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Cultural Heritage and Associations in France: Reflections on a Ground-Breaking Investigation, Twenty Years On

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Abstract

This interview was carried out to mark the approaching twentieth anniversary of what has become a seminal text within French heritage studies: *Le Patrimoine saisi par les associations* (Heritage in the Hands of Associations). Ahead of its time, this work by the French sociologists Hervé Glevarec and Guy Saez shed light on a number of important yet little-studied dynamics concerning the interactions between the field of heritage and associations in France. Many of the aspects they outlined have become a common part of heritage making and a focus of heritage studies around the world. Somewhat surprisingly, there has been very little intellectual follow-up of Glevarec and Saez' pioneering work. As well as detailing the social context that led to the study and underlining some of the key findings, in the interview Glevarec and Saez point to some significant evolutions in political, intellectual and moral paradigms affecting contemporary cultural heritage production. The interview demonstrates the historical value of ethnographic and sociological studies which, when compared with more recent research, can help chart the extent of transformations of a social field over time..

Key words: cultural heritage-making; heritage associations; heritage houses; minor heritage; France

Introduction

Published in 2002, *Le Patrimoine saisi par les associations* (Heritage in the Hands of Associations) by Hervé Glevarec and Guy Saez (2002) has become a key reference within Francophone heritage studies. Written following a study commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture in the late 1990s, this book reflected a desire by the French government to understand the extraordinary rise in the number of heritage associations in France. Yet in numerous ways Glevarec and Saez's investigations and analysis went far beyond the expectations of the commissioners at the Ministry.

At the time of the study Guy Saez was an established scholar with the French National Centre for Scientific Research (*Centre national de recherche scientifique*, CNRS) with a special focus on cultural policy and public administration, and director of a political science research centre in Grenoble, where he led projects exploring heritage, music, theatre and museums in France. For his part, Hervé Glevarec had just finished a PhD in sociology on the French public radio station *France Culture*. He was recruited as a postdoctoral researcher for this study and later joined the CNRS himself. For over two years, the two worked together to explore the growing phenomenon of increasingly diverse social groups (including rural and working-class groups, and groups in 'the provinces' – that is, far from Paris) which were endeavouring to protect, value, and transmit various cultural goods within the framework of volunteer associations.

Nearly twenty years later, *Heritage in the Hands of Associations* has a confirmed place within Francophone heritage studies, regularly appearing in reading lists and bibliographies within French-speaking heritage scholarship. With exhaustive quantitative and qualitative analyses of the dynamics of heritage associations in three French *départements*,¹ the study helped shed light on a number of important dimensions relating to interactions between the

fields of heritage and the associative sector. These include: the role that the associative sector, or 'civil society', has played in expanding understandings of heritage in France, bearing in mind that before the 1980s, museums, monuments, and archives were the core objects of the highly centralized Ministry of Culture; the opening up of the category of heritage to include popular customs, rituals and artisan know-how, as well as the memories of working class or peasant communities; the reconfiguration of museum institutions and conservation policies; the methodological value following the biographical trajectories of heritage actors; the significance of the dialectical relationship between the local, the national, and beyond; and, finally, the interplay of these dynamics within the construction of the national imaginary.

While many of these aspects have become a common feature in countries around the world, Glevarec and Saez's research predates the international conventions concerned with Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), which recognize the plurality and diversity of heritage and which point to the internationalization of the cultural heritage field.² The 2003 ICH convention of UNESCO came into force in the first decade of the twenty-first century and has profoundly shaken the cultural landscape of France. However, as Glevarec and Saez set out in the interview, some of these dynamics were already apparent at the end of the twentieth century within the heritage associations that they studied. Conversely, they note that the 'economic turn', now so prevalent within the sphere of cultural heritage, was then only emerging within the domain (Hoffman and Fainstein 2013). Since then, as elaborated in more detail below, cultural heritage-making has undergone a significant shift, with international dynamics and economic values permeating this social field.

Le patrimoine saisi par les associations could seem very 'French'. And this interview certainly highlights some of the specificities of heritage-making within a French context, which we outline briefly below for those who are less familiar with this setting, before setting out why this is a useful time to revisit the findings of the research carried out by Glevarec and Saez and to share these with a non-Francophone audience.

As Glevarec and Saez note, the French State has largely played a regalian role with regards to cultural heritage in France. In line with a classic nationalistic perspective, monuments and museums were commandeered to support national identity narratives. When the Ministry of Culture and then the National Heritage Inventory (1964, *Inventaire général des monuments et des richesses artistiques de la France*, and later, *Inventaire général du patrimoine culturel*) were created in the mid-twentieth century under the then French president, Charles De Gaulle and André Malraux, Secretary of Culture at the time, control over heritage was kept in the hands of the government in order to hold together a nation riven by the fallout of the Second World War, decolonialization struggles and the displacement of France on the world stage. In this highly centralized country, where national identity was based on ideas of homogeneity and equality, there was little room for the recognition of regional contestation, alternative discourses, and internal diversity claims at State level. Yet, by the close of the twentieth century, changes to laws governing associations opened up some form of counter-spaces within the field of heritage and culture, while also creating new opportunities in relation to charitable and political activity, and sports and leisure pursuits (Desfrane 2004; Cottin-Marx 2019).

