

## Can the Living History professionalization lead to a dilution of the territories singling out?

### La professionnalisation de l'Animation Historique Vivante du Patrimoine peut-elle entraîner une dilution de la singularisation des territoires ?

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#### **Summary :**

Stories and local singularities carrier, heritage through its mediation is constitutive of the territorial identity. However, economic issues related to these activities are very important and it is therefore increasingly rely on professionals. By analyzing the range of living history companies we will show that this professionalization entails a kind of standardization and dilution of local specificities.

#### **Résumé :**

Porteur d'histoires et de singularités locales, le patrimoine à travers sa médiation est constitutif de l'identité territoriale. Cependant, les enjeux économiques liés à ces animations sont très importants et on fait donc de plus en plus souvent appel à des professionnels. En analysant le rayon d'action des troupes d'animation nous allons démontrer que cette professionnalisation entraîne une sorte de standardisation et de dilution des spécificités locales.

**Key words :** territorial intelligence, heritage, living history, identity.

**Mot-clef :** intelligence territoriale, patrimoine, Ahvp, identité.

## Can the Living History professionalization lead to a dilution of the territories singling out?

### 1. In territories singling out through the heritage

#### *1.1. Heritage a metonym of the territory*

Competition between territories has become fierce and this competition created by the decentralization policy and the globalization compels cities and territories to seek ways to distinguish

themselves. As pointed out by P. Dumas: « regions, municipalities fiercely defend their competitive advantages to attract industry and tourists. » (Dumas, 2006) In this process of singling out, heritage plays a vital competitive role. Just look at the logos of local authorities or hoardings that line the highways to find that they are often the symbol or icon of a territory. (Bertacchini, Venturini, 2004) We can therefore argue that a territory is distinguished largely by its heritage, its expression or its presentation. Commonly chosen as an emblem, heritage is a material representation of the territory. As noted by Landel and Senil "It becomes a metonym of the territory" (Landel, Senil, 2009)

### ***1.2. Heritage is constitutive of the territorial identity.***

Carrier of stories and local singularities, collective references appropriation factor, knowledge of the past, heritage is thus constitutive of the territorial identity. Indeed, the construction of representations that define territories is inseparable from the construction of identities. As quoted by Guy Di Meo, "the territory base, supported by a network of places and geographical features formed by visible heritage elements, reinforces the identity image of any community. It draws a scene and provides a discursive context of justification." (Di Meo, 2007) Giving cohesion to the territory, it defines it by his mere presence and thus distinguishes it from surrounding areas who do not have or do not practice it. It is therefore in this sense a way of singling out and distinction.

## **2. The Ahvp, a singling out factor**

### ***2.1. A resource in this quest for distinction***

Consequently, heritage mediation through the historical local performances, or Living History, appears as a resource in this quest for originality and then also for development. The Living History allows the combination of factors rooted in the territory, its heroes are local, its material support is local, ... By revealing territories elements with specific qualities, this practice becomes a singling out factor and contributes to a necessary differentiation of territories in the struggle for visibility. In telling the territory heritage, it reinforces the features that can be distinguished from each other, the other territory, the other community.

The Living History is thus a factory of local identity and is then a legitimate or even an effective way to provide to living places a specific territorial identity. By defining, giving them cognitive frame, and being supported and carried by the population, these events may appear as resources in a redefinition of identity « by local social practices ». (AM Thiesse, 1999) These social practices realized around an "icon heritage" reinforce community identity and build cohesion forms of identity.

### ***2.2. Professionalization***

However, some of these performances have become true "war machines" in the service of economic development, tourism development, the image politics. The economic stakes are substantial. The success of the Puy du Fou for example is giving ideas to many mayors, and it is understandable that local authorities want a high-quality product with professional criteria.

Moreover, according to several observers, like Claude Origet du Cluzeau, and Patrick VICERIAT in studies made by the AFIT (French Agency for Tourist Engineering), we can see that the cultural customer is increasingly demanding. It is undeniable that there is a real general awareness of the need to professionalize mediation and the development of heritage tourism.

It is therefore increasingly rely on professionals. This professionalization, legitimate and necessary, is not without adverse effects and carries a deadly element for the development of local territories identity.

