
The Network of Experts and the Construction of Cultural Heritage Identity Formation in Contemporaneity

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Abstract: This paper presents the most important findings of a research project on the expert processes that mediate in the construction of a sense of belonging through cultural heritage in the context of the Basque Country. Drawing from a theoretical framework based on Post-structuralism, Science and Technology Studies (STS), as well as other contemporary and classic sociological schools, this paper uses a qualitative approach (interviews and participant observations) that led to the analysis and description of the main expert processes involved in the construction of a relationship between cultural heritage and the community, group or society that considers it as part of their own identity.

Keywords: Actor-Network Theory; Basque Country; cultural heritage; experts; identity.

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I. Introduction

We live in an epoch where the processes of meaning construction and the modern institutions are under scrutiny. In the social sciences and the humanities this climate of crisis is reflected on formulations such as the *postmodern condition* (Lyotard 1984), the *liquid modernity* (Bauman 2000), the *era of emptiness* (Lipovetsky 2004), the *risk society* (Beck 1992) and the *crisis of meaning* (Berger and Luckmann 1995).

Hence the question arises: How do we produce meaning – a sense of belonging, identity, community – in a context where the production of meaning is problematic? This text tries to answer this question by analysing one of the social, political, and cultural mechanisms devised to over-

come this conundrum at the beginnings of the post Second World War era: cultural heritage. This article is then about how social meaning is constructed in contemporary society.

Focusing on the Basque society as an example, I will introduce in this article how different expert processes mediate in the production of a sense of belonging in contemporary society. My research was carried out within the limited but powerful field of the network of experts that maintains, manages, and produces cultural heritage in the Basque Country. This text focuses therefore on the description of the main expert processes that participate in the production of a very specific relation; the one that is established between an object – cultural heritage, understood as what belongs to us – and a subject – the heritage subject, understood as the group, community or society that appropriates that cultural heritage.

Firstly, I will outline the main characteristics of the study on which this essay is based, detailing the research context and the methods that were used during the investigation. I will explain why I chose the Basque Country and the network of experts as the case and object of study for my research and briefly introduce my theoretical and methodological approach: impressionist mapping. This approach explains the way I dealt with the empirical data collected from the interviews and observations and, above all, how the findings are presented from a narrative point of view. The essay will then explore the relationship between cultural heritage and identity. There is a broadly extended belief among cultural heritage scholars, reflected on their works, which assumes that cultural heritage emerges as an identity reconstruction tool in an era precisely marked by risk, nostalgia, and the crisis of meaning.

From this starting point, the article presents a conceptual map with the main expert mediations involved in the processes of identity formation through cultural heritage. Based on new and original empirical data from fieldwork carried out in the Basque Country, the map is introduced as an analytical tool that can be used to describe various situations within the framework of expert proceedings when it comes to dealing with cultural heritage. Not only is it useful to describe the Basque case, it also provides an example of impressionist mapping in action.

2. Network of Experts in the Basque Country and Impressionist Mapping

2.1 Case Study and Methods

In my research I studied how experts participate in the production of a sense of belonging through the construction of cultural heritage in the Basque Country (Spain). I chose the Basque case as a representative ex-

ample on how identities are constructed in contemporary societies based on three particular aspects¹.

Firstly, because identity has always been explicitly analysed at a political, social and scientific level in the Basque Country. Secondly, because the last three decades have witnessed a complex political development in the Basque Country, which has culminated in the creation of an autonomous space of self-government, along with a specific social and cultural framework for the Basque population (with the establishment of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country). This process has turned the Basque society into a sociological laboratory, making the act of carrying out well defined and delimited observations easier. Thirdly, mainly due to the construction of this particular social reality, the Basque identity has fallen more recently within the meticulous scrutiny of experts, moving away from a more traditional political activism. Thus, militancy has not disappeared, but its role in reproducing and managing Basque identities is not as important as it was in the past.

When it comes to understanding the main reason why I decided to focus on the network of experts that work within the field of cultural heritage, it is fundamental to acknowledge the existence of a growing and consolidated expert culture. This plays an important role in defining and mediating broad aspects of social reality². In this respect, the expert culture could be understood as the institutionalisation of the practices, discourses and products of expert knowledge in contemporary societies.

According to this, the network of experts – at the same time the product and foundation of expert culture – is a theoretical abstraction that is used in this text to encompass the heterogeneous set of agents that produce knowledge: on the one hand, the actors embodied in the role of scientists, technicians, academics, specialists, consultants and other expert agents; on the other hand, the non-human agents that join them, such as methodologies, rules, regulations, discourses, methods, objects, techniques, tools or experiences. They contribute to producing and managing specific realities by mediating between the elements that constitute them. It is outlined, thus, the idea of the network of experts as the fabric of actors, practices, protocols, methods, and technologies that helps create and maintain realities from the point of view of the experienced accumulation and application of knowledge.

The fieldwork was carried out using qualitative methods such as semi-structured personal interviews, a total of thirty, and two participant ob-

¹ An excellent introductory work on the Basque society from a sociological point of view can be found in Gatti, Irazuzta and Martínez de Albeniz (2005). For a more classic approach see Pérez-Agote (2006).

² Several social theorists have highlighted the importance of expert knowledge in the last decades: the *post-industrial* societies described by Touraine (1974) and Bell (1976), the *epistemic cultures* of Knorr-Cetina (1999), the *knowledge society* of Stehr (1994) or the *expert systems* in the works of Giddens (1991).

servations. The interviews focused on the experts' day-to-day tasks, the tools they used and the specific experiences they had in the heritage projects they were involved in. There were also more theoretical questions about their notion of heritage and the link between heritage and identity, but always as a way of observing how they handled those concepts in their work.

The observations consisted in studying the behaviour of different experts in projects related to heritage. The observation mentioned in this article consisted in following an expert who works at a hiking business while he was designing and executing an official path between two Basque localities. In the process, he highlighted different elements of heritage within the itinerary. The observation included helping him to place some signs and interpretative panels, an interview about his job, and a few informal meetings where we discussed his activities as a hiking technician, particularly about his ongoing project.

