BREAD AND HOME:
GLOBAL CULTURAL POLITICS IN THE TANGIBLE PLACES OF
INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

(BULGARIA, CUBA, BRAZIL)

Nadezhda Dimitrova Savova

A DISSERTATION
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE
BY THE DEPARTMENT OF
ANTHROPOLOGY

Advisors:
Lawrence Rosen
Carolyn Rouse

January 2013
©Copyright by Nadezhda Dimitrova Savova, 2013. All rights reserved.
ABSTRACT

The dissertation “Bread and Home: Global Cultural Politics in the Tangible Places of Intangible Heritage (Bulgaria, Cuba, Brazil)” examines the local meanings and impact of a cultural policy model, understood ethnographically and defined conceptually as the “community culture model”. This type of national policy focuses on developing community cultural centers, often called “houses of culture”, imagined as spaces that would inspire people of all ages to develop their artistic creativity and/or preserve local traditions.

The dissertation traces how this concept and policy strategy traveled from Bulgaria (where the centers are called chitalishte) and the Soviet Union (dom kulturyi) to Cuba (casas de la cultura) during the communist period, and then in the 1990s from Cuba to Brazil. The Cuban version of the Bulgarian/Soviet model inspired the Brazilian cultural policies of Gilberto Gil leading him to develop similar cultural spaces (pontos de cultura), particularly in low-income areas, in an attempt to improve the local quality of life. While the “houses of culture” model has been widely perceived as a form of socialist propaganda aimed at the masses, the research reveals that it has much earlier origins dating back to the 1850s when a network of grassroots organizations (chitalishte) started evolving in Bulgaria. These centers now number some 3500, reaching all across the country, thus making them the oldest non-governmental organization in Europe as recognized by the Council for Europe. Current ethnographic analysis is, therefore, fascinating for it shows how and why the network is still so meaningful and has persisted notwithstanding the political, economic, social, and cultural turmoil of the past century.
One of the reasons why these cultural centers are so interesting is because they occupy space betwixt and between the professional, high arts and community social work, between the state (with its interest in national uniformity) and the local (with its potential for disturbing centralized control of the symbols and metaphors of cultural identity). Studying these centers in their local details allows us to see the negotiation of values over continuity and change, heritage and modernity, consumerism and activism, power and agency, personhood and society.

Because the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture linked these cultural centers’ activities to UNESCO’s Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity, the dissertation also traces how these international standards were developed by each country. Through such an analysis we can see the discrepancies among the interpretations of UNESCO’s discourses at both the policy and communal levels. While UNESCO did not address “where” intangible cultural heritage might be locally situated and transmitted, the links between the Convention’s goals and the community cultural centers were similarly perceived in the three countries by both the Ministries and the people. Intriguingly, however, in the three cases people’s views on cultural heritage and community arts diverged from the national understanding, particularly on the contested issue of food. Sharing food, especially bread as a key symbol in the Bulgarian case, was not officially recognized by UNESCO as intangible heritage – not until one baker’s persistent struggle for recognition narrated in the dissertation - or by the state as an activity befitting a “cultural center,” even though food was perceived by the local people as central to their transmission of tradition. Ultimately, people’s struggles to develop kitchen spaces within the cultural centers enacted creative forms of resistance to the
political narratives and a tactic for appropriating public space made private. It is these shared experiences and reactions that point to the particular liminal space of the community cultural centers as friction zones between the global and the culturally specific. Thus, for all their local and evolving qualities, the centers proved to be defined by a few key common characteristics, symbols, and metaphors that make tangible the shared dynamics of these transnational networks.

The very choice of where to “break bread” thus allows us the opportunity to assess social and cultural patterns as they are evolving within and across each of the three countries. Ultimately, people’s bargains over global cultural politics were lived in multiple daily acts of resistance, often as symbolic and small yet real and powerful as breaking bread.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A dissertation about bread and home cannot but thank first of all the people, who let me in their homes, hearths, and hearts throughout the course of my research and writing. My multiple interlocutors in Brazil, Bulgaria, and Cuba are such a large group of people that I could not mention all the names, yet I want to explicitly express my deep gratitude to the main interlocutors in this book, starting alphabetically by country: in Brazil: Dona Dalva and her wonderful family, core of the Samba de Roda Suerdieck group, who let me soak the worldviews of the samba through the aromas and rhythms of their kitchen; Rosildo and the team of people around the Casa do Samba Santo Amaro; the generous officials at various governmental offices of the Ministry of Culture and IPHAN; in Bulgaria: Dina and the other members of the Bistritsa Babi group for their warm welcome at the chitalishte even in the coldest winter nights; Bogdan and Raicho, bakers, for sharing their stories and dreams; all the amazing people and interlocutors in this dissertation, who volunteered their labor and love to make and animate the Bread House, in particular Kalin, Ivelina, Nikolai, Silvia, Vesselin, Julia, Mariana, and Evgeni; Valentin Velev and Silva Hacherian at the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture for their generous time and openness; Dr. Haralan Alexandrov at the New Bulgaria University for his valuable insights into Bulgarian culture and support with teaching; in Cuba: Sara and all the other members of the Tumba Francesa group, who let me inhabit the most intimate space of their cultural center; the welcoming staff of the Casa de la Cultura in Santiago de Cuba and at UNESCO’s Bureau in Habana for the hours of conversation we shared; at UNESCO’s Headquarters in Paris: the whole Intangible Heritage Section team and in particular Franck Proschan and Cesar Moreno-Triana for our multiple lunch-break
discussions about the tangibility and intangibility of heritage, letting me experience UNESCO’s ICH Convention right from the kitchen where it was cooked.

Of course, beyond the research component, a dissertation is the product of years of interactions and relations woven around it with all my professors at Princeton, every single one in the department, to whom I am forever grateful for the truly exceptional academic and human experience they have given me: one of the greatest gifts I could have ever hoped for! First of all, I want to thank my main adviser, Dr. Larry Rosen, for his unfailing patience with me, for his brilliant way of simplifying concepts and getting to their gist, for care spent in countless hours of editing my page-long sentences and clarifying my convoluted thoughts; for his wit, wisdom, and humor that could cheer me up even in the hardest times. Dr. Carolyn Rouse, my second adviser, has been an endless source of inspiration for her questioning of taken-for-granted concepts and practices in community development. I admire Dr. Rouse for her deep ethical concerns and engaged approach to anthropology, helping build a school in Ghana, and thank her for being genuinely understanding, supportive, and very helpful with advice during my experiences developing the Bread House cultural center in Bulgaria. Lisa Davis, my third reader, for her willingness to share her broad knowledge and analysis of the complicated South-East European histories and politics. Jim Boon for his generous time ever since I came to the department, helping me keep my poetic penchants in thinking and writing vibrant yet not too far off the ground. João Biehl for nurturing my sensitivity to comprehend Brazil and its people and culture, and for his support with publishing my article on Rio’s favelas; John Borneman for his sharp comments; Carol Greenhouse for her brilliant insights; Alan Mann for his unfailing smile; Abdellah Hammoudi for helping me comprehend the
beauty of ritual and sharing with me the enchantments of bread yeast. From all my heart, to those three amazing women who truly made our Anthropology Department feel to me like my home away from home for seven years: the incredibly caring and always, always helpful out of their way to fix the many times I had gotten things out of place or out of time (including completing this manuscript in the last minute): Carol Zanca, Gabriela Drinovan, and Mo Lin Yee. I could not have asked for more wonderful fellow graduate students, in particular my cohort, Claire, Niko, Amy, and Sam, who all helped me make my way into anthropological thinking the first year when I came to the field without having studied anthropology.

It is hard to express my gratitude to Dr. Stanley Katz from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, who has since the first days I came to this campus been working with me on the questions of cultural policy, heritage, philanthropy, and cultural economics, and has throughout this time been tremendously supportive and caring. Similarly, my deep gratitude to Dr. Paul Di Maggio from the Sociology Department, who always manage to make time for our discussions even in the midst of piles of papers and books. Through both Dr. Katz and Dr. Di Maggio, I want to thank the Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies (CACPS), which the two of them have been directing, and which has provided me with invaluable grant support for my research. I am grateful for the conceptual insights and sharing within our Slavic Kruzhok work group led by Dr. Serguei Oushakine; for the stimulating intellectual discussions with Dr. Stephen Kotkin and Dr. Jeremy Adelman in History; Dr. Margaret Beissinger in the Slavic Department; and many other amazing scholars and colleagues at Princeton, as it would take too many pages to thank all individually. Alongside CACPS, I want to deeply
thank the Princeton Program in Latin American Studies (PLAS) and personally its amazing Director Rubén Gallo and Program Manager Rose Rivera who firmly believed in my multi-national project and provided generous grant support for my research and conferences participation in Brazil and Cuba.

I want to thank the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies (PIIRS) and in particular its Director Dr. Mark Beissinger for having provided me with the unique dissertation completion fellowship opportunity during 2011-2012, receiving very useful feedback on my work in our interdisciplinary seminars and being part of a wonderful, nurturing community. The Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies offered me with an amazing range of seminars and lectures that fed the mind - and certainly the body with Greek food! - and I am forever thankful to one of the warmest people I have met, the Center’s Director Dimitri H. Gondicas, and the many outstanding fellows I got to know throughout the years around our vibrant commensalities. I truly appreciate the Graduate School’s generous support for conference and summer research funding.

On a personal note, I want to thank Kim, Amin, and Francis Rizk for becoming my Princeton host family, providing a true home away from home and thus making possible and pleasant my year and a half write-up of the dissertation. A huge thank-you to Raoul and Carlo Momo, who so generously and with such painstaking support for the last two years made their bakery on Witherspoon street my “bread home” and, in fact, a kind of a Bread House community center, which is among the many acts of their unending care for the Princeton community. I am forever grateful for the priceless friendships I made and I hope will last for a life-time: the amazing Jessica Gheiler, whose emotional as well as analytical support have been instrumental for this dissertation to come to
completion; John Graham with his family Eka and Elisabeth; Nestan and her unconditional care; Niko Marinides; Adedoyin and the Orthodox Christian Fellowship group and Father Dan for keeping the community around the Transfiguration Chapel united. Thank you to Susan and Teymore Darhkosh for sharing so many wonderful moments dancing together and analyzing Bulgarian folk dance and music, as well as to the Princeton Capoeira Group and Mestre Zumbi for letting me have an embodied understanding of Brazilian music and dance.

Words will here completely fail to express my love and gratitude to my American host family Mary and William Howes, who have been my true parents/grandparents since I came alone and lonely to Furman University when I was 18 years-old, and who have since then always given me strength to believe and work hard for my dreams, but most importantly, to be able to “rise above my principles” out of love. My Bulgarian family and relatives, my father, brother, grandparents, aunts, all of you should simply know that you will never know how much you have given me and how much I love you.

This very last line here naturally belongs to the one who helped me write the very first line in my life, my mother Darina, for the meaning of her name reveals exactly what she is to me and all who know her: a “Gift of God”! I thank my mother for always helping me understand that a dissertation is not about the final product but the process in which you hope to touch people’s lives as much as they touch and transform yours. Thank you, Mom, for having nurtured me with so much self-sacrifice, and for having taught me to try to cherish all people through the most encompassing love for God. Clearly not last, *May it be thanks to the Lord!*
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABSTRACT</th>
<th>iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 1

**Living Human Treasures – Living Houses**

1.1. The Global Travels of a House: From Bulgaria to Cuba, Cuba to Brazil 1

1.2. Foundational Research Questions 17

1.3. Missing humor – Rising bread: Surprising Findings from the “Houses of Culture” to the House of UNESCO 26

1.4. Missing Kitchens – Dangerous Commensalities: What is the Place of Food in Cultural Policies and the Politics of Culture? 34

1.5. *Heritage Kinaesthetics*: Shifting Aesthetics in Museum Education (Insights from Open-air Museums/Heritage Sites in Brazil) 39

1.6. Chapters Outline and Main Conceptual Frames 49

1.7. Inter-Disciplinary Contributions 59

1.8. Research Time-Frame and Methodological Developments 63

1.9. The International Family of Networks: Building and Housing “Cultural Citizenship” 70

## CHAPTER 2

**The Community Culture Model: Transparency, Trans-use, and Tensility through Nets of Arts Institutions**

2.1. Bread and Roses 77

2.2. Historic Foundations of the *Community Culture Model* 92

2.3. Three Characteristics of the *Community Culture Model*: Continuity and Change through the “Bread Net” Metaphor 97

2.4. *Structural* Aspect of the “Entrepreneurship” Process:
2.4.1. Between and Betwixt the “House” and the “Home”:
*House Economics and Home Oikonomia* 116
2.4.2. Buildings, Bodies, Boundaries: People’s Relationship to the
Community Cultural Center as Structure and Symbol 121

2.5 *Syncretic* Aspect of the “Classification” Process:
   Bread Net’s *Trans-use* 127
   2.5.1. Fasting, Fast Food, and What Fits “Cultural Heritage”? 134

2.6 *Synesthetic* Aspect of the “Framing” Process:
   Bread Net’s *Tensility* 146
   2.6.1. *Feeding and Feedback* Cultural Organizations:
       Food as Indicator of Informality and Belonging 150
   2.6.2. Sleeping as Transgression:
       Spatial Privatization of the Public in Cuba 153

2.7. Bread Nets Unfolding… 160

CHAPTER 3
The Missing Kitchen: Purity and Porosity in Culture and Food

3.1. *Surogat* Lives 166

3.2. Bread and Circuses:
   The Social Life of *Furni* and *Chitalishte* in Bulgaria 173

3.3. “What’s intangible about food?”:
   Materiality at Stake in UNESCO’s Narratives across Continents 182

3.4. The Politics of Porosity:
   “Live” Bread in and out of “Living Heritage” 193

3.5. From the Iron Curtain to the *Iron Cap* 206

3.6. Slow Depletions:
   Humus – Humility – Humor – Humanity 210

3.7. Slow Fast Food Movement, Slow Movements of Food: Street Food
   between Enterprise and Entertainment in Cuba and Brazil 214
CHAPTER 4
Contested Commensalities: Communion and Community around the Table
(The case of the Bread House Cultural Center, Bulgaria)

4.1. Tables of Confluence and Conflict 225
4.2. Building the Bread House: Volunteering as Gift Exchange 230
4.3. Domesticating the House and Making Public the Home 237
4.4. Seals of Sanction and Sanctity 240
4.5. Significant Informality – Intimate Strangeness 247
4.6. Kneading and Re-forming Age, Gender, Class 252
4.7. Non-memories:
   Recollecting Archetypes versus Archiving Collections 269
4.8. Artificial (Bread) Rise and the Capitalist Fear of Failing 274
4.9. Cut Bread Cruelties: Stories about Cherishing the Wrong Crumbs 279
4.10. Eucharistic Communities:
   Communion and Community as “New Traditions” 290
4.11. Oikonomia beyond Economics 310

CONCLUSIONS 317

REFERENCES 322
Dina regularly pointed to the community cultural center in Bistritsa, her neighborhood of Sofia (Bulgaria), and called it “our home.” The concept of a community cultural center, often called “house of culture”, in every neighborhood - whether supported by state or non-governmental funding - will, in the course of this dissertation, require us to traverse such disparate realms as a small house (cultural center) with its wood-fired oven to other similar houses across continents, and from people’s kitchens to the “kitchen” of hidden politics in the global assembly halls at UNESCO’s Headquarters in Paris. In the course of the study we will have to consider in the context of communal spaces dedicated to collective creativity what does it mean to talk about and experience home, house, private and public space, identity, heritage, and the transformation of cultural and moral values. For it is precisely in the context of these cultural centers that one can see how the processes of displacement and commodification, and the shifting boundaries of sacred and profane, private and public have been emerging in Eastern Europe and parts of Latin America. That I began my study with the central example of my native Bulgaria only to discover that the cultural policy model employed there has been applied and transformed in such diverse places as Cuba, Brazil, and parts of Africa (Angola, South Africa) and Asia (India, China, Vietnam) only underscores the common
concerns that surround the developments of these “houses of culture.”

Globalization is not without its surprises. Initially I was drawn to a concern with Cuba because of the impact on Cuba’s current cultural policies through its contacts with Bulgaria during the socialist period. The connection was brought home most strikingly when I was directed to the House of Culture (Casa de la Cultura) located in an old bourgeois mansion in historic Habana – a house that had been nationalized and destined for use as a cultural center. The Cuban dance instructor at the center turned out to be named after the popular Bulgarian pop diva Yordanka Hristova, whose alleged intimate relationship with Castro led to her being called “the bride of all Cubans.”

Yordanka exclaimed with joy at my mention of Bulgaria and immediately grabbed me by the hand and started dancing a Bulgarian circle folk dance! She was eager to show me what she had learned from the Bulgarians who had come as part of the cultural exchange program that the Cuban Ministry of Culture and their casas de la cultura had with the Bulgarian Commission coordinating the chitalishte (the Bulgarian “houses of culture”), which were used as the model for the casas.

In my very first visit to Cuba in 2004 with a school trip from my undergraduate university, Furman University, I had heard about the casas de la cultura. This is how I started discovering that a phenomenon I thought local growing up in Bulgaria is, in fact, global, and later found out the Bulgarian model is one of the oldest still existing, as its cultural centers go back to the 1850s. Bulgaria alone currently has about 3500 such cultural centers and the model has spread to Ministries of Culture across the former socialist countries and beyond: in the world at large there are tens of thousands of community cultural centers, known as “houses of culture,” promoting leisure activities
involving various forms of arts, from contemporary to the preservation of traditional cultural practices and products.

Considering the global scale of these publicly-subsidized networks of cultural institutions - usually public but in some cases non-governmental as is the Bulgarian case of the chitalishte - it is paradoxical that they are hardly ever discussed at cultural policy conferences or recognized officially by UNESCO, and that they do not factor as central topic of policy-making related to development, social welfare and wellbeing, and education (though these community-based centers cross all these fields locally). The community cultural center, in its ambiguity in-between the traditional and modern arts, the amateur and the professional, does not factor as an official cultural institution neither in the UNESCO’s Conventions’ language and conference discussions, while institutions like museums, galleries, theaters, and art schools are formulated as key spheres of cultural policies. The topic is particularly relevant and intriguing in the field of post-socialist studies, since most former socialist countries still have the infrastructure of hundreds and thousands of these houses, which raise multiple issues about civil society, state, leisure, heritage, continuity and change. The few studies that exist on this topic (Grant 1995) offer perspectives limited to socialist political propaganda, with the exception of Donahoe and Habeck’s (2011) edited volume with some ethnographic data from current houses of culture (including my article in the volume).

My particular interest in studying the houses of culture and their predecessors, the chitalishte, in Bulgaria lies both in the local meanings that these spaces hold and the ways they inspire negotiations of identity and belonging. At a national and international cultural policy level, I am interested in how these institutions interact with the circulation
of discourses on the meaning and methods of “safeguarding intangible cultural heritage” as envisioned by UNESCO. I examined the discourses both within the corridors and conference rooms of UNESCO’s Headquarters and how these narratives, titles, and symbolic capital circulate and are interpreted and employed locally by people in communities to make sense of their daily realities. The Convention and concepts I focus on is the 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage\(^1\), its conceptualizations of “Masterpieces of the Heritage of Humanity” (groups of people, practices, rituals, certain types of knowledge, etc.) and the “Living Human Treasures” title given to individual carriers of particularly valued traditional knowledges. The individuals recognized nationally (by each national Commission of UNESCO) as “Living Human Treasures” vary widely depending on the local understanding of tradition and value: from craftsmen, dancers, musicians, and story-tellers to, as we will see in the cases examined in the dissertation, experts on food preparation who had to put efforts in making their cases for recognition: a baker in Bulgaria, a street food vendor and singer, pregonera, in Cuba; and ritual food cooks, also street vendors in Bahia, Brazil.

In the chitalishte and other houses of culture, traditional cultural expressions, such as folk music, song, dance, and crafts, had historically been termed “folklore” until 2003, when with the spread of UNESCO’s Convention’s discourses, cultural professionals and cultural policy administrators started denoting these expressions as “intangible cultural heritage” in order to employ UNESCO’s symbolic cultural capital for various tactics in the politics of culture, from the national to the communal level. It is more specifically in this field of the “safeguarding of intangible heritage” and its titles

“Masterpieces” and “Living Human Treasures” that I examine the concept and realities of the houses of culture as the tangible places of negotiations and enactment of intangible heritage. While doing research at UNESCO, I started calling the “houses of culture” “Living Houses”, echoing the “Living Human Treasures” concept, in order to be able to translate for people at UNESCO in their own language and recognizable categories what I meant by “community cultural centers,” where people usually engaged in folk activities such as folk dance and music ensembles, or what UNESCO would have termed “intangible cultural heritage transmission”, particularly since often the teachers would be old masters, musicians or craftsmen, and even if these people were often not officially recognized as “Living Human Treasures,” many of the people practicing the traditional cultural activity as hobby would often become “Living Human Treasures” themselves through regular engagement, performing as folk ensembles at world-class festivals.

These “living houses” are particularly intriguing sites for the negotiation of concepts, practices, and meanings of what constitutes living heritage and what is its role in the daily life of the modern city landscapes (with the evolving UNESCO notion of “historic urban [cultural] landscape” [H.U.L], stressing the intertwining of tangible and intangible heritage\(^2\), which I have elsewhere analyzed as *heritage kinaesthetics* [Savova 2009]) and discussed in brief in a section below).

The idea that every neighborhood should have a community cultural center for the purpose of creative leisure has a long and varied history. It spread across the socialist world under the name of “palace of culture” (*dvorets kulturyi*) and “house of culture” (*dom kulturyi*) from Russia to Cuba and Mozambique to Vietnam and China. At that time it was labeled as a Soviet cultural policy, when in fact its antecedents lay in the Balkans,\(^2\) UNESCO, 1992, Convention on Cultural Landscapes.
as the Bulgarian *chitalishte* community cultural centers, organized in a wide national network, already pre-date socialism by almost a hundred years.

The chitalishte were a civil society initiative aimed at forming a network of community institutions. Dating from the 1860s they served as bridges and meeting spaces for men, women, and children, and for various socio-economic classes. Alongside the mission of fostering social cohesion and preserving the Bulgarian cultural heritage within the frame of cultural dominion from the Ottoman Empire, the chitalishte also had the ideological engine of nation-building in resistance to the Ottoman dominion. Nonetheless, the political side of the institutions did not overtake their social and cultural mission and vision, as these centers often fundraised for scholarships to send bright students to study abroad and supported the poor, in addition to organizing a variety of free communal artistic and cultural events. It is telling how locally specific the *chitalishte* are to Bulgaria when we note how during socialism, while Stalin was modeling the “houses of culture”, in Bulgaria the word *chitalishte* continued to be used and was not replaced by “houses of culture.” Only some central cultural institutions built by order of the Communist Party in major cities were called “palace of culture,” directly copying the Soviet concept. These spaces were, however, never perceived as communal but rather city-wide and more oriented towards professional artistic performances and exhibits.

Comparing the Bulgarian network with models that were emerging in the West in the second part of the 1800s, we see how in Western Europe the rise of industrialization led factory workers to protest for more leisure time, or, as a famous slogan read, for “Bread and Roses.” In response to these demands, factory owners initiated educational, cultural, and social programs for their workers in order to provide alternative to the
leisure of drinking and gambling offered by the “public houses”, for short called “pubs.”

The story of these working men’s new social gathering places and the “cultivating” activities they offered was examined in the installation exhibit at the 2010 *Venice Biennale* at the Hungarian Pavilion (see in the *Venice Art Biennale Catalogue* 2010). The videos showed images of modern houses of culture across Budapest and their relative decline and stagnancy, while the book that accompanied the exhibit traces the history of the working men’s clubs in England and across Germany and France. While the model of the working men’s clubs could be seen as the predecessor to the houses of culture model, as argued in particular by Dr. Stephen Kotkin⁴, I would agree that this is true in terms of the vision of these spaces being spread in a network.

However, the difference between the working class houses in Western Europe in the late 19th century and the *chitalishte* network in Bulgaria (and at that time also in Serbia, where the institutions no longer exist) is that for a long time in the West the model was limited and exclusive along gender, age, and/or class lines (the working men’s clubs in the UK and the Danish folk universities were closed to women for decades after their establishment). Thus one of the aims of this dissertation is to show, through interviews as well as written sources, the ways in which people in the past and in the present have perceived the meaning of *chitalishte* as unique compared to other regional Eastern European and Western European models.

Lenin and his wife Nadezhda Krupskaya employed a populist policy claiming to spread “Enlightenment” for the masses through the creation of *izba-chitalnya* (reading rooms or small public libraries), mostly used as a political strategy to engage the popular

---

⁴ Stephen Kotkin, Professor of History and Politics, Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University, personal discussions with Nadezhda Savova, fall 2011 - spring 2012.
imaginary rather than a well-planned and wide-reaching educational program due to the impediments posed by lack of transportation infrastructure, communication channels, geographic distances, limited resources, among many. In the absence of archival records, the name and organization of these *izba-chitalnya* nevertheless echo a very likely connection with the Bulgarian *chitalishte* model. In fact, students in Russia were taught how Lenin had been inspired by the Bulgarian model of a national network of local revolutionary committees to organize the upheaval against the Ottomans. Because most of these committees’ meetings were housed at the local *chitalishte* in each town and village, it is thus almost certain that Lenin knew the chitalishte model well and employed it in the development and spreading of the *izba-chitalnya* (a name meaning “reading rooms” and exact translation in Russian of the Bulgarian word “chitalishte”). At the moment when Lenin’s wife Nadezhda Krupskaya was spreading the messages and methods of “enlightenment” through the *izba-chitalnya*, the Bulgarian *chitalishte* had already been a vibrant network of almost 2000 houses built and organized since the 1850s, containing library and reading space as well as spaces for artistic rehearsals, performances (the first theaters in Bulgaria) and meetings (educational, social, as well as meetings of the revolutionary committees preparing the upheaval against the Ottomans). By that moment in the first decade of the 20th century, the chitalishte model had also already been brought to Ukraine by large groups of Bulgarian refugees from the Ottoman Empire (the *Bessarab* Bulgarians).

Stalin later built on the model of Lenin’s *izba-chitalnya* by building on a national scale new and bigger community cultural centers, equipped with stages and larger

---

4 By memories of Russians, interviewed by Nadezhda Savova in Moscow and St. Petersburg, June and July 2010.
rehearsal areas. As a student of linguistics, Stalin developed localized cultural institutions, especially in Central Asia, as a way of dividing and conquering ethnic groups by raising localized ones, with their own dialectics, to the status of separate entities (see more about these ethnic-based *dom kulturyi* in Donahoe and Habeck, 2011). These new cultural institutions were referred to in two different ways, *dom kulturyi* (“houses of culture”) and *dvorez kulturyi* (“palaces of culture”), and as their names shows the first kind was more geared towards community engagement in neighborhoods and the second towards “culture” in terms of professional performances at a city-wide level. In both cases, however, the various form of arts, no matter whether professional or amateur, were intended to inspire popular creativity in order to produce leisure time that was both entertaining and politically indoctrinating and disciplining through censorship that infused all art and even traditional cultural expressions with socialist content (Brandenberger 2002). This was a period, too, in which a number of competing models were being tried in different parts of the world. While the *dom kulturyi* in Russia became in the 1970s and 80s hubs for emerging amateur jazz and rock bands that were allowed to sing pro-Western songs in the penumbras of the state-funded houses of culture (see more in Neidhart 2003), the Soviet Union exported the concept of the “houses of culture” as one of the staple Soviet cultural policies models across the socialist world.

In Cuba in particular, both Russian and Bulgarian cultural professionals visited to help plan and implement the program in the late 1970s. There, in a similar vein as in Russia with the case of the dissident rock bands in the 80s, currently the Cuban *casas de la cultura* paradoxically sometimes house pro-Western hip-hop groups, as noted by Sujatha Fernandez (2006). In these multi-faceted houses of creativity veiled in ambiguity,
the relations between the state and the communal creativity it claims to enhance remain
ambiguous to the extent of people pretending to provide legitimacy to the state by
participating in its cultural spaces and the state pretending to grant freedom of creativity
and expression by allowing measured amounts of dissidence. It is precisely this intriguing
ambiguity in the sphere of state-supported amateur creativity that we shall trace across
Bulgaria, Cuba, and Brazil in order to comprehend how the similarly framed model I call
“the community culture model” ramifies in both similar and distinct forms of local
meaning and practice5.

These eastern European models came into contact with other models that had been
developing in the Americas. The name “house of culture” in Spanish, casa de la cultura,
and the concept of it as a community arts institution might have already been in
circulation in Latin America before it appeared in Russia: by the 1920s, Mexico in
particular already had turned some of its colonial-era mansions into spaces for local arts,
both traditional and contemporary, alongside educational programs for adults. While it is
not clear where the name and model originated, one hypothesis rooted in various
interviews and research I conducted in Spain and Mexico in 2006 and more recently
discussing with scholars experts on Latin-American History (notably Dr. Jeremy
Adelman at Princeton University), a possibility is that the model of the “house of culture”

5 A web blog on Slovak culture described the dom kultury in this way: “Dom kulturyi seems to be a
holdover of a term from communism – “a house of culture,”’ is how this literally translates, but “community
center” might be a more accurate translation into American English. A variety of activity takes place in
these Dom Kultury – sometimes there are big screens for film screenings by a local film club for several
hundred people at a time, or concerts, folk dancers may come from all reaches of Slovakia for a
performance and then serve a meal afterwards, dances may take place, performances, there might be a little
room for students to just hang out, or there might be a gym of some sort, there might be an auditorium
where contemporary church services are held, or where writers speak to little kids, there might be chess
matches held on the weekends in the basement, there might be a tiny room where teenagers go to play
Nirvana on guitars and chain smoke as if they were some soon to be washed up rocker from the 1970’s
recording the next big thing in music.” (available at <http://www.52insk.com/footnotes-to-slovak-
culture/dom-kultury/>.) Consulted on October 11, 2011.
evolved with the socialist movements in Spain around the turn of the century, as it also seems similar to another cultural and educational institution, the “Ateneo,” which was a reading and library space initially limited to the elite circles, but later giving birth to popular libraries and less exclusive cultural centers.

With the beginning of the Cold War, the concept of “houses of culture” spread in the East through Russia and in the West it was made popular by France, which developed the *maisons de la culture* (“houses of culture”) in the 1960s and spread them as a model across the Francophone world. The social democracies of the Nordic European countries, famous for their all-embracing social policies, are also known for having wide national networks of community cultural centers, and these networks are currently united in the European Network of Cultural Centers⁶, spearheaded by Belgium and Germany in the 1990s, an organization I have done extensive research on by attending their various international conferences.

In this range of cultural policy orientations, the United States lies at perhaps the extreme end on the spectrum of cultural policy funding compared to Eastern Europe and Latin America. By comparison to other countries the USA lacks a Ministry of Culture, relying instead on the relatively small National Endowment for the Arts, and thus has no such concept as a national, publically-funded network of community cultural institutions. Whatever small local “arts councils” exist (this is most likely what the US equivalent would be for a chitalishte or “house of culture”), they rely mainly on their own fundraising and grant applications rather than state programs. Toqueville ([1835] 2000) and Weber’s ([1904] 2010) classical analyses of American civil society are still relevant when it comes to the debates on public funding for areas whose impact is particularly

---

⁶ See more at www.encc.eu.
difficult to measure as is the case of the arts. Paul Di Maggio’s (1992) “high culture model”, shows how the differentiation between “high” and “popular” culture in the USA was only possible when the arts were liberated from the dependency on the market.