Progressively, associations became an alternative site where forms of cultural heritage not included in the official lists could be promoted and protected. Regional-based learned societies, folk groups and associations defending regional languages joined forces with different experts to transform their familiar and local heritage (sometimes coined as 'ordinary', 'little', 'minor', or 'rural', in opposition to the 'national' heritage of institutions such as the Palace of Versailles or the Louvre museum), investing them with symbolic value in terms of identity in the process.

This trend emerged slowly, sometimes leading to contestation and conflict with local and national stakeholders. Nevertheless, by the end of the twentieth century, these dynamics were well advanced and Glevarec and Saez convincingly painted a picture of a heritage 'social field' in France which was shared both by State agencies and local-based voluntary groups. In this way, associations contributed to the enlarging of the French definition of cultural heritage, sometimes in collaboration with national policy makers, sometimes in contradiction to legal frameworks governing cultural production in France.

For a long time, the term heritage in English was deployed more widely than the French word *patrimoine*. However, in recent years there has been some convergence between the two, as can be seen in the increasing diversity of forms of *patrimoine* being defined and defended by a range of actors. The exploration of the way *patrimoine* was being operationalized by associations in Glevarec and Saez's book provides an excellent example of the cultural, social and symbolic shift occurring in France at the end of the twentieth century, from a nation understood and symbolized by a sole and unique cultural heritage to that of a France increasingly seen as made up of various ethnic populations, a multiplicity of narratives of the past, and a diversity of emblems of local identities.

Unlike the seminal work of Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Realms of Memory) (1984), Glevarec and Saez did not approach this as an intellectual and erudite project, carried out from above. Instead they chose to explore these questions *from below*: asking how, who and why local people were acting to preserve and transmit what they considered to be their own culture and heritage. This is why, in addition to underscoring the ground-breaking nature of this study within the field of heritage studies, it is worth highlighting the political approach of Glevarec and Saez.

Both authors have long defended the status of non-official cultural heritage actors and have challenged the ontological status of official heritage actors in ways, we argue, that resonate strongly with the focus and concerns of critical heritage studies today. We think here of the values and approaches set out in the manifesto of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies in 2012;³ the work of Laurajane Smith (2006) on the contested hegemony of the authorized heritage discourse; some of the hypotheses worked up by Rodney Harrison and his team (Harrison *et al.* 2020) concerning the future of heritage and future as heritage; the comparative views of Tim Winter (2014) on Asiatic and Western conceptions of heritage and analysing local approaches of heritage; and the work of Sharon Macdonald looking at rural, local and sometimes difficult heritage and memory claims in Europe (2003, 2013). We can also add to this list the research led by the anthropologist Daniel Fabre and his colleagues (Fabre 2000; Fabre and Luso 2010) looking at the social life of national monuments in Europe; the increasing number of local museums created in Italy (Bravo 2001); and research exploring the explosion of industrial and rural heritage as new and powerful trends in the heritage economy (Rautenberg 2012).

In short, this interview is not just the opportunity to evaluate changes that have occurred in the heritage and associative fields since 2000. It is also the occasion to reconsider a text that remains highly pertinent when attempting to analyse and compare uneasy relations within and between heritage associations in and across different national contexts; to learn from Glevarec and Saez's painstaking research and analysis; to treat seriously their insistence of the need to study heritage actors on their own terms; and to consider those areas of research which Glevarec and Saez identify as meriting further investigation. The discussion took place in April of 2018, at Guy Saez's house in Grenoble, with Hervé Glevarec attending via a Skype call, after sharing a convivial lunch of regional specialities; no doubt a nod to the sociologist's appreciation of local cultures.

Cyril Isnart: Could you begin by telling us how this study fit in with your academic interests and trajectories at the time?

Hervé Glevarec: Back then I was a young researcher, having freshly completed my PhD in sociology. I had just finished my thesis on the French national radio station, *France Culture*. Our collaboration was brought about by the Ministry of Culture, or more precisely, by Dominique Jamet,⁴ who put the two of us in contact because she wanted to bring together an early career researcher with someone more experienced to gauge the extent of the field of heritage associations. They were looking for numbers; they wanted to know how many associations had been created, with the view to draw up an inventory. And they also wanted fieldwork.

Guy Saez: As for me, I was director of a research centre, the CERAT [Research Centre for Politics, Policy and Territory] at the Institute for Political Studies in Grenoble, where I was

carrying out studies on cultural policies, financed mainly by the research and development department of the Ministry of Culture. The Minister considered our study necessary because, following the publication in 1997 of the report on the cultural practices of the French [*Pratiques culturelles des Français*],⁵ he had been trying to give more consideration to amateur practices that had been a somewhat-forgotten component of cultural policies.

Briefly put, the need for this study emerged during a particular moment of reflection about cultural policies, and the 'discovery' of amateurs. Nevertheless, the majority of research dealt with the cultural offer and professionals. In this sense, sociologists have a guilty conscience when it comes to amateurs; they tend not to see them. It's not that they are blind, but they work with the means that they are given and, in general, they are given means to study 'audiences' and not 'amateurs'.

Cl: Did the appearance of this new object of study – heritage amateurs, heritage associations – influence your thinking about the sociology of cultural policies?