## **3. Analysis of companies ranging**

### ***3.1. The protocol used***

Indeed, it seemed to us that the use of foreign companies in these performances was a desingularisation factor of these events. We wanted to make us mindful of the phenomenon study these companies and their performance spots. By studying the places where these companies perform

and by choosing as an indicator the presence of these same companies in many events taking place in cities far removed from each other, we believe we can wonder what is the transmission of identity they carry. By analyzing the range of these companies, we will show that these performances eventually offer customers services without specific local identity.

We selected a sample of 15 troops, according to several criteria. We chose companies we find a site on the internet. Then we selected those we could identify the place of origin, an indication rarely mentioned. Then we had to find their agenda, when we found it, we chose the 2009 one. Finally, we attempted to observe companies from several areas to see if there were differences or points of convergence.

We then identified 6 distances (D) corresponding to the range of companies: D1: Department of implantation, D2: the administrative region of implantation, D3: in a radius of 200 km, D4: a radius of over 200 km and less than 500 km, D5: over 500 km and D6: when companies perform in an other country.

### 3.2. Results Comment

#### a. Two main profiles

We can see when we study in detail the movements of companies we have selected that at least it exists two major profiles of companies: those with local activity, and those who have a wider range. Some, indeed, operate most of their performances in a relatively small area (see Fig 1), while others have virtually no local activity and make the most of their performances away from their local base (see Fig 2), or even in foreigner contry for five of them (Aux couleurs du moyen âge, (C in our graphs and tables), Les derniers trouvères, (D), La cour pontificale d'Avignon (J), Waraok (M) and Carla Musa, (N).



Fig. 1: Companies with a range rather local. (Author Sophie Lacour)

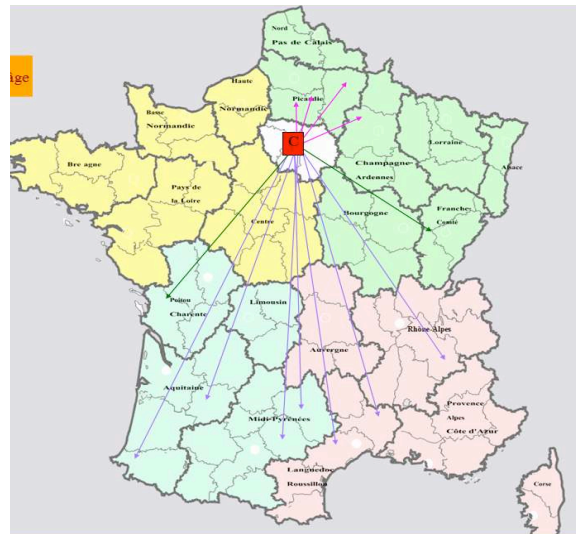
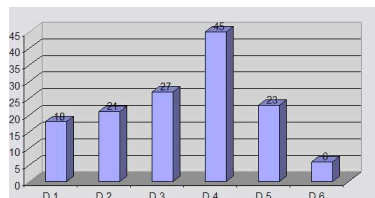


Fig 2: Company with a wide range. (Author Sophie Lacour)

b. D1 and D6 indicators

However, the first of the surprises that we see in reading the results, is that the percentage of performances in the department of origin (D1) is after the one of foreigner contry (D6 = 4.28%) the lower of our indicators. Indeed, with a total of 140 performances identified for the 15 selected companies, only 18 were made in the department of origin, that is to say 12.85% of the total (See below Fig 3).



D1 : dépt.                      D2 : région  
 D3 : <200 km.              D4 : +200 km et -500 km ±  
 D5 : + 500 km                D6 : foreigner countries

Fig 3: Global percentage of companies ranging. (Author Sophie Lacour)

c. D2 indicator

Regarding the D2 indicator (administrative region of implantation), one more time the result is somewhat surprising since the percentage of performances made in the region of origin by companies is only 15%. This is a first indication of the mobility of those companies who do not realize, far away, most of their activities on their territory or nearby.

d. D3 and D4 indicators

But the category that identifies the most performances is (D4) between 200 and 500 kilometres since then, it is no less than 45 events listed, or 32.14% of the total. So, unless one third of the performances taking place on the companies territories of origin (D1 + D2 is: 27.85%), slightly more than half are geographically remote (D3 + D4 is 51.42%) and more than a fifth are very remote (D5 + D6 is 20.70%).

e. There is a real companies mobility

This can be seen therefore, there is a real companies mobility, and facing this mobility, we

can wonder about a possible standardization of supply, since we find at more than 500 km from his place of origin, identical performances. On Fig 4 below, for example, we can notice that two companies, one from Riviera and one from Brittany, are performing on the same event that takes place in a third region.



