

World Heritage, Grassroot Management: A Community Participation Experience Inventorying Six “Milongas” in Buenos Aires

MERCEDES GONZÁLEZ BRACCO¹⁴⁷

Abstract:

This paper reflects on the pilot experience of community participation in the inventory of six “milongas” (tango dance venues) in Buenos Aires. Coordinated by the UNESCO Regional Office for Latin America in 2013, it led to the active participation of the community through six “milongueros” as representatives of the milonga scene. Led by two UNESCO coordinators, they established which milongas would be treated, what elements to register and the community implied. Through participant observation of the process and further interviews with some of the partakers, this paper aims to inquire about the opportunities and limitations of a participatory experience, and how it can be improved in order to empower the community involved to make decisions regarding their heritage.

Keywords: UNESCO; Tango; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Community Participation; Inventory

Resumo:

Este trabalho reflete sobre a experiência piloto da participação comunitária no inventário de seis milongas de Buenos Aires. Coordenado pelo Escritório Regional da UNESCO para a América Latina em 2013, permitiu a participação ativa da comunidade através de seis milongueiros como representantes da atmosfera da milonga. Liderada por dois coordenadores da UNESCO, foram eles que estabeleceram que milongas inventariar, quais dos elementos registrar e qual era a comunidade envolvida. Através da observação participante do processo e subsequentes entrevistas com alguns desses representantes, o objetivo deste estudo é investigar as oportunidades e limitações de uma experiência

¹⁴⁷ University of Buenos Aires-CONICET, mercedesbracco@yahoo.com.ar

participativa, e como elas podem ser melhoradas para empoderar a comunidade envolvida para a tomada de decisões sobre o seu património.

Palavras-chave: UNESCO; Tango; Património Cultural Imaterial; Participação da Comunidade; Inventário

Resumen:

Este trabajo reflexiona sobre la experiencia piloto de participación comunitaria en el inventario de seis milongas en Buenos Aires. Coordinado por la Oficina Regional para Latinoamérica de UNESCO en 2013, permitió la activa participación de la comunidad a través de 6 milongueros como representantes del ambiente de la milonga. Liderados por dos coordinadoras de UNESCO, fueron ellos quienes establecieron qué milongas inventariar, qué elementos registrar y cuál era la comunidad involucrada. A través de la observación participante del proceso y entrevistas posteriores con algunos de estos representantes, el objetivo del trabajo es indagar acerca de las oportunidades y limitaciones de una experiencia participativa, y de qué manera puede ser mejorada en pos de empoderar a la comunidad involucrada para la toma de decisiones en torno a su patrimonio.

Palabras Clave: UNESCO; Tango; Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial; Participación Comunitaria; Inventario de Milongas

1. Introduction: UNESCO and the heritage management

Since its creation and with up-growing legitimacy and support from important countries in the world, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has started to concentrate and unify conservation and safeguarding parameters. At the same time, the legitimate spectre of what can be patrimonialised¹⁴⁸ has been broadened. This process has intensified the internationalization of heritage passing to be considered as belonging to "all humanity". It has also incorporated new arguments for conservation according to the idea that it is threatened by contemporary economic and social changes. This expansion in heritage

¹⁴⁸ As examples of how the range has widened, we highlight the definition of the international principles and guidelines concerning archaeological sites in 1956, the Safeguarding of Beauty and Character of Landscapes and Sites in 1962, the Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1972, the creation of the Living Human Treasures programme in 1994, the Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage in 2001, the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003 and the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions in 2005. All the texts are available at <http://www.unesco.org>.

acceptance has appeared as a counterpoint to the transformation process of big cities worldwide, from economy trans-nationalization to information technologies expansion. Heritage was therefore reformulated in the tension between new local and global interactions during a moment of accelerated transformations due to the expansion of the global market. This reformulation was also affected by the dissolution and/or transformation of national identities and the crisis of territory references (Ortiz, 1997; Huyssen, 2001; García Canclini, 2001).