GS: I had already worked on cultural associations to the extent that, in France, the cultural policy field has been historically and structurally linked with associations. This is also the case in legal terms, given that a large number of cultural institutions have the status of an association. Artistic and cultural initiatives often begin as associations, and then undergo a process of institutionalization. Even if associations end up disappearing, evolving or transforming into something else, associations continue to be a structural element of cultural policies. In fact, I had already written a monograph on associations created in Grenoble between 1944 and 1988 and I had been struck by the extraordinary growth during the 1970s and 80s, which constitutes a fascinating sociological enigma.

Claire Bullen: Would you say that heritage associations have followed a similar evolution?

GS: The evolution in the number of heritage associations was in step with the more general growth of associations. We can say that the associative sector underwent a cultural turn at this period. Previously, the largest share of associations came from the field of sports, whereas, from the 1980s, there was a shift and now cultural associations dominate.

HG: I'd add that, for the institutional commissioners, our study is still considered a bit extravagant. I don't have the impression that there has been any request for more expertise to bring the data up-to-date. Indeed, one of our findings was the fact that there was a separation between the appropriation of heritage by the associative sector and central government, the regional bodies responsible for culture [the *DRACs*⁶] and the national inventory of heritage. However, while the Ministry gave us a free rein to carry out the research, there were lots of questions about these associations that were emerging, and which were starting to make claims and potentially also criticisms.

It was a time when, apart from the study on the cultural practices of the French, there was still very little information and few studies concerning the associative sector in France. When we wanted to survey the associations, we had to send out hundreds of letters to the *communes*, which was a Herculean task. And we only had very approximative data with regards to amateur practices specifically directed at heritage. So we were missing information on two counts: quantitative data concerning the field of associations and the practices of heritage amateurs, and data coming from the individuals themselves.

GS: I agree with what Hervé said about these two dimensions. On the one hand – and it's interesting to raise this as it gives an idea of the way in which research is produced by the French administration – the request initially came from the Directorate of Heritage and Architecture [DAPA]. It wasn't only the Research Department that was interested in this question. The enquiry came from the head of the Ministry, which was concerned to see the mushrooming of requests [for objects to be classified] that they were not aware of and which they did not control, accompanied by a whole range of intermediaries, including elected representatives and architects. People in the department were telling the minister '*we're not really sure what was going on. It's a bit frustrating trying to do our job as there are a multitude of requests from all over the place*'. Based on this initial concern, the Ministry's research

department, the *Département des Études Prospectives et Statistiques [DEPS]*, which serves as an intermediary between the Ministry and researchers, reformulated the question and gave us complete freedom when it came to the work.⁷

On the other hand, it is clear that there were no appropriate tools for collecting statistics, and this remains the case. The reality of the dynamics of associations remains understudied; sociologists have not really taken a hold of this field, and we are left with understandings that are less than optimal, when it comes to statistics, sociability and the relationship with the State.

CI: *There is a question concerning the control of the Ministry, when it comes to associations. In the history of French ethnology, we are familiar with the Benzaïd report,⁸ which explicitly recommended greater oversight and a framework to better manage 'uncontrolled' and 'amateur' ethnology in France. Your study comes twenty years later. Was that study a precursor, the first sign of a loss of control in the cultural realm, or were there other studies or reports that pointed in this direction?*

GS: That report was a bit counter-intuitive, as French ethnology owes a considerable amount to people such as Paul Rivet,⁹ Georges-Henri Rivi  re,¹⁰ and Paul-Henri Chombart de Lauwe,¹¹ who promoted amateur ethnography through their 'participatory' studies of places. When the Benza  d report came out, there was a desire to institutionalize the profession of ethnology and the place of ethnology within the Ministry. Incidentally, at the start of the 1970s, the influence of the historian Michel de Certeau had had quite an impact when it came to the re-evaluation of 'everyday culture'.¹² But this stayed an intellectual influence that didn't get transformed into policy.

HG: As a young researcher, I was pretty open when it came to the field. Concerning the intellectual context, it's true that the encounter between Guy, a very open-minded researcher, and myself, was very productive. I wasn't trained as a critical Bourdieusian, even though at times I do draw upon this, and critical theory can potentially be applied to associations. I remember having read some articles at the time that were very critical about a nostalgic appropriation, or 'invention', of the past by associations and amateurs. We tried to develop a comprehensive approach in our book. We tried to make sense of what this heritage appropriation might mean, something which of course can be considered as tainted with a form of backwardness, or as having a somewhat twisted relationship with academic knowledge. Trying to make sense without any prior critical suppositions and in a well-grounded way is one of the best lessons I learnt from this fieldwork. Since the study, I see heritage and the world of associations in a much more nuanced and rounded way.

GS: At an intellectual level, the study had two principal guides. There was the ethno-methodologic, constructivist aspect and the aspect concerned with an analysis of public policies. Going beyond critical sociology, the challenge was to articulate the two approaches so that they could show what was at play in terms of sociability, the extension of the field of heritage and cultural practices. It was a matter of avoiding falling into an essentialization of the origins of sociality, instead understanding behaviour as examples of positions taken by amateurs of 'residual' cultural policies, given that their action was aimed at minor local heritage. We brought together these two issues, and this is what gave the dynamism to the study.