Fig 4: The range of companies (Author Sophie Lacour)

However, this global profile is not as homogeneous as might seem. Indeed, from a company to an other movements are heterogeneous, we can meet profiles totally different. Thus, if we compares the companies Aux couleurs du Moyen âge (C) and La fol farandole de Montferrand (H), we have two profiles on opposite each other. Indeed, for the first, it does not participate in any demonstration taking place in his own department, either in its own administrative area location and produces half of its services to more than 500 km from its base (D5 = 50%) while the second is realizing no less than 60% of its performances in its department or its settlement area, but only 10% are made over 500 km. This is almost the same for the company La mesnie de la licorne (I), which, as the company Aux couleurs du Moyen âge (C) does not perform any event around the home (D1 and D2), but we can count 11 or 78.57%, produced between 200 and 500 kilometers from its point of origin (D4). However, all give performances far from home, and therefore offer at hundreds of kilometers identical services. Also note that the same company will be able to offer its service 4 or 5 times in the same season in the same department as Carla Musa (N) for example.

To illustrate this constatation we chose to show you more in details ranging for two companies from both ends of our examples. Fig 5 below shows the movements of company C. We can see that 50% of its performances are made more than 500 km away from its base (D5) and, in contrast, it has no activity in D1 (Department of implantation) or in D2 (administrative region of implantation).

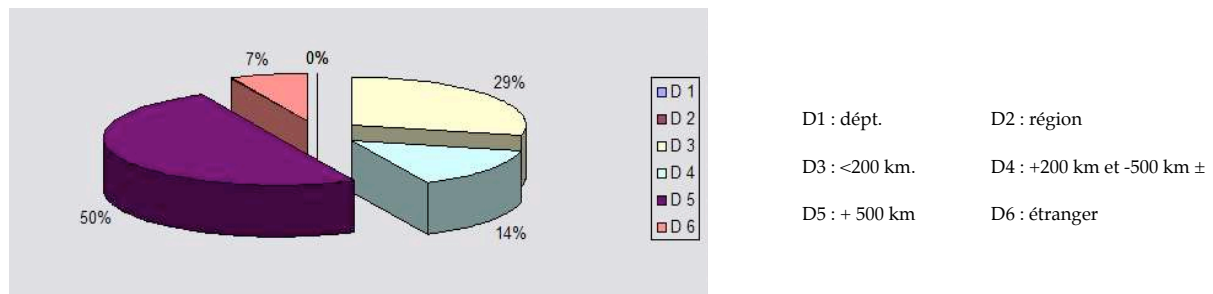


Fig 5 :Ranging of company C. (Author Sophie Lacour)

And below Fig 6, which illustrates company N ranging, we can see that 51% of its performances are realized in its department and area of implantation (D1 and D2), in contrast, it has only one performance in D5 (more than 500 km).

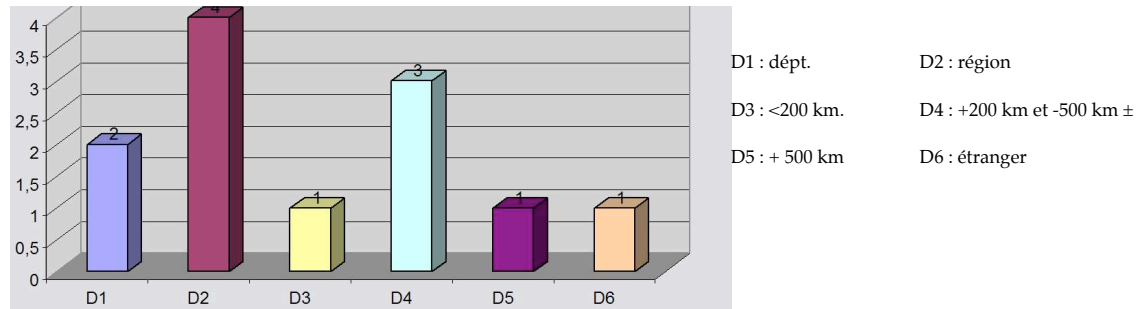


Fig 6 : Company N (Author Sophie Lacour)

In comparison, companies globally realize more prestations within a radius of over 500 km from their location (D5) than within the previous two categories (D1 and D2), since the percentage is 16.42% against 12.85 % (D1) and 15% (D2).