2.2 Impressionist Mapping of Social Mediations

The research was carried out within a theoretical framework based on *Post-structuralism, Science and Technology Studies* (STS), as well as other contemporary and classic sociological schools, with a particular focus on *Actor-Network Theory*. Drawing on a notion of social reality as the articulation of heterogeneous elements, this theoretical and methodological framework understands agency as the multiple, distributed and dislocated production of differences and transformations that can take a multitude of forms: a determined agent, actor or figure, where the “distinction between the agential capacities of humans and nonhumans ceases to be helpful” (Sayes 2014, 145). The proposal considers that the mediation – the trace that is left by the agency – is the unit of observation in sociology (Muriel 2016).

The idea of mediation (Latour 2007; Hennion 2002) functions as a guide that focuses our attention on the displacements, trajectories and transformations that are constantly giving form to the social. It is a key concept in the design and execution of sociological maps that sketch out trajectories and circulations beyond the more traditional (although necessary) spaces and objects. In short, if the social is defined as the articulation of heterogeneous elements – the result of the different agencies that compose it – then mediations are what configure the observable universe; they leave traces that can be followed and studied, and from which we infer everything else. John Law (2004, 161) defines “mediation” as “the process of enacting relations between entities that are, as a part of that process, given form”. These are entities and relations that did not pre-exist, but are constituted in the moment that the process is carried out:

Mediation is a turn towards what emerges, what is shaped and composed, what cannot be reduced to an interaction of causal objects and in-

tentional persons (Gomart and Hennion 1999, 226).

All these notions are made operational in a critical approach that addresses the reality being studied from this sociological prism: the impressionist mapping of social mediations. This impressionist mapping is defined as the ordered accounting of a set of mediations that lead to a concrete social reality based on the articulation of diverse traces and impressions. I attempt to reconcile two elements that in their intersection generate a lot of tension, if not a strong contradiction: mapping and impressionism. One is meticulous, detailed, precise and figurative: a map of reality; the other is composed of broad strokes, centred on appearance, blurred prints, formalist: leaving traces of reality. Thus, this subterfuge is built through simultaneous support from and leakage between these two cornerstones.

On the one hand, there is a sociology of mediations, based on concepts developed by *Actor-Network Theory* (Latour 2007; Latour 2013a; Law 2004) as well as other empirical tools, which permits us to construct detailed maps of the social. The problem is that this leads to descriptions that are strongly situated and localized. Given this difficulty, it is about making a less detailed map, more abstract, making it manageable on a sociologically acceptable scale. The leakage in this case is in the direction of the mobile, the comparable, the standard, the theory. The mapping becomes impressionistic.

On the other hand, there is a sociological impressionism (Simmel 2002; 2009; Frisby 1992; Zerubavel 2007), which permits us to focus on the fundamental forms of the social without being constrained by the historical, spatial and cultural specificities of concrete cases, while also being a more useful tool for capturing the changing flow of the real. The main pitfall of this approach is its connection with transcultural and ahistorical formalism, with universalist and essentialist pretensions. All of these characteristics are, however, smoothed over with mapping. The leakage here is in the direction of the local, the historically situated, the case. The latent formalism in impressionism becomes, this way, partially historical and situated.

Hence, the impressionist mapping is related to the efforts made by some scholars within STS to avoid being trapped inside the tensions that traverse what has been known as the “turn to ontology” inside the discipline (Lynch 2013, 445). This particular map drawn in an impressionistic fashion follows what Marres (2013, 423) identifies as an empirical conception of ontology: “the issue of what the world is made up of, is in actuality decided through specific, historical, cultural, technological and scientific interventions and as such, should be studied in empirical terms”. Theory that only makes sense if it is enacted through an empirical approach; an empiricism that is able to inform contingent, liminal, theoretical frameworks.

3. Cultural Heritage and its Relationship with Identity

In this section, I will show the links between identity and heritage that are established by different social theorists. Considering the enormous differences between authors and how they approach that relationship, I do not directly address its nature: is heritage the mere expression of identity? Or does heritage participate in the promotion and creation of certain identities? Even though I prefer to see heritage as part of the processes and *dispositifs* that help produce identities, I simply want to highlight the idea that continuously connects heritage with identity in the academic literature.

In this sense, heritage is seen as part of a nostalgic response that, throughout modernity, is taking over the feelings of society by force of fundamental social changes. However, the last third of the 20th century is a period of time when nostalgia and its rhetoric have become “almost habitual, if not epidemic” (Lowenthal 1985, 4), the moment in which emerges a *preservation mania* (Samuel 1996, 139) and the “desperate desire to hold on to disappearing worlds” (idem, 140). In turbulent times for identity (Macdonald 2002), heritage would try to find points of anchorage, a way to face the issues of contemporary society that seeks to “neutralise the instability of the social” (García Canclini 2001, 164).

As an apparatus for reconstructing social meaning and as a nostalgic response to the climate of crisis and decline, heritage, according to these authors, allows the re-enactment of what belongs to a community and facilitates the production of a sense of belonging. According to this approach, heritage helps us make “links between past and present” (Macdonald 1997, 162), fostering the temporal connections that unite societies through history. This provides stability to the group and its “collective identity” (Arrieta 2007, 156) and heritage is considered as a tool in the present for “the creation of new identification referents that articulate a sense of belonging to a distinctive place, group or cause” (Anico 2009, 67). Heritage is, therefore, represented as a place where “some people feel better, more rooted and more secure” (Howard 2003, 147).

