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**Forget the clichés and take a look at living heritage; intangible cultural heritage as seen
by the
Federation of Ecomuseums and Social History Museums (FEMS)**

By Céline Chanas

1. Short presentation

Good morning

My name is Céline Chanas, I'm the curator of the Brittany museum in Rennes in Brittany and I'm President of the Federation of Ecomuseums and social history Museums, also known as FEMS.

2. Let's begin with a short description of the project

The UNESCO convention on intangible cultural heritage has introduced a novel redistribution of balance, between researchers and the local populations, and therefore cease to be the objects of studies or potential visitors and become the major players.

The FEMS was curious to see how those museums, which have always addressed questions of living cultural expressions, of memory and its transmission, are taking advantage of a new tool to protect our heritage.

The FEMS propose to lead a original research project about ICH, especially to connect society museums, communities and photography.

Therefore it orded a series of photos to two photographers from the collectif Bar Floréal, Jean-Christophe Bardot and Olivier Pasquiers : the topics were suggested by members of the Federation's network. The project had a documentary ambition, but also aimed at producing a



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sensitive and distanced interpretation. This is another way, so to speak : neither the museum discourse nor that of the communities.

3. So, What ICH are we talking about ?

Oral traditions, songs, dances, festivals, rituals, know-how, recipes... These practices, inherited from the past but still very much alive, are part of what UNESCO calls intangible cultural heritage. In 2003 UNESCO adopted a convention in order to safeguard this particular kind of heritage.

This approach is one that is familiar to social history museums which have always asserted a civic commitment to preserve and promote our heritage alongside those creating it. As Florence Pizzorni reminds us in a recent report on museums in the 21st century, social history museums relate to the idea of the laboratory-museum initiated by Georges-Henri Rivière. As such, they are tools for a given population to understand what unites people and territories and to imagine the future by finding inspiration in our heritage. They have been collecting everyday life objects for a long time.

The identity of these museums is defined more by the methods used to give meaning to the public/collections/territories interface than by the collections themselves.

The society museums are very keen on involving the locals in their project.

The photographers were free to deal with the subject as they saw it. However, guidelines were given by a scientific committee within the federation. They have taken photos all over the country.

In the space of 11 years, they have made more than 500 photos and followed 13 different practices.



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The photographers worked on subjects as diverse as the Dunkirk Carnival, the Island of Ré salt production, the bullfights in the Landes region, the making of *pommé* and the *Fest-Noz* “night festivals” in Brittany, the festival of the corporation of weavers in Charlieu, fishing in the Dombes region, the nativity plays in Provence, the Gay Pride march and the festival of the Hindu God Ganesh in Paris.

One of the main challenges of this work, was to show how these traditions, which are mostly inherited from time immemorial, actually result from a profound desire to keep them alive. Traditions evolve according to the way each generation sees its past. They are regenerated by new needs, new collective projects and a new imagination.

By recording these living practices which are constantly recreated by the different communities, according to their social background, their interaction with the environment and their history, the photographers propose a reflection on modern times which is far from being a folkloric or even an endorsing one.

The subject dealt by the Museum of Charlieu around the festival of the corporation of weavers is significant here. The silk industry which made the town famous from the mid-19th century, is almost inexistent today. The festival, which doesn't reflect an industrial reality, is very lively and attracts more and more people each year and has managed to reinvent itself.

In keeping with this idea, *pommé* jam-making shows how a tradition that has been lost for several decades, can be brought back to life to satisfy new socialising needs. *Pommé* comes from typical Ille et Vilaine cooking. It is a kind of jam which is made by steeping and stirring apples in hot “pure juice” cider for 24 hours. It was slowly abandoned but the recipe was revived in the 1980s by associations supporting Breton folklore. This event has been updated in many villages in



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order to create local interest. It is very popular with the locals because it gives them the opportunity to meet and share with other generations to the sound of Breton music, song and dance.

4. After the documentary “Sortons des clichés”, different ways to promote this collective action

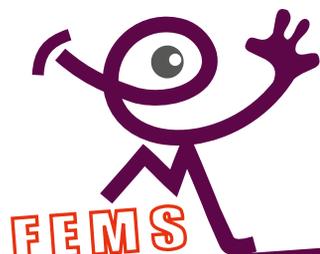
The documentary lasted for 11 years. It involved more than 13 museums, their scientific teams or mediation, as many different communities throughout the country invested in a living practice and of course the two photographers . The documentary corpus includes more than 500 photos

After the being on site, the FEMS imagined several projects to valorize this vision at a given moment of the state of the ICH seen by the society museums.

- a temporary exhibition at the Albert-Kahn Museum in Boulogne, a museum specifically concerned by the photos and the approach of the cultural diversity in its scientific and cultural project
- a window display showing both together texts and photos
- an itinerary exhibition : all museums belonging to the FEMS can borrow it at no cost. Others can rent it for one week or several months.

A review of the action was also carried out with the publication of an article in the magazine “In situ”.

Our setback is still insufficient, but overall we can evaluate this project as very positive for the network.



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5. Evaluation : positive effects and obstacles

As a positive effect, we can see that the project has reinforced the knowledge of the museums involved with the intangible cultural heritage of their territory. It allowed to update the speech that museums could hold but also to link museum professionals to the communities currently involved in these practices, through the approach with photographers

On the scientific level, it has also made it possible to create a corpus of documentary photos, which document the practices. It is therefore a material heritage that is also given to this living heritage.

As obstacles, I will say that the project was long and complex :

- Long to map with the museums of the network
- And after to create the different displays : website, exhibition

Will the link with those communities remain in the future unfortunately no assessment was made at the end of the project due to a lack of resources.

So thanks to this symposium we hope to be able to do it fairly soon.

Especially as 2018 is the year where the itinerary exhibition is being shown in several museums all over the country.



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Depicting the « intangible » / an experimentation

During the 18-month project, Olivier Pasquiers and Jean-Christophe Bardot went together to the different places they were commissioned to photograph. This resulted in 2 different interpretations.

With an almost ethnological approach, the photographers took time to create a trusting relationship with the people they met. Olivier Pasquiers explained how they tried to understand situations in the field: *“Firstly, it was the fieldwork that decided our way of being. We had to try to understand the people by listening to them and following their lead but with our own demands. The paradox was that we were there to get our own shots and pictures and not those that the people wanted us to take.”*

The photographers were supposed to evoke the identity, economic, festive, and social aspects of the practices but also the know-how and soft skills that come into play and insist on the ways they are handed down and learned. When speaking of his report on *Pommé* making, Olivier Pasquiers recalled the need to determine and isolate the moments during which this handing down took place.

Thank you for your attention.