HG: For me, this study reveals something that often remains hidden in relation to the connection with heritage. I remember a discussion with Guy where we talked about the perspectives of intellectuals and their heritage appropriations. Referring to people who live in major cities, notably Parisians, he said: 'Yes, but they don't need to join an association to defend ordinary/minor heritage,¹³ they live within heritage sites'. And I think that this idea of 'they live there', this '*in Paris, we live amongst classified historic monuments, so we don't see them*', is very accurate, and stayed with me. To put it more broadly, our research on heritage associations was a way of making visible something which was implicit and which seems to remain implicit for the majority of us, which might even be repressed, particularly within sociology, because it is linked to our identity and our link to place, and these are things that sociologists don't really want to see, particularly their own links to their own history and heritage. And by approaching heritage associations, I was able to see such ties through the eyes of the people involved.

CI: In a nutshell, there we have the two major axes of your book: minor heritage and a comprehensive approach towards a phenomenon that is not necessarily visible for elites and for the Ministry.

GS: Not only invisible, but also troubling. When we analyse the field of heritage, we also need to include strategies at the heart of the cultural field. Yet what drives this is a plurality of cultural expressions that forces all those who develop culture, all those who live by it and all those who consume it to take a stance with regards to this plurality. Plurality is disturbing in intellectual, political and economic terms. It is something that is uncomfortable for all those who live within a classic heritage tradition.

CB: Could you give an overview of the principal conclusions of the book?

GS: The first conclusion is that there were no explicit and structured relations between the world of minor heritage and the world of major heritage federations, who are the usual intermediaries for the Ministry. Notwithstanding this division, minor heritage associations are not against prestigious and national heritage; it is just not their problem. What the investment made by heritage associations highlights is the desire for expression, to express a form of sociability, of social interest, of values. There is a demand for a minimum degree of recognition of the forms of expressions shaped by the place where they live, the *commune*, the region. It is also important to understand the investment made by heritage associations as a vector for the social construction of proximity, a form of territorialization.

HG: Another aspect to draw out from this study is that it enabled us to compare. We carried out a questionnaire across three French *départements*, which we chose on the grounds of the richness of their heritage, their administrative structure or the presence of national federations. This questionnaire gave us access to the objects, the objectives and the titles of these associations. In our analysis we saw, for example, the shift from 'Society' to 'Friends of' and finally 'Heritage Association'. There are thus three phases, three moments for these associations, and we could distinguish between valuing [*valuation*] and conservation, because in valuing there is the notion of value. There was also the terminology related to social outreach activities/mediation [*animation*]. We paid a lot of attention to these new words, asking: When did the word heritage appear? When did the historic monument disappear? We wanted to create a topology of associations, taking the evolutions and the differences seriously, not just lumping them together, saying that associations are the same as historic societies a century ago. That is not the case. It is not the same thing and, what's more, the older societies were attempting to evolve.

We also paid attention to forms of appropriation from the ground up. We were able to give a sense of this appropriation by amateurs. What I discovered was that concern with memory was part of the discourse of a generation which described itself as a '*pivotal generation*'. This was why the key word was '*rupture*'. These people identified an historic rupture and it was because of this rupture that there was a need to take responsibility for local heritage.

We went on to explore what this historic rupture meant, but it is a bit ambivalent. There are two dimensions; two '*temporalities*'. A very, very long period of time, with the end of the European industrial society and the shift to a post-industrial society; and a more specific period, that of the 1960s-70s, which relates more to a cultural revolution in values. People of these generations in heritage associations, mainly retired people, but there were also some in their thirties, represented the idea in the public sphere that there was a memory that needed to be conserved. One of the writers who has put this best is Paul Ricœur.¹⁴

There was also the question of a debt. This was not criticized; it was taken seriously. These associations would tell us: '*We have a debt towards our elders, we have identified a rupture and we wouldn't want this rupture to be too brutal*'. The concern of heritage is to maintain a link with an area (*territoire*), to work and to preserve former forms of everyday life, via all those objects, such as the irons, coffee grinders, and sugar tongs. It was as if the everyday was also a sphere where a rupture had been able to take place. A question mark was left hanging about this in the book, but I took this very seriously.

GS: A further contribution of the study was to question the classic definition of heritage as a continuity of traditions, transmitted by people who are inscribed within these cultural traditions. Sometimes the people responsible for the associations were not from the region; they came from elsewhere. And sometimes they came up with requests for peri-urban [*périurbain*] areas;¹⁵ these were traditions to be invented, they are not consubstantial with the area. So there were 'heritage entrepreneurs'. Being a heritage entrepreneur is not, first and foremost, about being inscribed in tradition, but it is about wanting to inscribe the future in a debt [to the past] – which is, in part, imaginary – and within a project of transmission. They think of themselves as agents of transmission, even they don't have the sociological attributes at the start.

But the study also taught us something about the life of associations. Reasons to participate in associations are not the same as those that dominated in society in the 1950s and 60s, when forms of engagements were shaped by the major institutions of social organization: unions, the church, political parties. People used to sign up for life and for a cause that was bigger than them. Now, we see people who have limited engagements, which are unstable and revocable, malleable, and very reactive, with innovative actions that more classic contexts did not permit. This capacity to innovate is a rupture with what was done before. Additionally, if we look a bit more precisely, this calls for a need to reactivate a sociology of aptitude.¹⁶ We see some real inequalities between individuals. There are the people who manage to found the museum that they have always dreamed of, and they become the director; and then there are the others.