My research on the chitalishte shows how in their case, even if the field is not the high arts but amateur/community arts, it was the formation of trustee-governed non-for-profit organizations (the chitalishte) that provided for their sustainability over the decades of political transformations, or what I call the community culture model building on DiMaggio’s “high culture model” concept. I take the US model of how high arts institutions evolved as a reference point to analyze, compare, and contrast how “community arts” evolved into institutions in the Bulgarian chitalishte both because the models are in a way the two perfect opposites and yet because there the particular intriguing similarity of the key role of the non-governmental trustee management boards, which makes the Bulgarian chitalishte unique from most of the other state-funded networks of community arts centers where these organizations are usually municipal and thus serving with a politically appointed, not locally elected, management body.

The Brazilian pontos de cultura are for the most part non-governmental organizations and are in this sense similar to the Bulgarian community culture model, whereas and Cuban network and most of the houses of culture networks that evolved in the former-socialist countries and across Latin America are for most of their part public institutions, funded by the local municipalities and thus also dependent on them for appointment of staff and programming. These dynamics are explored in detail in the second chapter, which draws an overall outline of the main theoretical frameworks employed and developed in this research project and the ethnographies from each of the
three countries that illustrate these dynamics and offer diverse perspectives that make the theory tangible and render the tactility of the arts and the foods animating the centers into theoretical constructs that can illuminate other similar cases and models around the world examining the social impact of the arts, and in particular community arts.

Currently, the model of a community arts/cultural center, often called a version of “house of culture” or “cultural center” in the local language, is spread across continents under similar logic even if sometimes slightly different forms, mainly contingent locally upon the cultural specificities but framed similarly at the national policy levels (organization, funding, mission, and house appearance and programming). I have so far discovered 56 countries with similar networks of community-based cultural institutions, employing various forms of research: from interviewing Ministers of Culture and cultural professionals from around the world at global meetings at UNESCO, to interacting with scholars and cultural managers at more than twenty international conferences over four years, to archival and policy documents research. Later on, these research on networks of community cultural centers led me to develop an internet platform for an evolving global network of these national networks, called the International Council of Cultural Centers (ICCC, or I3C), inspired by the model of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), filling in the gap for an international council to connect the living places of living heritage transmission and, thus, safeguarding, t.e. these multifunctional and inter-generational community centers. I3C is further discussed below also as a site of action research observations and lessons learned about the meanings and operational dynamics of symbolic capital circulations within these networks. As I was learning about
the ways in which the Cuban network developed in cooperation with Bulgaria in the 1970s, I decided to take an ethnographic approach comparing the *casas de la cultura* to the Bulgarian network of *chitalishte* with two fieldwork sites, and later on the third case of Brazil and its network of cultural centers emerged as intriguingly connected and relevant. The Cuban *casas de la cultura* and in General Cuba’s active community-oriented cultural policy have over the past decade become widely popular with the rise of socialist governments in Latin America, from Venezuela where President Hugo Chavez is developing a model of cultural spaces inspired by the *casas de la cultura* and animated through the now world-famous network of community-based youth symphony orchestras called *El Sistema*; to Bolivia with its first indigenous president Evo Morales and his discourses on “universal access” to resources from water to the arts, with increased public funding for social programs including community arts projects; to Brazil with the election of the left-wing government led by President Lula who modeled some of his policies inspired by the Cuban models, in particular in the fields of healthcare, education, and culture.

The Brazilian cultural policies in 2004, framed by popular singer Gilberto Gil who became Minister of Culture under President Lula, launched the *Cultura Viva* Program which was meant to revive cultural expressions and creativity across ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic groups. To achieve this goal, Gil envisioned the *pontos de cultura* (points of culture) network of community cultural organizations, which was often a title (with certain annual public-funding attached to it) given to already existing organizations such as the already existing *casas de cultura* and *centros culturais* developed by the military regime in the 1980s. Under Gilberto Gil, the Brazilian Ministry
of Culture started recognizing (as “pontos de cultura”) artistic groups and small organizations from marginalized urban and rural communities across the country, supporting them financially and integrating them institutionally into a national network under the vision that the arts and heritage could operate as tools to decrease violence and poverty. During my first research stage in Brazil (in Rio de Janeiro and Salvador de Bahia) in 2007 and 2008, I discovered that, on the one hand, these programs of recognition, public funding, and network-building were hailed by many small organizations, which were inspired to symbolically form part of a larger whole, a national network of similar organizations, often called by some a “family”. On the other hand, however, there were also points of friction as some local groups and organizations contested the act of labeling them as “pontos de cultura,” which was perceived as depriving them of their own history, vision, and efforts independent from government support (and sometimes even precisely in spite of or contrary to mainstream politics) and thus complained that the network was subsuming and appropriating their identities and merits into a wider national project. Even these organizations, however, would usually agree that the new state funding scheme for the pontos did make a difference and helped them build capacities to enlarge their program offerings and in particular to purchase and employ new media and develop small cultural industries.

The Cultura Viva Program further employed UNESCO’s discourses on “safeguarding intangible heritage” and found creative ways to put them into practice. My fieldwork case studies come from Rio de Janeiro’s oldest favela Providencia and from Salvador de Bahia’s historic center Pelourinho, which are both sites of “tangible heritage” (patrimonio tombado), and where the concept of “safeguarding intangible
“heritage” got interwoven with the strategies towards conserving the tangible, built heritage. Community groups were invited to animate the old houses as community cultural centers/pontos de cultura, which showed an approach distinct from the standard conservation techniques, which traditionally limited as much as possible the physical interaction with the spaces thus isolating local participation in the site’s animation and socialization (Hufford 1994).

In 2007, I visited the Brazilian cities of Rio de Janeiro and Salvador, the latter because it is considered more similar to Santiago de Cuba than Rio de Janeiro as well as being the state birthplace to the samba de roda and the group declared Masterpiece of the Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, Samba de Roda Dona Dalva in Santo Amaro. As Cultura Viva and in particular the pontos de cultura model expanded, connecting in only two years a network of more than 2000 pontos de cultura and keeps expanding with hundreds every year. Thus, since 2009 the pontos de cultura have been gaining continental fame through the central role of some of them in the Latin American Network of Arts for Social Change (RLATS). In 2010, after multiple international conferences, discussions, and debates, RLATS convinced the MERCOSUR governments to recognize the Brazilian model as an exemplary cultural policy model for the region and one that the other governments agreed to start implementing in their own respective countries. The model became in many ways the regional cultural policy tool par excellence, called Cultural Viva Comunitaria Latinoamericana, and it required governments to stipulate their commitment to contribute 0.1 percent of their national budget to culture, which
would be enough to help develop and unite about 10,000 community cultural projects across the continent.

Such international recognition and Brazil’s own powerful domestic emphasis on culture as a tool for development was the reason for Brazil’s recent prominent cultural presence in the recent World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil in January 2012 and at the UN Global Eco Summit RIO+20 in June 2012, where cultural professionals presented the pontos de cultura model as a good international practice of how the arts can be employed locally for social transformation. Representatives from Argentina, Colombia, and Peru presented how the model has been implemented in their respective countries with the help of “capacity-building experts” from Brazil (see more on RLATS website), which reminded in various aspects the way in which the Cuban network of casas de la cultura evolved with the help of Bulgarian experts on the chitalishte model. This is, indeed, how the concept and practical animation strategies of a house, a communal and creative “house of culture” have travelled and keep travelling across continents and cultures.

**Foundational Research Questions**

For a complex, multi-national topic of this scale yet one addressed through the ethnographic sensitivity typical of anthropology, a suited research structure is a multi-sited ethnography in the three countries selected through preliminary research – Bulgaria, Cuba, and Brazil (listed in this order according to the chronological line of research).

---

8 Congress Documents. Red Latinoamericana de Artes Para la Transformacion Social, RLATS. Available at www.artestransformador.net (accessed November 2009).
While there were certain limitations to multi-sited research compared to longer-term, deep description and engagement (which I nonetheless had in Bulgaria where was my most concentrated ethnographic research for a period of two years), in the case of this particular question of a globally modified cultural policy strategy, the breadth of the examined cultural, political, and economic cases proved to be quite intriguing. Through the three distinct countries we sense how the more or less same cultural model operates both similarly and differently in three distinct political and cultural contexts, from post-socialist (Bulgaria) to socialist (Cuba) and social democratic neo-liberal system inheriting policies from a military regime (Brazil).

While the core of the model remains more or less the same – the vision to have a social space dedicated to local creativity in various neighborhoods - the community cultural centers proved to be framed in different terms when it comes to their overall mission and vision at the national, ministerial level in each country, and at the same time at the local level, the meaning of the centers and their impact on people’s daily lives ended up sharing many characteristics, particularly in the shared ways in which people perceived the centers as “homes” and animated them as informal gathering places subverting the formal institutional notions about these centers as sites for more or less formalized rehearsals and performances.

The ministry-level discourses on the mission of the centers also varied, as: in the Brazilian case, the *pontos de cultura* were conceptualized as a tool to “decrease violence and poverty”; the Cuban emphasis was on the *casas de la cultura* as sites for, as framed by the socialist regime, “cultural citizenship” and organization of “revolutionary hubs” framed within the communist ideology of universal access to the arts and all other
resources (Craven 1990; Davalos 1983; Gomez 1988); and in Bulgaria, the chitalishte were framed mainly as sites for the preservation and transmission of traditional, folk arts, recently called “intangible cultural heritage” under the influence of UNESCO’s global discourses on cultural continuity and change.

Indeed, with the rise of popularity of UNESCO’s Convention on ICH since 2003, more and more people and institutions in Bulgaria started using the term “intangible cultural heritage” instead of “folklore” and the whole set of discourses around the term in order to legitimize and further valorize what they were promoting at distinct social and political levels: from the community chitalishte management and the people participating in its traditional cultural activities through ensembles (performance groups of folk dance, music, singing, etc.) or kruzhoks (workgroups for traditional crafts); to the municipal, regional, and national cultural authorities; to non-for-profit organizations coming up with new funding schemes for projects in the field of intangible cultural heritage. All these ethnographic observations of how international ideas and political discourses are translated locally and infused with meaning in people’s daily lives then gained a richer level of understanding when I approached the international level ethnographically as its own site of meaning-making at UNESCO’s Headquarters in Paris, where I conducted three months of consultancy work and participant observation in 2008. Out of these multiple and distinct in scale ethnographic sites emerged the guiding axis for my dissertation, where I explore the meanings of community arts as a practice and as communal gathering places in the model of the chitalishte, referencing the Bulgarian model in view of the two cases of the similar yet also different networks in Cuba and Brazil, which I link through the common thread that UNESCO has developed itself in the
listing of heritage expressions from diverse countries in one representative global list, where, serendipitously, Brazil and its *samba de roda* was lined in alphabetical order next to Bulgaria and its Bistrishki Babi polyphonic singing tradition.

Beyond this simply symbolic connection, however, I discovered locally that these cultural practices in all three countries shared a particular characteristic that was, however, not understood or taken into account at UNESCO: all three groups representative of each country were meeting to rehearse and perform regularly at their local versions of a community cultural center – respectively, Bulgarian *chitalsihte*, Cuban *casa de la cultura* and Brazilian *ponto de cultura* – which clearly showed that already for decades before UNESCO’s global discourses many countries had been developing nation-wide networks of communal spaces that served to promote local creativity and social cohesion in general, but including, as I will argue, an implicit system of incentives for people to “safeguard their intangible heritage” by making these cultural expressions visible and valued as a leisure alternative. It is in the light of both these local cultural institutions and of the global cultural discourses and models that I ask “What does it mean locally to these people to have their clearly distinct traditions brought side by side by a global agenda to create shared meaning for these expressions as a “shared heritage of humanity”? What does it mean to the people to live this “heritage” more as leisure practices than an intrinsic part of their no-longer agricultural lives? And how has this reframing of meanings been shaped by the community cultural centers and this in interaction with national cultural policies?”

Led by these questions, I selected the three groups recognized by UNESCO as “Masterpieces of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity” in each of the three countries
(Bulgaria, Cuba, Brazil) I had already explored ethnographically researching their networks of community cultural centers (as well as other community-based organizations and spaces). The multi-sited ethnography revealed how global transversal themes such as the international conceptualization of cultural policies connected three geographically-distant and culturally-different countries and helped me notice in the light of the other two specific phenomena in each country that enriched the particularities and the similarities observed in the other two rather than enlarging the universality of the model. In fact, instead of universal, the model, which I define in the second chapter as the community culture model building on Paul Di Maggio’s (1992) “high culture model”, is trans-nationally applicable in its polyvalence and flexibility derived from the multi-functionality that usually characterizes a community cultural center regardless of its country.

Rather than approaching the international issues top-down or bottom-up, the multi-sited ethnography strives to show how the perspectives gained in the local ethnographies of community cultural centers help us see what is not visible from the national and international levels of cultural policy that goes beyond the classic professional arts and is geared towards a) intangible heritage safeguarding, and b) mixed modern and traditional community arts, which are often framed more as social interventions than as artistic products. The overall framework of analysis of the meanings of these networks of cultural centers locally, nationally, and internationally lies within understanding how the concept and operations of these networks evolved and is currently operating within what kinds of social dynamics, cultural schemata, and political ideologies.
So far, most research on the 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)*\(^9\) has focused on issues of representation of cultural identity and the politics of recognition (Blake 2001, 2002), but what I present in my dissertation is ethnographic evidence on how the Convention’s discourses and strategies are lived and modified in communities as on-going ways of living and re-creating heritage. For example, the Brazilian government’s implementation of UNESCO recommendations since 2003 materialized with the creation of “Samba Houses”, or *casas do samba*, which were incorporated into the network of *pontos de cultura*, while in Cuba and Bulgaria the governments did not develop new institutions but began to use the new language of “intangible heritage” to refer to what was previously denoted as “folklore”, which was in itself a highly politicized concept and strategy of popular indoctrination.

The community cultural centers, particularly those that the groups declared *Masterpieces of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity* perceived as “their” community cultural centers and described as “home” used for informal meetings and celebrations beyond the formal rehearsals, thus turned out to be sites that made possible people’s participation in the processes of “safeguarding intangible cultural heritage” and thus offered alternative interpretations and modes of enacting, experiencing, and living UNESCO’s discourses how heritage could impact “community development” through

---

“community participation”, stated throughout the text of the 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)*

The two selected cultural centers in each country and their respective cultural groups recognized as global *Masterpieces* thus included: in Bulgaria, the *Bistritsa Babi* group in Sofia and the Bread House *chitalishte* in Gabrovo which evolved as action research where I actively participated in the establishment of the chitalishte; in Brazil, the *Samba de Roda Suerdieck* at a *ponto de cultura* in Salvador de Bahia and another *ponto* in the Favela da Providencia in Rio de Janeiro; in Cuba, the *Tajona* group in Santiago de Cuba and their *foco cultural* and *casa de la cultura*, as well as a *casa de la cultura* in Habana. Parallel to sharing the daily lives and performances of these people in and out of their cultural centers, I conducted interviews with officials at the respective Ministries of Culture and Agriculture (related to issues of food as heritage), local, regional, and national non-governmental organizations, businesses, bakers, and officials at UNESCO’s Headquarters in Paris.

In Bulgaria, I further interviewed researchers at the National Institute of Folklore, professors at the Sofia University and New Bulgaria University, attended various conferences and public debates in the Red House Cultural Center, as well as visited an approximate of 100 chitalishte over the 3 years in Bulgaria and was in regional meetings with hundreds of their administrators as well as the national chitalishte meeting with

---

1500 representatives, an average of a person representing two chitalishte in order to secure full national representation.

My research discovered how what ends up ultimately being locally meaningful for “heritage safeguarding” is for people to have a collective space that they can appropriate and tailor to their collective needs, a public space/cultural center that they often called “home,” and where people claimed informality and flexibility in the framing of notions of “culture” and “arts” to allow for informal gatherings. Such informality often turned the formal publically-funded centers into personal places as people brought in home furniture and engaged in various informal activities from cooking to celebrating birthdays and funerals in addition to the formal arts classes, rehearsals, and performances. Throughout the dissertation, I develop and show evolving in various cultural contexts the theoretical frameworks of the heritage house-guarding (see Savova 2008 for the initial formulations of this framework), denoting the processes of meaning-making that local communities develop around the ways a community cultural center relates to intangible cultural heritage by transmitting, translating, de-contextualizing, and re-creating tradition.

These dynamic processes of “safe-gurading” inside the houses of culture in the diverse countries are defined by two main characteristic phenomena: a) the transition of “heritage” into a leisure activity in ever more modern, ubran contexts; and b) the placement of heritage within new physical and symbolic topographies, from the village, agricultural field, and sacred space to the community centers, which people so often, again across cultures, referred to as “homes”, in an interesting divergence from that state that usually officially refers to the spaces as “houses” (later explored in my distinction between house oikonomia and home oikonomia).
Indeed, the key observations I made studying the ICH recognized groups in Bulgaria, Cuba, and Brazil and their related cultural centers noted the importance that people placed on having a physical community house to host their regular, on-going interactions. The processes through which people were personalizing these public places revealed key elements of what UNESCO was vaguely calling “community participation” and “heritage safe-guarding”. In this sense, heritage house-guarding reveals what UNESCO and the multiple meetings of politicians and experts it summoned obscured, and it is the “where” of transmission, or how a communal space, just like the house/home for a family, is the one important factor in people’s lives that on the ground takes “safeguarding” from the archive and the past to a living present practice for various generations. This is particularly true when the tradition is not an event/festival, but a set of regular, on-going interactions (often taking place within and around the community cultural centers).

Upon my introducing for discussion the concept of the “house of culture” in the informal off-session discussions with representatives of Ministries of Culture and NGO leaders and academics during the ICH Convention meetings at UNESCO in 2008, I noticed how the tangible image of a house immediately opened up intriguing conversations on “safeguarding” as it started being seen, analyzed, thought through, and questioned in tangible and spatial terms through the imagination of communal focus sites for social interactions. Indeed, where this dissertation was born and is located: “the tangible places of intangible heritage.”

As such networks of houses of culture got physically built across the three countries, what is fascinating is that despite the cultural, political, and economic
difference among Bulgaria, Cuba, and Brazil, people’s ways of appropriating, making sense, challenging, and modifying the cultural policy model of the networks of community cultural centers ultimately showed similar in the way people personalized the public cultural centers through two key informal and potentially subversive activities: cooking (including making bread) and sleeping at the cultural centers.

**Missing Humor – Rising Bread:**
**Surprising Findings from the “Houses of Culture” to the House of UNESCO**

Fieldwork surprised me with two major findings: the enormous relevance of bread and little relevance of humor to my study of local heritage practices (in one town where “humor” defines local folk traditions) and trans-national cultural policies and UNESCO heritage Conventions. My journey of exploration, discovery, and surprise reminds of anthropologist Donna Goldstein’s (2003) experience. At the offset of her research on national and transnational processes affecting the urban poor in shantytowns (favelas) in Rio de Janeiro, Goldstein had no idea she would use humor as one of the consolidating themes of her ethnography on poverty and pain!

Similar to Goldstein’s experience but in an inverted way, I expected to discover a lot of humor and to use it as a major register of meaning in my dissertation since one of my two ethnographic sites in Bulgaria, besides the Bistritsa Babi chitalishte in Sofia as the home of the UNESCO-recognized ICH bearer group, is the town of Gabrovo (and its Bread House cultural center), which had been branded during communism as “the world capital of humor” embodied in the constriction of a huge House of Humor museum. However, I was surprised to discover how what one would expect to be the “world’s
“funniest city” is located in the country that came to be labeled as “the saddest place on Earth”. This was the title given to be Bulgarian in the comparative world survey conducted by the magazine *The Economist* in a 2010 article on the correlation between income and happiness. The survey’s findings conclude simply and simplistically: “Latin Americans are cheerful, the ex-Soviet Union spectacularly miserable, and the saddest place in the world, relative to its income per person, is Bulgaria.”

Paradoxically in line with the *Economist*, in “the funniest town in the world”, Gabrovo, I discovered a town plagued by sadness and disillusionment, swamped in one of the highest unemployment rates in the country following the massive closure – post-socialist privatization equaling “liquidation”, as the Bulgarian term goes - of the dozens of textile and leather factories that had been the backbone of the Bulgarian economy since the turn of the 20th century and during communism. With the regime change in the 1990s, the factories as almost everything else were rapidly privatized by people who were quite often linked to the former party leaders as the only people owning enough money to “privatize”. These people did not care about developing Bulgaria’s economy but about amassing cash in off-shore accounts, and thus the new owners rushed to sell the factories’ equipment rather then revive their operations, leaving thousands of workers on the street.

While I will not delve into analyzing the outcomes of the interviews that produced the survey employed by *The Economist* (2010), it is key to note how in the field I had to constantly navigate the prevalence of negative talk (lament and complaint) in the “funniest place on Earth”, but also to learn to distinguish the polyphonic discursive

---

tactics and “cultures of complaint”\textsuperscript{12} of not only the Bulgarians, but in some ways also the Cubans and Brazilians (as Goldstein notes), where the exaggerated negativity was mixed with the ambiguities of humor as tropes that people employed in widely diverse situations as modes of coping with the absurdities at hand through an imagined restructuring of reality.

The Bulgarian propensity to make fun of their difficult situation and at the same time take bitter-sweet enjoyment in complaining and lamenting is a discursive and linguistic trope, also noted by Ledeneva (1998) in Russia, is what the interviewers from the \textit{Economist} certainly did not consider. What is intriguing here is how humor becomes a shared tool for expressing mixed feelings and crafting creative ways of navigating economic and political paradoxes while also a brand and a cultural symbol in souvenirs, T-shirts, and banners employed by the Carnivals in all of three cities where I studied Carnival traditions (Gabrovo, Santiago de Cuba, and Salvador).

Thus, along with the unexpected “sadness” in the “world’s happiest place” and thus as humor seemed to not be that relevant to my research, I discovered another discursive trope that seemed to offer wider potential for analysis: the recurring theme of

\textsuperscript{12} I borrow the term “culture of complaint” from the title of a conference organized at Princeton University, in March 2013, titled “Cultures of Grievance in Eastern Europe and Eurasia”, where the definition of “complaints” in this cultural context is useful to understanding the phenomena in Bulgaria that led to its classification as the “saddest place on Earth”: “Complaints are one way that the powerless and the dispossessed communicate their disagreement, dissatisfaction, and resentment to the powerful and the dominant. As a legal genre, a communication tool, and a narrative structure, complaints have a long history in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, from the peasants’ petitions to the Russian tsar to the dissidents’ letters to the party committees and from the complaint books in Soviet grocery stores to denunciation reports to the secret police. This conference plans to examine the genre of complaints in the public culture of Eastern Europe and Eurasia. In his \textit{After the Wall: East Meets West in the New Berlin}, John Borneman reminded us that legal petitions in East Germany were in fact a form of legal privilege, a politically legitimized framework of public discourse that “allowed the citizenry a licit means of responding to and interrogating the economic and political structure.” Nancy Ries (1997) in her \textit{Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation during Perestroika} pointed out another important aspect of complaints: their formulaic structure and repetitive reproduction turn them into “ritualized discourses” through which realms of politics, economics, and law are navigated and negotiated.
bread and bread-making as a contested object and symbol at the friction lines between tradition and modernity. Thus, I did not expect that, when I set off to study the effects of national and transnational (UNESCO) cultural policies, I would end up making bread—having never made or even seen any women in my family make bread before in the urban socialist context that I grew up in—and would end up studying bread and bread-making as a locally meaningful cultural practice and powerful symbol, because it proved to be a particularly relevant analytical tool, both phenomenologically and semiotically, to help me observe and understand otherwise largely invisible or unspoken cultural schemata.

Bread, with its related processes of bread-making (who, where, how, when) and the places of its preparation (in the contestation between traditional and modern kitchen facilities), became the main linkage of all chapters as an epitomy of perhaps the simplest form of co-creative act, which thus well illustrates the general topic of my research: the concept, praxis, and meaning of community co-creative arts. “Bread and Roses”, the overarching theme of the second chapter of the dissertation, is one way to define the concept of community arts and universal access to creativity, as it was a slogan that acquired an idiomatic and iconic value after the workers’ protests in 1912 in the USA when people called for dignity not only in terms of working conditions and wages (the “bread”) but also in securing leisure time and access to the arts (the “roses”).

I discovered bread-making to be particularly relevant to the analysis of the role of community cultural centers and the evolution of the community culture model for a few reasons, mostly as the changes in home and communal baking reveal the processes of rethinking and restructuring gender, age, class, and ethnic roles around and through tradition, and the re-creation of tradition as a leisure art form. It is key here to clarify that
when I talk about bread-making, I refer in particular to the Bulgarian traditions, and the
connection with the references to Cuba and Brazil and their community cultural centers is
along the lines of food in general (not bread alone), examining the place and role of food
and kitchen spaces in the cultural centers.

On the one hand, collective bread-making in Bulgaria and pretty much in all of
the traditionally bread-based societies was not a public, collective practice but a home-
based activity reserved for the women in the sacralized space of the kitchen (in terms of
popular belief and superstitions expressed in songs and idioms). For big church feasts,
Bulgarian women would make bread at home and take it to the church, preparing it with
prayers as a way to channel blessings to the family. When bread entered the commercial
sphere, bakers were traditionally men, and thus bread-making remained divided along
gender lines between the private home space, where it belonged to the women, and the
public space where it was in the hands of men, indeed, the “bread-winners.”

On the other hand, collective bread-making which evolved as a central co-creative
practice at the Bread House opened up a unique space for cooperation and sharing,
opening topics and conversations that would have otherwise not been discussed yet they
found their place in this particular ritual practice – bread-making as a collective art form -
within this particular ritual place – the designated community cultural center with the
special setting of a wood-fired oven and old-house atmosphere – and within the particular
ritual time construct of a special evening event outside of work and home, in a third space
and third time forming it’s a special communal chronotope. In other words, collective
bread-making underwent the three steps that Paul di Maggio (1992) points in the “high
culture model” as characteristic in defining a genre of art - “organization,”
“classification,” and “framing” - and thus bread-making at the Bread House chitalishte in its re-contextualized form started being perceived as an art and leisure, attracting both men and women, re-shifting gender roles, and introducing multiple new social dynamics, such as cross-generational cooperation, philanthropy, informal giving, volunteering, artistic improvisation. The space was also contested, opening the vent for various conflicts over meaning and power, which revealed cultural tropes that would have otherwise never surfaced were it not been for the new framing of a traditional practice linked to such a culturally meaningful and beloved symbol and sensorially-charged food as bread.

As I further discovered, bread was particularly relevant to my analysis on the Bulgarian chitalishte as the combination of bread-making and a chitalishte reminded many people of the old-time communal bakeries (furni) which used to act as the neighborhood informal gathering spots (third spaces). Bulgaria is a country with some of the oldest bread traditions dating back to Neolithic times, with the oldest dwellings in Europe discovered in the town of Stara Zagora. This town is also the hometown of Bogdan, one of the main people in this ethnography, an artisan baker who struggled for years to be recognized by UNESCO as a Bulgarian Living Human Treasure.

Despite this bread-related Bulgarian history and rich living traditions of bread-decorating for various religious holidays, it is paradoxical that in bakeries around the country one can usually only find three kinds of factory-made, not artisan, bread: pure white, mixed, and rye. Small, private local bakeries got revived after the end of socialism only until rigid tax and hygiene regulations started stifling them and limiting their ability to compete with the economies of scale and the monopoly of the privatized socialist
bread factories. Created before communism and kept during the regime (though nationalized) as back-up in case of war, what existed in Bulgaria were not so much commercial bakeries in the form they existed at that time in Western Europe as small artisan shops, but they were rather community ovens (*furna* coming from the French *four*) to which people brought home-made bread. As far as church bread (*prosphora*) it resulted that there are cases in Bulgaria when it is made in industrial-style bakeries by Muslim Turkish families, divorced from the traditional way of making it at home, either by each family (a tradition still kept in some areas of Greece and Romania as women bring home-made bread to the Liturgy) or by a specifically designated woman. This latter practice is a later development in Bulgaria influenced by the decrease in collective participation in the Liturgy and, according to some Bulgarian theologians, the influence of Catholic scholasticism in the 17th and 18th century framing strict laws on purity, dignity, and piety that did not previously factor in the concept of the flexible, case-by-case application of canons based on the principle of love (*oikonomia*) of the community.

I found bread transformations to be particularly useful to examine alongside the transformations of the *chitalishte*, helping us understand the network of these cultural institutions in its much broader context of social and cultural transformations. Indeed, the changes in the processes of preparation of the church *prosphora* breads and in the spaces of the *furnas* and the related transformations of daily bread production methods and quality illustrate – were affected by and they themselves influenced - the transformations occurring in Bulgaria over the course of the past 150 years, which is the time period this dissertation embraces as it goes back to the origins of the Bulgarian *chitalishte*.

In addition to being a channel for new social dynamics, I analyze how bread
acquired new cultural meanings by being recognized as a collective creative (some people would term it “artistic”) event much like the processes of state recognition, classification, and organization of intangible heritage rituals through the community cultural centers got framed into leisure rather than life-cycle ritual. This process of defining “culture” and its expressions as separate from the daily rhythms of life is what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) calls elements of “metaculture”, or a cultural sphere on its own, and as such a special, “out-of-the-norm” experience it starts operating within new registers of meaning.

Alongside bread as the symbolic vehicle of exchanges and collective re-enactment of tradition as much as invention of creative practices, I employ the house/home metaphor as a symbolic place (but also actual, physical sites of my ethnography) of exchanges and the overarching metaphor of the intricacies in the construction of leisure practices and places to house them. In this sense, studying the houses of culture it is key to study the food exchanges inside of them, as food defines in many ways the levels of sociability allowed and de facto taking place within a space. And why bread became such a key food to undertake as a collective activity at the cultural center rather than any other food or cooking practice will be a question I explore in detail in the chapter on the Bread House and its “contested commensalities”, but an important element to it is the rich sensoriality of bread that I later analyze through the literature in the anthropology of the sense. Just to point to a few key comments made by people at the Bread House, among all foods, bread is the one that, as a woman pointed, “when hot out of the oven, it can hardly ever taste bad, everyone loves its smell, and cannot get people sick with germs,” which speaks partially to the sensorial and bodily reasons why bread is such a particularly
important and interesting element through which to analyze people’s engagement with food, art, and with one another. For bread is one food that, again when hot and fresh, does not leave people dispassionate, but, in the words of another person engaged in the Bread House, “nothing can be more innocent and also more passionate than bread.” Bread, as “high-touch rather than high-tech” endeavor, introduced touch and taste to the space of a cultural center, which shook the system of these spaces through a deeply sensorial experience, new to their conceptualization of culture and arts, and it is precisely the sensorial, as much as the semiotic, analysis of these communal spaces that is crucial to understanding their potential for bringing together diverse and often marginalized groups and for transforming communities through new tactile experiences: paradoxically, indeed, the tangible handling of “intangible heritage.”

**Missing Kitchens – Dangerous Commensalities: What is the Place of Food in Politics of Culture?**

The presence of food in the community cultural centers and in general in public buildings, and the ways in which people interact with it, can serve almost as a lithmus test revealing and measuring the degrees of livelihood of the space in much the same way food presence in open-air public places such as streets and parks can reveal levels of freedom of engagement with the environment, flexibility of hygiene, small business, and public action regulations, and thus potential for social proximities and conviviality. The community gardening projects currently springing across Western Europe, the USA, Canada, and Australia are one intriguing case that illustrates well the difference between East and West in terms of the political inheritance of socialism in Eastern Europe. In Eastern Europe, public parks remain inherently aestheticized and controlled public
spaces, where any interactions with the environment such as stepping or laying on the grass are prohibited in clear contrast to people’s free behavior in Western parks, and the same can be observed in terms of the street food dynamics between post-socialist Eastern Europe and the West. While Western public spaces are being continually re-drawn under the influence of immigration, as more and more food carts fill the public spaces across the USA and Canada pressing the food regulations to open up and be ever more flexible, in Eastern Europe the limited influx of immigrants and the stagnant and rigid regulation systems limit and keep on curbing small-business food initiatives both in terms of street food sales, hardly existent in the streets of Bulgaria and Eastern Europe in general (whereas, by the memories of still living witnesses, street food vending used to be a vibrant tradition in this part of the world until the Communist shifts in the 1940s).