In this regard, heritage is seen as a powerful source of ethnic and cultural meanings destined to constitute a nation (Hall 2005); nations that construct their memory and identity by “selectively binding their chosen high points and memorable achievements into an unfolding national story” (Hall 2005, 25). Depicted as an entity that creates “a focus for ideas of civic or national identity” (Hewison 1987, 84), heritage is invoked, especially from the governmental sphere, in order to promote social cohesion (Mason and Baveystock 2009). Thus, heritage is playing a “decisive role in the definition and assertion of cultural identities” (Anico 2009, 63).

Heritage, then, is part of the processes that participate in the creation of the ideas of society and community, of the possibility of sharing common ideas, feelings and meanings: cultural heritage is necessary for the

reproduction of the “meaning we find when we live together” (García Canclini 2001, 184). One of the interviewed experts clearly defines what the heritage that is represented in her museum means to her, and how it is considered for those who visit it:

I understand that they take it as part of our culture, that is, here it is shown a part of what belongs to us (Marta, head of museum).

Heritage is therefore conjugated in a plural form, because it always makes reference to *us*. And as we are speaking about a possession, something that we have inherited, we consequently say: *what is ours*, *what belongs to us*. Thus, the debate on heritage is usually carried out in terms of possession, in which the “possessive pronouns ‘my’ and ‘our’, ‘theirs’ and ‘yours’ are constantly deployed” (Howard 2003, 112). Heritage is, furthermore, an *explicit* articulation of what belongs to us: “recognised, designated and self-conscious” (idem, 148). With regard to this, an attempt to define cultural heritage could be as follows: *the explicit articulation of what belongs to us as individuals, citizens, a community, a group, a nation or a society*.

Heritage is often put at the same level as identity in the discourse of social scientists. An identity that remains in time and space and belongs to someone: a subject, a group, a society. The relationship between heritage and identity is often taken for granted:

How the links between identity and heritage are developed and maintained, however, is an area that has not had much scrutiny in the heritage literature (Smith 2006, 48).

That is the reason why this article explores how those links are produced and managed from the point of view of the experts who work with cultural heritage. The aim of this paper shares Heinich’s (2011) proposal to replace the *why* with the *how*, moving from an *explicative sociology* to a *comprehensive sociology* in order to understand how cultural heritage is made. Obviously, this approach does not exhaust all possibilities when it comes to studying the creation of those links, but at least gives a valuable insight into the issue. How the individuals and groups targeted by the experts’ operations react is something that has not been dealt with in this text. In any case, the field of heritage makes possible to carry out a research project on how identities are reflexively produced in contemporary society.

4. The Expert Mediation in the Construction of a Heritage Relationship

Experts conceptualise heritage in terms of a possession relationship: their aim is to make individuals feel a set of symbolic and material objects – heritage – as their own. It is the subject-object heritage relationship.

The subject-object heritage relationship (shorten as the *heritage relationship*) can be defined as *the relationship that is produced in the heritagisation processes from which the cultural heritage object and the subject who makes it his own emerge*. It describes a relationship between a subject who possesses – the group, the community, the nation, the society, the individual, the citizen – and an object that is possessed – cultural heritage, all of which entail a sphere of what is typical, of what belongs to and define us.

In the same way identities and subjectivities are not an *a priori* because they are produced as the consequence of complex processes, the heritage relationship also relies on multiple and heterogeneous mediations: “objectivity and subjectivity are not opposed, they grow together and they do so irreversibly” (Latour 1999, 214). Hence, we should not understand this relationship in a canonical sense, that is, the existence of an active subject (the groups) and a passive object (cultural heritage). Both are entities with an active social existence.

Heritage is not a cultural and social inheritance that is inevitably transmitted in a spontaneous way. It demands hard work; experts deem that cultural heritage is a reality at which they must work explicitly:

That was the objective (...), to make people aware, make them know and give value to their own heritage, to those things they have in their homes (Indira, lecturer).

That is the most important thing for the network of experts, to turn cultural heritage into what belongs to us, to make individuals feel that the legacies from the past “have become our very own” (Lowenthal 1998, 23). What comes below is mainly a description about how the network of experts participates in the process of making identities through cultural heritage (see table I), always in the context of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. Following the Actor-Network Theory tradition, I tend to use the same language used by social actors, which does not imply I agree with their opinions or I uncritically analyse their practice and discourse³. My main aim is to draw the map of expert mediations

³ The experts’ point of view could be part of what Laurajane Smith call the authorised heritage discourse (AHD), the theoretical abstraction used to address the hegemonic discourse in the expert literature on heritage and the government institutions that usually support it. Even though my research has only focused on

that they carry out during their participation in the construction of the heritage relationship. This is a narrative mainly built from the point of view of experts and all the definitions are based on their work as they describe it. I leave to the reader to judge their activity and the consequences it might have.

	MEDIATIONS INTENDED FOR	CHAINS OF MEDIATIONS	OUTCOME
ORIENTATION TOWARDS THE OBJECT	Knowing and classifying cultural heritage	<i>Register:</i> to know what we have	It names and distinguishes heritage
	Protecting cultural heritage	<i>Conservation:</i> to protect what we have	It gives continuity and preserves heritage
ORIENTATION TOWARDS THE SUBJECT	Making cultural heritage understandable	<i>Interpretation:</i> to make what we have understandable	It gives meaning to heritage for the subject
	Socialising cultural heritage	<i>Activation:</i> to make what we have something that can be owned	It socialises heritage connecting it with the subject

Tab. 1 – Expert mediations in the construction of the subject-object heritage relationship.

4.1 To Know What We Have: The Register as a Process of Naming and Distinguishing Heritage

Completely focused on the selection of potential heritage, the first step requires knowing what we have. According to experts, this step focuses on the task of making a register, which consists in the group of taxonomic mediations aimed at identifying, selecting, recording, and classify-

the expert side, I have found that some distinctions usually made between authorised/dominant/expert and dissonant/subaltern/non-expert could be revised. For more information on the AHD, see Smith (2006).

ing the different elements that are part of heritage. The register is a group of routines, activities and practices that tries to give a name to heritage.