Since the Convention on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in 2003, the importance that the cultural expression had for the community and its respect for the international law were added as new criteria. Thus, two lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage were defined. The "Urgent Safeguarding List", which seeks for preserving menaced cultural expressions; and the "Representative List" which corresponds to the new determination to acknowledge cultural expressions as community identity referents. Under this last denomination, Argentina has successfully proposed two elements. The first one, submitted together with Uruguay is tango, incorporated in 2009 (Gómez Schettini *et al.*, 2011). The second element is "filete porteño", incorporated in 2015 (González Bracco *et al.*, 2015).

It is worth saying that tango, as a cultural expression of the identity of the City of Buenos Aires, had already been subject of several public policies in order to promote its visibility in the international tourism field. Nevertheless, since its declaration, events for international audiences have grown in popularity (Morel, 2009). As an example, in 2015, the Tango World Championship – included in the Tango Festival and Championship that has taken place under different names since 1998 – had 600.000 spectators and participating couples from 37 countries¹⁴⁹. This success, however, does not represent the reality of other elements related to tango such as musicians, lyric writers or dancing places, subject to economic fluctuations and disseminating problems, among other issues that threaten their survival. This reality, shared by other acknowledged elements, made UNESCO implement strategies to strengthen the national capacities to safeguard the ICH. The Project "Living Heritage" carried out by the Regional Office for Latin America, which at a first stage benefited Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, is included in these strategies. In the local case, this Project took the form of a pilot experience of making an inventory of six milongas¹⁵⁰ with community participation.

According to UNESCO parameters, inventories intend to identify and define elements that compose ICH in order to establish their viability and generate a process tending to their

¹⁴⁹ The number of assistants doubled since 2009. Information available at <http://www.estadisticaciudad.gob.ar>.

¹⁵⁰ The term "milonga" refers to a dancing rhythm as well as to places where tango is danced. Here, I refer to the second meaning.

safeguarding. They reaffirm the continuity of community members and contribute to the public management and sustainable development plan¹⁵¹. In the case of the tango, the aim of making an inventory of milongas was to establish the boundaries of this sub-element in order to study it in depth, making it possible to obtain inputs to formulate direct safeguarding measures. At the same time, this project had the active participation of its own "holders" as a distinctive feature. They were the ones that defined and esteemed the dimensions to be considered for its safeguarding and continuity.

2. About milongas and milonguer@s¹⁵²

In terms of historical construction, the genealogy of the tango has usually been represented in terms of a journey. With a dark origin related to the brothels of late 19th century Buenos Aires, the tango travelled to Europe, where it was coded and "became decent". It returned to its place of origin with a new prestige and dignity, which opened doors to dance halls and celebrations of the local upper classes. After a golden period throughout the 1940s and 1950s, its popularity declined to the point of being almost hidden in a few enclosed spaces. The dance recovered its esteem in the mid-80s thanks to a successful worldwide tour of the theatre show *Tango Argentino*. As several authors have observed, it is once again the story of the successful trip to Europe what restates tango as a highlighted local cultural expression. Thus, it is explained that since then it has been "rediscovered" by new Argentinean generations that began to listen and dance to its rhythms (Morel, 2012; Carozzi, 2015).

Apart from this real or imaginary bond, it is interesting that while the story of the marginal beginning and triumph of the tango in Europe has been repeated to exhaustion as an unquestionable truth, it is barely known what was going on in the places where tango was effectively listened to and danced. Meeting places with popular music and dances such as milongas, ball rooms and kermises did not find a relevant place in academic studies until a few years ago, when they started to call to the attention of some historians, sociologists and anthropologists that went through their history and present, describing uses and practices associated to them (Pujol, 1999; Maronese, 2008; Cecconi, 2009; Carozzi, 2015; among others).

¹⁵¹ For further information on inventories, see <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/inventorying-intangible-heritage-00080>.

¹⁵² Translation from the book title by Maronese (2008). As it is called "milonga" the place where tango is danced, "milonguero/a" refers to the experienced tango dancer.