This point will result crucial in the fourth chapter exploring a particular kind of a cultural center in Bulgaria, called Bread House, whose central activities focused around the safeguarding of traditional foods and bread in general gave rise to bureaucratic scrutiny, impediments, and struggles over meanings and cultural values: to what extent is food “heritage” and if yes, which most people agree, how can this heritage be “safeguarded” through collective public events so that hygiene norms are kept? The contested concept of a food-centered chitalishte is analyzed in comparison with the dilemmas arising around the concept and registration of a “traditional artisan bakery.” I explore this in the case of a Bulgarian baker who applied to receive UNESCO’s recognition for his skills in order to get the government regulating machine to let him open a bakery with traditional wooden counters rather than the mainstream metal mass-

---

13 This contrast has been examined in the architectural analysis and installation art by Turkish artist Can Altay. Presented as part of Fritz Haeg’s Colony Project, Princeton University, spring 2012.
scale production facilities stipulated by the central hygiene regulations of the European Union, uncritically adopted by the Bulgarian state without any consideration of the heritage of traditional food production methods. The issue illuminates key questions arising around what is heritage and can it be safeguarded in the public context, when at the chitalishte similar struggles over space and tradition in light of the stringent hygiene and food safety regulations coming from the EU (similarly strict in the American case) arose immediately when food was officially introduced as one type of collective activity, as we will see in the fourth chapter analyzing the Bread House and its contested commensalities.

In my explorations of the role of the arts and creativity in patterns of socialization, I examined various cultural spaces and institutions, from libraries to theaters, operas, and museums, and they all ultimately led me to the spaces of restaurants and street food. Again, why food? Because I noticed how the levels of socialization within cultural spaces were contingent upon the levels of freedom in the interactions around and through food creation, consumption, and/or sharing. I discovered that a central importance to the animation of these community cultural centers was the possibility they offered for people to bring in food (unlike in local coffee shops or restaurants and pubs, which are other sites for socialization but of a very different kind) and thus the levels to which the cultural spaces was open or closed to food was correlated with the levels of local ownership and sense of belonging to the space.

Because kitchens were widely missing from the architectural plans of the state-built houses of culture, the subject of food opened intriguing debates and niches for local subversive acts. A particularly telling case reflecting the discipling rather than socializing
mission of these cultural spaces is the architectural plan of the Cuban National School of the Arts (Escuela Nacional de las Artes). As a product of the Communist regime’s fear of the artists for their power to criticize, create, and transform, the arts complex was set far away from the center of Habana, the genres of arts were separated in distinct buildings, and, as noted by a dance professor at the School, each building was meant to have its own dormitories and its own cafeteria, so that the arts and would not crosspollinate and thus would be more easily controlled\textsuperscript{14}.

While some work exists on kitchens as spaces for sociality and internal discussions in particular in the socialist and post-socialist world and the developments of “kitchen culture” (Boym 1995:140-160; Gerasimova 2002), where the kitchen was so central as it was also the space where all the shortages of food were most directly and viscerally experienced\textsuperscript{15}, and in general commonplaces of daily living as the perfect clues for those seeking to understand a culture (de Certeau 2011), usually these studies focus on the kitchen in the private home, and in this study I explore the multiple ways in which the kitchen space evolves in the public spaces of the community cultural centers, where it becomes a site of contestation in particular in the cases when kitchens were never planned in the formal architectural plan of these spaces reserved for the formal definition of “culture” as “arts,” even if non-professional, community arts. These local acts of subversive agency of the ordinary are what de Certeau calls “tactics”, often expressed through mythic stories, common proverbs, and verbal tricks in the common talk, and I

\textsuperscript{14} Ultimately, the School of the Arts in Habana ended up having only one cafeteria for lack of funding.

\textsuperscript{15} A Bulgarian woman living in the USA once employed food well to summarize her experience of the difference between socialism and capitalism in Bulgaria: “Bulgaria under socialism was like a Trader Joe’s: limited, few products but good quality and at affordable prices. And Bulgarian capitalism now is like Whole Foods: an initial post-socialist crave for diversity and the recent craze with healthy eating, but both are not accomplished due to the nonsensical multitude of varieties…often useless and luxury goods that get you lost and stressed with too many choices and often prices you simply cannot afford.” (Interview conducted by Nadezhda Savova, February 15, 2012, New York).
build further on De Certeau’s distinction between the concepts of “strategies” and “tactics”, as he relates his ideas to the works of Foucault and Bourdieu in areas such as cooking, story telling, and believing. De Certeau uses the term “strategy” to refer to the top-down exercise of power to coerce compliance, while “tactics” refer to the opportunistic manipulations of the laws and regulations that the ordinary people craft and employ in various situations.

In my work, the various “tactics” that people employed to animate, appropriate, personalize, and domesticate the community cultural centers can be vividly understood and sensed, not directly but through association, in the personal story of the young baker, Bogdan, fighting for the recognition of his skills and the right to open a traditional, artisan bakery despite the national and EU hygiene regulations “strategies” attempting to control food production, even at the expense of killing local traditions. The dissertation shows through various contexts and spaces for food sharing within the formal art structures and institutions how, as De Certeau points, the ambiguous conflicts between state “strategies” and community “tactics” is ironic: as strategic forces expand to increase dominance, there is a corresponding increase in opportunity for tactical subversion.

I employ the kitchen space and cooking practices as analytical frames to comprehend the importance of daily practices in the enactment and embodiment of intangible heritage, mostly framed as a “festive”, “special” practice reserved for particular times and contexts yet in the case of the community cultural centers becoming a particular kind of daily practice, into a form of leisure. In order to convey "the formal structure of these practices," de Certeau (2011) points out two sorts of investigations: a)"to trace the intricate forms of the operations proper to the recomposition of a space by
When it comes to the presence of food in public buildings and in particular cultural institutions, over the past few decades, more and more “interactive” and “installation” modern arts projects around the world started involving food as a medium of communication, or what seems to me to be a kind of a cultural lacmus that artists employed to testify or reveal social issues by challenging the orderliness of the status quo, in particular the food-free and touch-free settings of the galleries in museums. While the subject of various art installations in galleries, food started creeping into museum spaces in varied form, from the so-called “demos” and “historic cooking” lessons to upscale “curated meals” (as the famous Fannie’s Last Supper in America’s Test Kitchen show documenting the recreation of an 1896 twelve-course Christmas meal\textsuperscript{16}) held mostly in thematic museums dedicated to a particular food (chocolate, bread, salt, sugar, pepper, potato, corn, etc.) or re-creating a particular historic period and thus striving to also re-create its flavors and smells (as in the Etura Ethnographic Open Air Museum in Gabrovo, Bulgaria).

The issue of the role of food in museum education has, in fact, become a hot topic in the field of museum education and was discussed for hours by museum professionals...

professionals and curators from across the USA in a webinar called “Feeding the Spirit: Museums, Food & Community” organized by the Center for the Future of Museums to “explore food literacy, values-based food service and community building.” However, a key discussion that emerged and ultimately engaged everyone in heated debates was the difficulties that museums were facing conforming with and trying to challenge and circumvent health services regulations. The case of Sauder Village Open Air Museum in Archbold OH is quite illustrative, as it is a place with five historic kitchens and trained historic cooks teaching guests to make foods, yet the people were never allowed to eat what they cooked, since public institutions can only serve food that is prepared in inspected kitchens which follow all health department procedures. One of the museum educators poignantly commented: “We teach the people who come to the museum to make bread and we bake in a wood-fired outdoor oven, but cannot serve the bread. It would be incredibly popular with guests if they could taste it!”.

To the questions of how were museums to incorporate kitchen spaces, people suggested housing the museums in old former residential houses/mansions that already had kitchens, and this is what the municipalities of my two ethnographic sites in Latin America, Salvador de Bahia in Brazil and Santiago de Cuba, did by letting cultural organizations occupy the world heritage houses in the historic areas and animate them as their office and rehearsal spaces. As I show ethnographically how the groups locally employ the kitchen as a central, if not the most cherished, space in the cultural center (as the Casa do Samba in Brazil and the Casa de la Cultura/Foco Cultural of the Tumba

---

Francesa group in Cuba), I have developed the conceptual framework of heritage kinaesthetics (Savova 2009).

Heritage kinaesthetics illustrates how human actions, rituals, and symbols enable the aesthetic looks of heritage spaces to “move”, to become kinaesthetic and alive with pulsating human interactions, or what public archaeologists and museum educators have been calling for through the term “heritage socialization.” The case of Salvador de Bahia’s historic center offers an intriguing case in which socialization was not the product of through tourist visits - which is what is considered the mainstream form of “heritage socialization” - but rather through the regular and creative use of these heritage houses and public spaces by local groups. While Collins (2007) shows the contested ownership over the old historic buildings in the reviving of Salvador de Bahia’s historic center as World Heritage site, I found a different, complementary story of re-habitation of these buildings, occurring through local community-based artistic groups, which often brough to the tourist-filled World Heritage old center youth from the peripheral favela shanty-towns to participate in the cultural groups. These new social and cultural dynamics are distinct from many other historic sites where the locals’ participation and cultural presence was limited to sales and services, fomenting passive tourist consumption of souvenirs and performances rather than active local creation of cultural products. Such active cultural creation was occurring in Salvador through on-going street performances, given by young people through the artistic social programs funded by the municipality, state, or foundations to enable help them leave the favelas and discover new opportunities for development, even when often these cultural activities would not
necessarily change their economic livelihood but would have other social and psychological repercussions.

On the same issue of cultural co-creation in public spaces, the Bread House as both a community cultural center (and to an extent community museum with its various antique and ethnographic objects donated by the people) and at the same time engaging people to prepare food and eat it together turned out to be new for Bulgaria and the region. Bread made sense in the Bulgarian context, where the presence of bread inside the cultural centers proved to be an important point of analysis as it provoked wide interest in the country up to the point of being covered in a documentary by the Bulgarian National TV, but I was further surprised that bread was also meaningful and an exciting subject of discussion in various international circles. At different international conferences where I presented my PhD or non-profit work with the International Council for Cultural Centers, during my presentations or in informal conversations with cultural workers, artists, and politicians from various countries, it was invariably the Bread House model that inspired them most to comment, share, envision, and want to try the method in their cultural organizations and promote it through their cultural networks. As expressed by the President of the European Network of Cultural Centers, ENCC, the continental network of a dozen countries with networks similar to the chitalishte, “tastes and aroma lack widely in our cultural centers, and at the same time they are crucial in attracting and connecting people, so we should really re-think the role of food alongside the arts.”

And indeed, the community cultural centers seem to be the ones that are able within the penumbras of “collective workshops” - though with difficulties as I

---

experienced it personally with the Bread House chitalishte registration - introduce food in their work as a collective experience, both prepared and shared at the cultural center. This is different from the food dynamics usually observed at the main cultural institutions, i.e. the ones formally listed in UNESCO’s cultural statistics - museum, gallery, theater, opera, and library, yet missing the “community cultural center” – as these are spaces mainly destined for cultural consumption, even if critical and engaged, this dissertation shows how the spaces of the community cultural centers serves the distinct function of fostering cultural co-creation, where the quality of the product is not of primary importance as much as is the dynamic of community-building.

The cultural centers often become inhabited by alternative practices that have not been foreseen and can be challenged and censored by the regimes of cultural policy, which is illustrated in Chapter Three discussing the missing kitchens in the houses of culture and people’s tactics to develop their own spaces for socialization, understood through the bureaucratic impediments and tactics employed by bakers in Bulgaria to try to establish the category of artisan bakeries that can use the traditional baking techniques.

Based on these observations, in the dissertation I thus drew a distinction between two major kinds of cultural institutions: 1) feeding cultural institutions, defined by process of cultural and culinary consumption, where food is sold through adjacent coffee shops and restaurants (theaters, operas, museums, libraries, galleries) or is shows as cooking demos and classes (museums) yet the audience cannot engage in cooking their own food, or even if cooking it in classes, they are not allowed to share it and engage in commensality; and 2) feedback cultural institutions (some community cultural centers), defined by the process of cultural and culinary co-creation and consumption, where the
institution is open to people coming together to cook and share food in the collective cultural space. As we shall see, sometimes the entrance of food in such public art spaces can be highly contested (Bulgaria), widely applauded (Brazil), or politically motivated (Cuba), and it is through these dilemmas and conflicts that I examine the impediments and the drives for heritage “safeguarding” and in general for the meanings of the community cultural center and the development of the community culture model in these countries and potentially in various other contexts.

Methodologically, I followed the unusual work schedules of bakers and community cultural centers administrators and participants (amateur artists): a) cultural centers’ administrators as they stayed until midnight random days of the week to close after all the rehearsals and concerts – not being paid extra for the additional hours – and b) artisan bakers (Vesselin in Gabrovo; Bogdan in Stara Zagora, and Raicho in Sofia) as they woke up at 2 am to go bake bread so that people would have the aromatic delight first thing in the morning. Both of these groups of people considered their work a “vocation”: the time and effort their jobs required were by no means receiving their due monetary retribution. This notion of vocation informs my notion of the distinction between house economics and home oikonomia in terms of considering their work a social act, an act not simply of “earning one’s bread”, as the expression goes, but of providing people with “food for the soul”, as the other common expression goes for artistic creations and, among the foods, in particular for hot bread often called “little soul” (dushichka). Despite the irregular working hours, most of these professionals said they would not want to change their jobs, since their work gave meaning to their lives knowing that what they do does on its part give meaning to other people’s lives. An
exemplary case is one chitalishte secretary, who told me sometimes she would have to carry three pairs of shoes and two or three outfits with her in one day, as she would move from a meeting at the municipality or the ministry, to a workshop with dance in the Roma community where the streets of the slum were so dirty she would have to bring her rubber boots from their village house, and then workshops at the chitalishte where she leads the theater and dance group and needs special dance shoes.20

This ambiguity of the multifunctionality of the community cultural centers in Bulgaria and as I later discovered in Cuba and Brazil, is one of the key reasons why in many countries where these networks exist they are overlooked and hardly ever discussed as key policy intruments in global conferences but rather perceived as insignificant local leisure sites. Indeed, the cue that I was researching an intriguing topic in my exploration of the relationships between ICH safeguarding and the houses of culture as the places hosting (or with potential to host) and affecting (and being affected by) safeguarding was, in fact, the absence of links between the two in the minds of the politicians drafting the Convention at UNESCO’s House as contrasted to the local physical and very tangible presence of these houses as the designated spaces for folklore/ICH recreation. One exception was the Bulgarian delegation, which presented its experience with the chitalishte as “instrumental in the preservation of national intangible heritage over the centuries.” The Bulgarian delegate in 2008 representing the Ministry of Culture, Nadezhda Zaharieva, even suggested in informal conversations that the institution of the

---

20 Shoes and their uses and contexts at the houses of culture, like the shoes at the “houses” on Wall Street discussed in Karen Ho’s (2009) ethnography, are much like bread in the way they tell a lot about the social and cultural structures depending on the contexts of their use.
chitalishte as a cultural model should be itself recognized as “heritage of humanity” and thus “inspire other countries to employ its model.”

At UNESCO, in my informal conversations with delegates during coffee breaks, dinner banquets, bathroom chats, as well as in formal interviews, my mentioning of the question of where people “safeguard” heritage was met with puzzling, surprise, and often genuine interest and excited realization that there were so many of these community arts centers around the world, and even in one’s own country, funded publically, yet never conceptualized as a substantial cultural policy tool.

I discovered how the missing house – the missing tangible place in relation to intangible heritage - in the discourses on heritage safeguarding at UNESCO was juxtaposed with the local people’s ongoing talk and strong emphasis on the meaning of these communal houses for rehearsals, performances, and celebrations. I examine and compare these diverging concepts and practices among local heritage groups of what UNESCO would call “safeguarding heritage,” as due to the political clout of the the ICH Convention, the term “intangible cultural heritage” became the fashionable term that governments and communities across continents began to use replacing the old term “folklore” in order to appropriate the symbolic capital of internationally recognized practices for local legitimization and empowerment.

Thus, I discovered how the missing kitchen inside the missing house appeared to be of importance to local people in their attempts to open up niches for informal socialization alongside the formal rehearsals and workshops, thus striving to make the centers feel more like “home:” indeed, domesticating the cultural centers from looking like houses into feeling like homes. The most intriguing clashes between the global and
local understandings of heritage and art were the struggles that the three groups in
Bulgaria, Cuba, and Brazil had similarly undertaken to develop kitchen spaces within
their state-funded cultural centers, where kitchens are hardly planned, since food is not
officially considered an intrinsic element of “arts and culture” or “ICH” by UNESCO.
The missing kitchens shaped these spaces into hubs for alternatives to the homogenizing
forces affecting both food and more broadly culture, and thus the kitchen space and food
became the consolidating elements in my dissertation, revealing and making tangible
through phenomenological analysis people’s experience of the houses of culture and their
polyvalent meanings.

Furthermore, the missing bread inside the missing kitchen inside the missing
(from official policy discourses) house of culture emerged as a recurring theme in the
particular Bulgarian case, where discussions on tradition and heritage often led people to
comment on the disappearance of traditional bread, both daily and rituals loaves that used
to be lavishly decored with sculpted dough, replaced as a home tradition by bad factory-
made bread (and the bread monopoly created under socialism and still kept). This
unexpected topic created a rich set of commentaries and shared memories and dreams,
which provoked me to experiment with the discourse on bread and try to turn it into a
phenomenology – and thus to employ a phenomenological rather than discursive analysis
– developing bread-making into one possibility for collective activity at the chitalishte.
This is how an new kind of chitalishte emerged called the Bread House, in Gabrovo,
Bulgaria, which I gave the initial idea for in 2009 as I started at my great-grandmother’s
house with a few volunteers opening the space to the whole community and offering
people a very simple thing: to come and make bread together. The idea of a common
space where people to make bread together, though new, had some resonance in people’s associations with the old-time communal ovens/furni that did not exist anymore and many sensed nostalgia for the way those spaces used to animate the neighborhoods and the streets with their fresh bread aroma. Rooted in my own experience growing up with my greatgrandmother’s stories about the old furni, I tapped into the cultural memory of the communal ovens/furni that existed in every neighborhood before communism and were the places where people brought home-made bread to be baked. The unexpected enthusiasm among people to create a communal oven space offered valuable action-research insights to the meaning of sensorial experiences, such as kneading, baking, and sharing hot bread, and to their power to inspire people’s creative agency to strive to subvert bureaucratic obstacles – in this context and for this cause, contrasted to a dominant passivity and registered through surveys very low levels of civic participation in voting and protests in Bulgaria and in most other post-socialist countries – but enacting civic activism in a sphere outside the mainstream area perceived as “civic participation” by undertaking unusual tactics: framing the collective bread-making and decoration as an art form, calling it among themselves as a tool of resistance to neo-liberalism, whose hygiene regulations limit the possibility for collective cooking in public spaces as well as for producing bread with traditional methods, reverberating how heritage and art were sanitized under socialism. Introducing the collective bread-making helped me discover and observe social and cultural patterns in a similar way as if spreading flour on an old wooden table, where it helps you see the patterns and the occasional scratched letters and phrases in it, from love declaration to curse words and patriotic or xenophobic statements. Through the touch of flour and the texture of bread I discovered how details
have enormous importance for how people socialize – evident in my student’s comment on how the oven functioned as the old-time TV – and how people participate in society: indeed, how a society labeled as ultimately deprived of “civic culture” due to its socialist heritage turned out to abound in people willing to volunteer, give, and participate if given the opportunity in the right context and framing. As the case of the high culture model, the possibility for people to participate through something as innocent and non-intimidating as bread in collective creative experiences, started nurturing and shaping a particular volunteer culture, a kind of volunteer culture model with its own organizing, classifying, and framing, to borrow di Maggio’s terms: from Vesko, the re-awakened baker, showing initiative to contact the children’s lung disease sanatorium and make the long trip to go make bread with the children; to Ivelina, lonely clerk, donating her humble savings collected over the years for the roof repairing; to Kalin, the unemployed sculptor, donating his time and love.

Chapters Outline and Main Conceptual Frames

I approach the analysis of the meaning of community cultural centers and the local experiences and re-workings of international and national cultural policy strategies both phenomenologically and semiotically, inspired and guided by the methodological tradition of the anthropology of the senses (Classen 2010, Stoller 1989). In Stoller’s The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology, referring to the work of such predecessors in the area as Levi-Strauss, Ong, and Feld, Stoller calls for anthropologists to produce “tasteful ethnographies” exploring with sensitivity to detail “the smells, tastes
and textures of the land, the people, and the food” (1989, p. 29). I therefore attempted to knead, bake, and break with you a “tasteful ethnography” around the theme of bread as a consolidating thread exploring the topic of communal engagement, collective memory, and bargain over meaning of heritage and modernity within community cultural spaces that would otherwise be viewed as a formal aspect of cultural policy examined in a quantitative manner, lacking the touch and taste of the life inside these houses across the globe.

The derived conceptual frameworks of this research span four main levels that emerge as on-goingly interconnected: 1) the personal; 2) the communal; 3) the national institutional level in the relations between the Ministries of Culture and the local cultural centers connected within a national network enacted through meetings, festivals, and collaborative projects; and 4) the trans-national inter-governmental institutional level with the circulation of UNESCO’s discourses, projects, and programs, and the trans-national non-governmental level examined in the relations between national networks of cultural centers connected through global conferences, folk festivals, international artistic projects, cultural exchange programs, seminars like the ASSiST Summer School we held in Bulgaria at the Bread House Cultural Center, and thus in my own action research through the weaving of the trans-national network of the International Council for Cultural Centers. Within I3C since its inception in 2008, I have been both participating and observing in the varied network dynamics and circulations of meanings and visions, and I have been in particular the engine for a growing movement of culinary-cultural centers called Bread Houses that we started referring to through an acronym: BREAD Movement, standing for *Bridging Resources for Ecological and Art-based Development*,
recognized by Slow Food International at their global meeting in Torino in 2010. Such ethical food movements in general and in particular the BREAD Movement will be examined further below as linked to the ways in which the community cultural centers across Brazil, Bulgaria, and Cuba have started linking ecological concerns, issues of biodiversity and cultural diversity, and the preservation of food heritage as core aspects of their perceptions of culture and creativity.

The two main institutional theoretical frameworks of the community culture model as the spatial and institutional framing of community arts and the heritage house-guarding dynamic are interwoven throughout the dissertation’s ethnographic stories from the three countries, as in each the model and processes both change and show intriguing similarities. The two frameworks are ultimately grounded in the classical anthropological theories on ritual (Durkheim [1912] 1995) and gift and symbolic capital exchange (Mauss [1922] 1990), Bourdieu (1986), which lay the foundational conceptual texture of the dissertation.

Building on this first chapter that sets the road-map for the main questions and ethnographic specificities of the research, the second chapter titled “The Community Culture Model: Transparency, Trans-use, and Tensility through Nets of Arts Institutions” traces historically the cultural centers’ foundational principles as well as their current meanings and uses. Multiple case studies and observations ultimately help me pull together and weave the main, shared characteristics of the cultural centers and their networks across the countries and more broadly the continents I study. I pull the thread together in the conceptual framework of the community culture model, explaining the processes of institutionalizing intangible cultural heritage and communal creativity into
the categories of “leisure” and “amateur arts” as forming a whole new genre that could generically be called “community/amateur arts” (lyubitelsko izkustvo in most Slavic-speaking countries). I examine and show how this field and whole new set of practices and relationships expected from people evolved particularly through the establishment of places designated for these activities: the community cultural centers. This model goes alongside the previously developed concept of heritage house-guarding dynamics (Savova 2009) making sense of the meanings of these spaces and the ways in which these local institutions are animated. The two concepts reveal the importance and also contested meanings invested by policy-makers and local people into the infrastructural component of a communal permanent space dedicated to regular creative activities, meant to unite – even if often point of contestation - various local amateur groups.

Building on DiMaggio’s (1992) “high culture model”, the community culture model defines how cultural traditions, formerly called “folklore” and more recently under UNESCO’s influence termed “intangible cultural heritage,” got institutionalized through the establishment of community cultural centers, often linked in national networks (again, particularly present across the socialist world yet traced to one of the oldest, non-communist and grassroots network model in Bulgaria).

The community culture model evolved through the same three main processes defining the institutionalization of high arts in the USA as commercial popular arts evolved into high culture institutions non-governmental, non-for-profit, trustee-run entities independent from the market – the processes of “organization” (organizationing into institutions), “classification” (defining categories of high arts), and “framing” (establishing framework of relations between audience and art work developed). These
more formal and theoretical conceptual frameworks are balanced out by ethnographic vignettes that reveal people’s tactics of domestication of the public spaces of the arts centers, which intriguingly pass through food and sleeping (sleeping over at the cultural centers) as tactics for spatial ownership of the planned out formal cultural organizations.

This third chapter delves more in the current vestiges of socialism in Bulgaria and the dynamic processes of reviving and negotiating a moral economy of Christianity linked to the community centers, as people strive to develop alternatives to the persisting socialist and capitalist economic structures that I define as *house economics*. *House economics* is defined by power and money-mediated relationships, whereas more and more organizations in Bulgaria, Brazil, Cuba (though its political and economic context is very specific) and other countries around the globe in movements of “social justice” strive to organize a more socially-sensitive and equitable moral economies, or what I term a post-industrial *home oikonomia* (from the Greek Orthodox *oikonomia*). As Bulgarians returning to the Orthodox faith have been reviving the Greek term *oikonomia*, denoting “the rules of the house of God” rooted in Orthodox Christianity, I believe the concept of *home oikonomia* can be relevant to the similar discourse and aspiration of communal responsibility, ecologic farming, and lessening dependence on the consumer system present also in other movements for alternative economies around the world, where the roots are not religious (such as the Occupy Wall Street movement) yet *home oikonomia* resonates at least discursively in their claims. *Home oikonomia* is a general frame that I employ to denote the social movements striving to construct a new type of social household beyond money.
The dissertation further analyzes in cultural policy distinct models of public and private funding patterns for the arts and cultural policies, defining *fist-grip* policy approach (tight strings attached and close monitoring and control exerted by direct public funding); and *hand-shake* policy approach defining the system of regular funding for community cultural centers in the *community culture model*, as quite distinct from the Anglo-Saxon model of “arms-length” system.

These dynamics within the *community culture model* are summarized in the metaphor of the bread net, called *avoska*\(^{21}\) in Russian (a string shopping bag that resembles a basketball net), which acquired a quasi-iconic value after the fall of socialism in many of the former states East of the Wall as a materialized bitter-sweet memory of the drudged lines for hot bread – but also the lively conversation spurred while waiting; the shortages – but also the often comicly creative ways of employing personal contacts and networks to find goods in the underground economies of barter. Indeed, people discuss these memories of socialism with ambiguous nostalgia mixed with the recognition and complaints of the difficulties of that period.

\(^{21}\) The website *Russiapedia* describes well *avoska* and its symbolic meanings and creative practical uses in Russian society, quite similar to the way it was employed in Bulgaria: “*Avoska* – or rather *avos’ka* with a soft “s” – is a Russian-only word used to describe a string bag that resembles a basketball net. The space-saving bag was designed and widely used in the country during Soviet times. The *avoska* – an “accessory” for both women and men – easily fit in a lady’s handbag or in a man’s case and could be unfolded in a grocery store. The first reference to the string bag as an *avoska* dates back to 1935, when the then highly popular comedian Arkady Raikin read a monologue holding the rank-and-file bag. The root of the word - *avos’* - means “maybe” in Russian. It is widely used in traditional Russian fairytales and fables, probably just as widely as the expression “once upon a time.” The word, which would just mean uncertainty in any other language, had a wider meaning in the USSR. When most things were hard to come by and there was a deficit of certain products even in grocery stores – the *avoska* was a kind of scoop-net. People took it with them in the morning just in case, they might catch a certain goody by the end of the day. Arkady Raikin played with the etymology of the word, describing the string bag as a “maybe-bag” – “*Here’s my maybe-bag. Maybe I’ll get something into it...*” Available at http://russiapedia.rt.com/of-russian-origin/avoska/ (accessed October 2012).
I use the bread net as a tangible metaphor to help us better comprehend social phenomena and complex webs of relationships through simpler analogies, or, as Henare and ed. (2006) show in their edited volume, a metaphor that is a vehicle to help us “think through things.” I employ the bread net both for its symbolic role as an object of both the imagined and lived past and present, thus acting much like the chitalishte as a site that focuses and helps open up negotiations over time, space, and meaning. I employ the bread net also because its particular physical characteristics (and thus factors affecting its functionality) - transparency, trans-use, and tensility - very well visualize the way the community cultural centers function both as a network and very locally as a third place in their respective communities.

The bread net metaphor links to the shekere net metaphor (shekere is a Brazilian instrument made of a gourd and a net of beads wrapped around it) I had previously employed to analyze cultural policy decision-making (Savova 2011b). While the shekere net illustrates the dynamics of how a community cultural center locally (any bead on the shekere’s net) relates to and interacts with the national network of their centers and the national and international cultural policies and politics affecting the network – defined by factors I summarized as looseness, lapse of time, and locality, or the three “l”s of network dynamics. The bread bad metaphor as illustrative of the community cultural model discussed in detail in the second chapter of the dissertation is focusing more than on the relations within the network rather on visualizing and comprehending better the dynamics within a community cultural center and thus the broader notions and meanings attached to the centers’ symbolic and functional role in the local context, which
notwithstanding culturally specific, is marked by shared qualities in the countries I studied.

In Chapter Three, titled “The Missing Kitchen: Purity and Porosity in Culture and Food,” we move from the national and international network dynamics and explore very locally with ethnographic descriptions how the community centers open questions on two distinct views on heritage transmission, metaphorically presented by the spaces of the cultural center’s *formal stage* and *library* and the *back kitchen*: the former exposes UNESCO’s and the Ministry of Culture’s formalized emphasis on archiving and performance (official forms of cultural capital embedded in recognition awards, festivals, and hygienic regulations of the arts centers’ sounds, smells, and prohibited flavors), and the latter emphasizes informal heritage transmission and living tradition, which can occur when heritage becomes a leisure (regularly rehearsed, performed, and celebrated while also on-goingly transformed) as revealed in the *heritage house-guarding* processes grounded in the ways people locally perceive as crucially important to have a common space, a house, to rehearse but also meet informally and circulate tangible and intangible gifts (performances) to food (usually bread and chocolate) and humor (story-telling).

The dilemmas of the kitchen missing from formal architectural plans are interwoven with the personal story of the young baker, Bogdan, who challenged the state to recognize the category of “artisan bakery” as a particular kind of establishment/institution allowing the use of traditional bread-making methods, which he tried to get recognized and employ the legitimacy of UNESCO’s “intangible cultural heritage” title.
In Chapter Four, titled “Contested Commensalities: Communion and Community Around the Missing Table (The case of the Bread House Cultural Center, Bulgaria),” the community culture model is further understood through the ethnographic detail in the collective bread-making dynamics at the Bread House chitalishte in Gabrovo. In this context, the powerful symbol of bread holding multiple meanings in the Bulgarian context helps us navigate between notions of home and community, private and public, religious and commercial, female and male, age and ethnicity. Bread became the main register of the contested commensalities I observed as a pattern also in the cultural centers explored in Brazil and Cuba.