It can be understood as a basic list, which gives an account of the components that are part of a group, in this case, the elements than can be labelled as heritage. The register distinguishes aspects of the sociocultural inheritance in order to make them into objects that will be a recipient for subsequent actions. It is the expert mediation that starts the whole process through which a group appropriates a particular reality:

We have to know what we have. We have to know what we are dealing with (Marta, head of museum).

This is how experts distinguish a particular reality – objects, buildings, customs, traditions, histories, and practices – in order to transform it into heritage. It constitutes a *sine qua non* condition for these experts; if we do not know what we have, it will be very difficult to construct a heritage relationship:

If you enhance something you don't know, you are not enhancing it at all. Or rather, when we talk about heritage, the first step to enhance something is to know it (Jaime, lecturer).

Experts make inventories that originate from the knowledge available on the total amount of elements that are potentially part of cultural heritage. Thus, data management systems are created, taking the shape of catalogues and repositories, which feed archives and databases. After all, creating a register is to translate part of the sociomaterial reality into data, texts, codes, pictures and organised descriptions (based on categories such as kind of heritage, location, or name). Therefore, a register transforms the heritage reality into information that helps to construct inventories.

These catalogues and databases are the outcome of the efforts and research done by experts. Transformed into manageable data (inscriptions⁴), parts of the world (distinguished elements considered as heritage) are moved to those centres of calculation that are museums, heritage centres, archives, libraries, and websites. Materialised as data repositories, the inventories connect a reality that is difficult to cope with – a vast sociocultural inheritance – with another one much more easily handled: lists of ordered heritages. According to these experts, not only do inventories help to know what we have, but they also turn what we possess into something manageable and cognisable. From there, experts will be able

⁴ Inscription is “a general term that refers to all the type of transformations through which an entity becomes materialized into a sign, an archive, a document, a piece of paper, a trace. Usually, (...) inscriptions are two dimensional, superimposable and combinable” (Latour 1999, 306).

to carry out more mediations.

Furthermore, the expert production of inventories demands the compatibility between them. The power of expert knowledge and its growing importance in contemporary society lies in, above all, its ability to manage heterogeneous elements in order to organise and compare them in different ways⁵:

The task of unifying the inventories was very difficult for us (...). If we call it “tower house”, it’s “tower house”, not “tower”, not “stronghold”. So, that is the common language for the unification of languages. And then, in this way, all the inventories are compatible with each other (Sara, civil administration).

It is the task of constructing common languages to make the seams of heritage that are waiting to be utilised into a standard surface of action:

The use of these thesauruses in the systems of information and dissemination of cultural heritage allows the normalisation of vocabularies among the cultural institutions and guarantees an agile and thorough recovery and exchange of data⁶.

This is how experts work on heritage and issues related to identity formation: making them, at the same time, manageable, comparable and subject to singularisation. The expert knowledge facilitates, thus, the creation of registers that help find what is typical of a society through the construction of an expert shared language. The register gives a name, in an organised way, to heritage.

4.2 To Protect What We Have: The Conservation as the Process of Preserving Heritage

Once the aspects of the social and cultural inheritance which can be part of cultural heritage have been identified and classified, experts consider that it is necessary to protect them through a series of mediations that belongs to the process of *conservation*. The task of conservation is described by experts as *the set of preserving mediations that seeks to protect, maintain and, eventually, restore the different elements which have been identified as part of cultural heritage*. The conservation is closely tied to the material possibility through which a part of heritage might be appropriated in the future by a society or a community:

As regards conservation, we try that the following generations know the existing heritage (Iker, civil administration).

⁵ In this sense, for instance, see Latour (1999, 1990) or Latour and Woolgar (1986).

⁶ Source: <http://tesauros.mcu.es/index.htm?operation=accept>.

The future generations, then, are seen as virtual receivers of a heritage that belongs to them as part of their cultural legacy. According to these experts, this approach is justified by the moral imperative of protecting heritage assets, as survivors of the vicissitudes of time, in order to avoid their disappearance in the current context (Ballart Hernández and Juan i Tresserras 2005). An example of heritage conservation can be found in the activity of an expert geologist who worked inside the team that participated in the conservation of an emblematic theatre in the city of Bilbao.

The first step in this conservation process is the diagnosis, which analyses and evaluates the object's condition; in this case, a building. To this end, the expert draws a map of materials (see figure 1), which consists in translating the composition of the various types of rocks that are part of the theatre's facade into a map.

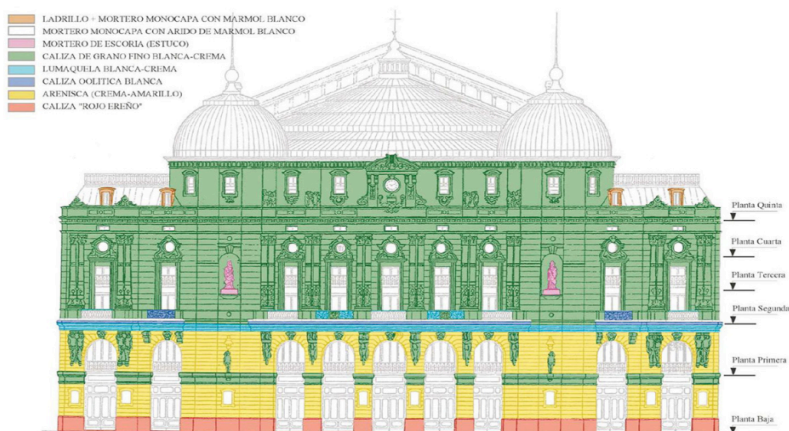


Figure 1. Map of materials. Source: Herrero and Gil (2000, 12).