According to these studies, milongas started to multiply, as well as diversify, in the last few decades. Among them, the “traditional” ones are the most well known. Frequented by tourists and locals, the dancing is exclusively between man and woman, with rigid dressing and social codes. There are also more “relaxed” milongas, mostly frequented by young people, where norms may be infringed without problem and the “practice venues” – which are not strictly milongas –but rehearsal places especially frequented by beginners that do not dare to dance in milongas yet. In the last years “queer” milongas, where same-sex couples are welcome and dancing roles defined by gender can be exchanged, have also started to appear. This diversity creates sub-worlds that coexist, in tension but also in harmony. Taking the question formulated by Maronese at the beginning of her enquire (2008: 12) as a starting point: “How do dancers and musicians manage the fact that these forms are rooted in the community for its use and, however, they have to be renewed in the contemporary world?”¹⁵³, I believe this to be the challenge of any “living heritage”, it must find an equilibrium between tradition and innovation.

In order to see how this paradox works, this paper reflects on the pilot experience of the participatory inventory of six “milongas” in Buenos Aires mentioned above. Having had the opportunity to witness the experience as a Technical Assistant, the chosen methodology was based on an ethnographic approach that involved participant observation and further interviews with some of the partakers. According to this primary information, I describe the whole process, with its ups and downs, observing the development as was proposed by UNESCO Coordinators and performed by the milongas spokespersons. As a result of this research, it is possible to apprehend the opportunities and limitations of a participatory experience, and how it can be improved in order to empower the community involved to make decisions regarding their heritage.

3. Inventory with community participation: the experience

As stated above, the Project “Living Heritage” was carried out by the Regional Office for Latin America and aimed to make an inventory of milongas of Buenos Aires with community participation. An anthropologist and a sociologist coordinated it and, as it was a pilot experience, the community participation was restricted to six spokespersons. These participants were dancers, some were also teachers and in almost all cases they organised milongas at the

¹⁵³To illustrate this contradiction, the author refers to the sacredness of music that reifies most milongas’ experience. According to the organisers and DJ’s, dancers - with few exceptions - just want to dance to the music of the great orchestras from the 40s and 50s, which tends to crystallise and folklorise the genre: “this is why milongas ‘sound’ all the same” (Maronese, 2008: 80).

moment of performing the inventory. In regards to demographic composition, there were three men in their seventies, of vast trajectory in the world of milongas, and a younger man, professional dancer and president of the *Asociación de Organizadores de Milongas* (Milongas Organisers Association - AOM). Two middle-aged women who organise milongas completed the group. The work also counted with observers from the Ministry of Culture of the Buenos Aires City Government and from the National Government.

As the coordinators said on the first meeting, the fact that spokespersons were (currently or not) milonga organisers was a key point for recruitment, as this role provided them with a specific knowledge making them able to define items that had to be included in the inventory. They were the ones who would decide which milongas should be inventoried and what should be observed in each one of them (meeting with spokespersons, fieldwork notes).

The project lasted from May to October 2013 and was based on two pillars. On one hand, the spokespersons assisted to the selected milongas, where they made observations and carried out interviews accompanied by photographs and videos. On the other hand, and as a complement, meetings were held every two weeks, during which issues to observe were discussed, criteria was adjusted and the progress of the inventory was shared.

For a better comprehension of this process, I distinguish three dimensions in order to analyse the possibilities and limitations of this work dynamic: the scope limits, the elements to inventory and the fieldwork¹⁵⁴.