While in Brazil and Cuba the heritage foods in question were not bread – in Brazil, street fried dumplings called acaraje in Salvador (in the state of Bahia), and in Cuba, various street foods sold in the accompaniment of particular songs called pregon – the diverse foods nonetheless resulted wrapped up in similar process in which the local people engaged in resistance and tactical struggles to get their traditional foods and cultural practices recognized as “heritage” in order to be counter modern food hygiene regulations (Bulgaria), communist censorship and limits on private food enterprises (Cuba), and striving to limit the rise of violence and drug abuse among the youth through community cultural activities, and struggling to recognize food and cooking as official cultural element (Brazil). In the case of Brazil, the process of recognizing food as heritage was achieved by establishing a legitimate space, a traditional foods restaurants run by local women, within the cultural center (Casa do Samba). In the case of Cuba it was achieved through the organization of a large festival to create the image of the street food vending as a heritage and artistic practice rather than a commercial act.
In my reading of the social lives of these centers, the dichotomy between the kitchen versus the library/stage official spaces of cultural performance reveals the contested notions and practices of “legitimate culture,” as my interlocutors were raising the questions of where do the “culinary arts” fit within the “fine arts” or “high arts” categories. Indeed, as one asked, “Why is heritage even called ‘intangible’ when there is so much touch involved?” And on the issue of touch, my main interlocutor in Cuba, Sara from the Tumba Francesa group, even pointed that traditions should not even be defined by touch but my movement, thus arguing it should be called “moving heritage.”

People often talked about the community cultural centers in ambiguous terms, as “grey” zones between other formal cultural institutions with clear “cultural” and “artistic” functions like museums and theaters. The ambiguity was made very visceral as an embodied experiences of these spaces due to the sensoriality they generate and intensify: people’s engagement with diverse materials, from wood and wool to clay and dough, to sweat exchanged in folk circle dancing; to smells, sounds, tastes, touch, and temperatures that are often unexpected and out of place in the cultural center. These cross-sensorial experiences, or what I call cross-sensorial learning of cultural categories and their possible reshifting, become channels for people’s discussions on and performances of cultural identity and religious belonging.

The conclusions of the dissertation tie all these threads of meaning and praxis together around the main question: “What does heritage mean when it is lived in urban contexts as leisure and community arts, on the one side as a practice vis-à-vis the discourses of UNESCO, the Ministries of Culture’s heritage programs and local NGOs, and on the other side as alternative categories to define their identity and participation in
civil society? “How do the community cultural centers act as “third place”, where the important element is not the artistic practice (“what” people do) alone, but in fact the places (“where” they do it) that foment an even stronger sense of belonging beyond home and work/school? How does heritage recreation and artistic creation affect how people handle issues of citizenship, philanthropy, and participation; money and exchange; spirituality and routine; ritual and performance; continuity and change/tradition and innovation; practice and place; entertainment and critical thinking? The four broad registers of this research - heritage, civil society, food commensality, and networks - include multiple other sub-categories such as: practice/performance, space/place, gender and inequality, work and leisure, money and gift.

**Inter-disciplinary Contributions**

Considering the global scale of these networks of community cultural centers and the substantial funding that some of them receive nationally - clearly the cases of Bulgaria, Cuba, and Brazil - it is paradoxical that UNESCO does not factor them in when it lists countries by their national cultural indicators: the category of “community cultural/arts center” is missing where it belongs alongside the categories of library, gallery, theater, opera, and museum. Similarly, the national profiles in the EU Compendium of Cultural Policies do not contain local cultural indicators, and the 90 pages of profile on Bulgaria do not mention the *chitalishte* centers despite the Council for Europe’s research on Bulgarian civil society before the country’s accession to the EU, when the Council discovered that Bulgaria had proportionately one of the largest

---

networks in the world (about 3500 centers for 7 million people) which was also recognized to be the oldest non-governmental organization (NGO) in Europe existing with the same name for over 150 years: a fact that is often quoted among Bulgarian cultural workers to enhance the value of their work.

The choice to use as the main reference in this research the Bulgarian network of *chitalishte*, rather than for example the Russian *dom kultury* model – which I explored as I visited some houses of culture in Russia in order to be able to compare with the Bulgarian case – is due to the unique history of the Bulgarian network that long pre-dates the houses in Russia and persisted through changes of regimes from the Ottoman domination through capitalist industrialization, socialist cultural propaganda, and post-socialist neo-liberalism and its current developments with the European Union as the oldest such model recognized within the European Network of Cultural Centers. The permanency of the chitalishte and its survival and vibrancy after the collapse of socialism is also distinct and intriguing when compared to most other similar networks that had been developed top-down by the socialist states and, because of their lack of local roots and often perceived as state propaganda, substantially decreased their activities after socialism across Russia and its former Soviet republics (see in Donahoe and Habeck 2011).

In the context of socialism and post-socialism, I explore how the socialist discourses on “folklore” and practices of cleansing folklore from its religious content in order to stage national identity through performances framed as “reworked/staged folklore” (*otraboten folklor*) changed after the fall of socialism with the new discourses coming from international cultural policy framed by UNESCO’s language and
approaches towards the “safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage” as a community-based system of values, relations, and transmission. I show how the chitalishte administrators and local participants started adopting the international discourses on “intangible heritage” but infusing the term with local meanings and tailoring it to local needs, interests, and hopes for transformation. The chitalishte and its folk ensembles thus presented intriguing alternatives to the commodification of culture and the arts in the post-socialist capitalist market economy by creating leisure options of non-commercial, community-level creativity and cultural performances at the houses of culture, with the recent phenomenon of an enormous boom of folk dance ensembles perceived by many young professionals as after-work fitness/work-out activity.

This dissertation thus contributes to the field of post-socialist studies as well as to the field of cultural policy studies and in general to cultural anthropology ethnographic explorations of a topic that has been widely unstudied though so massively present around the world as the networks of houses of culture (with the key exception of Donahoe and Habeck 2011, to which I have contributed a chapter), both in post-socialism as well as in the cases of other similar and often inspired from the socialist model networks around the world. To the fields of Heritage and Folklore Studies, this research contributes analyses of the understudied modern urban places and networks of centers implicitly safeguarding intangible heritage and enabling inter-cultural dialogue, or better, inter-cultural co-creation. The analyses are also useful and could be applied in practical development projects whose main problem usually is how to achieve sustainable community participation in inclusive local initiatives.
Despite the emphasis on “community participation” in UNESCO’s Conventions, heritage literature has, indeed, vaguely connected to community development issues (exceptions are Karp 2006, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett [1995, 2002, 2004], and Kurin (2004), but even here no practical suggestions and alternatives are present), while the field has focused mainly on: “identity” as an issue of representation, collective memory, and nationalism (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Howard 2003; Graham 2000; Lowenthal 1985); the utilitarian application of “heritage” in tourism (Bruner 2005; Handler and Gable 1997; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Smith 1989); and traditional arts as issues of intellectual property rights (Blake 2001; Brown 2004, 2005; Merryman 2005; Prott 2005; WIPO); still few studies have elaborated on the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage (Munjeri 2004), and ethnographic in-depth research is needed, but the field is developing with the expanding field of “cultural landscape preservation” and the “historic urban landscape” (H.U.L.) safeguarding approaches.

The transnational and trans-disciplinary layers of my research contribute perspectives to a few major fields: a) thematically, Development Studies/Anthropology of Development (through heritage, tourism, and arts); Philanthropy/Science of Generosity (advised by Stanley Katz); Public Policy (specifically cultural policies); Heritage (also Folklore and Museum) Studies; Performance Studies; Food Studies; and b) geographically, it contributes to East-European/Balkan and Post-Socialist Studies (Todorova 1996; Silverman 1998; Yurchak 2008, 2010) with focus on Bulgaria (Buchanan 2006; Creed 1990, 1993, 1998, 2000, 2006; Kanef 1995, 2002b, 2004; Young 2010); and Latin American Studies through the comparative analysis I draw between similar networks of “houses of culture” in socialist Cuba (casas de la cultura)
and how the model was modified by the social democratic/neo-liberal Brazilian cultural policies (*pontos de cultura*).

**Research Time-Frame and Development**

The overall period of my research and writing embraces 6 years, even though the concentrated part of fieldwork was mainly concentrated in the three years between 2008 and 2011. I began fieldwork during the winter break of my first year as a PhD student in 2006, when I went to Brazil and began studying their cultural centers network, having already had some knowledge of the Bulgarian case and thus drafting first comparative sketches. Prior to my formal proposal defense in March 2009, I had already conducted fieldwork for 5 months in Brazil (January 2007, February 2008, August-September 2008, and January-February 2012), 2 months in Cuba (June-July 2008), 5 months in Bulgaria (over the period 2007-2009), and 3 months (June-August 2008) in Paris at the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Section as a consultant and researcher. Then the period of condensed fieldwork after my fieldwork proposal defense comprised the years between April 2009 and September 2011. So far, the research has produced 6 scholarly publications in peer-reviewed journals including the *Anthropological Quarterly*, *International Journal on the Arts in Society*, and UNESCO publications.

My research at UNESCO starting in 2008 coincided with a historic moment for the organization that serendipitously connected directly to my dissertation: the first woman secretary-general of UNESCO elected in 2009 was a Bulgarian, Irina Bokova, whom I had gotten to know through the various meetings at UNESCO. Other two key
Bulgarian women, who played central roles in the particular in the case of the *chitalishte* and how they were represented at UNESCO, were the now-former Deputy Minister for Culture for the Department of Local Cultural Policy coordinating the chitalishte, Nadezda Zaharieva, and the acting Director of the Department, Silva Hacherian, and they both employed the image of being “mothers” of the chitalishte family to inspire the chitalishte managers to legitimize their leadership even if perceived as temporary because of being highly dependent on the political shifts at the ministerial level. I met Nadezhda Zaharieva twice at UNESCO in Paris during the Intangible Heritage Convention Global Meetings in June 2008, and she kept arguing, at times joking and at times seriously talking to other country representatives, that Bulgaria should try to get the *chitalishte* recognized as “intangible heritage.” Her claim, if ever submitted formally to UNESCO as an ICH application, would have probably sparked similar heated debates as those involving France’s candidacy for French cuisine as a “world heritage,” which illuminated the ways in which UNESCO framed the concept of “community” of practitioners as key factor for the recognition of a practice only when it proves as a vehicle for transmission and socialization. Irina Bokova joined our conversations with Nadezhda Zaharieva on the *chitalishte* and commented that she also believed the chitalishte are so unique that Bulgaria should be the “global exporter of the model”, which is what intriguingly became the international image and cultural diplomacy approach that Brazil assumed with its *pontos de cultura* over the past few years.

Besides noting these international discourses and how they tied in with the national uses of the houses of culture as political tools to show the government’s support for culture and social development – which is usually a minimal investment as a
percentage of the national budget - compared to other countries’ spending on culture – I decided to employ Bokova’s words both as an analytical and practical challenge to understand and facilitate the dynamics of interactions among the various global networks around the world by laying the foundations of an online platform to become one day the global network of the national networks of community cultural centers, the International Council for Cultural Centers.

It was legally registered in Bulgaria in 2009 after completing my research at UNESCO, with the core mission to help the various networks scattered around the globe connect to each other, exchange idea, and cooperate on projects. Despite Irina Bokova’s verbal symbolic support for the concept of the chitalishte and the vision of the I3C network, when we got to actually apply to UNESCO for support for the first global meeting of the networks to take place, the requests were never fulfilled. It had already gotten clear to me while working inside the organization that such large bureaucracies operate ultimately on a person-to-person basis employing relationships and connections, which ultimately distribute the funding within a small inter-connected circle of people. Such is also purportedly the closed internal system of the EU funding structures which many Bulgarians with big hopes to develop social projects or businesses with EU support got frustrated by the invisible barriers, which I would call “Iron Caps” playing on the concept of the Iron Fist and the Iron Wall that during socialism divided East from West. The post-socialist establishment of capitalist market principles that abolished the wage caps and the price caps on goods and services were at first hailed as signs of freedom yet very soon got perceived as simply another kind of control yet not as visible and clear – thus easier to oppose - as the ones under socialism, where the limits were even infrastructurely embodied in the Wall.

See more at <www.international3c.org>.
From April 2009 on I started conducting research simultaneously at the Bistritsa chitalishte in Sofia and the AGORA Association of regional chitalishte networks, attending their capacity-building seminars for chitalishte administrators and analyzing the small chitalishte projects they fund in order to inspire civic initiative, both in line with the US models of civil society (as most of AGORA’s funding is American) and at the same time striving to revive the core foundational principles of the chitalishte.

A key turning point in the research was the spring of 2009, when I undertook as a personal passion but also as a research challenge the initiative to establish together with local enthusiasts a chitalishte at my greatgrandmother’s old house in the town of Gabrovo. In addition to my hope to simply be able to provide space for creativity and joy in the community, I was also interested in immersing myself in the very details of organizing and managing one cultural center in order to be able to better comprehend the organization from within and then also its other institutional links and networks.

The process of developing the Bread House chitalishte presented such rich data and intriguing observations and personal experiences that it resulted in my second ethnographic site in addition to my parallel research with the Bistritsa Babi group in Sofia. Because of various impediments examined in one of the chapters to reveal the chitalishte’s institutional limitations, it took more than a year, from December 2009 to February 2011, to formally register the Bread House as a chitalishte (although it started functioning as such already in 2009). Parallel to the Bread House development, throughout 2010 I continued meeting with the group in Bistritsa and participating in various events and activities, and at the same time I started conducting interviews with
officials from the Ministry of Culture, both at the Ministry and at festivals and other more informal settings.

In February 2011 and throughout the year, I gathered data from participating in the Ministerial work group to discuss and revise the *chitalishte* law (which defines their special status as both an NGO and a publicly-funded organization), in addition to being a consultant on a project run by the National Culture Fund (the Bulgarian arms-length institution equivalent to a National Arts Council) that aimed to organize seminars in all major regions and one big national meeting of 2000 representatives of *chitalishte* and local cultural administrations in order to enable better cooperation between cultural actors in each municipality. This national project provided me with intriguing data for analysis about the institutional discourses that frame the work of the *chitalishte* and impact them despite their non-governmental status, and these observations have been continuously put into international context and comparison at various international conferences on cultural policy and sustainable development through the arts that I have been invited to attend and speak at and which have provided me with key comparative observations.

I took up the classical anthropological long-term participant observation, grounded in Tonkin’s (1984) helpful points, and then employ them to study both local and national and international issues as discussed in George Marcus’ ([19951998]) “multi-sited research” approach. Marcus importantly warns of both the advantages and disadvantages of a research that takes the fieldworker across “thick and thin” social interactions, and I attempt to avoid these risks by focusing on a study of the local as a site where multiple global and simultaneously particular local issues get intertwined, translated, interpreted, adapted, adopted, inverted. Avoiding the standard political science
top-down analysis, I examine through long-term ethnography of two local cultural centers and their groups the variety of heritage, civil society, and development discourses both inside and outside the *chitalishte* in multiple spheres of my interlocutors’ daily lives. I hope to offer an ethnographic qualitatively-based insight onto the modern living of cultural heritage as a practice of civic engagement and gift exchange and philanthropy at their intersection with global and national cultural policy and non-governmental projects, all claiming that the arts can be a catalyst for social change.

Policy statements, documents, social phenomena, and ethnographic data will be interpreted throughout the dissertation through keen attention to people’s sensorial experiences, use, and appropriation of space and time through movement, smell, taste, and texture. Such approach is informed by the growing anthropological “sensory-based” analytical frameworks and the work on “embodiment,” where the sensory and psychological experience of the body is the “starting point for analyzing human participation in a cultural world” (Csordas 1993: 135). Recognizing the danger of subjectivity and the need for careful self-reflexivity, the action research methods I employed while establishing the Bread House cultural center can be called a *cultural construction* approach, which as a research methodology of active physical and social construction together with my interlocutors – and the construction itself took a life on its own in the community and led by a mixed community of people whose meanings and relations I attempt to tease out through the chapters - builds on my previously developed analytical concept of *cultural constructivism* (Savova 2009).

This concept was inspired by Jean Piaget’s social constructivist theory of learning as a process of ongoing exchange and mutual co-construction between teacher and
learner, highly contingent on the learner’s cultural background and modes of socialization. Under cultural constructivism\(^\text{24}\) I denoted the ways in which people (in the particular case, people in a Brazilian shantytown) construct out of inanimate spaces personalized, meaningful cultural places – cultural here in the narrow modern term referring to the arts - by appropriating and modifying state and NGO discourses on heritage and civil society to develop their own vision of a community cultural center, both as a symbol and as a physical place, which could add color, sound, value and meaning to daily life. My participation in the construction of the Bread House chitalishte in Bulgaria happened to take place parallel to – and ended up being informed by - the hands-on and conceptual experiences of one of my dissertation advisors, Princeton Anthropology Professor Dr. Carolyn Rouse, who has been involved in building a school in a fishermen village in Ghana as part of an aid initiative and as a site of her ethnographic research. As a native anthropologist, I faced multiple issues and difficulties. In the “Virtual Anthropologist”, Kath Weston (1997) discusses the polarities of identities

\(^\text{24}\) “Constructivism” otherwise is a theory of knowledge developed by Jean Piaget that argues that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas. During infancy, it was an interaction between human experiences and their reflexes or behavior-patterns. Piaget called these systems of knowledge \textit{schemata}. Constructivism is not a specific pedagogy, although it is often confused with constructionism, an educational theory developed by Seymour Papert, inspired by constructivist and experiential learning ideas of Jean Piaget. Piaget's theory of constructivist learning has had wide ranging impact on learning theories and teaching methods in education and is an underlying theme of many education reform movements. Research support for constructivist teaching techniques has been mixed, with some research supporting these techniques and other research contradicting those results. Social constructivism views each learner as a unique individual with unique needs and backgrounds. The learner is also seen as complex and multidimensional. Social constructivism not only acknowledges the uniqueness and complexity of the learner, but actually encourages, utilizes and rewards it as an integral part of the learning process (Wertsch 1997). “Social constructivism” or socioculturalism encourages the learner to arrive at his or her version of the truth, influenced by his or her background, culture or embedded worldview. Historical developments and symbol systems, such as language, logic, and mathematical systems, are inherited by the learner as a member of a particular culture and these are learned throughout the learner's life. This also stresses the importance of the nature of the learner's social interaction with knowledgeable members of the society. Without the social interaction with other more knowledgeable people, it is impossible to acquire social meaning of important symbol systems and learn how to utilize them.
as a native and as an anthropologist: “Social relations inside and outside the profession pull her toward the poles of her assigned identity, denying her the option of representing herself as a complex, integrated, compound figure” (171). I discovered interesting observations on Bulgarian culture when talking to foreigners, so I started conducting in-depth interviews with Peace Corps volunteers and a group of ex-pats through the InterNations network to observe their comments on Bulgaria. “It never came home to me”, as a key economic analyst from the World Bank expressed it when noting how only by living with a poor Indian woman for a week “the real issues that the WB was trying to address finally came home” – in other word, the issue made sense and they also “made senses” as sensorially-felt realities. In this case, I would argue, one of the key advantages of native anthropology is the *self-reflexive sensorial sense*, or the fact that many of the observed phenomena make sense sensorially, through smell, taste, and touch, allowing the researcher to delve into questions that the people do not raise or dare answer.

**The International Family of Networks: Building and Housing “Cultural Citizenship”**

Let me close this foundational chapter with an ethnographic description of the most recent international conference of community cultural centers organized by the European Network of Cultural Centers (ENCC), the continental network of national networks of community cultural centers similar to the *chitalishte* (thus, a continental associated network of the International Council of Cultural Centers, which I represented in the double position of practitioner and scholar). Held in November 2011 in Warsaw, Poland, the meeting brought together representatives of more than 20 countries and their national networks, including the Bulgarian *chitalishte* represented by a young woman
from the National Chitalishte Union. The meeting offered intriguing observations on the
dynamics of interactions and the predominant cultural policy and cultural management
discourses around the questions of how community arts serve society and what is the
particular role of the community cultural centers. Most panels and workshops revolved
around the question of programming and access, as dictated by the overall frame of the
conference title “Art (Not) for All”, as various cultural workers and artists raised
questions about the discrepancy between the stated purpose of the cultural centers as
spaces promoting the creativity of all people, and their de facto exclusion in various
contexts based on ethnicity, class, or simply lack of creative programming and inability
to inspire public participation.

The opening of the conference was marked by the words of a young woman
director of a community cultural center (“house of culture”) in Warsaw. She started off
by creating the image of three stone masons, each analyzing the same construction work
from a distinct perspective: one said he was simply carving stone; the other was
perceiving his work as a means to earning the daily bread for his family; and the third one
believed he was building a cathedral. She concluded how this story summarized in many
ways the core mission of the community cultural centers: to offer free access to the arts to
anyone so that people would have the chance to view the world differently and so that the
cultural centers themselves would be “the cathedrals of a creative society” and the
“houses for creative citizenship.” The concept of “cultural citizenship” kept being used
uncritically as a trope and prevailing discourse throughout the conference but I tease out
various themes and issues out this concept later on in my chapters through people’s
understanding of how citizenship is enacted or contested through community arts.
Following the address of the director of the Polish house of culture, whose utopic vision was widely applauded by the audience, the stage was filled with women whose performance provoked marked surprise in the audience, and certainly stroke cords with me, for the performance began with a bread recipe! A group of women from all ages performed through chaotic polyphonies and modern dance choreographies ways to tackle the issue of female emancipation by using bread as a symbolic product and action. “No more proportions, no more measurements!” was shouted out followed by the polyphonic utterings of the distinct element of bread - “Flour!”, “Yeast!”, “Salt!”, “Sugar!”, “Eggs!” - as women framed the matter of bread into an artistic material and not a daily food enslaving women inside the kitchen. The performance clearly employed bread, such a powerful symbol of basic sustenance and semiotically linked to the mother of the household, in order to semiotically invert it from a traditionally gendered activity into an act of resistance and emancipation, where no rigid proportions were followed and the kitchen utensils were used for making music – what reminded me much of the way my interlocutors in Brazil narrated how samba was born in the kitchen, while the slave women were cooking and used songs to veil the men training in the same space the capoeira martial art for self-protection, pretending it was a music and dance festivity rather than an act of resistance.

Comments among the audience following the performance associated it with the US-based political theater group Bread and Puppets, whose performances had taken place in Poland already in the 70s and 80s marking the rise of the Polish anti-communist movement and the thawing of the Cold War. As Polish cultural figures later told me afterwards, at that time, the arts scene in Poland was already much more open and free
than in other socialist countries, through networks of galleries housed in private apartments. Such flexibility propitiated the vibrant exchange with the radical *Bread and Puppets* theater group in the USA, who came a few times to perform in Poland with statements and puppets clearly challenging the status quo.

Other people commented after the performance on how the bread in the performance reminded them the many alternative Catholic movements in Poland taking place through a network of improvised churches at people’s homes, calling for the revival of the traditional Eucharistic ritual, resisting both the clericalistic past when emphasis on hierarchy deprived the “unworthy” lay people of the wine (“Blood”) in Communion, and also resisting the modernizing decisions taken during the Second Vatican Council which in many ways left the mystery of the Eucharist secondary. That movement of community-centered and Communion-centered revival in religion reminded me much of what I was observing and researching in Bulgaria with the rise of “Eucharistic communities” as they define themselves, and as examined in detail later in the dissertation.

Another interpretation of the bread performance that night at the Polish house of culture came from a cultural worker, who connected the protest in the performance to an act of protest against the regime that had previously shaken powerfully the whole country and the world: the burning body of a disillusioned peasant who had set himself to fire in the old Warsaw stadium during a massive communist celebration in order to protest the regime’s oppressions, and whose powerful symbolic act shook people as it resonated with the popular imagery and phantoms of the Catholic Inquisition.

The use of the metaphor of bread that night sparked emotional reactions and culturally meaningful associations for people also from diverse countries. In the evening
cocktail following the performance, people kept talking about bread, and people also connected the performance to my presentation about my experience with the Bread House as a kind of a community cultural center. Bread provoked cultural managers, directors of international NGOs and European Union high-ranking officials to share childhood and family stories in conversations that would have otherwise been much more formal and structured, and amidst the laughter and ice-breaker that bread provided I noticed how people employed the informal chatting to start discussing with the important people issues of funding and cultural policies. What was fascinating to observe is how a community-based theater performance, written and enacted by a group of women who had been meeting regularly at a small community house of culture in a suburb, managed to spark so much interest and to, indeed, transform the talks, discourses and the experiences of the conference participants through the skillful use of such a simple element like bread. And again, what was key to understand was that behind the performance laid the infrastructure of a community cultural center that was “open to house a variety of age groups across classes and let them use the space for free to develop their creativity,” as that particular house of culture’s director shared when presenting the piece.

Polish anthropologist Kolankiewicz who gave the keynote address that evening commented on the bread-inspired performance by noting how the popular wisdom holding that ‘man shall not live by bread alone” echoes the popular call for universal access to the arts framed as “cultural citizenship” to be recognized as a universal human right, pointing to the Polish civil society success in pressing the government to sign in 2011 the Pact on Culture, which was the first social agreement signed by a government
with civil society and not with a formal institution, but a volunteer-run civil society
movement/initiative. Comparing it to Rousseau’s vision of the social contract,
Kolankiewicz pointed to this political tool as the epitomy of what the community cultural
centers stand for and should fight to enhance, and throughout the conference
representatives of cultural centers and their national networks, united in the ENCC, kept
discussing what and how is the role of the cultural centers at their multiple levels from
local to national and international programs, where the concept of “cultural citizenship”
has already been widely circulated in more general terms as examined by Latinamerican
scholars Canclini and Yudice, but in this context it was specifically applied to the issue of
the cultural centers.

It is key to point, however, that the true debates, the deep sharing of worries,
problems, and struggles, thus the true spirit of a network of support and exchange, did not
happen in the formal conference rooms but late in the evening at a restaurant, around a
big table with all the ENCC twenty more members, which was a stark contrast from the
ENCC Board Meeting that had taken place only a few hours earlier, with the same
people, but on the theatre stage of the Theater and Cultural Center IMKA (as the largest
available space at the cultural center where the conference took place), as board members
spoke literally in the spotlight of performance projectors lighting the space. The serious
discussions about organizational structure of finances and responsibilities were structures
that were clearly ultimately supported by the anti-structure of informal play, lived around
the table not as an opposite but as the needed complementary to the stage.

In fact, the front stage and the back room kitchen table in the community cultural
center evolved as the main locations of my research across the cultural centers in the
three ethnographic sites in Bulgaria, Cuba, and Brazil, as people organized distinct but parallel and complementary gift exchange economies of work, play, and love through the exchanges of performances, ritual re-enactments, foods and bread in particular in the back kitchens and on front stages of the houses of culture.

This research is, therefore, not about the networks of cultural centers per se, even though I do analyze them as a particularly interesting cultural policy model, the community culture model, but what is revealed in more depth behind the stages of the centers and in their improvised kitchens and make-shift sleeping areas are the multi-layered, polyphonic meanings that people draw out of these networks and the individual community houses of culture that make the networks. The practices of the mind, the heart, the hands, the feet, and the voices animating the houses promote and maintain mechanisms for sustaining and improving while also contesting continuity and change in all their variants. In the chapters to follow I mostly present observations from Bulgaria, limited by the length of the dissertation, yet bringing key references and relevant insights from Cuba and Brail for their similarly-organized networks and policy discourses. We will observe and become part of how these creative practices affect, more often than not adding meaning and enriching, people’s daily lives in varying degrees: from survival to living; from existence to co-existence, from conviviality to commensality (even in conflict) around the table; from the individual home to the community cultural center; from the church to the market and the square; from private to personal space and public place; and from the home kitchen to the street food cart: the many tastes and touches of the tangible places of intangible heritage.
CHAPTER 2

The Community Culture Model:
Transparency, Trans-use, and Tensility through Nets of Arts Institutions

Bread and Roses

"Our lives shall not be sweated from birth until life closes. 
Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses!"
(James Oppenheim, 1911)

The 1900s saw a rise in workers struggles for dignified labor conditions and, more than wages and food and shelter, their cries for dignity extended to include demands for beauty, for leaisure, arts, and culture, summarized in the slogan “Bread and Roses.” The slogan originated in a poem of that name by James Oppenheim, published in The American Magazine in December 1911, and had been associated with the textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, during January-March 1912, known as the "Bread and Roses strike,” which united dozens of immigrant communities under the leadership of the Industrial Workers of the World (the “Wobblies”) led to a large extent by women.

“Bread and Roses” has since then expanded out of its labor movement context to denote in broader terms the call for access to the arts and creative leisure as a universal human right25, alongside education and healthcare. An important point to be understood in the labor struggles is not only the call for leisure and creativity, but also the efforts to

---

25 “Bread and Roses” was the title of a popular guidebook on the meaning and role of community arts distributed among community organizations and social workers in the UK in the second part of the 20th century.
salvage craftsmanship and limit workers’ dependence on and replacement by machines (an issue that I will examine in another chapter on the gradual disappearance of hand-made bread in Bulgaria under both socialism and neo-liberalism as a process illustrative of shifting values and dispositions). This chapter is thus as much about the “roses” (the arts) as it is about the “bread” in the sense of trying to understand labor and leisure through the “third places” offered by the community cultural centers in-between work and home, giving new meanings to both through the weaving of new social networks rethinking daily rhythm, money, free time, and tradition. Meltzer (1967:12) points, how the decrease of craftsmanship by the mechanization of labor and the rising worker’s dependence on machines destroyed a whole process of production that involved both the beauty of hand-made artisanship and the dynamics of intellectual and social freedom opened up around and through labor, as shown in one worker’s biography (in this case cigar-rolling worker):

[…] (we, workers) learned to do more or less mechanically (the hand labor), which left us free to think, talk, listen, or sing. I loved the freedom of that work, for I had earned the mind freedom that accompanied skill as a craftsman. I was eager to learn from discussion and reading or to pour out my feeling in a song.

I heard similar stories from Dona Dalva, the founder and leader of the traditional group Samba de Roda Suerdieck, UNESCO-recognized Masterpiece of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity, that I studied in Brazil. Seated on the old sofa in the misty kitchen of her house, Dona Dalva recollected how the samba group, still vibrant today with ever more younger members joining in, formed in the years at the turn of the century when workers still hand-wrapped cigars, and the learned craftsmanship left them free to sing
and improvise rhythms. The same holds true for a lot of the folk ensembles still meeting at chitalishte around Bulgaria, started in the 1910s and 1920s as factory workers developed their own leisure activities and used the spaces of the already existing chitalishte community cultural centers (in Bulgaria, there was no need to create separate working men’s clubs as in the UK, for example, since there were already common spaces for people of all walks of life).

The “Bread and Roses” socialist slogans calling for workers empowerment through culture pointed to a marked polarity between the socialist East and the capitalist West, where capitalist logic did not consider arts and creativity part of worker’s basic needs and rights, while socialism built much of its discourse and strategies around employing the arts as tools for social cohesion, as much as political propaganda and control. In the West, indeed, as shown by DiMaggio’s (1982) “high culture model,” the arts underwent classification into “high” and “popular” arts, where the elites framed the arts as objects of production and consumption particularly tailored to and reserved for their own closed circles. Engagement with the arts was presupposed to require not only time and money (economic capital and surplus) but also education, knowledge, and skills (cultural capital and surplus), which was a vision much different from the socialist “bread-and-roses” cultural policies heavily investing in the popular access to the arts. Furthermore, before the Communist ideological diffusion, in the 1850s when the “high arts” classification was taking place in the USA, it was a vision quite different from that in Eastern Europe where the Bulgarian network of hundreds of chitalishte community cultural centers were engaging people of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds through processes and principles that I will analyze in this chapter through the conceptual framework of the
Community culture model. Since it is precisely the Western elitist, class-based division of the arts into “high” and “popular” culture that the socialist movements challenged, a network of community cultural centers like the Bulgarian chitalishte pre-dating socialism was appealing as a model for Lenin, Stalin, Castro, and other socialist leaders.