The diagnosis entails, then, two mediations that transform the analysed object: on the one hand, the diagnosis translates the object into a flat surface which makes it easier to handle; on the other hand, the analysis takes the object apart according to some criteria (in this case, type of material) to create a surface of action that will guide the following steps within the task of conservation. All these efforts point to the idea of *keeping the social flat* (Latour 2007), by making different aspects of reality manageable. The construction of a map of this kind is based on diverse identification methods, ranging from a mere glance to more precise and complex approaches:

Sometimes you have all the information with a little splinter, however, in other situations is necessary to take a bigger sample or we turn to exploration techniques and we extract a specific sample, what we call a witness (John, lecturer, geologist).

On this occasion, the act of moving the building is literal: they directly take samples from the theatre. Among the type of samples that can be identified, there are the *witnesses*: pieces of rocks that, after an extraction (a *survey* in their terminology), *speak* to experts about the properties of the place from which it has been extracted. This is a movement that allows the expert to establish the characteristics of the theatre's materials without pulling it out from its foundations or having to move the laboratories to its location. In this way, even the tiniest details of the object that experts want to conserve are translated into a language that can be interpreted by them.

Once a particular heritage has been mapped, experts assess the condition of its materials. Their aim is to determine the physical capacity of that heritage to resist the passage of time and the elements which might damage it. Added to the observation of the chemical, mineralogical and petrological composition of materials – testing their resistance and durability, a study about the agents that cover the façade, agents who might erode the theatre, is also carried out. Thus, it is possible to determine the heritage's condition – level of deterioration and pathologies – and its prognosis.

Those agents, organic and inorganic, become relevant for the expert when techniques of visualisation appear and *force* them to emerge. In the specific case of salt concentration, it is used the diffractometer, a tool for analysis that shows the salt presence and its activity through spectrum peaks (see figure 2).

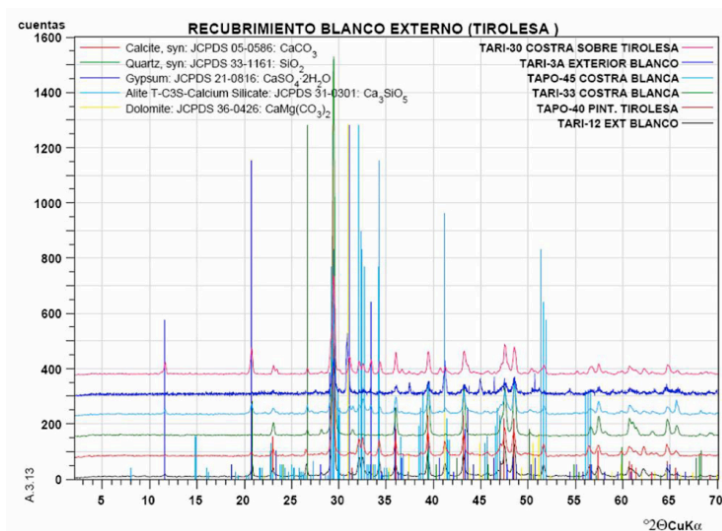


Figure 2. Diffractograms. Source: Herrero and Gil (2000, 8).

The expert mediation identifies those elements that are flawed and allows experts to act on the agents which put heritage in danger. If the first part of the diagnosis is centred on what kind of material heritage is made of, the second part consists in the delimitation of what can be understood, strictly speaking, as heritage, discarding everything that pollutes it.

All of it completes a diagnosis in which heritage is dissected as *bounded*, as an element “with identifiable boundaries that can be mapped, surveyed, recorded” (Smith 2006, 31). Even from the diagnosis within the tasks of conservation, experts are giving shape to heritage. After the diagnosis, experts can make recommendations to facilitate heritage conservation: how to clean, repair, and protect it.

Through this expert procedure that continually scrutinises, undresses, classifies, and cares about every part of heritage anatomy, experts, in their logic, are physically allowing the subjects who approach heritage to enjoy it in the present as well as in the future. The conservation process gives continuity to heritage by preserving it: it halts and, eventually, reverses the passage of time.

4.3 To Make What We Have Understandable: The Interpretation as a Process to Give Meaning to Heritage

The *interpretation* is, for experts, the *process that entails the mediations aimed at making heritage understandable to different groups in a simple, attractive and adapted way*. According to experts, the possibility that people accept as their own a specific heritage – and the way they do it – will depend, to a great extent, on the process of interpretation.

Even though the process of making a register helps to select and differentiate a vast inheritance by determining its most relevant elements and by naming them, while the process of conservation is focused on preserving that selection, they do not have, by themselves, any influence on an experience of *what is ours*. As a series of operations mainly oriented to the object of heritage (and not its subjects), both are practices which produce very technical *raw knowledge* and not very digestible:

They give us that raw data, which is illegible for the general public, because it is very academic and people do not understand it. We transform that erudite text into something understandable, bringing it closer to the general public (Nadia, heritage management business).

The interpretation is understood as a practice in which a guide, a native or an expert explains to a foreigner, a stranger or a novice the idiosyncrasies of a place, a territory, or an object (Dewar 2000). Experts think the subjects of heritage do not have the ability to automatically identify that legacy. This is why they seek to convey that knowledge in an easy-to-understand fashion:

I think all that information and all that knowledge must be communicated and transferred to the citizen in a very didactic and participative way (Markel, civil administration).

Experts consider that the interpretation should be didactic in order to decipher why a specific heritage is important for any subject: accessible, empathic and attractive. Firstly, experts think that the interpretation should be accessible. When a script that reflects the content expressed in the interpretation of a particular heritage is carried out, it must contain texts that can be easily understood and do not overwhelm its readers:

It is not the same to write for a newspaper than to do it for an interpretation table: more or less, very simple phrases, very short; it must be easy to read and attract your attention (Joseph, hiking technician).

All of this is part of the expert's creed which claims that the heritage subjects need to understand quickly and efficiently their heritage, without apparent obstacles between them. The process of interpretation is all about transforming the expert content into "understandable, accessible and non-erudite texts" (Nadia, heritage management business).