3.1 Limiting the scope: milonga as cultural space

Given the character of the project as a preliminary test, it was known from the start that we would work with a limited number of milongas, which ended up being six. However, the criteria for their selection were not yet defined. Therefore there was a debate regarding the role of milongas as high-density cultural spaces due to their relation with their locations (social and sports clubs in many cases), their closeness to different neighbourhoods and the relationship with their audience. At this point, their vulnerabilities, related to authorization problems, tourism seasons and access to wider outreach, were exposed among other issues. Consequently, the initial discussion allowed gathering different proposals that were to be taken as safeguarding measures at a latter stage. These included, among others, the need for a real acknowledgment

¹⁵⁴ All the descriptions that follow are based on the meetings with spokespersons and the visits to the milongas as registered in my fieldwork notes; and the further interviews with two of the spokespersons. However, it does not include the inventory itself. For further information on the inventory results, see Lacarrieu and Maronese (2014).

of these places and the formation of a tango circuit that goes beyond the international festival (which, on the other hand, does not include milongas).

Taking into account the aforesaid, it was decided to leave aside the diversity and create an ideal type of milonga taking into account its acknowledgeable elements. Because of that, an important criterion for its selection was durability, which means the persistence of milongas or their organisers. Some milongas selected survived the “resistance period” (between the 60s and 90s), thanks to the perseverance of their organisers or habitual attendants. Other milongas selected were comparatively new, but had a history linked to their locations or acquired a highlighted identity due to the trajectory of their organisers. This allowed them to have, according to the spokespersons, a “very good dancing level”. Another important criterion was geographical diversity, as historically there were differences in dancing according to areas where it was practised (issue that, as explained below, was largely discussed). Finally, to this diversity in areas, gender diversity was added (milongas organised by men and others by women were considered). At every moment, it was agreed that these criteria were not the only possible nor should they highlight any essentialism. Nonetheless, the selection tried to feature those places where milonga traditional codes were maintained or recreated preserving their spirit. In words of the spokespersons, this meant selecting milongas where the most important thing was a good dancing level.

Although it was not theorised at the moment of performing the inventory, the selection of this type of milongas corresponds to the ideas submitted by Carozzi (2015) regarding the appreciation of traditional milongas as the places with the best dancing level. The author observed that young people frequently assisted to these milongas with the objective to dance with the old milongueros, seeing this as a way of entering in the selected circuit of good dancers. Moreover, these old milongueros successfully imposed their preferences in regards to music and dancing floor social codes, as the organisers invited them as a tactic to obtain a better hierarchization of their milongas and in this way, attract the audience interested in “true” tango dancing.

The final selection included four milongas organised by participating spokespersons and two others, organised by third parties. These were: *Milonga Malena* (Club Sunderland¹⁵⁵ - Villa

¹⁵⁵ Although it is not exactly known when it started and has counted on several organisers all throughout their history, the Club Sunderland’s milonga is one of the most traditional in Buenos Aires. The milonga investigated for this work was “Malena”, which has been taking place for several years on Saturday nights. More information at <http://www.sunderlandclub.com.ar/paginas/milongamalena.html>.

Urquiza), *Sin Rumbo*¹⁵⁶ (Villa Urquiza), *Lo de Celia*¹⁵⁷ (Constitución), *Club Atlético Milonguero*¹⁵⁸ (Club Huracán – Parque Patricios), *La tierrita*¹⁵⁹ (Asociación de Fomento Mariano Acosta – Parque Avellaneda), *La Milonguita*¹⁶⁰ (Palermo and Constitución) (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Buenos Aires City Map placing the milongas

Source: Lacarrieu and Maronese, 2014

Below, some spokespersons referred to this election as appropriate for a preliminary trial but that a greater diversity of spaces should have been taken into account to show the present variety of milongas:

I think they used a criterion that is a criterion to take into account, more traditional milongas, which are not always representative of the current ones. This is

¹⁵⁶ This club, that opened in 1919 and was called “tango cathedral” by the fame of its dancers in the Golden period, holds another of the most important milongas of the city, which also went through different organisers. More information at <http://elsinrumbo.com.ar/>.

¹⁵⁷ This milonga is performed, since 2000, in a place formerly occupied by another renowned dancing floor. It is organised by Celia Blanco (spokesperson of this work), of well-known trajectory as tango dancer and spokesperson of this work. More information at <https://www.facebook.com/lodecelia.tango>.