#### 4. Towards a standardization of local identities?

Two major problems emerge from these results:

- Firstly for a season we find the same performances in a small area
- Secondly it does not show local specificities.

##### 4.1. We find the same performances in a small area

"For an event is truly an event, it must be unique and offer an exceptional moment." (Cahier Espaces, 2002) Yet by appealing to professionals who reproduce from historical festivals to animations and « son et lumière », the same performance, there is an effect of performances standardization. Even if some companies propose « prestations adapted for the city or the castle », everything seems to move towards a standard product, where only empty keys are left to put the name of the city, or the family castle one. Organizers seem to copy « what works » elsewhere (Cahier Espaces, 2002). Renaud Carier, however, specifies that each case is unique and it would be risky to try to reproduce what has worked elsewhere. (Carier, 2002) Indeed the main strength of any heritage product is its induplicable exceptional character. Ideally, it should not be able to reproduce it elsewhere. These professionals create timeless historical periods, they make a "story ready to wear" and convey thus historical standards and consensus. This practice is drowning every single history in a "deja vu" that is not original and could eventually produce a meaningless history, a sort of "Disney main street" where all Middle Ages look the same. All these performances offer to spectators similar prestations to a few miles away and we have seen, nothing distinguishes them from one another, either in terms of frame, nor in terms of content.

##### 4.2. This does not show local specificities.

But any action around Heritage is an action by hypothese "no de-localized" in the words of Claude Origet du Cluzeau. (Origet du Cluzeau, 1998) It's a unique offering, unduplicable. This notion of unduplicability, its intrinsic originality makes heritage a subject deeply rooted in the territory in every sense of the term and the events that occurred on this medium should be very local, specific. Yet this notion of unduplicability no de-localized found in this nomadic companies limitations. Indeed, if all pasts are similar, then local identities are no longer distinguishable.

We have seen that the animations are the same, without local characteristics on several hundred

kilometers. Without further examination, it is evident that this phenomenon is producing a middle age without age (which runs on nearly 1000 years) and also without language (oc or oil, or even from other countries such as Spain or Portugal) without local particularities related to everyday practices, materials or techniques (agricultural for example).

We are here faced with a paradox: an expression that is supposed to be an emanation of identity is expressed not so largely on the location of its identity. Meanwhile, from an animation created on the territory and for the territory, based on the history and people of the territory, we are now faced with professional entertainment, a performance imported directly on the site, regardless of specificities. Isn't it a transfer and a mutation of the product more for lucrative than cultural purposes? The performance although carrying a local historical significance is reflected by actors who are not local and offering a story that has not any specificity. Are we here by moving from a pattern of territorial integration to a disconnection of the territorial environment? A form of deterritorialization? Let us attend to a manufactory of local history as a standardized product, unified? And thus, to the standardization of local identities?

### ***4.3. The role of ICT***

In this context, territorial intelligence is an instrument in the identification of these relationships. By the use of ICT for example, it's possible to make an identification and a quantification of different actors, their crosses, their geolocation. The collection of these data allows a territorial actor to measure the spatial extent of the problem and control it.

Knowledge of actors in the various performances offered on a territory:

- Gives the possibility to invite the organizers to change their programming,
- Can offer to the different actors a possibility to adapt their services to places and themes

Knowledge of these data allows an awareness of the standardization risk. We have outlined it above, it's the specificity that creates the distinction between the territories and thereby promote their attractiveness. This awareness is part of this necessary differentiation in the struggle of territories for their visibility.

## **5. Conclusion**

The multiplication of prestations by the same companies on the territory regardless of the specific heritage leads to a kind of standardization and dilution of local features.

For the territorial actor thus arises a real question: should we seek professionals to provide quality entertainment for a better position to attract spectators with the risk of losing its identity? or should we employ only local troops, with their specificities? If yes, how and by what criteria? If these companies occur only in a limited number of events can they survive? Is it possible to encourage companies to comply with local particularisms?

It should perhaps be able to answer to all these requirements, to consider training local volunteers to these practices and to improve the networking of professionals and volunteers encouraging them to work in synergy. This might help to cultivate the territorial specificities while having as frame, professional actors to bring own rigor and efficiency needed for any public performance. This article is a first step in trying to understand the phenomenon, to be able to make concrete proposals in the context of a thought and mastered development of local identities through cultural practices. Through this article, we engage ourself in a broader debate aimed at developing Living History on the territories as a factor of local social and economic development.

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