Over the past decade, unlike the industrial states of the first half of the 20th century that disregarded “the roses,” many modern states have been influenced by UNESCO’s discourses on arts and culture as one of the four “pillars of sustainable development” and a major tool for economic growth, as for example the support for local cultural industries promoted by the Convention on Cultural Diversity, have, on the contrary, preferred to focus much more on the “roses” than the “bread.” However, such policies and strategies have often assumed a populist character that tries to obscure and distract from people’s serious problems and needs, thus making culture “expedient” and “instrumental” much more than an integral world-view, as noted by George Yudice in The Expediency of Culture (2003). This cultural instrumentalism is often achieved through superficial but visually engaging arts interventions in particular in low-income areas, from big festivals to colorful posters and media campaigns, and Brazil’s Cultura Viva Program, for all of its locally applauded impact through the pontos de cultura, was also criticized by some of my interlocutors from cultural workers to community members as a populist move to wrap problems in color. Similar points are raised by Liisa Malkki (2010) in her work on the use of images and the ethical issue of representation in the trans-national portrayals of children in need to spur support for humanitarian interventions, whose strategies and effects are themselves questionable when implemented on the ground.
The Brazilian case, which I have been examining in comparison to the Cuban and Bulgarian models (Savova 2009), is a particularly rich case study of what I would term a “bread-and-roses” policy: a term summarizing a cultural policy model that supports popular access to the arts not in terms of passive consumption of cultural products but one nurturing local participation and creativity. In this strategy of the Program “Cultura Viva”, the Lula government set aside a substantial sum from the national budget to community cultural centers and community arts as a way to combat the cycles of poverty, low education, and violence.

In the Bulgarian context, the slogan “Bread and Roses” was particularly employed by the Bulgarian Communist party, for the rose has traditionally been the national flower of the country known for its world-famous rose oil26. As an expression of the aspiration for popular access to basic physical nourishment (bread) and psychological nurturing (cultural traditions and non-professional arts), I will employ the element of bread as a metaphor as well as a tangible object to help us better comprehend the meanings and practices within the networks of community cultural centers and in general the field of community/amateur arts.

In particular, I will employ the metaphor of the bread net/string bag, popular for shopping during socialism and currently cherished with nostalgia as an iconic artefact of the socialist period across former socialist countries in stories I have heard by people from Russia to Albania. The main characteristics of the bread net will serve below to illustrate and elucidate the complex, multi-layered, and often ambiguous and changing

---

26 The particular variety of rose grown in Bulgaria was once imported from Syria (Rosa Damascena), but due to the particular Bulgarian Rose Valley’s microclimate, the Bulgarian roses are now giving the largest amounts of oil in the world and have turned Bulgaria into a major producer and exporter of rose oil in the world, mainly for the French perfumery industry.
aspects of the community culture model. The net bag helps us think about the model as a flexible construct that keeps changing shape depending on the people, activities, discourses, and power dynamics that fill it (the net as both a metaphor of an individual cultural center container of relations and also of the network of these centers nationally and across countries). In this sense, the community culture model challenges the dominant notions of “modeling” in economics and political science as a fairly stable system, which changes as long as the selected variables change but does not factor in unaccounted for and unexpected factors from outside the system, as well as does not allow for more flexible relationships within the model beyond those initially set. Thus, the flexible bread net bag as a metaphor defines the evolution and current functioning and meanings of similar networks of community cultural centers that evolved around the world in various political and economic milieux and thus responding in varied degree yet nonetheless united by a common heritage tracable to the shared principles of Enlightenment’s “Bread and Roses” call for popular education and creativity.

It is paradoxical, however, that while Bulgarians are known for eating roses (rose petal jams) and inhabiting a land imagined as infused with rose aroma from the Rose Valley, there is a very limited production of rose oil products and hardly any organized system of exports. Similarly, it is paradoxical that while Bulgaria is known for its variety of ritual bread decorations and for the unique bread flavor due to the indigenous bacteria Lactum Bacillus Bulgaricus producing sourdough fermentation, the virtual lack of artisan bread in Bulgaria is illustrative of the loss of artisan traditions and entrepreneurial culture during the economic, social, and cultural transformations that the country has been undergoing during and after socialism. The rose oil cosmetics and other products are only
in the past few years starting to develop as competitive products on the national market, and are not yet reaching the international market – thus, the rose industry is locked into a raw material exports of the oil, much the way former colonies were and continue to export mainly raw materials - due to the low levels of entrepreneurship and marketing and product development skills in a country that lacked this school of thought and practice for over half a century.

The case of the roses in Bulgaria further resembles that of bread: hardly any small bakeries opened after socialism and it was not until French and Dutch bakeries opened in the past few years with pre-frozen breads but marketed as luxury gourmet goods that the culture of good bread returned to the Bulgarian table, which is explored in more details in the chapter on the issues of the role of cuisine as a national and global intangible cultural heritage and the role of food in the community cultural centers. In addition to the death of small businesses, capitalism brought about the destruction of the former national enterprises and their performative privatization – sarcastically denoted by some people as the “Bread and Circuses of privatization” pointing to the unfulfilled promises of

---

27 I employ the metaphor of bread and bread-making and their historic modifications and travels as metaphors-markers of milestone cultural paradigm shifts in human history. As a staple food for the largest portion of humanity (and where not staple food, as in Asia and previously in Latin America, where the eminent presence of bread at the moment testifies to post-colonial heritage), bread can help us visualize and more tangibly perceive human history by roughly organizing it into periods marked by a particular aspect of bread. In fact, bread is already often used in contemporary discourses to mark such periods or phenomena, such as the “bread and spectacle/circuses” period and approach of rule of the Romans. In my attempt here to employ bread as a metaphor-marker, I also use it symbolically to point to the changing perception and role of the arts, or that which is “beyond bread”, where “man shall not live by bread alone.” It is, in sum, a “bread and roses” attempt to look at and comprehend history, and it is clearly simplifying complex historic events, phenomena, narratives, and politics, not in order to downplay them but to simply attempt at offering an additional way to look at history through food and arts, or food for the body and “food” for the mind and eyes.

The “Bread +” periods could thus be roughly sketched out as: 1) Bread and Home, or the development of sedentary agricultural societies that domesticated wheat and gave birth to agriculture, as a milestone turning point in human history when societies made the transition from nomadism to sedentarism and opened the possibilities for leisure, arts, religion, politics, and economics; 2) Bread and Circuses period leading up to the 1st century and the birth of Christ when historic chronology started using the BC and AC time markers, pointing to the advent of the new religion, using bread as its most central symbol of the
incarnate God, that challenged the Roman Empire; 3) Bread and Wine (Body and Blood) period of Christian expansion from the establishment of the Byzantine Empire in the 3rd-4th centuries to the Middle Ages dominated by religious thought and art; 4) Bread and Cake marking the French Revolution with Marie Antoinette’s famous phrase “If there is no bread to eat, let them eat cake!” responding to the massive protests that fueled the French Revolution’s call for equality and propelled the nation-building movements across Europe in the following two centuries; 5) Bread and Roses marks the historic rise of socialism with the communist ideals developed by Marx and Engels, and employed by workers as discourses in their struggles at the turn of the 20th century in the protests against capitalist injustices; the rose became the symbol of the Bulgarian communist party also because of the rose being Bulgaria’s national flower symbol; and the slogan still inspires various social justice organizations in the UK and USA, such as the Bread and Roses Delaware Community Fund (see more in Morawska 198527 showing how East Central Europeans brought to the USA their culture of organizing amateur arts societies, from singing to theater and reading). Alongside the “Bread and Roses” slogans in the USA, taken from Oppenheimer’s famous poem quoted above, Peace! Land! Bread! was the battle cry of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia that would change the history of Russia, end serfdom, and affect the entire world. Food usually provokes or is associated with endearment and can be a powerful form of control through affect, thus I argue that it is key to analyze in what place and on what occasions people share food, and what kinds of food, and in particular how is it used as a political tool. For examples, in the USA, President Johnson became known for his “barbecue diplomacy” of informal gatherings with high-level officials at the White House; or Raegan for his love for Jelly Bellies and ordering blueberry Jelly Belly to be produced only so that he could give them as election gifts matching the colors of the American flag. In the USA, around the two world wars, bread got used as a political symbol in: 1) the US government using the donut as symbol of the American morale in WWII inspiring people to eat donuts as a way to show fellowship through comfort food with the soldiers; 2) post-WWII economic rebuilding through the idyllic vision of a new cut-bread, Wonder Bread society, living in cookie-cutter houses and eating Wonder Bread (many Americans still, despite the popular talk on the need to eat healthy, whole-wheat breads, love this white bread as a staple to use with peanut butter and jam; BLT; and grilled cheese sandwiches, all comfort foods of American culture); later on, bread was used in the civil rights movement as the African-Americans coined the term “white bread Americans” as opposed to “black bread Americans” (similar in Bulgaria, calling someone eating “white bread”27); 6) Bread and Butter period is how I would refer to the Cold War, as the socialism and capitalism divide was described in the famous children’s book by Dr. Zeuss as the war between two countries over what is the right way to spread butter on the bread, on top or on the bottom. Echoing this irony of the absurd rivalry between East and West is the famous “Kitchen Debate” between Nixon and Kruschev, when Nixon was lauding during an exhibition of American kitchen appliances the advances of processed foods and microwaves in the modern kitchen. In a similar vein, communism lauded the factory advances – organizing factory-made bread and shutting down small local bakeries – which eradicated much for the East European traditions of home-made breads for the various Orthodox Christian holidays, and people stopped placing bread stamps on the traditional ritual breads and bake them in the communal oven (see more in Kaneff 2004).

In the West, the Bread and Butter period of the Cold War could be divided in sub-periods: from the “cut-bread period” while the Americans took proud in the rise of processed food to such an extent that the cultural dispositions produced the expression “it is the best thing since the invention of sliced bread” with the baby-boomers and the drive for the emancipation of women away from the kitchen through processed foods; to the “artisan bread period” with the rise of the artisan bread movement (and the famous national best-seller the Tassajara Bread Book) related to the Hippie movement and the Vietnam-War protests; and currently to the most recent craze of “flour-less bread” and “no-knead bread” periods driven by the rise of gluten allergies and the fear of gluten that marked by the insurgency of varieties of recipe books, bread-making machines that do not require kneading; no-knead methods of letting the ingredients knead themselves, with processes beguiling modernity in a performed attempt to return to “real” and “slow” food.; and the “bread and peace period”, as the “bread and peace” voting outcome model evolved recently in the work of Douglas Hibbs, showing how income growth — “bread” — is a strikingly good predictor of the vote outcome27.

In the socialist East, the Bread and Butter period was mainly divided into two periods: the “factory bread period” which erased most small bakery business for the sake of centralized, state, mass-scale production at bread factories; and the “bread lines period”, which I very vividly remember and which most people in post-socialist countries mention as one of the first thing they associate with communism, visually
documented with lines of people waiting for bread in the freezing cold because of the constant scarcity and unequal rationing of the limited resources. Yet people used even the hated bread lines to socialize and develop social networks, as Neidhart (2003:372) observed in Russia, where the same people would meet everyday at the same time in the bakery line to chat and comment on the regime. The Bulgarian socialist period was marked by a very tight connection to the Soviet Union, despite the fact that upon the entry of the Soviet troops in 1944 in Bulgaria there were only about 6,000 official members of the Communist Party, whose growth and loyalty to the Soviet mother party is explained by many lay people as well as scholars with the historic connection between the two countries along the line of Slavic language and culture and the particular historic event of the Russian army popularly perceived as “liberator” of the Bulgarian people from the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century.

The Bread and Circuses period of the Roman times is made relevant to the more modern periods, both before and after the advent of socialism, as depicted in Dostoyevski’s Brothers Karamazov. There the philosophy of the “Common Task” is, in fact, the philosophy of Christian communion and collective participation in experiencing bodily, psychologically, and symbolically the unity of heaven and earth, heaven fully infusing the earth as the ultimate porosity. The Great Inquisitor argued that people want three things: miracles, mystery, and authority, undertaking the role not of a malevolent dictator but of a caring governor who realizes that freedom of choice is often unwanted burden for ordinary people, and where “circuses” were popular distractions. The Brothers Karamazov’s Orthodox Christian setting recalls the origin of the tradition of public processions common now in Christian rituals. Processions were born in the first centuries after Christianity was allowed, as early Christian church was striving to outweigh the public appeal of the circuses through liturgical processions and chants in public areas during the gladiator games. The games and stadiums, as in the famous case of St. Ignatius of Antioch, became also the key sites of martyrdom and, out of the martyrdom, some recorded manifestations of miracles performed by the saints, thus transforming miracles into spectacles. In the case of St. Ignatius in the 4th century, it is recoded how he declared: “I am writing to all the Churches and I enjoin all, that I am dying willingly for God's sake, if only you do not prevent it. I beg you, do not do me an untimely kindness. Allow me to be eaten by the beasts, which are my way of reaching to God. I am God's wheat, and I am to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, so that I may become the pure bread of Christ.— Letter to the Romans. Martyrdom during the period of Bread and Spectacle was a stage for many miracles, as a famous one that occurred when St. Ignatius’ student St. Polycarp of Smirna was set to fire and the air was filled with the aroma of baking bread. Such miracles in public, as recorded in the lives of many saints, were transformative spectacles as they tangibly affected people and made many people believe in the power of the Christian god and thus convert to Christianity and often lose their lives along with the martyr-saint who inspired them to believe in Christ.

The Bread and Wine period started evolving since the official adoption of Christianity as the principal religion of the Roman Empire. In the first centuries of Christianity, the opposition between circuses and games versus churches and services (processions) resembles the antagonism enacted by the anti-religious communist regimes in Eastern Europe juxtaposing stadiums and churches, often building stadiums with the stones from destroyed churches: as in the case of Korca, Albania, where the main cathedral was destroyed to build a soccer stadium but people would not go to the games; cases in Georgia when roads were build and people would not walk on them; or the famous case of the harvest rituals celebrated during communism with a mass march in the Stadium in Warsaw, when a Polish peasant set himself on fire as a sign of protests against the regime and the collectivization of the farming lands, and his burning body of a self-enacted martyrdom echoed with a wave of criticism that spurred much awakened criticism of the regime in a similar way the burning body of St. Polycarp of Smirna effusing the aroma of baking bread awoke spiritual conversions.

Bread is a central theme in people’s discourses about and memories of socialism in particular as they recall the bread lines, forming, in the above list of bread-defined periods, the Bread Lines Period. It is, indeed, one of the most vivid memories I have of socialism. I remember the bodily experience of shivering outside having to stand in line with my mother in the freezing winter wind but enticed by the aroma of the bread that had just arrived fresh from the factories. Unlike the vivid, almost tangible and visceral memory of the bread lines, I remember only vaguely the fall of the Berlin Wall on TV, and next thing I recollect is my parents shouting “Freedom!” in a big square. Years later, another important physical collapse was the destruction of the building of the Musoleum of George Dimitrov. Later, one by one, I recollect the collapsing factory chimneys along the Yantra river in my greatgrandmother’s hometown, Gabrovo, which used to be called the Manchester of the Balkans at the turn of the 20th century for its world-class production
capitalism the theatricality of privatization – which all concluded mostly with a dead-end liquidation. All of these processes of economic, political, social, and cultural transitions and their daily, local, tangible, sensorial, psychological, and visceral effects on people’s experiences of cultural continuity and change are intriguingly mediated and often mitigated, when in their most traumatic forms, by the social networking and support spaces of the chitalishte, whose main aspects I examine below within the community culture model frame.

This chapter spans various levels of arts funding, organization, and philanthropy discourses and practices - transnational, national, local, and personal – as each one explores in connection with the others how the notions of private philanthropy and public policy funding for community arts engage (or discourage?) local participation and civil society initiatives, promote (or impede?) cultural diversity and intangible cultural heritage transmission, and organize (or lack coordination) the formation of a field of community arts alongside high arts and commercial popular culture.

I will examine in particular the organizational models and cultures of giving that helped establish and currently maintain the Bulgarian network of community cultural centers (chitalishte) with references to other similar networks, in particular the Cuban (casas de la cultura), transferred directly from the Bulgarian cultural policy model during
socialism, and the Brazilian network (pontos de cultura) emulated from the Cuban in more recent years within the leftist move of governance in Brazil and in a few other Latin American countries. Building on DiMaggio’s “high culture model”, I show how a distinct model of a cultural institution and of an artistic genre - respectively, of the community cultural center and the field of “amateur” or “community” arts - evolved following the same steps as in DiMaggio’s “high culture model,” though the two models end up with very different final fields of artistic production and consumption patterns.

The community culture model contributes insights to the major anthropological question and global issue of the processes involved in the production of “community” and “neighborhood” in an increasingly globalized world. The community culture model reveals how the art-based places (community cultural centers) and processes of engagement (community arts) open up intriguing, often ambiguous, dynamic and lively spaces for contestation, resistance, and local agency through the ambiguous medium of the arts. As noted by Appadurai (1996):

Neighborhoods as social formations represent anxieties for the nation-state, as they usually contain large or residual spaces where the techniques of nationhood (birth control, linguistic uniformity, economic discipline, communications efficiency, and political loyalty) are likely to be either weak or contested. At the same time, neighborhoods are the source of political workers and party officials, teachers and soldiers, television technicians and productive farmers. Neighborhoods are not dispensable, even if they are potentially treacherous. For the project of the nation-state, neighborhoods represent a perennial source of entropy and slippage. They need to be policed almost as thoroughly as borders. The work of producing neighborhoods – life worlds constituted by relatively stable associations, by relatively known and shared histories, and by collectively traversed and legible spaces and places – is often at odds with the projects of the nation-state. This is partly because the commitments and attachments (sometimes mislabeled
“primordial”) that characterize local subjectivities are more pressing, more continuous, and sometimes more distacting than the nation-state can afford (190-191).

The project of developing community cultural centers in each neighborhood, defined by the community culture model, could be either a grassroots non-governmental project or a state cultural policy initiative, as much as a hybrid mix of the two as is the current state of the Bulgarian model. What is fundamentally characteristic of the model is that it defines how cultural traditions and non-professional artistic creativity have been employed as tools to achieve certain social purposes, whether at the very local, national, or international level, by framing these creative practices into their own genre of “amateur” or “community arts” with the specific mission to help nurture a sense of “neighborhood” and “community” and at the same time serve the larger national needs to maintain and produce heritage practices and places affirming one’s loyalties to the state.

More recently, since 2005 with UNESCO’s Convention on the safeguarding of the “intangible cultural heritage” of humanity, the transmission of these practices in

28 UNESCO’s definition of “intangible cultural heritage” (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/>) is the following: a) traditional, contemporary and living at the same time: intangible cultural heritage does not only represent inherited traditions from the past but also contemporary rural and urban practices in which diverse cultural groups take part; b) inclusive: we may share expressions of intangible cultural heritage that are similar to those practised by others. Whether they are from the neighbouring village, from a city on the opposite side of the world, or have been adapted by peoples who have migrated and settled in a different region, they all are intangible cultural heritage: they have been passed from one generation to another, have evolved in response to their environments and they contribute to giving us a sense of identity and continuity, providing a link from our past, through the present, and into our future. Intangible cultural heritage does not give rise to questions of whether or not certain practices are specific to a culture. It contributes to social cohesion, encouraging a sense of identity and responsibility which helps individuals to feel part of one or different communities and to feel part of society at large; c) representative: intangible cultural heritage is not merely valued as a cultural good, on a comparative basis, for its exclusivity or its exceptional value. It thrives on its basis in communities and depends on those whose knowledge of traditions, skills and customs are passed on to the rest of the community, from generation to generation, or to other communities; d) community-based: intangible cultural heritage can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it — without their recognition, nobody else can decide for them that a given expression or practice is their heritage.
particular through community cultural centers is becoming a central part of the model, which is a process I have denoted as *heritage house-guarding* (Savova 2011), inverting UNESCO’s discourse on heritage “safeguarding,” as I draw on my ethnographic observations across various countries on the key role of the physical community center in neighborhoods as a symbolic and practical locus of belonging and interactions.

These productions of locality get ever more complicated by what Appadurai (1996) calls “translocalities,” where the movements of people due to migration, commuter work, and tourism produce an “inherent instability of social relationships, the powerful tendency for local subjectivity itself to be commoditized, and the tendencies for nation-states, which often obtain significant revenues from such sites, to erase internal, local dynamics through externally imposed modes of regulation, credentialization, and image production” (192). In the case of intangible heritage, the same processes can be observed, as in my participant observation experience with the three groups I studied declared Masterprices of ICH by UNESCO in Bulgaria, Cuba, and Brazil, which experienced moments of such popularity that becoming the focus of national media and touristic attention became at times burdensome, unpleasant, and disrupting to the local webs of relationships. This occurred especially when the density of visits from tourists requesting workshops or invitations for festival participation ultimately had to be limited, since these cases produced internal group tensions and a sense of commoditization of a practice that up to that point the carriers of the heritage engaged with out of love and attachment to tradition rather than for the purpose of servicing others’ curiosity.
What the *community culture model* contributes to the studies on organizational culture and in particular philanthropic organizations, with major contributions made by Paul DiMaggio and Stanley Katz, is to analyze and expose the key role of sensorial factors in the framing of the arts and the classification of their genres. The ethnographic observations reveal the importance that people place on the smells, sounds, temperature, color, architecture, and taste of spaces, where the senses channel but also mediate and produce particular cultural sensitivities, experiences, and propensities to produce and circulate social capital, or what I would call *the synesthetic factor* affecting the *community culture model*, as well as more broadly any model trying to understand human interactions and organizational culture.

“Synesthesia” is a Greek word loosely meaning “the mixing of senses,” but it has been employed as a neurological diagnosis for people in whom a stimulus in one sense involuntarily elicits a sensation/experience in another sense modality (such as associating colors or tastes with a sound). In this case, I will employ the word synesthetic to mean in particular to denote experiences where more than two and up to all of our five main bodily senses participate simultaneously, which often occurs in festivities when there is music, dancing, singing, and food and people touch, taste, smell, hear, and move. Food and food-sharing in this context is a particular field of social action that has been excluded from the official approaches towards the measurement of civil society engagement employed by political scientists and, with minor exceptions, sociologists, or when examined by anthropologists they have been limited to the private space of the home kitchen; yet I will show the importance of these food-related rituals and spaces, based on my analysis on the Bread House chitalishte in Gabrovo, Bulgaria, as a particular
kind of cultural center. These kinds of cultural centers come under a broader category I
crafted for feedback cultural institutions, which could range from a community theater to
interactive museum and community garden, defined by the active and often informal and
non-monetarily-mediated cooking and exchange of foods. The feedback cultural
institution is distinct from the passive sales-based feeding cultural institutions that rely on
coffee shops (at more classical museums and theaters) or food classes and demos that still
remain within the frame of passive and unidirectional relations between audience and
presenter/performer/artist/chef.

While the synesthetic factor is examined in more detail in my dissertation chapter
on the Bread House Cultural Center in Bulgaria and the cross-sensorial experiences
triggered by collective bread-making, it is key to point to it here so that it outlines from
the beginning the particular micro-level dynamics of interaction rituals that the
community culture model strives to comprehend as being nurtured through the
institutionalization of community cultural practices and leisure into the field of
community amateur arts. The synesthetic factor further expands on my previous work on
“heritage kynaesthetics” (Savova 2009) pointing to the ways in which intangible cultural
heritage has been employed by some communities to animate, to “move” and turn
“kinetic”, the otherwise often static built tangible heritage subject to rigid and
unimaginative conservation cultural policies.

In this chapter, we will try to make sense of what is happening at the micro level
of the Bistritsa chitalishte in Sofia and the Bread House chitalishte in Gabrovo (Bulgaria)
in reference to similar centers in other European countries and in Latin America (in
particular Cuba and Brazil), as I try to tease out and make these experiences more legible by weaving the main elements of the community culture model through the metaphor of the bread net (string bag) that define the particular Bulgarian case but are also applicable, even if in varied degrees, to many other similar networks around the world within the general frame of the “bread-and-roses” cultural policies geared towards community cultural development.

**Historic Foundations of the Community Culture Model**

Over the 150 years of their existence as a network of community cultural centers, the importance of the Bulgarian chitalishte in preserving cultural traditions, serving as one of “the three pillars” (*stozheri*) of Bulgarian society along with the school and the church, was a commentary I read and heard over and over again, running as a discursive trope through the memoires of the teachers, merchants, and priests who started the chitalishte in the 1850s, all the way through the Ministry of Culture’s official documents and regulations under socialism, through the on-going discussions at every national meeting of the chitalishte and other smaller regional meetings I attended over my three years of research, and finally often present in the ways chitalishte managers and local participants talk about these houses in their informal conversations. Some key historic accounts and current opinions about the chitalishte were collected in an edited volume of essays published by the National Union of the Chitalishte for the network’s 150th Anniversary in 2007 (Sirakov, S.ed. 2007). The echoing of the discourse that often seems mechanical and void of content, however, does not invalidate the perceptions of local chitalishte members, as we shall see below at the Bistritsa chitalishte, who express and
enact belonging to the space and to the symbolic value of the institution on various occasions, from personal donations to recurring discussions and volunteer labor in rebuilding the buildings and animating them through various formal and informal activities, as I reveal these hidden sides of the network and extrapolate out of it the community culture model applicable to other networks.

Since the fall of socialism, various sociological surveys of civil society activity and its organizations in Bulgaria (such as the CIVICUS report) have pointed to the chitalishte community cultural centers as key hubs for social capital generation and circulation. The chitalishte, as Valkov (2010) shows, while having very particular local characteristics that are unique, were at their inception modeled after mid-19th century community organizing models inspired by the Enlightenment movement and the nation-building projects in Western Europe, in particular in Northern Europe and Scandinavia, such as the exemplary Danish folk high schools (people’s colleges) model developed by Danish educator and intellectual Nikolaj Grundtvig (after whom the EU named one of its main life-long learning programs). The first folkehøjskole in Denmark was founded in 1844 at Rødding by Christen Kold, a follower of Grundtvig, and later spread to the rest of the Scandinavian countries (Valkov 2010: 127).

Valkov as a political scientist employs theories on public policy transfer (Stone 1999; Dolowitz and Marsh 1996; 2000; Dolowitz and Hulme 2000) to conceptualize how these ideas of “institutions of social capital,” as he calls them, travelled and were locally emulated through adaptation. However, to my research and knowledge, none of the models existent at that time (1850s) aimed to bring together such a diverse group of people as the chitalishte, people across age and across socio-economic classes, but were
rather divided by and specialized and tailored for particular groups (working men; women; children; or others) and organized by particular narrow areas of specialization, mostly popular education often limited to basic reading and writing, while the chitalishte since their beginning in the 1850s aimed to nurture all kinds of creativity and artistic forms alongside educational and reading opportunities.

Lastly, another unique aspect of the chitalishte is that they are among few non-governmental organizations in Europe that started as early as mid-19th century Europe and remains still existing with the same name, form of management and organization, mission, and similar profile of participants across various political, economic, and cultural periods. It is for this reason that many chitalishte feel pride, and often mention the Council of Europe report that came out in the late 1990s on the state of civil society in South-East Europe, which proclaimed the chitalishte as the oldest non-class-based NGO in Europe. Indeed, in most of the other cases of similar networks, as seen in the list of networks within the European Network of Cultural Centers (ENCC)²⁹, are public institutions, usually municipal rather than funded by the Ministry of Culture, and thus neither independent nor well organized in national networks of regular exchanges and meetings as in the Bulgarian case but rather a fairly loose association of members from across the country (for example, the German and Belgian networks).

All of these above aspects make the chitalishte model unique and the reasons why I take it as the foundation on which to develop the community culture model to show an exemplary case (then applicable in varied degrees to other similar cases) national network of community arts centers gets organized and then classifies and frames a whole field of artistic production, in this case both “folk/heritage” and also general amateur and

²⁹ A full list of networks is available at <www.encc.eu>.
community-based arts, as the model’s main elements then in varied degrees apply to the many other similar networks of community cultural centers (usually named “house of culture” or “cultural center” in its form in the local language), which were developed mostly after the 1940s as cultural policy programs inspired by the socialist and leftist politics across Europe.

The perseverance and sustainability of the chitalshte model is in many ways paradoxical for Bulgaria, where people ongoingly complain that nothing lasts long and one thing recurringly gets exchanged (podmeneno) for another when the political and economic interests shift. As politics and policies shift with each new government, people perceive even the Church as having been “podmenena”, since priests during socialism were officially replaced with secret service policemen. The religious heritage and Church-civil society relationship in Bulgaria, is indeed, a contested field of debates, as I show in the episode with the Bistritsa Babi group in this chapter, yet it is also intriguing that these varied forms of heritage are being constantly re-negotiated precisely in the chitalishte and through the various performances it enables.

In the midst of all these institutions and regulations in on-going flux, the chitalishte have remained in their organizational structure fairly unchanged for more than a hundred years (at least on the formal side, but also fairly consistent in the day-to-day application) preserving their NGO status and their particular ruling legal document, the National Law of the Chitalishte, establishing their rights and responsibilities as a peculiar kind of an NGO that is also state-subsidized.

The chitalishte form a separate category of an NGO aside from the other two main types of Bulgarian non-for-profit organizations: foundations and associations (around 83
percent of all registered NGOs) which are then divided in two categories, acting a) in private interest or b) in public interest (around 90 percent). There are currently about 30,000 registered NGOs in Bulgaria, but only about 6,000 are considered active\textsuperscript{30}, and there are about 3500 chitalishte with their proper buildings and some (even if often minimal) state funding. The *National Human Development Report 2010*, however, showed that popular opinion towards NGOs is one of overall general mistrust, with 41 percent of the people stating they do not know of the NGOs have had a positive social impact, and 31 percent stating mixed feelings of mistrust. According to the NGO Sustainability Index (developed by the US agency), Bulgaria has one of the lowest NGO sustainability rates in Europe but a bit higher than its neighbors in the Western Balkans. The chitalishte numbers have been diminishing since 1997 from 3,646 in 1997 to 2,895 in 2007 and decreasing membership. The CIVICUS Report 2010 “Citizen Actions without Engagement” developed the Civil Society Index diamond considering 67 quantitative indicators, and it showed how the majority of Bulgarian community organizations are involved in artistic and cultural activities mainly housed at the chitalishte (the second group is involved in sports clubs; the third are organizations working with the disabled). Thus, the chitalishte were recognized as the organizations serving most actively and immediately people at the community level; however how and why this is the case and what kinds of social dynamics and networks do they propel, maintain, or perhaps impede?

While the chitalishte are officially included in the surveys on civil society activism in Bulgaria as key institutions that could provide data on membership in voluntary associations, I argue that the numbers of official group members is much

\textsuperscript{30} Statistical data collected from <www.ngobg.info>. 
smaller and less important than the numbers of people coming to the chitalishte for various other activities, such as communal feast and festival celebrations or local amateur groups rehearsals not registerd as official chitalishte groups. In this sense, what the chitalishte do present as an intriguing case study is a particular art-based spatial and institutional frame for Toqueville’s associative model ([1835] 2000), where I argue that key factors to be understood as affecting associational behavior are trust (and the various networks and relations enabling trust) and the interactions across gender, age, and class. While trust has been noted as the main component of social capital generation by Woolcock (2000), also studied by Putnam (2001) and Ostrom (2000), this research on the chitalishte and the networks of community cultural centers in general present a particularly interesting model of social capital generation through the arts examined below through the various aspects of the community culture model.

Three Characteristics of the Community Culture Model: Continuity and Change through the Bread Net Metaphor

The “High Culture Model” (DiMaggio 1982), presenting the processes of institutionalization of the high arts in the USA in the mid and late 19th century, informs the community culture model, which defines the processes of institutionalization of local community arts, crafts, and cultural traditions/folklore (recently framed as “intangible cultural heritage” by UNESCO) becoming a genre of their own as “amateur” or “community arts” (depending on the country). I show how a key role in the model is played by the establishment of community cultural centers (often called “houses of culture” and linked in national networks, in particular across the former socialist world
but also similar to the public libraries in the UK and USA in their polyvalent functions). I trace back particularly the model of the socialist “houses of culture” (dom kulturyi) to the grassroots model of the chitalishte community spaces in Bulgaria which emerged in the 1850s, around the time of the evolvement of the “high culture model” in the USA, as sites of amateur arts and public libraries and reading rooms.