And then there is the more complicated question that Hervé has just evoked: is Hobsbawm's major analysis of the invention of tradition applicable to objects that are not the nation?¹⁷ In relation to objects that are not history, but heritage? I am tempted to say yes. Actors invent a version of history, beginning with small material things, which could be a collective oven, traditional agricultural tools, a tool machine, or computers. It's similar to Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities,¹⁸ as these people construct museums, collections that make sense, which are a fundamental asset when it comes to constructing a localized collective good.

CB: What public policy resources did these associations draw upon?

GS: The question of museums is crucial for associations since, if they want to make their activities last, they need to aim at having a public space similar to a museum. The perspective of a museum comes pretty naturally, but many of them refused the word 'museum'! They replaced it with: 'heritage house' [*maison du patrimoine*], evoking family, convivial and memorial values. We had discussed this ambiguity in the relationship between associations and museums, which are seen as being too institutional. In contrast, they invested in education, live transmission; people who would make the objects work, in real time, before a public, in front of children, with the aim of maintaining the historic thread and to bring these objects alive. These objects shouldn't be dead, as they are often thought of in a museum. There was this idea, '*the museum is lifeless*', even though museums have been reinvigorated since the 1980s. But the 'house of heritage' was conceived of as being an active and animated collective space.

CI: It would seem that heritage houses are positioned on the margins of a very open museographic landscape: the ecomuseum model, the latest social museology, or even open-air museums that stage artisanal know-how in front of visitors.

HG: Of course, even though the idea of the ecomuseum was not one that was defended by heritage associations, no doubt because it was already very institutionalized, appropriated by professionals. Undoubtedly, the associations were trying to invent their own form of exhibitions, staging and narrating heritage. And the heritage house was the formula that they had come up with.

CI: How was the study received by the Ministry, and by the national heritage federations that were aware of it?

GS: The Ministry of Culture is a large building and it's important to differentiate between all the different floors and tenants in that building. I think that the research department was surprised by the depth of the study and the fieldwork that Hervé carried out. They promoted the study in a special issue of *Développement Culturel*.¹⁹ Yet we received very few invitations to speak about our work, and none from the Directorate of Architecture and Heritage [DAPA]! Not straight away, in any case. Later I was invited to several meetings by the DAPA who commissioned me to carry out a new study on a heritage topic, the Cities of Art and History (*Villes d'Art et d'Histoire*) label,²⁰ which is proof of the warm reception of the study. But no-one ever invited me to talk about the book. The ethnology department in the Ministry has never contacted me.²¹ I was contacted two or three times by the major federations and asked to present the study. On the other hand, we received a lot of invitations from university departments.

HG: The fact is that outside of this book and three publications requested, strangely enough by cultural historians, I had few echoes from State institutions. This lack of follow-up was perhaps due to the fact that the Department of Research was a bit knocked aback by this study. They had seen the multitude of meanings and the richness of this heritage appropriation by the grassroots, the ambitions of whom, as we had also shown, were modest. They weren't going to shake everything up tomorrow. They weren't going to replace professionals. They had their space, and often they didn't ask for much; just things that were easy to acquire: to have the ear of the mayor, to be able to promote the house of heritage, simply to have some recognition. I hope that we have contributed to the recognition of this field of heritage associations. As Guy said at the beginning, this field is structured into two worlds: large institutions, including historic houses, institutions responsible for archaeological digs, national level youth volunteers associations such as 'Rempart',²² and then this thriving world of associations that are set up without being asked. There are few links between the two, and this little world of associations that we observed over fifteen years ago is not structured by heritage federations.

GS: Returning to the question of the book's reception internationally, I had some invitations from colleagues from Belgium and Quebec. According to a team from the University of Leuven, what was going on in Belgium was the same as what we had studied in France. The same comment was made by the people from Quebec, as groups that are promoting certain aspects of heritage, or that are creating their own heritage, are popping up in little villages and remote corners of the country. But there is a perhaps a difference. We studied this phenomenon before – just before – associations were entering into a new logic, the logic of the economic value of heritage for different areas, something which now dominates everywhere. Today, the wish to consider something as heritage sees social memory being co-opted to serve the logic of economic development. Nevertheless, territorial development of rural areas is not a form of heritage instrumentalization; it's about value-creation. It's different because the values of transmission and memory remain fundamental.

CB: Could you say a few words concerning the benefits of thinking about associations within a national framework?

GS: In France, there is a strong form of schizophrenia in the oscillation between Tocqueville and Hegel. We oscillate continually between a political model shaped by successive mediations: the family, associations, different collective groups right up to the level of the State, which translate and negotiate aspirations and conflicts with a certain flexibility, and the Hegelian concept where the State expresses the nation, and shapes its future without any mediation. Associations offer a good way in to explore political forms, notably the structural incapacity in France to assume an existence within one or other of these paradigms. It is impossible not to be disconcerted by the current situation for associations, which is both very complex and heterogeneous. The remarkable growth in the number of associations could suggest that they have taken the public space in hand, on their own account. Yet, we have seen that the number of associations has grown in parallel with the growth in State grants [for associations]. For a Tocquevillian, this is an absolute contradiction. To explain this, we have to admit that

the State needs associations to do things that it cannot do. A large number of associations only exist because the State supports them, which generates considerable debate within the associative sector about whether those associations that live thanks to funds of the State should be considered part of the associative sector. So, there you have a first taboo, which is the State.