¹⁵⁸ The social site of Club Atlético Huracán, opened in 1941, was the venue of great neighbourhood dances with live orchestras. In 2012, after performing milongas at other spaces in the same neighbourhood, the organiser Julio Bassán (spokesperson of this work) relaunched the milonga in this place calling it Club Atlético Milonguero. Due to differences with the club management, this milonga stopped working in 2014.

¹⁵⁹ The Association is from 1929 and its milonga is one of the oldest operating without interruption. To this, it is added the importance of Oscar Hector (spokesperson of this work), of vast trajectory as milonga organiser.

¹⁶⁰ This milonga was created more than a decade ago by Graciela Lopez (spokesperson of this work) and, due to issues with city permits, it has changed its location several times. Although at the time of the project it had two rooms, currently it maintains only the one in Palermo. More information at <http://www.milonguitabaile.com.ar/>.

so because it is as... The flourishing development of milongas and proposals is such that there should also be given a place to all the young people that are around doing things (Graciela López, spokesperson, personal interview with the author, 11/10/15).

There could have been others... a broader range. (...) I think it can be done in another way... but anyway, now it is very easy to say it. (...) There are some things in which you must set the categorizations aside a little, in order to be more pluralist in the selection. Anyway, within the range of possibilities that we had, it was interesting (Julio Bassán, spokesperson, personal interview with the author, 01/06/16).

3.2 The elements included in the inventory: live tango

Once the milongas that would participate in the record were defined, it was quickly agreed that all elements to include in the inventory should represent in an open, but at the same time restricted, way what is to be found in a typical milonga. However, during the following encounters, the selected elements started to change, as observations and interviews made initial guidelines richer and more complex. For the final document, the following elements remained:

- Spatial sectioning: from the observations, sketches of dancing halls were made indicating the disposition of the place, chairs to sit down (men and women mixed or separated), dancing floor, bar, disc jockey, toilettes, etc.
- Dancing floor social codes: they are a set of implicit and positively valued rules that may be found in a greater or lesser degree in all milongas. They included the respect for the round of dancing (counter clockwise, entering through the corners, not push nor step on the adjoining couple), the “nod” (subtle signal from the man to the woman as invitation to dance), the hug (as proof of intimacy achieved by the couple while dancing), dancing close to the floor (do not make pompous figures which may bother other couples dancing) and the silence (as a way to feel the music).
- Community: this element involves those who are part of the restricted community as producers or transmitters, which means those who make the milongas possible (organisers, DJs, clubs management, buffeters); and on the other hand, the widened community, which means those attending the milongas, for example professional dancers, experienced milongueros, professors with their students, locals, foreigners.

Outside these elements, there were discussions regarding others that were finally left aside. One of the most important disagreements was about the dancing styles. The decision to not consider this element was based on the understanding that today there are styles which are not danced anymore (such as "canyengue"), while those that are still practised ("ballroom", "milonguero", and several neighbourhood styles) tend to be more homogeneous and therefore it was going to be very difficult to establish marked differences. There were long discussions regarding styles and their tendency to disappear after tango academies appeared. Older and more experienced spokespersons talked about their beginnings in dancing as something related to the home or of everyday life (they learned from dancing with their sisters or looking at their older brothers in local club dances). This non-systematised beginning was what defined differences in dancing styles among different neighbourhoods. As a counterpart, they mocked the exaggeratedly technical components that they observed in current academies, which diluted the said differences. One of the spokespersons exemplified: "*And this seminar was called 'Concave and convex forms in tango figures'. What is that? You have to go there with a dictionary!*" (Meeting with spokespersons, fieldwork notes)¹⁶¹.

Dressing codes were also discussed, but they varied from milonga to milonga and did not seem to influence in its development, that is why it was dismissed. Something similar occurred while discussing the exhibitions of professional dancers, quite frequent in milongas, but that are not part of the unity of these spaces with their regular visitors.

