

UNESCO in Greenland and considerations on teaching intangible cultural heritage in public schools.

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Allow me to begin by saying, that I am a bit of a newcomer to the whole UNESCO area. I am no expert on the conventions, but I am currently attempting to put them to use in a new project I am developing at the Department for Learning, at the University of Greenland, where I have been employed as Assistant Professor since July 2016. In fact, I find the conventions and associated texts quite difficult to navigate in and between, so I basically have more questions than answers at this point, which I hope is an acceptable way to end this panel's presentations.

Before describing my own project and concerns, I will briefly sum up on the current UNESCO and UNESCO-related work being done in Greenland.

Greenland stands quite strong on World Heritage Sites projects. And it is in fact quite difficult to even think of UNESCO in Greenland, without being reminded of Ilulissat Icefjord. Situated close to the town of Ilulissat with only 4.600 inhabitants, this site was accepted on the World Heritage Sites list in 2004. The listing has since been considered to generate an extra value of 63,5 million DKK through tourism (Duus, 2013). Despite the validity of this amount being difficult to assess, and local hotel director Erik Bjerregaard suggesting that it was actually the visits from world leaders wanting to 'see the ice melt' as a result of climate changes, that caused the boom in tourism in Ilulissat (Online editorial, 2007), the World Heritage Sites listing has no doubt had a large effect on the self-understanding of people and tourist operators in Ilulissat. Hence interest has been generated in having other sites on the World Heritage Sites list, as such a listing is expected to generate somewhat similar extra income.

Now officials in Greenland are working on having another two sites listed on the UNESCO World Heritage Sites list.

One of these projects has just been nominated for listing by the Danish Minister of Culture. This project involves an area in West Greenland, which constitute the historical hunting grounds of Greenlandic Inuit. The area is described as a unique cultural landscape rich with old hunting traps, ruins and graves of Inuit forefathers. Though obviously, the importance of preserving this historical landscape is mentioned in reports from the municipal council supporting the application, the potential for the area attracting tourists and generating income is given the most attention (Qeqqata Kuumunia Municipal Council, 2016, p. 21).

The other UNESCO World Heritage Sites project, concerns the subarctic farming landscape in Southern Greenland. The application was handed in almost simultaneously with the Inuit Hunting Ground project, and argues for listing, because of the extraordinary nature of the farming landscape, dating back 1000 years when the Norsemen arrived to Greenland from the south. The Norsemen vanished 500 years later, but the landscape was reclaimed as farming grounds in the late 19th century by Greenlanders taking up farming. Southern Greenland is already attracting tourists and operators, and the historical Norse presence is an important part in branding the area for tourism.

While Ilulissat Icefjord and the two mentioned nominated projects are directed at the World Heritage Sites list, the first, to my knowledge, suggestion for a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage project, has just been made to the Municipality Council of Sermersooq, which adopted a suggestion for further investigation into a potential nomination. The suggestion concerned the hunting culture of East Greenland in and around the town of Tasiilaq. The three politicians behind the suggestion, argued that this living hunting culture is worthy of the further recognition that a UNESCO listing would earn it, because of its uniqueness (Rosa, 2016, November 30). In a newspaper article following up on the suggestion, it was already debated how to best exploit the tourist potential in case the UNESCO listing came through (Rosa, 2016, December 1). Money, it would seem, was already on its way.

What surprised me about the East Greenland hunting culture suggestion, is that it had never come to my knowledge, that this area was home to a superior hunting tradition. Quite the contrary, as Tasiilaq mainly figures in the media as a place struggling with unemployment, extreme social problems and crime. Though I am not competent to make judgements on the qualities of the hunting culture in the area, I do have the sneaking suspicion, that the politicians suggesting it for listing, were considering all the good that 63,5 million DKK could do for the 2000 inhabitants in Tasiilaq.

My own project also concerns intangible cultural heritage, but I am more looking towards UNESCO for guidance on how to come through with it, than focusing on having anything listed. As an assistant professor in music, song, drama and dance at Department for Learning, I train students to teach these subjects. But once they graduate and get jobs as teachers in the Greenlandic public school system, they currently teach within a subject group called Local Choices, which is compound of several different practical and aesthetic subjects. Although I am no fan of this construction, which has been pointed towards as actually being a downgrading of practical and aesthetic subjects in practice (Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut, 2015, p. 114), the construction was originally intended to systematize teaching of traditional cultural heritage in the public school, as evident in the 2004 teaching guide for the subject group (Inerisaavik, 2004, p. A4). The intended principle was, that local school boards should suggest subject areas to include in Local Choices through use of local resource persons with specialized skills or knowledge (whether traditional or not), and that these suggestions should then be brought to the municipal council, authorized to make the final decision on teaching plans within the municipality for the subject group Local Choices. This has however never happened, and inclusion of local resources and teaching of intangible cultural heritage remains sporadic and dependent on the initiative of individual teachers (Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut, 2015, p. 114).

What I am in the process of starting up, is to initiate and take part in developing a program, that can make Local Choices work somewhat more in accordance with the original thoughts on bringing in different expressions of local culture. UNESCO's cultural heritage conventions are helpful in this process by offering a framework on how to establish such programs and giving examples from of best practices on safeguarding cultural heritage. As outlined in UNESCO's 2003 convention (UNESCO, 2003), we need to engage the local community in debating and deciding on what local cultural heritage to bring to the municipal council for inclusion in the

teaching plan for Local Choices. Then we need to develop inventory and build programs for teaching local cultural heritage in schools by collaboration with local resources and associations. This work includes the possibility of nominating local expressions of intangible cultural heritage for UNESCO's list, which I imagine people will be quite interested in (considering the boom in UNESCO listing applications in Greenland right now). Furthermore, listing would probably be very helpful when applying for funding for the programs. But the idea of listing some expressions of intangible cultural heritage, would in my view risk putting some expressions above others. Making some cultural traditions more worthy to be taught on a national scale than others. While this was never the intention in the construction of Local Choices, as this subject group was meant to give local municipalities power to decide what local culture was important to pass on, UNESCO listing also risks being hijacked by an ethnic national project in Greenland, which has so far been kept somewhat in check by a general wish to build a modern welfare state.

Most modern welfare states with which Greenlanders associate themselves, have so far not enlisted any expressions of Intangible Cultural Heritage on UNESCO's list. And perhaps for good reason. While both the 2003 and 2005 conventions were made to ensure cultural diversity and the right of communities, groups and individuals to choose and practice cultural expressions (if not in violation with the UN's other conventions), the conventions are easily interpreted to be directed towards minorities and indigenous people as is also directly addressed in the 2005 convention (UNESCO, 2005, p. 4). While I absolutely agree that any person, group or minority should have the right to practice any cultural expression keeping within international human rights, I do think that the UNESCO's cultural programs, and particularly the Intangible Cultural Heritage program lacks a performative perspective on identity construction. Minorities and indigenous peoples are not just solid categories having their own existence out there. They are fluid categories that are performed through culture and alliances within social networks. Hence students in Greenlandic public schools are not indigenous peoples, Inuit or ethnic minorities, and may not wish to be so either. If I take part in developing programs for the teaching of intangible cultural heritage in public schools in Greenland, will I then take part in forcing students to perform a low-power marginalized identity, indigenizing them and making them Inuit?

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