The second taboo is the economy. Yet many associations sign up to the economic world, to the world of work, more or less at the margins of the market, and identify themselves with the social economy. Our study shows that there are two kinds of associations: those that are underpinned by the State, and small associations, those that express something else and who can become veritable local developers, by taking part in the social economy.

HG: Associations also provide food for thought because they are the most common tool used by people to structure their heritage wishes. We haven't encountered groups of actors who were not structured by an association to look after heritage. Is this something that is in the midst of changing, with the Internet and social networks? – Something that was not at all around at the time of the study. The work of Manon Istasse on heritage and Facebook shows well that the Internet does play a role,²³ but will the associative model, which structures the field in France, be supplanted by social networks? More research is needed on this. It would seem that the engagement via Facebook is very individual, whereas what we were seeing was all about collective action, even if, of course, there was a hierarchization between members, volunteers, and active members, and that often an association was carried by three or four people. But there was the group, a name, the premises, an area for conservation. On the Internet it would seem that there is a much more individual appropriation, people take photos, put them on Facebook and make comments about them.

CB: It is interesting to note that the legal framework at an international level that is so central today via UNESCO did not have a major place in your study.

GS: Actually, the associations, who had few resources, did not have the means to engage in international relations. One exception is that the associations from Brittany had links with Ireland. For the others, the challenge of the associations was the construction of the local, no doubt as a response to globalization... But that was not to say that there was not an interest from international institutions for this movement. For example, the promotion of intangible cultural heritage is a response to local actors taking heritage in hand. The 2003 UNESCO Convention came to validate the movements promoting the recognition of local cultures around the world. The term 'recognition' is essential here, in the sense of Charles Taylor²⁴ or Axel Honneth.²⁵ If we went back to the field today, we would see a reconfiguration of a good number of heritage associations around the idea of intangible heritage.

The second fundamental evolution that I see concerns the recognition of cultural rights by French law, which is at the heart of another UNESCO convention concerning cultural diversity.²⁶ Thus, there are two international instruments available to heritage entrepreneurs. It is an unprecedented situation, as a new and fascinating field is opening up.

HG: Guy is raising an important point here, which is about the intellectual and legal tools that existed at the time of the study. At that period, we only really had the word 'heritage', which, at that period, was relatively new. Before that, there were historical societies, not houses of heritage. There had been the year of heritage promoted by the Ministry of Culture.²⁷ So there has always been some play between the discourses of local actors who lay claim to a local history and a local experience, and the international, intellectual and political discourses. Local associations are created by putting their weight on the words of public powers, which illustrates a little the paradoxes of the game.

CI: It might also be interesting to raise discussions about contemporary reconfigurations. Today we see heritage activity that takes place at the transnational level, within diasporic communities, or concerned with one object, with some games of scale that modify the local.

GS: This is a completely new phase, which is the working of migratory dynamics, which can feed debates about transnationalism and questions about Homi Bhabha's 'third spaces'.²⁸

But I also see hierarchies in these models, as there are diasporic jet-setters who are not representative of the majority of immigrants. And there is possibly a transcultural discourse that masks part of the reality.

CB: Today there is a rich field developing around questions of migration and memory, something which did not feature in your study.

HG: If the study were to be re-done, we would have to widen the world of heritage to culture more broadly, to include groups who lay claim to heritages that do not necessarily relate to the places where they live... or indeed, situations of cultural mix, such as Alsace, for example. We didn't have cultural associations, because I think in our survey there were very few. We caught the question of identity by default; in associations who had area-based objectives in Brittany and in Alsace, we knew that they were from the area. But I'm going to jump a bit here; concerning the associative sector, I think that heritage has broadened and individualized. And having just finished a study on the cultural practices of French adults, I am aware of how much food and the relation to history is important for a certain number of people. Relationships with heritage are thus at once both more individual and more uniform. It would be necessary to carry out a study on the relation between the French and heritage, without necessarily the mediation of associations, but looking at the individual relationship with heritage.

GS: Last year, I was invited to a round table as part of the Heritage Days (*Les journées du patrimoine*)²⁹ and I was struck by the discourse of a certain number of people responsible for heritage institutions, who are very concerned about being submerged by heritage tourists. 'We have never seen so many people come and visit our heritage and we have never been as dismayed by their behaviour'; 'they come, we don't know what they see, what they take away, what they understand. On the other hand, we are very aware of the material damage that they do'. From the moment that there is an explosion in heritage practices, there is necessarily a diversity; they undermine the monopoly of the traditional model.

Cl: Your last two interventions remind me that the Anglo-Saxons have a definition of heritage that seems more extensive than we have in French with the word *patrimoine*. We think about cultural heritage, in official terms, from the State, where when the Anglo-Saxons think about heritage, they also see grandmothers' cooking, the culture of people, minor heritages of groups. When I listen to you, I have the impression that we are arriving slowly at this larger understanding of heritage in France today.