The three main processes defining the “high culture model” also hold for the community culture model, even though the two started off at different places (one with small private arts companies and the other with local cultural traditions integral part of daily life), the end point was ultimately the same: an elite group developing non-governmental, non-for-profit, trustee-run entities independent from the market through the processes of “organization,” “classification,” and “framing”, so as to allow the arts to be liberated from the commercial rules of demand and supply and to start responding to more lofty needs and visions, whether ones of quality as in the high culture model or ones of wide social participation as in the case of the community culture model. In the case of the USA, the group propelling the high arts classification was the already developed upper-middle class, and in the case of Bulgaria it was what would have been the equivalent for the Bulgaria reality still under the Ottoman Empire, where the “upper-middles class” was constituted by intellectuals and bourgeoisies (merchants) who had been educated abroad and were stiving to bring education and “culture: to the general public, also for the purpose of liberation and nation-building.

DiMaggio shows how in the 1850s, the American cultural organizations, mostly concentrated in the Boston area, included: for-profit firms; collective enterprises; and communal associations, and to create institutional high culture, Boston’s upper class
accomplished three concurrent projects: 1) “entrepreneurship” (organizational model); 2) “classification” (categories of arts defined and legitimated); and 3) “framing” (framework of relations between audience and art work developed).

During the period of the 1850s examined by DiMaggio in the USA, Valkov (2010) shows how all across Europe public libraries free and open to the general public were evolving often as the product of private philanthropy in partnership with or later adopted by the state (as in the case of Carnegie who established in partnership with municipalities more than 80 public libraries by the 1930s) (Valkov 2010:118). The history of the American public library movement began in Boston, where since 1820 YMCA provided libraries for general use, and the YMCA is the closest type of organization to the community cultural centers relevant to the community culture model. I will thus examine below how the three main processes defined by DiMaggio apply also to the formation stages and factors affecting the community culture model.

By “entrepreneurship,” DiMaggio denotes the establishment of an organizational form (the trustee-run non-for-profit) that the members of the elite could manage and control. The equivalent to “entrepreneurship” (organizational model) in the chitalishte case is the principle of “self-governance” (samoupravlenie) which is one of three main tenets of the chitalishte, affirmed at every annual national meeting of representatives of all 3500 chitalishte around the country. Those principles include: self-governance; self-independence; and self-motivation (called somedeynost, or not monetary retribution for the artistic production and performances) as the main drive for participation. These three principles relate in a number of ways to the three processes defined by DiMaggio.
While these three principles are the ultimate main goals of the community cultural centers, the means by which these goals are achieved (or so to say, the objectives, if we are to employ the project grant language that more and more chialishte managers adopt in order to secure American funding) include: 1) structural, as an aspect of the “entrepreneurship” element in DiMaggio’s model (on the one hand, it is literally the “hard” building and organizing of the physical structures of community cultural centers; on the other, it is the “soft” organizational structuring of the community cultural centers through popular participation, membership fees, trustee boards, and involvement of other community associations and organizatons); 2) syncretic, as an aspect of the “classification” element (referring to the mixing of arts genres, as well as age and socio-economic groups, since social mixing and integration are usually stated as the main purpose of these centers); and 3) synesthetic, as an aspect of the “framing” element (referring to the mixing of the boundaries between audience and performers through the mixing of professional and non-professional arts and thus both formal and informal performances, where these flexible porous boundaries can be noted particularly in the engagement of the various senses, especially the circulation of food and drinks in the cultural centers before, during, or after rehearsals and performances; food is thus taken as a lithmus test and indicator for measuring the degrees of informality of interactions and the porosity of the frames; the varied levels of informality of the cultural centers are expressed in the distinction between feeding and feedback cultural institution).

These three aspects I present as key factors affecting the three main stages of DiMaggio’s high culture model are ultimately examined and better understood through the object of the bread net (string bag) and its three main characteristics: transparency,
trans-use, and tensility, which define various aspects of the community cultural centers both as affective realities and as imagined potentialities.

**Structural Aspect of the “Entrepreneurship” Process: Bread Net’s Transparencies**

The *structural* aspect of the community culture model defines and helps us understand two distinct areas of the “entrepreneurship” process involved in the establishment, organization, management, and maintenance of the community cultural centers: 1) the “soft” *structural* aspect of organizational culture and management with visions and opinions among administrators and community participants ranging across a spectrum from emphasis on full state-funding to fully self-sustained/self-financed centers; and 2) the “hard” *structural* aspect of the physical, infrastructural building and maintenance of these structures and bargains over the meanings and uses of these collective spaces.

The “soft” *structural* aspect of the chitalishte is rooted in their organization as civic membership organizations with a board of trustees: a form established and maintained ever since their establishment in the 1850s. The Bulgarian case is different from the state-organized socialist and Western socio-democratic models, because in the Bulgarian model the basic state funding does not take away their official non-governmental status and independence in appointing their own staff, elected by popular vote of the whole membership body of the chitalishte (a minimum of 150 people in cities and 50 in villages). It is thus important to note that for most of these other community cultural centers networks similar to the chitalishte, both the socialist *dom kulturyi* networks across the former socialist countries, and the Western types of cultural centers
united currently in the European Network of Cultural Centers (ENCC), the same “soft” structural aspect of the community culture model does not always hold, as they were usually started by state cultural policies (as in Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, France, etc.) and the centers are thus often public, with the structure funded and staff elected usually by the local municipality. Nonetheless, at the few pan-European conferences organized by the ENCC over the years I noticed how these centers also claim to have certain freedoms in developing their own cultural programs with the basic public funding received. In addition to the fair degrees of freedom and lee-way in the “soft” structural aspect, despite or often due to basic state funding, another similarity across all these centers is the “hard” structural element of the community culture model, where both state and civil society have recognized the importance of having communal infrastructure (houses) built across neighborhoods in order to provide popular access to arts and cultural activities.

The “soft” structural aspect of the model reflects the vision – whether of civil society, as in Bulgaria, or of the state as in many of the other cases - for the centers to achieve self-dependence and self-governance (samoupravlenie), which are envisioned primarily as securing independence from the market, so that the market would not control and dictate the activities, but there would be open space for people’s local necessities and interests to propel the communal activities. In Bulgaria, this “soft” structural self-dependence and self-governance was achieved between the 1850s and the 1940s through private donations.

Private philanthropy in Bulgaria up to the advent of socialism was, in fact, a very active and developed sphere (Valkov 2010; Sirakov ed. 2007). In particular, the town of
Gabrovo (where the Bread House chitalishte is located and is examined in later chapters as an example of how a modern-day chitalishte can be born out civil society efforts without the state) has been particularly known for its philanthropists since it was among the most affluent cities in the country at the turn of the 20th century due to its textile and metal industries, thus also called the “Manchester of the Balkans.” In Gabrovo, factory owners were known to have built schools, kindergartens, hospitals, and the chitalishte, in 1861, making it one of the oldest chitalishte in the country (the very first ones built in 1856). Furthermore, local sources point to the impressive local enthusiasm and financial support on a massive popular level surrounding the chitalishte, whose founding members were local teachers and merchants, who paid an initial fee of 125 grosh each, yet with the minimal monthly fee of 3 grosh for any interested members, in only a year of its existence the Gabrovo chitalishte had accumulated the impressive for its time sum of 10,000 grosh simply through popular membership. The collected money was used for books; providing scholarships for students from the villages to come to the city school; and for organizing cultural activities, as the first theater performance was staged in 1871 (Polyakova ed. 2009: 33-35).

I use the metaphor of the bread net’s transparency to denote a key aspect of securing self-dependence and self-governance in the community culture model. Self-governance is also the end goal of DiMaggio’s “entrepreneurship” process, which in the case of the high arts in the USA entailed the organization of independent from the market trustee-run organizations. In Bulgaria, it meant structuring a similar kind of an organization but with a larger “hard” infrastructural component that envisioned the construction of a network of
physical houses in neighbourhoods across the country, which is what defines the strong “hard” structural aspect of the community culture model.

Intriguingly, the actual net bread bag’s transparency used to be a point of contestation during socialism, as people were often afraid to let be visible what products they were carrying, since it would provoke interrogations about the social networks they usually would have had to have employed in order to get hold of products scarce under socialism. In fact, the term used for these nets in Russia, avoska, has at its root the word avos’, which means “maybe” in Russian, and it intriguingly expresses people’s ability to joke about their often unmet hopes of getting hold of scarce products, yet being always flexibly ready to react in case of unexpected opportunity, when one could just take the folded bag out of his or her pocket or hand bad. Indeed, the net bag across the socialist world transcended gender categories and was carried by both men and women, pointing to its crucial economic utility relevant much more to survival than to performance and gender or status categories.

In such an economic context of scarcity, the filled bread nets represented the power of social capital exchange within the indispensable informal, private networks, supporting underground economies of product circulation, that helped people make ends meet day by day. In fact, this is perhaps the reason why these shopping nets were, indeed, mostly used for buying and carrying bread, hence their colloquial name “bread nets” (“хлебни мрежички” in Bulgarian), since bread was a common basic, staple food that its acquisition did not outline any distinctions among people’s positions of power and capital.
The concept of transparency when applied to the community cultural model is useful to understanding the dynamics and politics of the content of the artistic and cultural activities taking place at the community cultural centers. Under socialism, that content had to undergo significant ideological purging, censorship, and regular organizational and management scrutiny by the state. This type of forced transparency is, however, different from the inherent principle of transparency and accountability that the community cultural centers were founded on, as their management was elected by the general assembly of members and all activities and budget distribution had to be accountable and transparent for all to discuss and decide upon.

At the same time, the question of transparency in architecture relates in particular to the “hard” structural aspect. The modernist architectural fascination with glass houses in the 1850s\(^{31}\) is relevant both temporally, spatially, and symbolically to the way community cultural centers were conceptualized and have since imagined themselves as open to all people as members and participants (though on the ground there are always exceptions with cases with various social exclusion issues along ethnic, cultural, educational, religious, and socio-economic lines). The centers were also meant to be transparent in their community work, related to questions like: who gets to have keys from the chitalishte; who cleans it even there is no one paid to take care of the place; what activities are to take place inside the center; what would be the balance between traditional and modern arts; and between arts and social work; who gets what and why; who is benefitted; who is involved, etc?

Annelise Riles (2011) uses the German parliament building made of pure glass as a metaphor of the misleading transparency of neo-liberal legal reforms, which she defines

as “virtual transparency;” or, as Bruno Latour described the Parliament building:

“Something you can see right through, but that somehow does not reveal anything at all” (Latour and Weibel 2005, in Riles on 215), similar to the way the laws seem to support transparency through open markets yet guise systems of power made possible in the opaque penumbras of the law. Riles shows how the “aesthetics of legal knowledge” relies on the way the law “aesthetically produced the indicia of its own effectiveness” (215). We see how, on the one hand, people locally make use of the transnational legal discourses and processes as they allow and enable people to compare themselves to others and bring meaning and value to their local practices, while, on the other hand, these same legal instruments could be working to support very different economic and political interests under the political radar of the law.

Architecturally, the chitalishte under socialism was characterized by the visible, “transparent” stage than by the back-stage, less visible (and thus also less transparent and harder to control) small rooms for books, workshops, and music rehearsals, and the prominent presence of these sites of display reveals how a major purposes of the centers, to varied degrees, has been to also represent local identities and traditions, as well as for the representation of national heritage, as contested and polyphonic as this might be.

Riles’ concept of “virtual transparency” applies to an extent to the legal framework around the Bulgarian chitalishte, but also in general to non-governmental organizations around the world, where their low transparency and accountability are usually the main reason for the mistrust of NGOs despite their claims of “non-for-profit” and “socially-beneficial” activities, which are often tangential to the majority of funds spent on

---

32 Clifford Geertz has extensively noted with rich ethnographic evidence the importance of the community representing itself to its own self, as much as to others, in order for better to comprehend and thus accept, even when rebelling in performances and ritual against, its rules and norms.
overhead. In the case of the “soft” structural aspect of the chitalishte, founded and run as NGOs, a key element of their form of organizing is that their wide popular membership requires them to provide financial transparency and public accountability (at least in theory, if not always in practice) to their general assemblies.

Each year each chitalishte is required by the Chitalishte Law (again, stipulating them as a particular kind of an NGO that is independent but state-supported) to hold a meeting for their General Assembly, open their books and give account for their activities and expenditures over the year. The general assemblies of the chitalishte are of a minimum of 150 members in urban areas and 50 members in rural areas, which are numbers stipulated by the National Law of the Chitalishte. The president of the European Network, Andreas Kaempf, attended one such general assembly during his visit to explore the Bulgarian network in March 2012, and he pointed to the similarity with the German cultural centers where financial transparency was crucial, but with the difference that there is no particular membership number requirement.

The Chitalishte Law, though democratically drafted and passed at the turn of the 20th century before socialism, has been recently circumvented, in particular when it comes to fulfilling the numbers and making sure that all members are invited and participant in the chitalishte management. The membership requirements were recently revised and the numbers increased by a working group at the Ministry of Culture involving both public officials and chitalishte members from around the country, but while on paper they try to secure wide popular participation, what they do in practice is to often force chitalishte to fake members, in particular in small villages where there are less than 50 residents in the whole village, and present in their official membership lists kept at the Ministry members
that have often long ago left the village or even passed away, and in this case we observe another aspect of the Riles’ legal “virtual transparency”, this time employed by people in local tactics rather than by trans-national corporations. Nonetheless, with the exception of such limited cases, sometimes raised and discussed at the national Union of the Chitalishte meetings, overall the system of checks-and-balances provided by the popular membership model of the community culture model in Bulgaria is perceived by its members as well organized in securing transparency.

Riles’ concept of “virtual transparency” is also relevant to UNESCO’s laws on intangible cultural heritage and cultural diversity. Across the cultural centers in Bulgaria, Cuba, and Brazil, I observed how people employed various local tactics to apply UNESCO’s discourses on intangible cultural heritage to their own local understandings of heritage in order to legitimate and add symbolic value to their organizations and practices. UNESCO’s Convention has often been a political tool of the struggle for power of less-economically developed nations to claim resources and recognition of value in terms of their cultural traditions. Furthermore, the Convention on Cultural Diversity following the ICH Convention proclaimed in its “virtual transparency” the concerns for preserving the diversity of cultural expressions, yet de facto it was a move for state to claim exemption from the free trade agreement regulations to be allowed to show preferential treatment for their national cultural industries and products and curb cultural imports.

I observed one particularly intriguing case when locals took advantage of the “virtual transparency” of the international UN Convention. It occurred during my research on the Cuban “houses of culture” (casas de la cultura), developed with the help of Bulgarian
cultural officers, where in the town of Santiago de Cuba the community cultural center ("casa de la cultura") employed the trans-national discourses of “intangible cultural heritage” to a cultural activity that the state had not only not considered “heritage” but was at the verge of being prohibited. The case involved the pregon street food songs, sung by street vendors selling their fruits, vegetables, and home-baked goods. The socialist regime, however, started curbing the street food sales for being condemned as private entrepreneurship that was not in line with the communist principles, and yet at this point the casa de la cultura stepped in and moved to declare the pregon a heritage practice, with the cultural aspects of song, music, colorful carts and the female vendor’s traditional costumes were emphasized much more than the commercial aspect and the state not only allowed the pregon to continue but it was taken to a whole new level of national recognition due to the festival dedicated to its safeguarding as a part of the Santiago Festival. Similar tactics employing the institutional value of the cultural centers were employed by Bogdan, whose story is examined in a later chapter as he, as an artisan bread-maker, who applied for UNESCO’s recognition of his craft through the local chitalishte in order to secure legitimacy in the struggle against the food safety services arguing that his bread needs to be produced through the century-old natural processes. This phenomenon is similar to the way other groups in the Living Human Treasures list always applied for recognition through their chitalishte, and the members of these groups kept referring to their recognition by UNESCO as “our chitalishte was recognized by UNESCO,” rather than referring to the group or its members directly. It was the community arts institution that, in their minds and experiences, was the one that had made possible the channeling of the recognition that was thus the one suitable to formally
bear the recognition. The match was clear: one cultural institution recognizing another, where people were part of the institution but not its full constituents. Similar dynamic was intriguingly noted by an American scholar traveling to recording authentic songs across Bulgaria, who told me how going to people’s homes to ask them to sing for them, he was often taken to the chitalishte and only inside the space of the chitalishte would the people sing and perform for him. This shows the extent to which people perceived the chitalishte as, indeed, “the house of culture”, the proper place destined for the preservation and tradition of tradition (again, what UNESCO and the Ministry of Culture now term “intangible heritage”), and where the personal attachment, appropriation, and sense of belonging I observed express towards the chitalishte as “our chitalishte”, “our home” did not mean their space were limiting “culture” to the “house”, but rather allowing cultural traditions to be housed, cared for, and comfortably shared in a home-like, privatized public space.

A similar association between cultural practice and its designated cultural place occurred in Gabrovo in my experiences with the establishment of the Bread House at my greatgrandmother’s house, where I was actually ultimately pressed by social and institutional pressure to label the Bread House a “chitalishte” in order for people to be able to recognize it and legitimize it, rather than spreading gossip and rumours about its doubtful mission, because people had difficulties placing the Bread House in a familiar category.

The power of framing a cultural practice in institutional terms, under the auspices of a recognizable cultural institution, thus a recognized, readable, and acceptable social category, is a case which particularly well illustrates what Holden (2006) has delineated
as one of the elements of the public value of the arts. They note a triangular relation between the three main public value elements: institutional; instrumental; and intrinsic.

The “institutional” value of the arts theory, showing how the arts create trust in public institutions and cohesion in society at large, finds a new reading and interpretation in the community culture model, whose structural aspect impacts society through: a) the “institutional value” of the individual center, of the actual permanent structure of the community cultural center in its neighborhood; in particular, in the context of the discourses on “intangible heritage safe-guarding” I show the dynamic of heritage house-guarding (Savova 2011a), where the communal arts house is perceived by many locals as crucial in the sustainable transmission of heritage practices across generations; and b) the “institutional value” of the network of cultural institutions, which increases the value and meaning of local practices when people see them in a larger context and have a chance to compare, share ideas and good practices, and present their activities to a much larger audience and networks of similar organizations.

Previously, I developed a theoretical framework to explain the main elements characterizing the relationship between the networks of community cultural centers and policy (both at the national and the international, inter-governmental level (UNESCO, EU). That state-policy model, distinct from the community culture model where the focus is much more on the mechanisms of operation of the actual network rather than its relation to the state, except for the issues discussed in the structural aspects of the network and individual centers’ funding. While I employed the metaphor of the bread net bag for this former civil-society and the arts model, the state cultural policy model employs as a metaphor the Brazilian shekere instrument (a gourd wrapped up in a loose
net with beads on it producing sound in their contact with the gourd) (Savova 2011 b).

The *shekere*’s particular rhythmic dynamics, or the three “L”s, define the main dilemmas of and factors in policy-making and implementation: *looseness, lapse of time, and locality.* *Looseness* reflects the dilemmas over the amounts of necessary looseness of state censorship and control so that artistic creativity locally can flourish, yet also dilemmas on the amounts of necessity “right” amount of basic state support necessary for sustainability; examined more in the issue of balance in the *hand-shake* cultural policy).

*Lapse of time* refers to the actual time it takes, and thus should be projected in a policy or project strategy, for a policy law, directive, program, or project to be implemented and reach the ground locally. *Locality* reveals the needed flexibility and adaptability of programs to local realities, as once the policy initiative reaches the local level it needs to respond to the particular characteristics and needs of each community, as those could be very distinct from the imaginary at the national level.

While at the national level the issue of the right levels of *looseness* of the net is the one applying to the state’s relation to both the local cultural centers and the national network, at the local level it is the issue of *transparency* and as we will later examine *tensility* of the net that applies to the community cultural center’s relations with the local community and the center’s public value. The institutional value of the cultural centers as respectable institutions depends enormously on their transparency, which is where the transparent bread net bag as a metaphor applies to understanding the chitalishte budgets and spending. These are topics discussed in transparent general assembly meetings, where the managers have to account for their activities before the whole membership body, and the process of setting the spending priorities for each year entail a dynamic,
democratic participatory budget, reminiscent of the Brazilian “participatory budget” model of popular participation in municipal administration.

When it comes to deciding how much state funding from the Ministry of Culture each chitalishte would be granted each year, the chitalishtes’ representatives in each region get together in a meeting with the municipal cultural officers (who are the distributing force of the Ministerial funding) and in these meetings each chitalishte has to present its past year’s activities and prove merit if they are requesting increase in their state funding. These meetings often end up with heated conflicts over validity or value of presented activities, over whether traditional performances or modern arts bear more value (often even measured by an improvised and contested point system), and general debates over continuity and change. These meetings of supposed transparency and accountability often end up resembling the dynamics of performances, mostly in Goffman’s notion of performances of the self, and are described by the cultural workers themselves as “pro forma transparency”, i.e. enacted only for the sake of the form that is discrepant from the content, yet the performances in themselves nonetheless have their own ritual value of annual meetings where bonding as much as breaking relationships develop among chitalishtes’ administrators as well as between the chitalishtes and the municipal authorities, leading to future partnerships and networks of support or long-term conflicts.

A final analytical frame applied to the structural aspect of the community culture model in terms of the organization and funding of the centers roughly involves considerations on: 1) the Western “arm’s-length” policies; what I call hand-shake approach; and the fist-grip approach to giving and exchange dynamics enacted by the “giving hand” of the state.
I have already grounded these three concepts (see in Savova 2011a) in my observations on the Bistritsa Babi group and many other groups and cultural centers in Bulgaria and abroad, and we will particularly examine these issues in light of the Bistritsa chitalishte, the home of the regular rehearsals, community performances, and informal meetings and celebrations of the Bistritsa Babi folk dance and music group, declared by UNESCO a Masterpiece of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2006 as representing Bulgaria. However, the notions of what constitutes heritage, at the local, regional, national, and international level, were highly contested as people debated on various occasions at the chitalishte, on and off the stage, in formal rehearsals and informal gatherings, how continuity and change played ambiguous roles in their lives and how they were craftily used and misused in politics in particular during the transition after socialism.

The Bistritsa Babi group’s director, Dina, often talked about the many things that socialism had given as well as taken away to the safeguarding of heritage. One particular comment of hers struck me with the richness of the metaphor of the “giving” hand:

During Communism we had money for activities, we had heating so we would not rehearse in freezing rooms like now, but they killed the authentic folklore: that which was really sung and lived! The Russian “massovki,” the same costumes, movement, the same artificial glamour erased the small differences in each particular place…Communism had a dual effect: with the one hand it was giving, and with the other: it was taking away…giving money, but taking away content…giving buildings but controlling how we used them… and all other forms of control through their giving.

The “giving hand” of the state has been an object of much discussion and ambiguity not only in the Bulgarian post-socialist context but in general across cultural
policies around the world, as the major concern arising is always one of censorship and control when money is involved, and the extent to which public funding should support the centers or they should fundraise privately their funds. The reason why the first key aspect of the community culture model I point to is the structural one is because what is unique to the model is the existence of multiple houses-community cultural centers across the world, whether built by the state or civil society, raising questions about the meaning and role of the arts in communities.

An important entry point to understanding the social imaginary and function of the chitalishte and the “houses of culture” across the former socialist world is to comprehend the very use of the term “house” and “home” rather than the terms “council” or “committee”, which are the main terms employed in the West to denote these types of community arts organizations. The two groups of words convey distinct connotations and reveal different cultural propensities towards the social function of these organizations. On the one hand, “house” and “home” imply: 1) privacy and 2) independence, and at the same time 3) a notion of belonging rooted in similarity, solidarity, and sharing (and yet on the ground, the names did not always match the activities and types of relationships monitored by the state). On the other hand, “council” implies a notion of pluralistic participation in discussion and resolution of issues organized through a principle of membership based on difference and pluralistic representation more so than on similarity and solidarity. In this sense, the pervasive use of the word “council” in the USA and the UK to refer to community cultural institutions called Arts Councils, distinct from the extensive use of the word “house” across Latin America and the former socialist world, might point to the distinct cultural understandings about the role of these community arts.
spaces and community arts in general. The word “house”, however, was also widely used in Western Europe but in the commercial sphere, as already in the Middle Ages trade guilds across Spain and Italy were employing the concept of “house” (*casa*), as in the *casas de contratacion* in Spain and in Latin America\textsuperscript{33}, to refer to their operations as independent of the state, i.e. with the approval of the state but without its direct control. In the Anglo-Saxon world, the “house” concept evolved in the banking system to refer to family-owned financial operation enterprises, as the “House of Morgan.”

**Between and Betwixt the “House” and the “Home”: House Economics and Home Oikonomia**

On the grounds of the culturally, politically, and economically diverse meanings and uses of the concept and discourse of “house” and “home”, I crafted the terms *home oikonomia* and *house economics*. *Home oikonomia* is the term I crafted to try to make sense of an intriguing emerging phenomenon in Bulgaria but also in varied degrees in other countries where Orthodox Christianity is the predominant religion, both in post-socialist countries and in neighboring countries like Greece. *Home oikonomia* points to people’s revived rhetorical use and in some cases practice of religion to rethink social and economic realities, particularly sifted through the Byzantine concept of “oikonomia.”

“Oikonomia” is the principle of flexible interpretation and application of Biblical Laws, seen and applied through the prism of Divine Love and compromise\textsuperscript{34}. *Home oikonomia* defines the current backlash in East-European Orthodox countries, with my observations

\textsuperscript{33} See more on local political structures and communal organization in Spain and Latin America in Tamar Herzog; on civic associations in Latin America between 1760 – 1990 in Carlos Forment, *Democracy in Latin America*; more on popular education through reading in Pablo Piccato and Pedro Guibovich.
particularly on Bulgaria, Greece, and Russia, where people are taking an alternative *oikonomic* approach towards capitalism (flexible and oriented towards social justice and revived spirituality marked in particular by a return to alternative agriculture and barter economies. In this sense, *home oikonomia* defines the tactics people employ to craft and sustain alternative equitable *oikonomics* versus capitalist *economics*, where people resort to volunteering and informal support networks, small-scale urban cultivation and exchange of home-grown produce, etc.

*Home oikonomia* is distinguished from what I would call *house economics*, which denotes both the socialist and the capitalist discursive uses of the word “house” in defining market institutions and organizing forms of control, regardless of whether channelled through the state or the market. While under socialism, the state-run shops were called “houses” (houses of shoes, of books, of electric appliances up to the non-commerical “houses of culture”), in the West “houses” were the banks and corporations (for example, “House of Morgan”). Bulgarians and other former socialist citizens importantly point to the fact that the socialist policies were not any more just or equitable than the current capitalist systems, since, as an interlocutor pointed, in “Communism” very few things were really “communal”, while the majority of goods and services, as well as access to large amounts of money, were reserved for the small elite of the Communist Party leaders. This is the reason why I locate the dynamics of capitalist and socialist economic policies and power dynamics under one roof with the term *house economics*.

Furthermore, currently the “house” is being employed politically in the frame of the European Union to create the image of one household with many inhabitants united
under one roof. The roof, however, can be taken metaphorically, and, as one chitalishte manager pointed jokingly, in the EU poor countries like Bulgaria and Romania transition from the Soviet “Iron Curtain” to the EU “iron caps” of funding. The Iron Caps are set at the place where access to the so-called “structural funds” for development of new members is ultimately reserved for those with personal connections and back-stage networks. The funds are thus unavailable to small organizations, individual farmers, and small businessmen, whom the EU is supposed to benefit most, particularly for the new, less affluent members.

This, in this context of ongoing inequitable house economics in Europe and across the globe, the move towards home oikonomia, though crafted employing a historically and culturally specific term relevant to the Eastern European Orthodox countries, can be applied more broadly to define the rising global phenomenon of people returning to non-economic –better, alternative economic or oikonomic - networks of exchange modelled resembling the traditional, small-scale gift exchange economies examined in classical anthropology by Marcel Mauss.

One marked aspect of my what I mean by the rising phenomena of home oikonomia around the world - or the aspiration towards the domestication of public spaces turning them from “houses” to “homes” - has been the employment of the arts in the field of economic development, which has prompted the formation of the field of “cultural economics” (see David Throsby’s extensive work in this field; for key term Throsby 1999; also Gudeman 1986).

Traced back to the “Bread and Roses” civic struggles for creative leisure for the working class at the turn of the 20th century, at the turn of the 21st century the rise of
culture as one of the four pillars of development is a key aspect of the *home oikonomic* dispositions as more and more community organizations scale their operations down to the local, the communal, the re-thinking of the private home and the neighborhood as a large household, employing the arts particularly in low-income and marginalized areas where beauty and creativity were never before considered fit. In this sense, the distinction between “house” and “home” in the economic context examined above correlates to the distinction between “house” and “council” in the realm of cultural policy and community cultural development.

While at the turn of the century museums were used for the control of the masses through imposing cultural capital, and later during socialism the museum was meant to educate about the political regime\(^3\), in the second case above talking about the community cultural centers across board as “homes” - whether named “council,” “house of culture,” “point of culture,” “community museum,” “community theater,” etc - in various economic and political systems around the world are taking up an ever more inclusive and participatory approach towards community arts and local development blurring ever more the formal lines of cultural institutions through informal and engaged relations with the local communities. Yet still there is one particular element that keeps marking the distinctive levels of informality and engagement at a cultural institution, and this is the role of food and food exchanges inside the cultural organizations, fully summarized in the third aspect defining the flexible frames of the community culture.

\(^3\) The socialist concept of the “houses of culture” is related to the Communist ideology, which saw the avant-garde vision of the museum as temple of beauty as “compensation for an absence of beauty in life itself,” and tried to abolish the museum by “radically utilitarizing art instead of aestheticizing utilitarian reality” (Groys in Lippard 1999: 104).
model when the community engagement is synesthetic, i.e. engaging all sense thus including taste and food.

But to try to comprehend the impediments and promises and niches before the various ways of inhabiting and animating the cultural centers, I would like to examine the “house”- “council” dynamic, both discursively and phenomenologically, through Martin Heidegger’s (1971:145-61) concepts of the “dwelling” versus “building” thinking.

Heidegger points out how the etymology of the word “to build” (bauen) in German also had the meaning “to dwell” and “to care, to cultivate land.” Yet more and more modernity shifted and segmented the two meanings into what Tim Ingold (2000) calls the distinction between the “building” and “dwelling paradigm:” “where before, building was circumscribed within dwelling, the position now appears reversed, with dwelling circumscribed within building” (Ingold 2000:185). “We do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is because we are dwellers…To build is in itself already to dwell… Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build” (Heidegger 1971: 148,146,160, original emphases, quoted in Ingold, 186).

Heidegger’s call to recover the “dwelling thinking” further sheds light on the socialist project, examined in more detail in Maurice Godelier’s essay The mental and the material (1986), where socialists vastly employed the notion of “building”, “building Communism” both symbolically and physically with a preponderant number of mass-scale construction and production projects, as the core purpose of social life without leaving much space for discussion on the kinds of relationships and activities that were to (or could be) animating and moving forward the structures. Indeed, the key question of “what does it take for a house, the physical building, to become a home, […]the setting
within which people dwell” (in Lawrence’s [1987] terms, quoted by Ingold 2000), is a question that is constantly raised around the community cultural centers.