3.3 Field work: registration modes and instruments

The selected elements (spatial sectioning, dancing floor social codes and community) were elaborated as result of the attendance of spokespersons to the selected milongas. There, supported by the coordinators, they carried out observation registries and interviews with the organisers, DJs and frequent attendants; they also filmed and took photographs. At that moment, several problems emerged due to the difficulty that the majority of them did not know how to use data recollection instruments (photo cameras, film cameras and recorders). In order to help the spokespersons, the agreed solution was that coordinators would accompany them during their visits to milongas as technical support. This unexpected variation of the original plan developed into a positive output, as very interesting mixed registers were set in a dialogue

¹⁶¹ Despite the discussions about them "killing" diversity in tango, academies have existed since the early beginnings of tango dancing (Pujol, 1999).

between the novice and the expert view, which allowed opening concepts or situations naturalised by spokespersons.

It is worth mentioning that not all the elements presented the same difficulty for its register. For example, the space sectioning recollection was mainly descriptive, for which it did not cause major trouble for its registration. Something very different happened with dance floor codes, as they had to deal with implicit and naturalised knowledge, it was very difficult for the spokespersons to register them. Because of that, it was necessary to work permanently together with the coordinators to obtain a more analytical and less valorising view. The same happened at the time of performing the interviews. Apart from the interview guides developed in the meetings, in many cases the spokespersons tended to induce answers: "So, tell me, would you say this is the best milonga in Buenos Aires?" They also tended to register only the best dancers on the floor and those whose behaviour was appropriate according to what was positively valued by them, forcing the results and avoiding observing situations that showed other codes or the lack of them. For example, despite the importance granted in meetings to nodding as a fundamental element within the dance floor codes, at the moment of observing milongas, this element was absent, or evasive, and difficult to register due to its cohabitation with other forms of dancing invitation.

Also, and despite the efforts to capture it, spokespersons agreed that the final work could not fully get the milonga "spirit", which was described as a proper failure of the inventory as an instrument:

For me, there was structurally an initial problem, which is that the enumeration we did was taken for granted at the first or second meeting, but we did not know that it was going to be so structured and rigid (...) It is fine that they are like tango prototypes but for a final work of this kind, it then happens that everything learnt is very superficial. Do you understand? It is fine as picturesque. It is as if I take a photograph. Then, I see the clothes, see the things... but after... if instead of the photography there was somebody observing, it is not the same. Because there is something dynamic, deep that moves there, and that was definitely not respected in the book, because it is... as the book was exactly... an inventory, which is what it was meant to be (laughter) (Graciela López, spokesperson, personal interview with the author, 11/10/15).

The most difficult thing really, and that could not be expressed, for me, in the work, has to do with the things that are "lived". You can write with words and a

beautiful syntax and semantics about what a milonga can be, a picture can be taken when you say, "Can you see? There it is, that is tango", but it is not before you live it that you know what tango is. You may have an idea, but a felt idea? No! And tango is to be felt. And there was the issue to explain it in the film, isn't it true? To be conscious, to say why there we see a connection, what is it that... they are subtle things (Julio Bassán, spokesperson, personal interview with the author, 01/06/16).

4. Conclusion: strengths and weaknesses of a community based inventory

The matters explained until here establish the first local experience of community participation in an inventory. Led by two UNESCO coordinators, stakeholders were who decided which milongas would be treated, what elements to register and the community implied. After describing this process, opportunities and limitations of this kind of participatory experience can be enquired, along with how it can be improved in order to empower the community involved to make decisions regarding their heritage.

As said, the work ended in October 2013, and the inventory was finally presented as a book in February 2014. At that moment, the spokespersons general perception was positive and all expressed to be pleased to have participated in the project. Moreover, some of them expressed later that, if it had been possible to continue, the five working months carried out would have worked as a good training for starting a new recollection in a more consistent and complete way.