HG: What you identify is the bipolarization between historic monuments and heritage, between 'our heritage' and 'the heritage'. The State will say 'heritage' and associations are going to lay claim to 'their heritage'. They are going to play on this dichotomy, or perhaps they will show their will to appropriate what has been dictated from above, by the administration, because it is indeed 'their heritage' that is designated by the Inventory, but it's not what they defended via their voluntary work, by specific objects, with photography; it is outside the group as it is not what the group has constituted. That is what the notion of 'appropriation' allowed us to show in our book: the appropriation of heritage as an administrative practice, at once intellectual, political and State-based. The two categories interact with each other, of course. Heritage associations are the first to defend and to identify with 'the heritage' of the major heritage.

GS: This is the impact of the broadening of heritage categories in France. However, we should be careful: cultural heritage remains a political and administrative category. While it remains a tool of the State to classify monuments, safeguard and regulate spaces, it will always be in tension with what is not included. But the notion is nonetheless mobilized by people of their own accord. This might mean lots of things: the acceptance that yes, there is a continuity between minor and major heritage [*le petit et le grand*], that yes, that can lead to opportunism, as in Great Britain, where the country is visually littered with plaques of the National Trust, and with museums. If we head towards such a landscape in France, it will not be visitors or the members of an association who will finance a museum or who will restore the roof of a château. The intervention of the State remains necessary: we only have to look at the latest measure concerning the French National Lottery to see that.³⁰

Concluding thoughts

This interview is the occasion for Glevarec and Saez to look back on a methodologically complex and, ultimately, ground-breaking research project, and to reflect on its reception over the subsequent twenty years. As they do so, they draw out issues, connections and parallels that resonate strongly with questions that are stimulating both French and English-language research, including the need to be attentive to the role and significance of non-elite actors in heritage-making theory and practices and the pertinence of interdisciplinary research that can go beyond the restricted sphere of cultural heritage policy agents. To date there is still little discussion between Francophone and Anglophone critical heritage scholarship; this article adds to efforts to bridge that gap.

Glevarec and Saez both underscore what they see as one of the methodological contributions of their study, that is, of being able to compare and contrast phenomena across three *départements* in France. At a larger scale, we argue that research such as this, which offers in fine detail a picture of historically-situated conditions affecting heritage making in France, can make a contribution to the theorization of the field beyond French borders. Bringing the work of Glevarec and Saez and other scholars working in France into conversation with those working in other national contexts provides opportunities to pinpoint what is specific about how heritage making has emerged and expanded in the French case, while teasing out other connections, variations, relations and ruptures in relation to heritage-related phenomena that they are working with in other contexts. Such cross-country comparative thinking can help us better identify and understand the convergences, specificities and/or hybrid forms emerging in the increasingly globalized networks that crisscross cultural heritage making at the current time.

With regards to the French context, this interview gives us a detailed view of the conditions that led to this investigation into heritage associations and the subsequent reception of their findings. One aspect that emerges from Glevarec and Saez's account are the ambivalences and tensions between the diverse objectives, missions and challenges of the various players involved in 'public research' in the French heritage field, which includes university departments, the CNRS, the Ministry of Culture and the heritage associations themselves. The contrast between the reception to the study by the cultural administration, where it was largely ignored, and the numerous invitations extended to Glevarec and Saez to present their findings from different university departments and research laboratories, arguably testifies to a certain separation between the Ministry of Culture and the academic world. Such an assertion might appear paradoxical, given the dependency of French heritage scholars on funding from the Ministry of Culture and the number of academics who are recruited as experts to carry out studies for the government. It can perhaps be understood as one more example of the uneasy relations between critical heritage scholars and other actors involved in the production of heritage (see Bullen and Isnart 2020).³¹

This interview also highlights the role that the associative sector in France has played in dynamizing the museum sector. Glevarec and Saez's research depicts the reticence of associative actors to delegate their social memories and artefacts to State or local authority museums, which were largely seen as dusty symbols of institutional power in which objects stultify or wither away. Instead, associations set up heritage houses as spaces where social values could be transmitted via the mediation work of their members. This associative trend has added to broader questioning about what a museum should be and what it should offer to visitors, and has contributed to the emergence of innovative forms of curatorship and museum practices, sometimes described as 'new museology' (Vergo 1989; MacCall and Gray 2013), where visitors, ordinary inhabitants, and local connoisseurs are invited to participate in the governance and animation of cultural institutions, or the range of curatorial practices now present in major museums across the world that come under the umbrella of 'participative' and 'inclusive' policies (Simon 2010).

Finally, as well as revisiting what were at the time pioneering approaches to the study of heritage making, Glevarec and Saez identify new areas for further investigation. They note, for example, that relationships with heritage have arguably become both more individual and more uniform in the last twenty years. This raises questions about whether one day the role

of associations in the production of minor heritage will become less necessary, in France and elsewhere, reminding us of the on-going, never-ending dialectic between the individual and the collective.