Heidegger’s and Ingold’s conceptual frameworks shed light on the ongoing discussions around the meaning and purpose of the chitalishte and community cultural centers in general, where the positions of managers, community participants, and public officers vary across a wide spectrum: from those ardently defending the importance of the physical space – and, indeed, first and foremost taking care of the building and its maintenance – to the other end of the spectrum with people emphasizing activities and programs that are flexible and can evolve in various places, locations, and contexts but secure lasting relationships and group dynamics as the primary focus beyond the spatial concerns. The majority of the voices in my research tended to occupy the mid-range of the spectrum, negotiating the balance between the building and the dwelling paradigms, as it was stated as important for people of varied ages and professions and relations to the cultural centers that the physical building is important to be symbolically present, because its presence inspires – and requires – the locals to ask what activities are taking place and to think of more that could evolve inside. The structural aspect of the community culture model thus defines a paradigm of thinking about community development based on the mixing and balancing out of the building and dwelling paradigms.

Buildings, Bodies, Boundaries: People’s Relationship to the Community Cultural Center as Structure and Symbol

The Bistritsa chitalishte is an embodiment of the effects of these three main kinds of structural entrepreneurship, as the building has witnessed all major Bulgarian historic
periods over the past century and their corresponding dynamics of “arms-length”, “fist-grip”, or “hand-shake” policies. The Bistritsa chitalishte was founded at the turn of the century decades before socialism and used to be located inside a small house donated by a local philanthropist (as was the case of most pre-socialist chitalishte around the country whose building were either donated or collectively constructed with volunteer labor and monetary donations). The socialist regime, however, considered the chitalishte house to be too small and unimpressive, whereas the cultural center was meant to be the symbolic epitomy of the regime’s caring hand in the local community offering free access to the arts for all. As a result, in the 1960s the chitalishte was moved from its former privately donated premises to its new, publically-funded and purpose-built massive, rectangular socialist-style building. The decreased funding from the Ministry of Culture after the collapse of socialism left most similar cultural centers across Bulgaria with the bare minimum funding for their maintenance and staff, forcing them to cut on anything from heating to light bulbs and cleaning detergents.

The current building of the Bistritsa chitalishte is big and imposing, standing in the center of the main square of the former village (now peripheral neighbourhood of the capital), as most other chitalishte around Bulgaria occupy the central locations in any residential area, usually alongside the church, the school, and the municipality.

The chitalishte has a big stage and performance hall and second-floor room for a small-scale community library (the name of the cultural center itself, chitalishte, comes from the verb for reading, cheta, denoting how one of the initial primary purposes of the chitalishte was to collect books as people could not afford them individually). On the second floor, there are three other rooms, two of which used for the chitalishte staff as
administrative offices (and improvised kitchen holding a fridge, a sink, and a foldable table) and a room used for rehearsals in singing, playing instruments, as well as a room for changing clothing after concerts or celebrating birthdays and informal gathering to chat and nibble on snacks after rehearsals. Usually in the winter, the dance group would all get crammed in the one small room that was heated up with a heater that someone had brought from their home, since the dwindled public subsidies after socialism were no longer enough to heat-up the whole enormous socialist-style building.

While in the West, many countries employ the Anglo-Saxon model of the “arm’s length principle” of funding, where each year NGOs apply to the Arts Council (semi-independent from the Ministry) with specific projects (both high and community, non-professional arts) that might or might not be funded, in the case of the community cultural centers networks, where those exist, they are usually funded on a regular, fairly secure basis (by a municipality or the Ministry of Culture) and such basic levels of security, even if not enough for large-scale activities, create a relatively stable local environment that one could argue is more favorable to sustained participation and potential for community change that a project-based funding. In contrast to the “arm’s length” giving model, the regular cultural policy giving creates longer-term, reciprocal engagement between donor and beneficiary that I have come to denote as the “handshake principle” of cultural policy giving (Savova 2011a), which however during socialism exercised such strict forms of control and cleansing of folklore and art of any religious or anti-regime content that I denote such cases of cultural policy “fist-grip” policy giving, also playing on the popular image of the Iron Fist of socialist governments.
Here the question arises “How then do the distinct historic origins of the different networks – some products of a civic philanthropic culture while others cultural policy tools – impact the current developments, most importantly community engagement dynamics, enhanced by the centers?” In Bulgaria in particular I discovered how the “old” philanthropy model both motivates and discourages new forms of generosity especially in the context of the fashionable discourses about the ways arts and culture strengthen civil society promoted by the European Union and US-based foundations like the Open Society Institute, Mott Foundation, and Gates Foundation.

The historic accounts of philanthropy (Hall 1992) and “philanthropy’s new maths” (Katz 2007) show how the historic evolution of the concepts and practices of philanthropy booming in the USA at the turn of the 20th century evolved up to the current megaphilanthropy trend growing in the USA. In this context, Katz raises the poignant question: “[…]whether a traditional philanthropic organization (the foundation), its management (the program-officer system), and its concepts (the search for root causes) can be adapted to the thoughtful and responsible expenditure of such vast sums of money by an institution that in effect will be conducting its own foreign policy” (2007: Page B6). I ask similar questions in the context of Bulgaria and post-socialist Eastern Europe in general, which have been heavily influenced by American foundation giving, and where such funds increasingly occupy the vacuum - yet also temporarily and without sustainability - of continuous state abdication from social responsibilities, most notable in the fields of social services and culture.

The enormous funding programs of the US initiatives in Eastern Europe like the Gates Foundation Global Libraries and the Open Society Institute programs are
conducting their particular “own foreign [cultural] policy”, and the questions we need to ask should delve into the real impact on the ground and in the high political and economic circles of this supposedly “free” giving? Can such large donations truly have “no strings attached”, and if there are strings, what does this mean to the communities that become beneficiaries? How do the strings connect and yet detach people from global flows of funds, information, and power? And how do people learn to play with the strings and use them locally with varied degrees of creative agency?

In the 1990s, some chitalishte, striving to reconfigure in the context of state withdrawal and market rule, mastered ways of bypassing their foundational principles of philanthropic, non-commercial activities and started renting out their rooms and stages to non-art-related businesses or employed personal connections to receive grants, while others returned to the chitalishte’s original characteristics of “self-organization” which they recognized and re-discovered in the US notion of “civil society organizations” helping “democracy-building” in former communist countries. For example, the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC) started supporting some chitalishte to help them become “citizens’ centres” that build additional revenues from activities such as an Internet club and collecting of medicinal herbs and craft-making (Benthall 2000).

Since 1998, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, UNDP, and the Gates Foundation have involved the chitalishte in series of “capacity-building” trainings which helped some administrators develop competitive grant-writing skills and come up with innovative artistic offerings to attract more people and private donors. In particular, Mott Foundation promoted in Bulgaria the US-based “community foundations” model to try to
spur local action in solving relevant issues through the mobilization of local resources, imagined as fundraising locally and coordinating volunteer and policy lobbying and advocacy efforts. Vera Dakova, the coordinator for Eastern Europe, expressed hope that the model would inspire the chitalishte to adopt the model of community fundraising and assume more charitable rather than strictly cultural and artistic functions. According to Vera in our interview in London where Mott is based:

Community foundations are what the chitalishte used to do before they started getting centralized funding from the state. Before, the chitalishte collected money to send the best students to study abroad so the whole community would then get a teacher afterwards; they helped poor and sick community members, so they bought remedies for the sick in the same way they bought books for all to read. Now the foundations look much like a chialishte since they have a widely representative board of members and board of directors, and include key public individuals as well as active local organizations.36

Vera’s hopes for mimesis between the two community models, however, turns out to be complicated by the issue of what seems like institutional translation, as in order for Mott to fund an organization in Bulgaria it had to prove that the association had a status in Bulgaria equivalent to a US 501-c-3. However, the concepts and management of NGOs in Bulgaria and the USA did not overlap completely, particularly in the case of the chitalishte with their peculiar status as a governmentally-funded and governmentally-coordinated and accountable organizationa, yet also a non-governmental and non-publicly appointed institution.

---

36 Vera Dakova, Mott Foundation, Director of Eastern-Europe Department. Interview conducted by Nadezhda Savova, May 15th, 2011. London, UK.
The chitalishte network’s international relations with other similar networks opens the transnational issue of “cultural houses networks” as cultural policies as much as the transnational issue of UNESCO’s discourse on “intangible cultural heritage” preserved through these networks, where the transnational processes result to always be ultimately embedded locally in dynamics that in my analysis of the network show translocality, as examined by Appadurai (1996) in his notions of ethnoscapes, to be relevant in the case of making possible the movement of people and practices through the networks through festivals and visits and exchange projects and at the same time through the transnational travel of the concept of this particular cultural policy model at the national level and the travel of the concept of the community cultural center as a system of similar but not centrally-organized grassroots initiative as in the case of Brazil’s pontos de cultura.

The community culture model, once structurally developed in both “hard” infrastructural and “soft” organizational terms, enters in the second process of classification of the artistic genre of community/amateur arts, whose main characteristic is the artistic co-creation, or the synergetic dynamic of the syncretic aspect of the category of community arts.

**Syncretic Aspect of the “Classification” Process: Bread Net’s Trans-use**

The “classification” stage in DiMaggio’s (1982) high culture model involves “the erection of strong and clearly defined boundaries between art and entertainment, the definition of a high art that the elites and segments of the middle class could appropriate as their own cultural property; and the acknowledgment of that classification’s legitimacy by other classes and the state” (377). In the case of the *community culture*
model, the process involved in developing a category of non-professional, amateur arts did not engage one particular class but it was rather the product of the bargains and cooperation of the communities themselves setting up these centers. The mix of genres of arts and creative and festive activities within the community culture model points to the co-creative characteristic of the activities taking place inside the cultural centers, well summarized by two Slavic words: *samodeynost* (Bulgarian) or *samodeiatel’nost* (Russian), denoting the “self-motivation” for the activity not rooted in monetary compensation; and *lyubitelsko izkustvo/tvorchestvo*, denoting “amateur arts/creativity” pointing at the non-professional aspect of the performances.

The centers were founded with the goal to be open to a variety of cultural activities and artistic forms, which defines the *syncretic* aspect of the centers as *multifunctional* spaces. The spatial multifunctionality of the centers can best be fined by the term “trans-use”\(^{37}\) developed in modern architecture and design to denote an approach towards building using recycled as well as re-purposed materials and objects, which have been adapted for new uses thus expanding on the concept of multifunctionality.

*Trans-use* is well illustrated through the metaphor of the bread net bag’s trans-use for its flexible, foldable, light, easy-to-carry, and thus multifunctional nature. *Trans-use* can be understood in two main contexts: in terms of, on the one hand, space organization; and management and communal participation. Both of these are factors, *spatial trans-use* (defining the varieties of spaces in a cultural centers, or the varieties of ways of using the

\(^{37}\) “Trans-use project” is a project by LA based designers who addresses the desire for progressive, affordable architecture. This goal is achieved by rescuing portable classrooms before they are discarded into landfills. The applications are infinite, and will benefit the environment and humanitarian needs of local communities. Available at <http://santamonica-california.olx.com/trans-use-project-needs-investors-and-volunteers-iid-12785604>.
limited space and re-purposing it) and synergetic trans-use (defining the varieties of collective, co-creative activities) affect the syncretic aspect of the community culture model, or to what extent and how various artistic genres and heritage practices are mixed inside the cultural centers. The syncretic aspect in this case corresponds to DiMaggio’s “classification” process and points to the ways people nationally and locally think about and use the centers.

As pointed at the opening of the chapter with the socialist slogans “Bread and Roses,” community arts and heritage were key tools employed by socialism around the world to develop and spread its political propaganda through a whole genre of proletariat arts. But why were amateur arts in particular such good instruments? Timothy Rice (1994) employs the concept of “two-part syncretic process” in his book May It Fill Your Soul to point to a few key reasons for the extensive socialist cultural policies: 1) “to overcome the classs divisions within the country centered on an urban-rural split, where high arts were no longer meant to speak only to the educated upper class but to villagers as well resorting to a heritage tradition that for many held special importance as constituting Bulgarian identity preserved over a period of five centuries under foreign domination; in this sense, village art, “taken as a symbol of the nation” was meant to evolve into a massively popular genre enjoyed also by the sophisticated urabnites as it was now framed in similar discourses, which Rice calls a “two-part syncretic process”, where the state aimed to mix folk and classical music, rural and urban classes, workers and intellectuals, etc. in order to homogenize and control artistic content (180-181).

The second reason Rice discusses was rooted in the state’s strategy to promote the concept of national socialist “spiritual development” (duhovno razvitie) as divorced from
religion and focused on the arts, both amateur and professional, as both a source of spiritual inspiration and further framed as instrumental in the construction of Communism securing that “from cultural growth would come economic growth”, materialized in the massive nation-wide construction of theaters, opera houses, and cultural centers.

The third reason Rice points is the state’s desire to develop a homogenous, easy to control “national socialist culture,” pretending to keep the local heritage distinctions but in reality boiling them down to singnature characteristics and forms devoid of content and meaning (particularly when religious content, as in the cases of old rural rituals, songs, and celebrations) into a new syncretic genre of the so-called “re-worked folklore” ("obraboten folklor") set on urban stages across the country, and which many argued saved tradition in the sense of transmitting it to the younger generations, while others criticize the purging of local authentic forms to have served for “decorative function” rather than secure the “living folk art.” (182). Such indignation was voiced by Dina and her struggle to recover the local Bistitrsa element that were not acceptable under socialism.

In the community culture model, taking the Bulgarian chitalishte as an example, the cultural centers were not used from the beginning as channels for state propaganda, and thus the syncretic aspect of mixing the arts genres and classifying “community arts” was much more linked to local creativity and community development. There is a distinction to be made between the two main sub-categories within the overaching category of “community arts” that developed through the structural organization of community cultural centers: a) samodeynost: literally translated as “self-executed action,”
it denotes “self-motivation” rather than driven by the goal to gain money, and is associated, at least in Bulgaria, particularly to more structured, regular, and good quality performances; and b) lyubitelsko izkustvo: literally translated as “amateur art”, rooted in the Latin word for “love,” denoting a category of less required or developed skills than in samodeynost).

Samodeynost has been classified as an artistic category and genre in terms of well-organized activities in which people often achieve professional skills though usually implied that they do not engage with these arts for a living (for money). The genre of samodeynost was organized through two main group formations: ensembles (for performance arts) and kruzhoks (for handicrafts, painting, poetry, literature), characterized by participants from mixed ages and socio-economic background, which is key to the syncretic aspect of the classification process in the community culture model. However, often as ensembles got ever more professionalized, participants start forming smaller groups by age and gender, yet importantly not based on ethnicity, class, or education (with some exceptions pointing to exclusion in ethnically-mixed areas).

The second subset of community arts, lyubitelsko izkustvo (amateur arts) evolved in the socialist Slavic-speaking countries through the networks of the houses of culture (dom kulturyi) framed as a group of activities that implied low-level of organization and proficiency with a main focus on entertainment and leisure, yet these activities could also be organized through ensembles and kruzhoks.

These varied forms of communal organization and belonging, though not motivated or measured by monetary value, serve various social and cultural functions for the community, which is what the “instrumental value” of the arts points to as related to
the syncretic aspect of the community culture model. The “instrumental” value of the arts, discussed by McCarthy et al. (2004) highlights various types summarizing the literature on the topic: cognitive; behavioral; health; social; and economic.

To the discussions in the field I hope to contribute an understanding of the roles of community cultural centers as spaces facilitating regular and long-term engagement with a variety of community arts alongside with various age and ethnic groups, all defined by the syncretic aspect of the community culture model. The final discussion on the contribution of these centers as factors affecting the benefits of the arts will develop in the last section of this chapter and the following two chapters, discussing the key role of the senses and the sensorial triggers as ways of fomenting social cohesion.

Further trying to make sense of the complex relationships and networks formed around community arts, I have developed the concept of community creative capital (Savova 2007) to denote the particular mix of social capital and cultural capital (two categories classically developed by Pierre Bourdieu), that is being generated and circulate through and at the community cultural centers. Community creative capital shows how community arts offer possibilities for creative mixes of the two and thus flexible navigations across age, ethnic, and socio-economic divides. The “instrumental” value of the arts in this case can be understood in the exchanges of symbolic capital – of community creative capital – that I observed as people expressed enthusiasm and often stated their greatest “reward” for participating in ensembles was the self-esteem generated through the exchanges of amateur performances that one group performed for another (songs, dances, music, etc) in the form of a gift. This is what I call performance gifts, grounded in Mauss’s theories of the gift exchange, which ultimately function as a
form of capital, whose purpose and power is to be circulated as a gift – reenacted in as many places and before as many audiences as possible – thus charging and maintaining the bonds within the group and establishing new social ties with external groups, quite often from other countries when the performances are given during international folk festivals that the chitalishte groups often visit.

The mixed genres of arts that these performances involve - currently, a cultural center would have anything from folk dance and music to hip hop, rock bands, and movie nights - define the *syncretic* founding principles of the Bulgarian chitalishte. In fact, already since their establishment in the 1850s, the chitalishte performed multifunctional role in society both towards various age groups and spanning diverse spheres of life: social, educational, cultural, artistic, organizational, philanthropic, etc. (Chilingirov 1930). This polyvalent nature of the chitalishte – and the reason why it remained ambiguous domain of social life that was not prone to full censorship and control during socialism – is well expressed in the words of Bulgarian intellectual Vassil Drumev (quoted in Doinov 2007). Drumev reflects on the establishment of the first chitalishte in Shumen in 1856 (two more were open the same year in Lom and Svishtov):

The establishment of the chitalishte is an effort by the Bulgarians to plant in local soil an independent organization: at the chitalishte, lectures are held; Sunday lessons are taught; theatre performances are held; they also host informal gatherings, where people discuss important issues related to the needs and wants of the communities. In sum, the chitalishte assume the character of a central focal point [*главно съредоточие*] of intellectual and moral development (109)
Doinov (2007) emphasizes the role of the chitalishte as focal points and as striving to be independent, where the author was mostly referring to independence from the Ottoman cultural oppression, and it is important to take into consideration the social and political context in which these structures were evolving. In general, however, we can state that that period all over Europe was a period of nation-building inspired by the Enlightenment ideals, and though the situations and histories were different, most of these similar networks of centers for popular education and cultural events as noted above by Valkov (2010) were instruments towards achieving more broadly educated and empowered citizens.

These foundational principles are being constantly re-interpreted and negotiated in the chitalishte across Bulgaria, and the developments at the Bistritsa chitalishte as my particular ethnographic site offer interesting insights to these foundational principles of the community cultural centers.

**Fasting, Fast Food, and What Fits “Cultural Heritage”?**

A very telling event about the dilemmas about the kinds of arts and cultural activities that befit a chitalishte, the bargains over what constitutes heritage, and over the role of the chitalishte centers in safeguarding heritage occurred one evening at the Bistritsa chitalishte in March 2011. That night a whirlpooling discussion took place after only one person refused to partake in the chocolates circulated to celebrate a birthday at the chitalishte. That person was Dina, the leader of the Bistritsa Babi group.
Dina preferred to keep the Christian Orthodox fasting tradition (entailing consumption of vegan foods alone for 30 days before Christmas) rather than partaking in the sweets, although, as she later confided, she was anticipating the sarcastic comments that ensued from some of the younger group members. The comments involved the common Bulgarian sayings “too much piety is bad for you” and “too much sainthood is not pleasing to God” (Прекален Светец и Богу не е драг).

People of various ages around the table started commenting and raising their voices above each other, debating religion and its role in Bulgarian heritage. Many of the mid-aged men and women talked about the Church having been corrupted by the communist regime in Bulgaria, which was the reason why they mistrusted the Church and preferred to “keep faith in their heart” rather than participate in Church rituals or keeping traditions like fasting. Some of the older women commented that they remembered the times before socialism when the churches were full and when Orthodoxy united Bulgarians and was the main marker of national unity, each holiday marked with its own ritual bread and Church rituals. But some younger ones laughed, calling all of these rituals “superstition.”

Soon the debate abated and was replaced by more patriotically-inspired comments about how folklore and tradition, “the Bulgarian spirit and culture,” were saved by the chitalishte over the more than century of its existence. One man pointed to a phrase I had heard over and over across other chitalishte in the country: the chitalishte has been since its inception one of the three pillars (stozher) of Bulgarian society and culture along with the school and the Church. 

---

38 The stozher discourse is evident in the title of the book published for the occasion of the 150th Anniversary of the chitalishte in Gabrovo, edited by the chitalishte manager Totka Polyakova: Polyakova,
However, in this case the way people spoke about the Church was not the way Dina meant it, as she commented in my presence later on. While they talked about the Church as if another secular, social organization that helped practical social needs and fostered national unity, for Dina the Church was a God-man organism for transcendental experiences, spirituality and salvation. Participating bodily in regular Church rituals like the Liturgy was a particular type of “heritage practice” that did not get revived after socialism, unlike other practices and rituals at the chitalishte, and it was what for Dina remained the problem with how people misunderstood the connection between the Church and the chitalishte. However, Dina remained misunderstood, and soon more chocolates were circulated.

Later that evening, Dina stayed until late at the chitalishte to clean the table and all traces of the informal festivity, which was not officially supposed to take place at the cultural center. I stayed with her and asked her how she felt about the comments. She paused for a while, then said quietly:

It just makes me sad to see that this heritage [talking about religious traditions] was not revived after Communism. We talk a lot about folklore as dance, music, songs, but our traditions were really rooted in our faith. Communism managed to replace [podmeni] the Church and the chitalishte became the official center of social and even spiritual life. So yes, the chitalishte has kept our heritage throughout so many different regimes and all these endless “transitions,” as they call them, yet now is the time for the chitalishte to revive the real, authentic heritage which was rooted in our faith. Our songs, the authentic folklore [izvoren folklore] that UNESCO recognized as so special, they do preserve the religious content, but what good does this do us when the people who sing the songs don’t even think about the meaning and no longer practice the faith?


136
Dina was, on the one hand, pointing to the key role of the chitalishte as a community focal point to engage various generations in transmitting cultural traditions to each other, more and more framed as a leisure social activity, yet, on the other hand, she regretted the loss of appreciation for a particular kind of “heritage” that was not classified as Bulgarian “folklore”, because of the long years of communist anti-religious propaganda. While religiously-inspired rituals have been recognized as intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO in other countries, in Bulgaria the religious roots of intangible heritage was never explicitly noted or emphasized as important to revive and “safeguard”. Even in the nestinari fire-walking ritual, which was the second representative cultural practice recognized for Bulgaria in 2010, little attention was paid to its Christian Orthodox aspects of people dancing with icons of saints, but was framed much more as a ritual traced back to pagan times.

For Dina, it was precisely Orthodox Christianity that formed the foundation of Bulgarian traditions, from dance and song to food, and yet it was a Christianity that no longer permeated society as a worldview and way of life but had been limited to a formal cultural marker. To this cultural marker, according to recent demographic surveys, around 85 percent of the population ascribe yet the churches remain empty. For most Bulgarians, in fact, Orthodoxy is perceived as a marker of identity that is no longer lived on a daily basis but rather enacted in a festival-type manner on certain major holiday occasions (mainly Christmas, Easter, St. George’s day) as performances of belonging and nationalism. These occasions resemble much the dynamics observed during Carnival celebrations by Turner and Schechner through the performance studies prism, who have
noted how these festivities’ main value was in creating a sense of spontaneous “communitas.” While older men and women sometimes narrate how the Sunday Liturgy used to be the main festivity of the week before socialism, religious practice did not get revived as a regular, weekly participation in a community. The festivalization of religion, enacted in major yearly celebrations, thus presented a dynamic similar to the “pressure valve theory”, where people let accumulated pressures and express collective hopes, yet the sense of “community” (общност) rarely exists in Bulgarian neighborhoods as organized around the space of the church. What does, exist, is a more pronounced sense of community around the central symbolic space of the neighborhood (kvartalno, from kvartal meaning quarter) chitalishte.

While in Bulgaria the regular participation in the Orthodox Liturgy did not get revived on a nation-wide basis as in other former socialist countries like Romania, Serbia, Ukraine, and Russia (a conclusion based on personal observations through travel), a marked revival and enthusiasm can be observed at chitalishte around the country in the years after socialism in the boom of Bulgarian folk dance, song, and music ensembles formed– up to the extent of a phenomenon I sometimes jokingly call “folk fitness” where folk dancing is performed as gymnastics, quite distinct from the chalga pop-folk disco fashion in luxury clubs (Noyes 1995) – while in other former socialist countries most of the “houses of culture”, the local equivalent to the Bulgarian chitalishte, got closed or were left with low community participation, since they were widely perceived as communist inventions.

Dina’s craving to see religious rituals revived in her community and infusing the “intangible cultural heritage” enacted by the Bistritsa Babi group echoed the vision and
struggles of a network of about fifteen parishes around the country which I discovered forming since 2009 and referring to each other as “Eucharistic communities,” where people had revived the regular participation in the Liturgy ritual and the regular partaking of the holy bread and wine (the Eucharist, in which these elements get transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ) as these mostly young people tried to connect folklore back to religion. The churches had varied number of regular parishioners from a few hundred to only a dozen, but forming an overall number of about a thousand people, whose vision of Bulgarian heritage was similar to Dina’s argument that most songs and dances were ultimately inspired, or “in-spirited” (an attempt at a literal translation of the Bulgarian word “oduhotvoren” from duh, spirit, or “filled with spirit”), by the connection with the ways in which Bulgarians traditionally embodied Christianity through regular collective rituals.

Some of the key discussions and negotiations over what constitutes heritage and change occurring at the Bistritsa chitalishte connected to the issues of bread, which was another occasion that made me raise questions about bread as a particular lithmus test indicator of the preservation and transmission, or “safeguarding”, of intangible heritage even if heritage that is not per se culinary but related to dance, music, or crafts. Such major discussion arose around Easter in 2009, when the women singers in the Bistritsa group were discussing traditional Bulgarian Easter breads called kozunak. I expressed the desire to learn from them how to make it, yet the old women laughed and said: “Who would spend two days making kozunak, sweating in a heated room, guarding it so it would not fall and keep rising with the heat, pounding it and braiding it, when you can simply buy it nowadays? Who would value all your efforts?!” The question of value
made a point about the disappearing practice and value of artisan work in general in
Bulgaria and across the world.

Then Dina made a point with markedly painful indignation in her voice:

If we do not value it, no one else would. Tradition has to be preserved in the family and only then it
remains valued in society. UNESCO can tell us how important all of this is, but if we do not appreciate it
and then live it ourselves, it will die! (her emphasis)

The women smiled, some nodded agreeing with her comment, two similarly
pointed through laughter: “Yeah, we know tradition matters, most people say it, but still
few actually make kozunak!” Dina, however, considered the making of kozunak a
spiritual responsibility, as well as an active statement of her position determined to
safeguard this religious tradition as what she personally felt was part of “intangible
heritage,” even if UNESCO recognized only their village’s singing tradition. Despite all
her responsibilities and long-hour shifts working at the chitalishte, closing it late nights
after evening rehearsals and taking care of her grandchildren during the day, Dina was
among few people in the village who put in a sleepless night to make the ritual bread.
Bread-making in her case was as much about a religious, spiritual obligation and keeping
her family tradition, as it was a quiet political statement which acquired its own
transnational political dimension recognizing locally what was globally overlooked by
UNESCO’s Convention on Safeguarding the Intangible Heritage of Humanity. In the
next chapters, we will comprehend the local meanings of similar acts of food-centered
and food-mediated resistance expressed through the challenges Bogdan, a young baker,
had to face trying to save traditional sourdough, or what he calls “living”, breads from the
stifling EU hygiene regulations aiming to limit live cultures in food - and, in many ways, culture and society.

The “giving hand” when related to the issue of state control through funding was clearly perceived as a threat in Dina’s experiences. The cleansing of folklore from religious content was a process reflecting the large-scale communist propaganda against religion and spirituality. In the opinions of most of my interlocutors and in the narratives of the Bulgarian media, these have been the causes leaving the country predominantly secular. Dina would often mourn the “loss of moral and spirituality”, and would argue that “As with religion, folklore is delicate.” She would point how the musical “obrabotki” (re-workings, additions) destroyed the authentic, “izvoren” folklore“, which was “a gentle thing that had evolved over centuries and suddenly composers started to clumsily fiddle with it” (“da go pipat nalevo-nadesno”): this trend led to the widespread acquaintance with and performance of the latter but also with state control that made the other forms of regional specificities ever more unpopular.

In fact, such regional cultural expressions were rejected from even participating in the national folk festivals or, when competing against other folk dance and song groups, these performances would receive low points and criticism on not fitting “the national folklore,” which are dynamics largely studied by Buchanan (2006), Creed (2004), Noyes (1995), and Slobin (1996). Still, Dina believes that a few individuals can do a lot to resist the state pressure and keep preserving the local traditions, as she herself had dedicated her life to saving local songs and dances. Dina’s resistance through her archaeology of local cultural forms in the context of socialist cultural homogenization and her post-socialist resistance to the wide-spread secularism and lack of return to Orthodox Christian
traditions reveals a dynamic of what Foucault (1976) called the resurrection of “subjugated knowledge.”

Many of the contested notions of heritage and values, however, got reconciled and beautifully interwoven in the mixing of the different voices when the women in the Bistritsa Babi group joined to sing the ancient “three-voice” polyphonic songs, which now belonged to something bigger than their ancestors, village, or the cultural center, indeed bigger than Bulgaria and its national heritage but a part of “the heritage of humanity” that politicians consecrated at UNESCO in 2005.

UNESCO’s House in Paris was, in fact, where I had seen in the summer of 2007 the expressive face of Dina side by side with the faces of the two other main women I spent months with during this research at their particular cultural centers, respectively in Brazil and Cuba: Dona Dalva (from the Samba de Roda Suerdieck) and Sara (from the Tumba Francesa in Santiago de Cuba), smiling from the photographs lined on the fence encircling UNESCO’s headquarters in an exhibit of all the “Masterpieces of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity.” On the one hand, all these very different cultural practices seemed connected, at least visually and symbolically, through a shared global understanding that their ultimate value is equal regardless of their distinct characteristics; however, alongside the “institutional” value of UNESCO’s recognition and its “instrumental” value when employed tactically in local claims for legitimacy (as in the case of Bogdan the baker or the Cuban pregon).

On the other hand, however, these people and their skills and knowledges were most likely marginalized in their own countries in small communities or, on the other extreme, exploited as markers of nationalist belonging and heritage, and ultimately
employed more as “intellectual property of UNESCO” rather than “intangible heritage of humanity” when nation states donate enormous amounts of money for its “safeguarding” but the money often goes to populist national and international colorful campaigns and festivals rather than to rooted community project. The logo of the organization placed above each photo resembled a form of cultural branding, and this strategy of control was later consolidated in 2008, when I observed at UNESCO’s headquarters in Paris the heated debates among ambassadors from around the world on selecting the logo of the ICH Convention. After much bargaining over divergent, culturally-defined interpretations of various symbols from around the world employed in the proposed logos, the final selection (of a patterns representing the mixture of both natural and man-made shapes) is being currently required from all state parties to the ICH Convention to be attached to any cultural practice or place in their respective countries, whether a festival or a cultural center, associated with the Convention. But what does this form of transnational cultural capital mean locally, how is it understood, sensed, framed, used, and how does it practically benefit or change the lives of these women and the mixed groups and communities their cultural practice formed part of?

In many ways what UNESCO has been doing through the ICH Convention is setting certain boundaries while trying to abolish the borders and barriers among the vastly diverse traditions of the world. “Unity in diversity,” as the current moto of the European Union, requires clear boundaries so that diversity can be recognizable but also more easily knowable, understandable, and thus acceptable, yet diversity also has to be simultaneously kept porous with removed rigid barriers and borders that would otherwise impede interactions and nurture mistrust and hatred. However, for peaceful interactions among vastly diverse groups of people to occur and sustain the so-called “inter-cultural
dialogue,” particular places and practices – or what I call inter-cultural doing - are rather needed for people to first, trust to come together in one place, and second, to engage in a synergetic action so that those barriers can open up. Yet the question of “where” or of the very “how” of transmission of heritage within a particular group was very generally asked and hardly practically responded in the hundreds of pages of UNESCO documents and conference follow-up notes. In the particular case of the community cultural centers, I examine in light of and as interpreters and sometimes implementers of UNESCO’s discourses, how these houses of different sizes, design, participants, and politics, offer much more tangible options than the long documents filled with generic terms and wishful talking. Indeed, the community cultural center’s multifunctionality turns them into polyphonic spaces for both modern and traditional arts through heritage houseguarding (Savova 2011c) – again, a term by which I denote the processes that have been securing heritage safeguarding in transmission across generations through activities hosted regularly by the house/cultural center. All of these mixtures of genres characterizes the syncretic aspect that defines the process of “classification” for the community culture model, symbolized metaphorically by the bread net’s trans-use as able to fit a variety of objects of all sizes and accommodate their shape due to its flexible, porous structure.