Secondly, a way to let the individuals who approach heritage participate in its interpretation is to awake their emotions and lead them to known places in which they could easily recognise themselves or others:

When we do the guide tours, (...) I particularly insist on (...) the workers' life, especially because you can clearly see, in the paintings, the sacrifice made by these people (Elisabeth, head of museum).

A very efficient method to make heritage understandable is then to arouse the compassion and empathy of visitors. Experts seek to affect people in the elaboration of scripts that interpret heritage, and try to make those individuals identify more easily with the given representations (Ballart Hernández and Juan i Tresserras 2005).

Thirdly, experts state that the didactic interpretation should make what is being interpreted more attractive. The expert's narrative, which differentiates what is relevant when it comes to interpreting a captivating story for the public, is transformed:

To invent stories, to write stories about what the expert tells us, to narrate a story that is attractive and beautiful for the public (Nadia, heritage management business).

The idea of heritage emerges as something that can be easily understood in an attractive way, closer to the logic of entertainment. The head of a museum on the history of the Basque Country and its symbols relates the procedure they followed in the making of a script that interprets its heritage in a new way:

We said to them: “we should try to raise a smile once in a while” (...), we wanted something close to entertainment (...) without being Disney (Marta, head of museum).

Choay (2007) negatively evaluates this kind of interpretations that uses sounds, discourses and lights. Targeted at the general public, these interpretations only work, according to her criteria, as a way “to distract and divert” (idem, 197) the subjects from the heritage interpreted. However, if we follow these experts’ assumptions, the interpretation that becomes accessible, empathic and attractive, far from pushing away the subjects from their heritage, it gets them closer: it involves people in their heritage, attracted by interpretations that give meaning to it.

Another way to tell what is relevant about a heritage relies on adapting the interpretation to the different kinds of individuals (Ballart Hernández and Juan i Tresserras 2005). Not only does the general public not have to know the language used by experts in relation to heritage, but the individuals who are part of that general public are also diverse and their abilities to interpret the heritage they approach (and the way they do it) might essentially vary depending on their age, level of education, general culture, origins, relationship with the heritage visited, interest, or any other sociocultural variable:

There are different targets of population and depending on who you are aiming at, the scope of the information varies. It depends on the level of knowledge or the visitor’s profile (...). It is not the same to do a guided tour with children than doing it with pensioners or with middle age people who went to college (Iker, civil administration).

The scope and type of interpretations are adapted to the targets in which experts divide the population. Although heritage always has a collective dimension, this singularisation of population targets turns *what belongs to us* into something that is more and more adapted to the micro social or individual peculiarities.

You put yourself in their shoes and try to make the product in a way that suits them. They are generally very different, but, well, you offer a diversified pace of expositions and presentations because you want to reach everyone (Nekane, heritage management business).

That seems to be the key of an adapted and diversified interpretation in experts’ opinion: taking into account the heterogeneity of those at whom is aimed, and, above all, putting themselves in the visitors’ shoes. Experts maintain that the interpretation is not carried out in a unidirectional way; it adapts itself to the diverse feelings and abilities of the targeted subjects. The objective is simple: to augment the probability that the interpretations given to the subjects are meaningful for them.

4.4 To Socialise What We Have: The Activation as the Process that Connects Subjects and Heritage

Once what we have is made understandable, experts can undertake the operations to socialise that reality already interpreted. Some of these experts refer to this process as the *activation*, which connects heritage to its subjects. It allows heritage to be visited, observed, assumed, consumed, and experienced.

The *activation* is understood by experts as *the process in which heritage is socialised through a staging that connects it to the subjects who appropriate that heritage*. Creating a space or a reality that enables people to approach representations of *what is ours*, the activation links – constructing them at the same time – heritage and groups. In this sense, the activation is *what belongs to us* in action; it is a proposal of a particular “world view” (Prats 2009, 80). Heritage is activated, according to experts, through three ideal types: adding value to heritage, re-enacting experiences of heritage, and standardising heritage.

Adding Value to Heritage

The activation of heritage can be presented in different shapes, for instance, the speech or the lecture, which allows a face to face interaction with the individuals who attend:

I brought an archaeological object, which I think it is, at least, 40.000 years old (...). And everybody was “Ah, I want to touch it, then”. Well, I think this link with the past (...) is fundamental (Jaime, lecturer).

When the very subject is the one who wants to touch that element, the bond with the past is directly established, invoking a feeling of continuity for the inhabitants of the locality. Furthermore, in experts’ opinion, an extra value is added to this heritage: we are faced with a non-simulated piece, an *original*.

One of the most recurrent means to stamp a patina of authenticity to heritage activations consists in the use of *auratic* elements, that is, components of a particular heritage that are seen as *authentic* because they are “imbued with the magic of having been there” (Macdonald 1997, 169). The notion of the auratic comes from the idea that the “presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity” (Benjamin 2007, 220). This could be extended not only to objects, like archaeological remains, but also to the spaces, the people and the activities they perform:

We always tend to recover authentic spaces, (...), we do not create a Museum of Cheese (...) in this building that has nothing to do with tradition or cheese. What we do is to go to the person who makes cheese, in

the field, bonded with the activity of a person (...), and that seems more realistic to those who come to visit (Arnaldo, head of museum).

However, stamping a patina of authenticity in a particular heritage representation depends not only on the originals or the auratic objects that can be collected; authenticity can also be obtained from the story that is effectively being transmitted during heritage activations. It is not important where the artefacts come from in a heritage staging, but they should be capable of conveying a suitable message. In this sense, diverse mediations are used to confer that authentic appearance to heritage: presenting the narrative as if it were contrasted facts, eliminating dissonances, using realistic three-dimensional constructions, or utilising techniques such as the audio guide, which ties the story seamlessly and avoids the discussion with other visitors (Macdonald 1997).

Whether auratic objects or not are shown, “authenticity of appearance is all” (Howard 2003, 143). Far from philosophical or historical debates, the question of authenticity is approached within the area of heritage like any other technical issue, as part of a representation that helps socialise heritage by adding value to it.

