensch 2011; Neyrinck 2014). In so doing, they have to mediate between heritage organisations and urban publics. Several respondents emphasised the importance of social skills, because of the challenge of establishing contacts with communities:

> Contacts are very important, but it's not easy to actually find people from the target group. You have to do extensive research in the community about your topic and the heritage community it concerns. (Independent heritage consultant)

> I have to admit, it's still quite complicated; it's a kind of process management. In any case, you need good communication skills. (Project coordinator)

These social skills are also essential for working with people who do not have a background in the heritage sector. Moreover, in order to reach out to urban publics, heritage organisations may need to work more informally than usual. Indeed, it became clear in the interviews that professionals often have to walk a thin line between the formal objectives of their organisation and the expectations of the other participants in a project. As a result, a vital role for heritage professionals is to bridge the gap between the interests of heritage organisations and urban publics. Urban ICH networks thus rely on heritage professionals to be pivotal connections between organisations and participants.

Nevertheless, the fact that networks are dependent on the contacts of key individuals can also make them vulnerable. Gielen (2013) raised awareness of the volatile nature of working in a network configuration, particularly when it involves temporary projects. It is a challenge for heritage organisations working with communities to establish contacts that continue after specific projects end. Several respondents interviewed for this study argued that it is not fair to 'use' people only for the length of specific participatory projects, because you are then exploiting them in the organisation's interests.

To ensure the long-term impact of projects, we need to also consider the sustainability of heritage practices and the organisations in which they take place. As many of the projects analysed rely on temporary funding, it is a challenge to develop long-term policies in which participation has a central role. Indeed, particularly for the smaller organisations in intangible urban networks, it can be difficult to become solid and viable institutions. Uitermark (2014) shows that new urban initiatives and civic society organisations are more successful when they can build on the existing networks and infrastructures of foundations and associations. Even if such associations no longer exist, the networks formed in the past can help to mobilise people and resources to develop new projects. Consequently, organisations are stronger when they tie in with continuing policies and involve professionals who maintain and develop networks (Neyrinck 2014). Sustainability also means that heritage organisations have to think about what happens after projects end. An example is the question of what to do with the information and documents collected for a project. Ideally, this material is archived and made public in such a way that it can also be retrieved at a later stage. The British Heritage Lottery Fund, for example, funds activities

on the condition that digital outputs remain available for at least five years.[12] As networked practices of intangible urban heritage pay a lot of attention to concrete activities in the present, it thus becomes vital to also consider their future accessibility.

Conclusions

This article concerns the changing public role of urban heritage professionals and organisations. These are challenged to involve their publics in new ways as a consequence of the implementation of the ICH convention, increasing digitisation in the heritage sector, and a broader conception of what is defined as heritage. The main contribution of this article is to shed light on the role of heritage professionals in the safeguarding of intangible heritage. In so doing, the focus was on cities, where the challenge to involve publics is particularly urgent because of the sociocultural diversity in urban settings.

The contemporary public role of heritage professionals has been defined in this study with the concept of networked practices of intangible heritage. This highlights three aspects of how heritage professionals redefine their position in a policy context that strongly emphasises public engagement. First, it emphasises the focus on public activities, with urban ICH given meaning through participatory practices involving the people who feel connected to this heritage. These practices are comprised of public activities in a city and are consequently very much focused on contemporary heritage. Second, the concept of networked practices of intangible heritage underscores the increasing attention paid to collaboration and the benefits of working with a wide range of partner organisations. Heritage organisations in a network can benefit from the strengths and expertise of others while also maintaining their own organisational identity. Finally, the concept signifies that contemporary urban heritage practices take shape in both physical and virtual networks, with heritage organisations increasingly experimenting with digital media to involve urban publics.

The article has demonstrated the growing concern with the diverse intangible heritage of urban publics. Although networked participatory practices enhance the democratisation of cultural heritage, the analysis in this article also raises awareness of challenges that need to be addressed in the cultural policies of heritage organisations, with several skills and orientations identified that are required for working in a networked structure. As heritage organisations increasingly collaborate with people outside the heritage sector, the conventional orientation on heritage collections has to be complemented with the management of community relations. In this changing context, heritage professionals need to ensure that networks are open to people with diverse sociocultural backgrounds. This increases the chances of the better representation of the experiences and histories of different urban publics. However, developing inclusive heritage networks demands coordination efforts, social skills and reflexivity. Of course, managing the interests of different groups inevitably brings its own tensions (Meijer-van Mensch 2011), and it is thus a challenge for people working with contemporary urban heritage to align their formal organisational objectives with the expectations of participating publics.

To further address the changing policy orientations that have been the focus of this study, future research could examine the potential role of digital media in the involvement of 'light communities' and non-institutional actors in heritage practices (Severo and Venturini 2016). The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, for example, is considering a Wikipedia-like approach to document the intangible heritage of less organised groups (OCW 2015). Such a bottom-up system is already being used in Scotland to produce an ICH inventory.[13] Another important issue for future study is the sustainability of networked practices of intangible heritage. Networks have a volatile nature, as they rely on central people who connect different organisations and communities. This may require new approaches to funding that not only support specific organisations, but also foster collaborations between them, as the dynamic global cities of today need flexible methods to document their continuously evolving heritage.

Notes

1. This subsample for the interviews included the representatives of Imagine IC, the Historical Museum of the Hague, Rotterdam Vertelt, Stichting Cultuurbehoud Breda, the Traditions in Overijssel project, the Ongekend Bijzonder project and a heritage consultant.
2. This quote is taken from the annual report (2014): http://www.haagshistorischmuseum.nl/files/2015-04/jaarverslag_2014_klein_formaat.pdf Accessed July 2, 2015.
3. All Dutch quotes have been translated by the author. This quotation has been taken from: http://www.belvedererotterdam.nl/historie-en-ontstaan-initiatief/. Accessed July 2, 2015.
4. http://museumrotterdam.nl/het-museum/samenwerking. Accessed July 2, 2015.
5. See www.haagseherinneringen.nl. Last Accessed on March 1, 2016.
6. However, even when a website is not actively curated by heritage professionals, they might still influence its policies and design in the case of projects initiated by heritage organisations.
7. This quote is taken from the business plan (2013–2016): http://issuu.com/amsterdammuseum/docs/ondernemingsplanam_31-01-12_1_0 (page 6). Accessed July 2, 2015.
8. Imagine IC presents itself as a network organisation in its annual reports. Furthermore, the Historical Museum of The Hague supports a network focused on the heritage of migrants.
9. See for example: https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/ministerie-van-onderwijs-cultuur-en-wetenschap/inhoud/cultuur-verbindt. Accessed March 2, 2016.
10. http://www.stichtingbmp.nl/cms/projecten/Ongekend-bijzonder. Accessed July 2, 2015.
11. This quote is taken from the policy plan (2013–2016): http://www.haagshistorischmuseum.nl/files/2013-12/beleidsplan-hhm-2013-2016.pdf. Accessed July 2, 2015.
12. See http://www.hlf.org.uk/file/10,258/download?token=zWkNYkSVJjRGQomoZMbNE75HU8GHICR6DyanbWNquk0. Accessed June 25, 2015.
13. http://www.ichscotland.org/categories. Accessed September 8, 2016.

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