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Notes

- ¹ France is divided administratively into four different levels: *communes* or *municipalités* (equivalent to English parishes and wards), *cantons* (equivalent to English districts), *départements* (equivalent to English counties) and *régions* (groups of *départements*). More recently, *communes* cooperate within larger administrative structures, known as *intercommunalités*, *communautés de communes* or *métropoles* which are situated somewhere between *régions* and *départements*.
- ² UNESCO, 'The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage', 2003. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>, accessed 15 May 2020.
- ³ Association of Critical Heritage Studies, '2012 Manifesto', 2012. <https://www.criticalheritagestudies.org/history>, accessed 15 May 2020.
- ⁴ A civil servant who was with the Ministry of Culture from the mid-twentieth century until 2011, Dominique Jamet is a historian specializing in cultural policies and the history of cultural administration in France.
- ⁵ This influential study sought to explore diverse forms of participation in a common shared 'cultural life' in France defined primarily with respect to the arts (reading, listening to music, amateur arts involvement, etc.) that State policy at the time was committed to encouraging and understanding better through studies such as this one, rather than the cultural practices associated with a particular group. <http://www.pratiquesculturelles.culture.gouv.fr/>. Accessed, 15 May 2020.
- ⁶ These regional offices of cultural goods and institutions were created in the late 1970s, gaining more power during the 1980s, during the time of the so-called *décentralisation*, a process leading to the distribution of some of the functions of the State to *régions*, the largest level of political administration in France. The offices took the name of *Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles*, the Regional Direction of Cultural Affairs.
- ⁷ The DEPS (the Department of Prospective Analysis and Statistical Research) was set up over 50 years ago in order to gather information about the cultural behaviour of the French and to have better understanding of the actors and sectors that make up the cultural field.
- ⁸ The 'Benzaïd report' (Benzaïd 1980) was an attempt by the government and French scholars to assess the impact of ethnological research carried out by amateurs and their involvement in associations, museums and research publications. According to Benzaïd, these needed to be brought under the control of the central administration to avoid undermining the discipline. A significant outcome of the report was the creation of the Ethnological Heritage Service (*Mission du patrimoine ethnologique*) within the Ministry of Culture. The *Mission* launched a series of calls for research that were taken up by researchers working in university departments of ethnology and anthropology, until the creation of another body dedicated to intangible cultural heritage in the 2000s.
- ⁹ Paul Rivet (1876-1958) was a French ethnologist who founded the Museum of Man (*Musée de l'Homme*) in Paris in 1937 after a long period of research in South America.
- ¹⁰ Georges-Henri Rivière (1897-1985) worked alongside Paul Rivet (see previous endnote) in what was then the *Musée du Trocadéro*, before it was transformed into the *Musée de l'Homme*. There, he was responsible for ambitious overseas research projects (West

Africa, Easter Island) before founding the *Musée national des arts et traditions populaires* in Paris in 1937, a museum dedicated to popular arts and traditions.

- ¹¹ Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe (1913-1998) was an influential French urban sociologist who worked in Cameroon before specializing in the study of the social history of Paris post World-War 2.
- ¹² de Certeau 1984.
- ¹³ As noted in the introduction, the study by Glevarec and Saez demonstrates the coexistence of two kinds of heritage items and conceptions in France: on the one hand, the national, collective, and historical monuments, which intend to symbolically represent the nation as a whole and comprise a group inscribed in the medieval (Notre-Dame de Paris, Mont-Saint-Michel) or royal (Palace of Versailles, the Louvre) and national-level history, narrated and illustrated in school textbooks; on the other, nineteenth century factory ruins, domestic cooking or washing instruments, modest chapels set on hills next to remote villages, or traditional festivals and vernacular architecture that form a more intimate, small-scale, local and community-based heritage, long ignored from the national cultural heritage policy framework.
- ¹⁴ Ricœur 2004.
- ¹⁵ *Periurban* comes from a French term to describe areas between the city and the countryside where the rural character has been shaped by urban expansion.
- ¹⁶ That is, focusing on individual social capacity as well as social structures.
- ¹⁷ Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.
- ¹⁸ Anderson 1983.
- ¹⁹ A journal published by the DEPS (see note 5) at the French Ministry of Culture.
- ²⁰ The French Ministry of Culture created this label as a means of preserving and promoting middle-size cities' heritage.
- ²¹ See note 6.
- ²² Rempart is a French association based in Paris but with local branches that uses the renovation of historic buildings to achieve social, economic and environmental outcomes in France and abroad. See <https://www.rempart.com>, accessed 25 August 2020.
- ²³ Istasse 2017.
- ²⁴ Taylor 1994.
- ²⁵ Honneth 1996.
- ²⁶ UNESCO, 'The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions', 2005. <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/convention>, accessed 15 May 2020.
- ²⁷ In 1979, French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing decided to dedicate the year 1980 to national heritage, following the organization of Women's Year in 1978 and the Year of the Child in 1979.
- ²⁸ Bhabha 1994.
- ²⁹ Now a European-wide annual programme known as the European Heritage Day, involving opportunities to visit buildings and sites not usually open to the public, this initiative began in France in 1984, sponsored by the Ministry of Culture.

- ³⁰ In 2017, the French President Emmanuel Macron charged Stephan Bern, a television presenter passionate about heritage and history, to come up with ideas to save heritage that was at risk and find innovative financial solutions to do this. Drawing on models in other countries, notably Great Britain, Bern proposed the first heritage lottery in French history, which was launched in 2019. While popular with the public, French heritage professionals and historians continue to remain sceptical about this approach and to contest Bern's legitimacy.
- ³¹ A social category understood here as made up both of State actors and those occupying a more marginal position within the cultural heritage field.

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