Being consulted regarding the content of the publication, the spokespersons critics concentrated on two issues, although it was highlighted that in many cases problems were due to lack of time to develop the work in depth. The first of these issues was the rigidity with which elements were defined. They should have deserved a better reflection and development, so when published they were not crystallised:

I don't know how to investigate this, I haven't got the least idea, and I don't know how to investigate. That's your job, but if it is a living phenomenon, you cannot stab a butterfly to see how it flies, because everything is ruined (Graciela López, spokesperson, personal interview with the author, 11/10/15).

This means that the fact of having only considered traditional milongas, when the idea was to show "living heritage", did not allow to show the real diversity that currently exists. At the other end, the fieldwork recovered the central elements of the stereotype which, as previously

mentioned, does not always represent the reality of many current milongas, where codes recollected do not exist or are diluted. Notwithstanding, as also acknowledged by the spokespersons, for this pilot project a homogeneous panorama was necessary to delimit the universe.

The second question to consider is the one referred to the difficulty to “translate” expectations about how to perform the fieldwork. Concepts postulated from UNESCO (terms such as “inventory”, “element”, “community”) were not clear for spokespersons, which resulted in trial and error exercises in seeking a point of encounter to perform the registrations:

There are things that are very difficult to work with and we do not have a job as anthropologists or sociologists, who probably manage certain codes, certain structure where said search may be more fluid and fast. Likewise, one of the things that I think it was very interesting was that one, I mean that the job was not done by anthropologists, because the anthropologist also has a preconceived structure in which he will try to obtain this or that, which was even present in the discussions in the meetings (Julio Bassán, spokesperson, personal interview with the author, 01/06/16).

This means, if on the one hand the danger was crystallisation, on the other hand the discipline view of how to perform fieldwork recordings and the difficulty to use the technological recollection instruments also influenced in the way of “describing” the milonga, in a continuous back and forth over what each party understood that had to expose in the inventory.

However, the latter problem was also referenced as a positive aspect. The spokespersons highlighted the ethnographical-type job in order to achieve a “defamiliarization” that allowed them to denaturalise their daily routine as organisers and attendees of milongas. Moreover, meetings allowed a space for reflection about their own practices, which was also valued by the informants. For example, the group discussion methodology to elaborate ideas was reproduced the following year in the AOM annual meeting¹⁶².

Another point to underline is the requirement of the spokespersons that the work performed had to go beyond a simple publication, being in fact useful for the promotion and safeguarding

¹⁶² López commented on the utility of this methodology for her job: “... there were different topics and each one had to take one with a group, then we discussed in groups of five or six. It was very interesting what each one was contributing with, saying, whatever... If you had told me two years ago, which is the difference between a practice venue and a milonga, I would have said anything. But now I have a concept thanks to that.” (Graciela López, spokesperson, personal interview with the author, 11/10/15).

of milongas. In this line, the participation of state officers as observers allowed, once the UNESCO project was over, the agreement on some public policies together with the community. This is how, since 2014 and under the sponsorship of the *Dirección General de Patrimonio e Instituto Histórico* (General Department of Heritage and Historical Institute - Buenos Aires City Government), "The Milongas Week" is organised in the city of Buenos Aires, to which an annually updated milongas map is added.

Having in consideration the foresaid, it can be said by the pilot experience of making an inventory with community participation turned out to be positive. In terms of exchange, because it allowed reflecting about a specific element – the milonga – from the spokespersons' point of view and experience, who were empowered at the time of discussing, recollecting and defining elements that had to be registered and safeguarded. Nevertheless, a lesson for future projects would be that the meetings with academic and technical assistants have to respect a longer time to adapt to each other and to translate needs and expectations.

In terms of public policy, it turned out to be an essential exercise in order to perform any action or create legislation around promotion and protection of this "live heritage". Despite all its problems, this experience shows that opening the field to the communities permits a real participation in taking decisions, promoting a flow from the bottom to the top in heritage appropriation and management. In the case of milongas, as mentioned by all spokespersons in the last meeting, it is a work that has just started.

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