Re-enacting Experiences of Heritage

One of the fundamental ways in which heritage is represented is through processes that recreate and transmit the knowledge about a heritage reality, including its feelings and experiences.

In the locality of Labastida, there are routes with performers in its old town. In those routes, the lifestyle of medieval times is re-enacted using actors who perform daily life scenes of that period next to the monuments and architectonic remains still present, which are part of the urban landscape of the town (see figure 3 on the next page). The city council promotes them as follows:

You will find interactive and dynamic visits, where visitors will enjoy and understand the past, experiencing live some of the key moments of the history of Labastida (City Council of Labastida⁷)

The staged re-enactment makes it possible for the subjects to experience *live history*. The anachronism contained in the statement shows how the network of experts fulfils its mediation during the construction of a heritage relationship. This works as a channel between the subject, who currently lives in the municipality, and the heritage, which includes history, costumes, events, and monuments that belong to the past. Those who perform and the ones who observe are involved in a cultural performance that implies meaning construction (Smith 2006). This representation ful-

⁷ Source <http://www.labastida-bastida.org/>

files the emergence and connection between the subjects and objects of heritage.



Figure 3. Staged route in Labastida (Araba). Source: City Council of Labastida

In this way, in a territory-museum that revolves around the iron industry in Legazpia (province of Gipuzkoa), the head of the museum states that “the idea is to bring a person to the modern age of iron” (Arnaldo, head of museum). How is it possible, then, to come back in time, to an era that does not exist anymore, in which it is impossible to live and experience in the contemporaneity? Through heritage activations that simulate those social universes now extinct or in ruins:

Then, what we have done is to recreate a housing of the 50s in one of the working class neighbourhoods, exactly as they were in the 50s (Arnaldo, head of museum).

Some of the most relevant social spaces of the 1950s have been reproduced based on research works that determine how they were at that time: a working class bedroom, a classroom, a chapel. Thus, some of most important referents of that time – labour, education, and religion – are invoked. All of it is staged where everything took place, recreating their social existence and including their buildings, aesthetics, languages, practices, and objects (see figure 4 on the next page):

You open the desks where we put inside some texts and books... you open some of them and you hear the music, or how they learnt, the teacher saying, “one time one, plus three, plus five, let’s see... wrong!” (Arnaldo, head of museum).



Figure 4. Recreation of a classroom in the 50s, Legazpia (Gipuzkoa).

Source: Lenbur Fundazioa

Not only do experts try to reproduce the spaces from an aesthetic and a formal point of view, but they also seek to get the visitor involved in what happened there. This social universe is unified through a route: “One day in the 50s. The route of the workers” (see figure 5), which offers the chance of travelling in time and experiencing the universe of working class families in the 50s⁸.

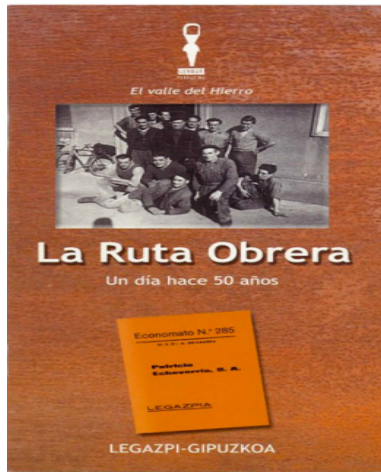


Figure 5. The Route of the Workers. Promotional diptych on the Route of the Workers.

Source: Lenbur Fundazioa

⁸Source: <http://lenbur.com/es/rutas/ruta-obrera/>

In this manner, heritage, to be considered as such, must be experienced or, even beyond that, heritage is the experience in itself (Smith 2006). It is an experience that makes the partnership between heritage and the groups who experience it unbreakable. The re-enacted spaces during the activation vibrate like meeting points between experts and non-experts and, above all, between the population and heritage. Those are the places where it is possible to establish the relationship that produces both of them.

Standardising Heritage: The Activation of a Route

The standard is how heritage is enacted in this kind of activation. Exhibited following a closed pattern, it is part of a “factory-produced common heritage” (Bauman 1993, 161). The advantages of this kind of activation rest on the fact that it simplifies the recognition of its codes, which makes the task of socialising heritage elements simpler. Brands, typical signs and standard nomenclatures facilitate – by giving a framework of shared meanings between subjects and experts, humans and non-humans – the crystallisation of the heritage relationship. I will describe, in this case, part of the process through which an expert, that belongs to a hiking business, designs and executes an official route, between the Basque towns of Zaldibar and Elorrio, where different elements of heritage are highlighted.

The official approval of the route is a central process within this type of heritage activation. In this procedure, an alphanumeric code is assigned to the path designed, becoming, effectively and officially, a route:

When I asked him what would happen in case the approval number did not arrive, he answered angrily: “No number, no route! That simple!” (Fieldwork note).

The expert expresses his sharp opinion in relation to the possibility that an already designed and signposted route was not officially approved: the staging would be ruined because of the absence of the number that certifies it is an officially approved route and, therefore, the possibility of individuals approaching heritage through the act of walking would vanish.

This particular staging of heritage gradually takes shape around a route, which that same representation helps to construct, through a series of articulated figures, colours, codes, and standardised forms (see figure 6 on the next page).

To that end, it is necessary to paint some spots along the path with the required colours and forms, a task assumed by the hiking technician. The entire route is, thus, signposted with the corresponding marks and colours, always trying to orientate the subjects who decide to visit it. Moreover, a set of boards and arrows are posted in the field in order to orientate

the subjects' trajectory while they are walking along the route. At all times, the aim is to maintain the visitor inside a *closed circuit*, which is determined by the official approval and the points of passage the visitor must pass and visit.

	CONTINUIDAD SE SENDERO	MALA DIRECCIÓN	CAMBIO DE DIRECCIÓN
G.R.			
P.R.			
S.L.			

Figure 6. Codes for type of path (Great Path, Little Path, Local Path) and direction according to international regulations. Source: Spanish Federation of Mountain Sports and Climbing.

Once the route is appropriately delimited, the only step left is to signpost the relevant points on the path with a particular piece of heritage. Interpretive panels (see figure 7) point out where to locate heritage elements inside the route, offering a brief interpretation of that heritage, which should be understood by the subjects who are walking through the route.



Figure 7. Interpretive panel and hiking technician placing the base for an interpretive panel. Source: Author.

This is, in the end, the activation of an officially approved route following a standard protocol. Experts face a representation of heritage that, in their opinion, will enhance its value, recognition, and, eventually, will facilitate that the subjects who walk its path will make that heritage their own. It is possible to walk across *what is ours*.

5. Conclusions

In this article, I focused on a network of experts that – in their majority – take into account other people as part of their main goal. Associated with other agents – not always human, this group of experts articulates themselves in a complex network that enables them to mediate between things, influence others, and produce relations.

Beyond the reflexivity of the individuals studied and rare cases of experts who were only focused on heritage as an object, most of the mediations they were involved in had as their final objective to influence other individuals. Despite the importance of the network of experts as regards heritage, they never impose their willing in a unidirectional and unequivocal way on those subjects they seek to affect. The interests and processes at stake are multiple: some pretend to construct a sense of belonging and community; others, socialise a knowledge about a reality that potentially defines us; there are those who wish they could seduce more people, attracting increasing numbers of visitors; it is even possible to find those with more material intentions, who want to sell cultural heritage more and better. In any case, subjects (experts) who take into account other subjects (the individuals who are represented by cultural heritage).

Even though there is a strategic orientation in this dominant heritage mentality (Smith 2006), not all the elements of the network explicitly consider this question, since everyone and everything seek different aims. According to Latour (1999), intentionality does not belong to objects nor to humans, but to these *dispositifs*, apparatus, institutions or, as in this text, networks:

Purposeful action and intentionality may not be properties of objects, but they are not properties of humans either. They are properties of institutions, of apparatuses, of what Foucault called *dispositifs*. Only corporate bodies can absorb the proliferation of mediators, to regulate their expression, to redistribute skills, to force boxes to blacken and close (idem, 192).

Cultural heritage is, then, part of what we could call *politics of meaning* or *politics of identity*; and the network of experts, including human and non-human elements, play an essential role in it. In this case, the principal network studied has been the one that is configured by expert agents who traverse the field of cultural heritage in the Basque Country, observing the main relationship in which they mediate and help to produce: the relationship between an object – heritage – as the synthesis of images and experiences of what is ours, and a subject – the group, society, community or individual that identify with that heritage – who considers that object as a fundamental part of their own definition (or at least they recognise it as something that belongs to a group, even if it is not their own).

How do these experts succeed in – or attempt to succeed – influenc-

ing other people in the particular relationship that is established between them and heritage? The processes described here were four: register, conservation, interpretation, activation. They do not cease to be forms – ideal types – constructed from brush strokes of reality – impressions. In sum, the impressionist mapping that describes systematically the set of mediations that leads to the emergence of a heritage relationship.

Considering that the social is the articulation of dissimilar elements, an articulation that is produced through the comings and goings of associations and displacements, it is postulated that the attention of sociological description should be focused on those movements and transformations, which can be condensed in the notion of mediation. Mediations which involve the diverse agents and processes that fall under the sociological perspective, constituted as sociology's units of observation. This way of approaching social reality permits the study of both the most regular and stable aspects and situations (aligned and stabilized mediations), and those that by their nature are more fluid and changing (volatile and continually transforming mediations) as shown by the case studied.

Mapping applied as a sociological methodology avoids the observed processes, agents and mediations being enclosed in social forms that have already been studied or installed in sociological knowledge, thus, it permits us to carry out more accurate representations of the reality studied. In some cases these social forms may adequately describe the reality observed, but in many other cases they will limit the richness of movements, displacements, and actors being studied. This involves a research process that is detailed, costly and relatively slow, but the results of which provide more realist sociological descriptions.

However, as social reality is in continual change, an assemblage of displacements, transformations, and associations in permanent movement, it appears as an unpredictable tide or maelstrom (Law 2004), which is difficult to describe with meticulous mapping methods that, moreover, are inadequate for carrying out sociological descriptions on a certain scale. As a result, joining a mapping technique with an impressionist approach is a way of capturing these fluid and changing aspects of reality; in doing so, the impression of their movements remains, while the descriptions reveal regularities and typologies that partially transcend the specificities of the cases studied, facilitating the work of generalizing, which is the objective of all sociology. With its own limitations, the impressionist mapping seeks – within a particular regime of truth or mode of existence, a particular sociological ontology – to end “the restrictions imposed by the notion of symbolic representation of a material world” (Latour 2013b, 299).

I have to insist that this narrative is built from the point of view of experts, which leaves to others the task of researching about the role played by the rest of the social actors in the heritage relationship: how do they receive these expert representations? Do they contest them? Do they pledge to them? Do they transform them? Is it established an alliance be-

tween these groups and the network of experts? Or is it more like a confrontation? Do they add different things to the mediations of register, conservation, interpretation and activation? Or do they add complete new mediations? Do they, in short, create new definitions of heritage? If we want to redefine agency and how reality is constructed from an Actor-Network Theory point of view, we do need to acknowledge the distributed nature – the different entities involved – of the different “modes of doing” (Abrahamsson et al. 2015).

As a general conclusion, it can be stated that behind the idea of heritage there is no fundamental *ethos* that constructs it. There is no element or transcendental concept that explains it, neither identity nor tradition nor history. Although those concepts are constantly invoked, they are neither the outcome of heritage nor its previous condition. That is the paradox of contemporary society; full of politics of identity, memory, and meaning, only the succession of processes and mediations which are part of heritage is what actually gives a value to that heritage, what makes it a contemporary sense of belonging provider.

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