In Bulgaria, the bread nets from socialist times acquired an intriguing symbolic significance in the post-socialist transition period, due to the powerful reminiscences of the childhood rituals when parents often sent their children to buy bread at a particular time of the day when it was delivered still hot from the factories. The bread-buying practice entailed the creation of a particular temporality, what we can call a socialist “bread time,” as people knew exactly what time of the day the hot bread arrived and
structured their daily routine and other appointments around those times to make sure that there was hot bread on the evening table (one had to get right in time in the line or the bread would be over). The scarcity of bread supplies, however, did guarantee that people got hot, fresh bread, and many now recollect with nostalgia those times, frustrated with the current packaged, cold and often cut manufactured breads in the stores available 24/7. During socialism, people remember how even the generally hated bread lines were put to good use as people were weaving social networks, noted by Neidhart (2003:37) in Russia, where the same people would meet everyday at the same time in the bakery line to chat and often comment very critically on the regime. The bread net has been a topic of such interest in Bulgaria that it has been the subject of a few online blogs, where people share various stories about their experiences with bread nets and *bread time*. In this process of infusing with special meaning a commonly-used object, the Bulgarian bread net became a marker of a historic era and its currently-lived heritage, of individual childhood and collective memories, and of a particular kind of agency claimed through nostalgic discussions and uses of the net.

To return to Bateson’s notion that not functionalism but relationality is the core meaning and purpose of the man-thing-nature interactions, the analyses of material anthropology relate to the recent concepts in the field of the arts and performance theory such as “relational art” and “relational aesthetics.” Relational aesthetics is a tendency in fine art practice that was originally highlighted by French art critic Nicolas Bourriaud (1998), who defined the approach as "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space" (113) Bourriaud’s work has been
mostly quoted by and related to professional artists and in particular the visual arts, but his overall theoretical framework is applicable to performance arts and, as I would argue, community arts. His call is for artists to emphasize once again that art is about the beauty of the inter-human, of the encounter; of the potential for proximity, all of which has nowadays been wrapped up in the notion of “interactive art” and varied strategies to encourage interactions between artist and "audience." However, it is important to note that much of the art that has been labeled “interactive” remains in the format of an exhibit passively consumed by the viewer and clearly distinguishing between creator and audience, even if people are often allowed to touch and react. It is important to note that the audience is hardly ever allowed to taste, even with the rising use of food elements in installation art, and hardly ever to co-create with the artists, which defines the still dominant passive aspect of cultural institutions locked in the “feeding” paradigm, or feeding cultural institutions, as opposed to the “feedback” paradigm of co-creative culinary and cultural practices.

**Synesthetic Aspect of the “Framing” Process: Bread Net’s Tensility**

The community cultural centers present creative perspectives on relational aesthetics and audience engagement, since within their spaces one can rarely find a clear-cut distinction between audience and performers. The synesthetic dynamic defines in general the mixing and participation of various senses in the rehearsals and performances at the cultural centers, making them often very informal. as long as they are not conflicting. The co-creative samodeynost nurtures processes of informal, inter-
generational relations, which are often channeled and affirmed through the non-officially sanctioned exchanges of foods and drinks inside the centers. These processes produce what I call *feedback cultural institutions*, defined by the informal exchanges of food which my interlocutors have defined as key channels for their socializing and factors affecting their sensations of feeling welcome as well as belonging to the cultural center. Thus, these *synergetic* actions, particularly powerful because of their synesthetetic nature (mixing the multiple sense, in particular taste and smell), propel what Collins (2004) has called “interaction ritual chains” (2004). The power of these regular co-creative activities can be understood through Durkheim’s analysis on when the ritual reaches “maximum intensity”, i.e. “by gathering together almost always at fixed times, collective life could indeed achieve its *maximum intensity*” (Collins 2004: 164), as he affirms that through group belonging and participation, the individual is motivated to keep participating in group activities by the collective power that the group generates and exchanges.

The “intrinsic” value of the community arts has been understood by Holden (2006) as “the set of values that relate to the subjective experience of culture intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually” (2006: 14), and McCarthy et al. (2004) have pointed that such intrinsic values should be viewed as occurring at various levels: individual, communal, and a mix of the two. Applying ethnographic methods of research to address these questions, it is key to try to comprehend better the meaning-making processes that people engage in, which in this dissertation are observed and analyzed mostly through the places and practices of community arts. A foundational conceptual framework I found relevant in my analysis of these dynamics often affecting personal and communal transformations is the concept of the liminal, or borderline, in general, and
more particularly the notion of “liminoid” space developed by Turner in analyzing play as ritual (1979). “Liminal” in ritual, from Greek meaning “resembling liminal” (and “liminal” denoting spaces of transition and in-between ambiguity), defines ritual re-enactments that are framed as leisure. Turner argues that the key element that distinguishes leisure and play from traditional rituals is not the lack of seriousness (since we can “seriously” learn categories and norms through humor and game, which in Greek comes from “learn”). Rather than seriousness, what distinguishes the “liminoid” from the “liminal” is the freedom of choice as to whether to participate in the activity, how to participate, and what to take out of it as applicable to one’s daily life. It is precisely this freedom of choice that I observed negotiated and enacted within the spatial and symbolic domains of the community cultural centers, where the particular “framing” of traditional arts and modern arts as informal leisure activities allowed much space for bargains over meaning, substance, form, etc. A particularly intriguing aspect of the relative freedom in these interactions is the opening of space and time for the sharing of intimate information among strangers, which in many cases is information kept away from close relatives and friends because of the many ties and webs of relationships that the information could affect and/or disturb.

Most of the participants in the chitalishte I met over the years point to the regularity of interactions – the ongoing membership in ensembles, the recurring visits and exchanges of performances (as “gifts” from one chitalishte to another), the free public performances at festivals, and the regular informal gatherings around food and drinks (importantly, not simply purchased as if at a coffee shop but brought and shared) at the chitalishte – as transformative in their lives. Intriguingly, such transformations have also
occurred among ethnic and religious groups that in other occasions, had it not been for the chitalishte activities, would have never interacted with each other. One particularly stunning example was the initiative of one chitalishte to present at a festival a traditional harvesting ritual, and in the process of ritual recreation had managed to engage mixed groups of Roma, Turkish, and ethnic Bulgarians in a town where the three groups are starkly divided.

The synesthetic aspect of the community culture model can be further well comprehended through the metaphor of the bread-net’s tensility\(^\text{39}\), or its ability of being stretched or extended. The bread net’s tensility is a metaphor for the ways in which the cultural centers have historically facilitated the flexible relationship between audience and artists/performers as a porous, cooperative, and informal exchange. Similarly, the term applies to the flexible relationships evolving within the performance groups, and the ways in which community arts ease the tensions between generations and socio-economic classes or at least provide space for the negotiations of these tensions. The porosity of relationships and etiquettes of conduct within the cultural centers is well defined by the concept of tensility, since the notion bears the inherent weight of tension, and it is

---

\(^{39}\) Tensility in physics is used in the concept of “ultimate tensile strength” (UTS), often shortened to tensile strength (TS) or ultimate strength,\(^[1][2]\) is the maximum stress that a material can withstand while being stretched or pulled before necking, which is when the specimen's cross-section starts to significantly contract. Tensile strength is the opposite of compressive strength and the values can be quite different. The UTS is usually found by performing a tensile test and recording the stress versus strain; the highest point of the stress-strain curve is the UTS. It is an intensive property; therefore its value does not depend on the size of the test specimen. However, it is dependent on other factors, such as the preparation of the specimen, the presence or otherwise of surface defects, and the temperature of the test environment and material. Tensile strengths are rarely used in the design of ductile members, but they are important in brittle members. They are tabulated for common materials such as alloys, composite materials, ceramics, plastics, and wood (source: Wikipedia).
simultaneously tension between contested understandings and practices of heritage and arts that dynamically produces creative innovations and cooperations.

The self-motivation for many of the participants in the community cultural centers has been fueled by the potential of receiving still practical and tangible benefits, such as the ease of travel nationally and internationally, since ensembles from community cultural centers have been the key participants in international folk festivals around the world, mostly involving folk dance and singing (as noted in the World Festival Federation lists). The characteristic of travel ease can further apply to the ways in which community arts participation and leadership roles could expedite one’s political and professional development, in particular in small communities, where the mayor is often someone who was a leader in a local ensemble. The non–monetary, “self-motivated” incentives thus involve: travel; fame; authority; popularity; contacts; barter; networking; etc.

Feeding and Feedback Cultural Institutions: Food as Indicator of Informality and Belonging

As food becomes part of cultural institutions, I distinguish between feeding and feedback cultural organizations depending on the level of freedom of engagement with food and thus, I would argue, correlated to the level of freedom of social interactions (commensality thus related to sociability and going back to co-creativity and heritage transmission). I take food as a lithmus test and indicator to measure the degrees of informality, or the porosity of the frames of interactions. The varied levels of informality of the cultural centers are expressed in the distinction between feeding and feedback
cultural institution, where an institution allowing both collective cooking and collective food-sharing marks a paradigm shift in the way we creativity and leisure arts have been perceived, particularly with the slow entrance of food as a creative practice in its own right. The ultimate goal of this process if for the community cultural centers to achieve active levels of community participation not driven by desire for material gains but self-motivated out of social, cultura, intellectual, creative, spiritual and other concerns. Self-motivation, or samodeynost in Bulgarian, was already discussed at the stage of syncretic developments, but here it is particularly related to the “framing” process in DiMaggio’s “high culture model”. “Framing” in DiMaggio refers to “the development of a new etiquette of appropriation, a new relationship between the audience and the work of art” (377). Self-motivation is thus the key aspect of why people engage in community arts, neither for money or to make a living out of the skills, nor a passive consumption of a cultural product, but out of curiosity, love, and pleasure.

In the case of food exchange with the community cultural centers, similar to the cases of performance gift exchange, I would refer to Mauss’ theories on gift exchange, yet in the case of food the particularity of the Potlatch-style informal gatherings create a distinct dynamic since all parties are partaking at the same time, rather than groups taking turns to perform for the other. “Sponatenous communitas” created by rituals and social effervescences in the theories of Turner and Durkheim has been largely impeded in the modern world by the culture of capital accumulations, since accumulation prevents the crucial circulation to keep relationships evolve. Mauss discusses two main forms of exchange, the kula ring circulation and the Kwakiutl Potlatch collective destruction of gifts. At the Bulgarian chitalishte, I observed multiple collective food-sharing events,
from informal back-stage gatherings to big community food festivals that resemble with amazing similarity the Potlatch dynamic. In some of these cases, often quite poor people bring lavish dishes, often made with the meat from the only lamb they had for the whole year, but key is to mark their willingness to sacrifice and share the food with others in order to affirm their participation in and commitment to the community and the social support networks woven along.

Alongside the festive Potlatch-type food exchanges, I also observed rituals reminding the *kula* ring circulation dynamics of traditional clothes being circulated across generations, as the older women often donate their traditional dresses (носии), head-dressed, and shoes (цървули) to the chitalishte and enjoy the way their dress circulates across younger generations, sometimes worn for years by the same child, then passed on to another when it is too small or an ensemble member changes. Often the linen shirts of the traditional dresses were stained with spots from the accumulation of sweat despite the diligent washing that each user is asked to keep as a responsibility towards “the cultural inventory of the house.” Nonetheless, the stains themselves, and the worn feel of some parts of the dress, spoke of history, tradition, and connectedness to the ancestors. The costumes are usually kept at the cultural centers and given out to the new members to use (while some have costumes inherited from their grandparents). Both adults and children take pleasure in finding connections with each other through the dress by imagining who might have been the people wearing the dress before them, and people often craft creative narratives for the texts of sweat stains on their shirts.

The “intrinsic” value of the arts is distinct and often not recognized – as difficult or impossible to “measure” - by donor organizations which require precise measurements
of the impact, or what is officially termed “outcomes” of the arts, through quantitative or some very specific qualitative survey-based indicators. This process, rendering local institutions often homogenously compliant with the donors, echoes some of my interlocutors’ complaints and frustrations with the theatricality with which they approach stating the “outcomes” of their projects, making up numbers and quotations. Their calls for a more flexible and more inwardly-oriented approach focused on human values and long-term transformations is what informs my previously developed concept of the value of an income-based approach to measuring the impact of the arts. “Income” in this case is defined as the variety of intangible intellectual, psychological, and physiological benefits of the arts that then can spill out into the social public realm but at a rate and in manners often hard to perceive as immediately measurable “outcomes” (see more in Savova 2010).

In this sense, I would argue an intriguing “indicator” within the income-based approach to development measuring what in project language might be called “levels of intensity of social cohesion” is sleeping! Indeed, the flexible “framing” of the relationships within the community cultural centers could be noted and better understood through the intriguing intimacy and belonging performed and nurtured through the acts of informally (and unofficially) sleeping over at the cultural centers. The importance of the unusual activity of sleeping over, unexpected at a public institution and the reason why bedrooms are not architecturally factored in inside museum, galleries, theater or cultural centers (except for notable exceptions of feedback cultural institutions, as we will see below).

**Sleeping as Transgression: Spatial Privatization of the Public in Cuba**
The first time I experienced the importance of appropriating public space through sleep was while doing research on the community cultural centers in Cuba. I spent endless afternoons in the breezy front room of the community cultural center, *foco cultural* (cultural focal point) or *casa de la cultura*, of the *Tumba Francesa*, the Cuban dance/music tradition declared Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. The group’s cultural center was sponsored by the Cuban state and located in an old colonial house in the heart of Santiago de Cuba, also recognized by UNESCO but as tangible heritage of humanity. My companion was usually Sara Bennet, one of the current oldest members of the group, composed of women, men, and children across generations, who had been meeting to rehearse and occasionally perform (for locals and tourists) at the same house for years. Recently, with UNESCO’s recognition the group managed to get some money from the Cuban state arguing that the most important thing for the “safeguarding of heritage” for them was to remodel the cultural center, which had been dilapidated over years and years of state maintenance neglect.

Sara joked and laughed a lot about the ways in which the group managed to get the bureaucrats to fix the house’s kitchen, which the group considered crucial (and had always craved to have a fridge!), yet the state officials emphasized the creation of a museum in the front of the house to open the space to public and tourist view as a marker of the support of the state for the safeguarding of national heritage. Nevertheless, Sara as the main leader managed to undertake the parallel renovation of both the kitchen and the museum, and in 2007 both places were in use, yet the kitchen, hidden in the back, was reserved for only people close to the group. As such, it did take me time to become close and accepted enough to be invited to the kitchen. After that, the ultimate level of
acceptance into “the family” was enacted in the invitation to spend the night in their kitchen. As Sara made a point to emphasize “sleeping in our kitchen is really special, it is like really being a part of the family.”

Being allowed to sleep over at the house of culture’s kitchen in Santiago de Cuba was a spatial and symbolic marker of acceptance into and belonging to the community. It involved the rite of passage from the state of a stranger (and the anthropologist as a formal researcher and observer) to that of the friend/companion (still a researcher, but accepted as a participant in people’s daily and, more importantly noctural lives), culminating in the invitation to share their kitchen table for food and their kitchen floors for bed.

In Cuba as well as in Brazil and across Latin America, traditionally the kitchen was separated and hidden, “the space, which relates the world of the house with the street, work, poverty, and marginality” (DaMatta 1991: 65), unlike the modern kitchens in Europe and the US where food is becoming increasingly on theatrical display, and it is certainly still hidden in wealthy private homes as the domain of the domestic workers. Within this cultural frame, the kitchen was to be clearly hidden at the house of culture, whose main function as conceptualized by the Cuban state when importing it as a model from Russia but mainly organized and trained by Bulgarian chitalishte administrators (many dance instructors at the houses of culture in Cuba were showing me with pride the Bulgarian folk dances they still remembered from those trainings), the model imagined the house mainly as a stage, not as a kitchen, where national culture, both folk and modern arts, would be showcased to portray the care of the state for people’s free time – as much as it supposedly took good care of their proletariat work lives.
I experienced again the importance of sleeping over at the cultural center – or for that matter I would suggest any public institution - during my fieldwork in Bulgaria. As I engaged actively in the establishment of a *chitalishte* in my grandmother’s house, calling it the Bread House for its bread-related cultural activities, sleeping over at the Bread House became a way for people to personalize the space often perceived as private (“Nadezhda’s house”) into their own, more publically-shared space through the most intimate act of spending the night in someone’s place. People started staying over at the Bread House sleeping on mats and in sleeping bags on the second floor which was the refurbished former attic connected through a ladder with the wood-fire oven room and thus suffused with the aroma of bread and fire. Spending the night at the house was at first a simple necessity for those who had come to make bread from other towns or from peripheral neighbourhoods from the city of Gabrovo and had no longer public transportation to take them home since sometimes the gathering would go on until midnight as people sat and chatted around the fireplace.

Gradually, from improvised hospitality, the sleep-overs at the Bread House became so popular that people would send their friends from other parts of the country and even whole orphanages and schools opted to come and visit the chitalishte with a particular request to stay over – rather than pay and sleep at the local hotel which was very affordable - in the large room and all “camp together,” which as a term applied to the experience showed how for many people this was perceived as an exotic adventure they had not had, since in Bulgaria during socialism camping culture did not develop as much as hiking (day hikes and staying over at state-funded mountain shelters, *hizha* (хижа), rather than tents). Thus, often there would be up to twenty – and one time thirty
two! – people often strangers to each other up to a few hours before would sleep together lined as sardines and chatting, joking, and singing until late into the night as they laid down on the wooden floor and under the sun-roof windows. Many commented how this was such a memorable experience of sense of community precisely because of the unusual combination of informal activities that one would not normally associate or consider possible experiencing at an officially recognized *chitalishte* cultural center, yet people also commented that everything about the space – and in particular making bread together and the aroma of fire and hot bread – made them feel at home and in an informal and welcome setting unlike in other official public institutions.

As if responding to their comments, a public library in the town Shumen made it to national news as it opened its doors for an over-night sleep-over for families with children to celebrate the “Night of Reading,” as the library director was inspired by the nationally-spread tradition of the “Night of the Museums” when one night of the year all museums in Bulgaria agreed to stay open all night and host a variety of cultural events. The act of personalizing public institutions such as the houses of culture reverberates the symbolic acts of the protesters in the various “Occupy” movements, from Occupy Wall Street to San Francisco and Barcelona - speaking also to the acts of the protesters in Tahrir Square in Egypt passing around tea and cleaning the square, which Lawrence Rosen argues analyzes as being acts privatizing public space, which ultimately are acts of bargains over power and empowerment.

Similar to Sara’s emphasis on the importance of the kitchen and its trans-use as an informal and secret bedroom, in Brazil the Casa do Samba cultural center in Santo Amaro (close to Salvador de Bahia) underwent architectural debates as to whether to include
bedrooms and a kitchen. Rosildo, the director of the Casa do Samba up to 2012, showed me in the summer of 2008 the still empty, recently-painted room of one of the future bedrooms. He pointed with enthusiasm:

We wanted to have a space that for all feels like a house, not a museum, and that we all feel owners of, collective owners. This is why we insisted on having a kitchen and spaces to sleep, and when each group visits it naturally becomes the temporary guardian of the house and takes care of it. That’s how it works.

Rosildo further confided that the day before, the volunteers who are trying to organize the community restaurant stayed for hours at the house, alternately arguing, fighting, and laughing. He smiled:

It is normal. Everyone has their opinion, but there is a unity, the idea of the restaurant unites them, especially now that it is material and we just need to set it to work.

What Rosildo, Sara, and Dina all referred to as the importance of sensations of “belonging” and “ownership” of the collective space is what I summarize with the concept of understanding the outcome of cultural programs through an income-based approach - attentively listening to and observing what is meaningful to the people and what makes them experience happiness. The synesthetic experiences of making bread together and sleeping over at the community cultural center’s floor are all crucial details that show important insights into the “institutional,” “instrumental,” and “intrinsic” values of the arts.
Artistic engagement in low-income environments has been examined by Stern and Seifert (2008) showing that participation in co-creation increases substantially the levels of social capital (trust and quality of life), however their studies are limited to the Philadelphia area and show separate cases, which need to be examined within broader trends of network organizing (such as nation-wide networks of community cultural centers) and of long-term institutional giving (by both state and private donors). As far as cultural capital is concerned, cultural economist David Throsby (1999) builds analogies between culture and nature to show how cultural capital exchanges can nourish economic development, but his analysis remains limited to the high arts and cultural tourism and not to the impact of community arts (to some extent economic but mostly non-monetary).

In fact, the synesthetic experiences at the chitalishte can contribute to the expanding field of anthropological inquiry on issues of happiness and well-being (theme of the March 2012 issues of the Anthropology News). Often chitalishte secretaries writing grant applications would feel frustrated not being able to frame in “measurable terms” the impact of the community arts. “Can’t we just say that the chitalishte simply make people happy!” has been an exclamation in various grant writing and project evaluation experiences with chitalishte managers. Yet, it is precisely the “happiness factor” produced in the synergetic and synesthetic activities that is so hard to pinpoint and measure through the standard indicators employed by project granting institutions/foundations. Precisely these shortfalls of the limiting language and approaches to the measurement of the social impact of the arts require new approaches to the whole concept of “community development” as a dynamic process and not a
measurable product, one much better measure by the amounts of food exchanged than the sheer number of participants in activities.

**Bread Nets Unfolding…**

In the summer of 2011, the remodeling of the stage of the Bistrita chitalishte was finally completed. The whole community rejoiced at the festive opening of the chitalishte’s big hall (salon) where on the stage all the ensembles from the chitalishte and visiting groups from the chitalishte in the surrounding neighborhoods and villages can together to celebrate. The structural remodeling took the chitalishte board a year and the hard institutional struggles led mostly by the chitalishte Chair of the Board (*predsedatel*) who is also the mayor of Bistritsa (former village, now neighborhood of Sofia) and one of the lead dancers in the Bistitsa dance ensemble. His leadership position in the ensemble and the chitalishte and his political career are more than a coincidence, as it is a pattern in many small places in Bulgaria the chitalishte stage to be also the symbolic stage of the exhibition and development of people’s leadership skills and roles in the community.

The restructuring of the chitalishte was a process that began at the offset of my research in Bistritsa and I kept observing the process over the years of the struggles of the chitalishte board and community members with bureaucratic impediments, from fire codes to architectural plans, and fundraising efforts in the community, the city of Sofia, and the Ministry of Culture. The process united many different people as much as it also divided people in the community in the moments of conflicting visions on architecture, use, money, meaning, and concepts over the types of activities befitting the chitalishte in...
the spectrum between authentic folklore and modern dance. But ultimately what mattered to the people involved in the chitalishte and the whole community, as many pointed with pride at the opening of the stage, was the self-confident feeling that the chitalishte would “now no longer be embarrassed to invite guests to visit it.” The expressed sensations of belonging and the use of metaphorical language defining the chitalishte as a household, as everyone’s “home”, responded to the various aspects of the community culture model examined above, across its structural, syncretic, and synesthetic dynamics.

In my observations of the chitalishte and other similar networks in Europe and in Latin America, the structural aspect of the community culture model defines a paradigm of community development philosophy based on the mixing and balancing out of the building and dwelling paradigms (Heidegger 1971). The important distinctions between the cultural centers defined by the community culture model occur, as I have showed, not so much in the structural aspect – since whether with the status of an NGO or as public institutions, usually the centers manage to secure relative local self-independence in developing their programs – and not so much of a distinction in the syncretic aspect of the types of artistic activities it hosts - as across board these centers engage inter-generational and ever more inter-cultural groups in a variety of traditional and modern art forms - but the main distinction occurs in the synesthetic aspect defining the degrees of informality of relations (and relations channeled through various levels of sensorial stimulus and engagement) allowed and encouraged inside the community cultural centers. This is where I have employed the lithmus test of food as a culinary indicator to measure the flexibility of the frameworks of relationships between audience and performers and among community participants, distinguishing between the passive
feeding and more interactive feedback cultural institutions, where the more the cooking and exchange of food, as shown in the informal gatherings at the Bistritsa chitalishte and in the collective bread-making at the Bread House chitalishte, explored more in detail in the next chapter.

The “institutional”, “instrumental,” and “intrinsic” values of the arts, applied to comprehend better the impact the various aspects of the community culture model, evolved out of people’s commentaries and practices I engaged in participant observation across Bulgaria (Bistitsa and Gabrovo), Brazil (Salvador de Bahia), and Cuba (Santiago de Cuba) with their respective groups declared Masterpieces of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. In Bulgaria, these values had to be employed in the Bread House initiative, when I found myself pressed to register my greatgrandmother’s house as a chitalishte in order for its informal cultural activities (which started off with collective bread-making evenings reviving old recipes) to be recognizable rather than sparking gossip about sectarian gatherings. As a bearer of recognizable symbolic capital, the house now called “chitalishte” could escape being the subject of discussions, wonder, and gossip.

In Cuba, an example of the institutional and instrumental value of the arts was manifested in the way the pregon street food songs were legitimated and saved as cultural workers framed them as “cultural activity” (a festival) and as a “cultural object” (“intangible cultural heritage”) under the auspices of the casa de la cultura in Santiago de Cuba. In Brazil, the institutional value of the arts evolved and manifested itself through the excitement of various small community-based arts organizations to join into a national network under the title “pontos de cultura”, propelled and coordinated by the
Ministry of Culture’s *Cultura Viva* Program. With enthusiasm, cultural managers discussed at the regional and national meetings the opportunities that the network opened up for organizations to connect and have face-to-face interactions with inspiring ideas and practices. Though some community workers complained that in many ways the regime appropriated their own work by labeling their organizations with the title “ponto” as if the state has created the organizations, the same people acknowledge the importance of the state providing regular basic maintenance funding for each *ponto de cultura* as long as the policy left them freedom to select locally-specific activities. In this sense, the Brazilian cultural policy presents intriguing *hand-shake policy* elements to consider, and it inspired the use of the metaphor of the *shekere* gourd-and-net musical instrument to define the dynamics of cultural policy-making and implementation, particularly towards community cultural development, through the three main characteristics of the *shekere*: looseness, lapse of time, and locality.

From the *shekere* metaphor defining cultural policy processes I bridge to the metaphor of the bread net bag and its characteristics as an attempt to elucidate the processes of formation of community arts as an artistic genre and the community cultural centers as the institution developing and diffusing the genre. The bread net bag’s three main characteristics help us think the complex layers of the *community culture model* through the sensorial experiences triggered by their tactility: *transparency* (elucidating the “soft” and “hard” structural aspects), the *trans-use* (related to the *syncretic* activities), and *tensility* (illustrating the flexible frames of the *synesthetic* experiences enabling informality). As we strive to comprehend the local meanings and roles of community cultural centers around the world, with the particular cases here rooted in Bulgaria, Cuba,
and Brazil, it is key to imagine - the way the communities around these centers do imagine and employ this collective imaginary as tactics for crafting and negotiating local meanings – how the houses get connected in an ever wider as well as tighter global network, such as the continental organizations of centers in Europe and Latin America. The trans-national net is, however, nonetheless locally spun, flexible, and tensile to embrace distinctive cultural practices and concepts of heritage, continuity, and change, as long as each net bag is serving the distinct local hunger for creative food and time.
CHAPTER 3

The Missing Kitchen: Purity and Porosity in Culture and Food

Surogat lives

“What we are living is not change (promiana) but replacement (podmiana)! Our whole life has been replaced (podmenen) with artificial substances (surogati)!"¹

People in Bulgaria are born, graduate, get married, and are buried accompanied by bread. It is the country with the oldest known bread traditions in Europe and possibly the world, with grains, grain vessels, and stone grinders discovered in the Stara Zagora Neolithic dwellings dating back to 7,000 BCE. Bulgarians have preserved over the centuries a ritual of transmitting the so-called “home bread seal” through the female line from generation to generation, and women kept using these Christian Orthodox cross seals even under socialism when they would place them on the bottom rather than the top of the bread and take the bread to bake at the traditional communal oven/bake house (furna). Guests are still often welcomed at a Bulgarian home with the traditional home-made bread (pogacha) and salt (hlyab i sol) as a sign of hospitality showing the hosts’ readiness to share with their guests both joy and sorrow (the salty tears).

It is a country with such a variety of ritual bread decorations that one could have a different festive bread each day of the year, and also the country known by scientist to have potentially the best sourdough bread in the world due to the unique air saturation of

the bacteria *Lactum Bacillus Bulgaricus*, which produces the fermentation in both yogurt and sourdough. And yet, in bakeries around Bulgaria usually only three varieties of factory-made bread are to be found (noted with surprise in particular by European tourists): pure white, mixed, and rye, and even the rye is not made of real rye but a kind of animal fodder grain mixed with coloring and improving agents.

The post-socialist bread monopoly (popularly called the “bread mafia” (хлебна мафия) is based on former party members or their children and friends who privatized the socialist-time industrial bread factories. During the regime, those factories overtook the production of small, private bakeries called *furni*, which were nationalized and kept by the system in operation as a back-up in case the factories were bombed in an armed conflict, yet their production was small in quantity and provoked long queues for fresh hot artisan-made bread, which always tasted much better than the factory production. This kind of behind-the-scene games of passing over formerly “national” properties to the same people only to call them “private” in the new system explains why *podmiana* (replacement) and *surogat* (artificial, replacing agent) are common tropes among Bulgarians more than a decade after the turning point of the so-called *Promiana* from socialism to capitalism and democracy - “Change” with a capital “C” as the idealized historic milestone of 1989 (Creed 1998).

In pre-industrial and pre-socialist Bulgaria, the kitchen spaces in traditional beliefs was considered sacred and the site of prayer and blessing for the family through food, defining the special female role as a house-keeper (*oikonomos*). The domination of socialist bread factories, massively staffed with women encouraged to join the proletariat force, took away bread-making from both the private space of the home and the public
communal *furni* (bake houses), illustrative of the socialist ideology on women’s emancipation, which was imposed and in many ways caused much higher levels of stress and burden for women, since they got forced to continue to operate within the accepted cultural frameworks of gender roles performing their traditional home tasks (clearly not equal to men), while also being expected to work and be equal to men in the public work sphere, as revealed in Gregory Massell’s study on Muslim women workers in his book *The Surogate Proletariat* (1974).

The period of projected “promeni” gets satirized as “a transition that is the most permanent thing in Bulgaria”, and since the changes of parties and policy statements and laws ultimately do not change the situation, the transition is additionally defined in performative and theatrical terms as an on-going *proforma*. Another way to denote the political *podmiana* and *proforma* politics is by saying that politicians act like “a baker’s oven shovel” (*furnajiiska lopata*, фурналджийска лопата), employing the vivid association with the flipping movement of the bread shovel upon placing and picking the breads from the oven bottom to visualize the surface change of colors and political positions of party members that ultimately remain with the same power and affiliations.

This is one among many other idiomatic expressions in Bulgarian that resort to bread and bread-related elements, objects, and adjectives to describe people, situations, conditions, and state of mind. Though bread is the staple food across Europe, Bulgarian is a language particularly rich with expressions employing bread to define a varied palette of cases, which points to bread and people’s attitudes towards it as a useful site for analyzing and understanding larger social, cultural, political, and economic issues in post-socialist Bulgaria, similar to the way other foods have been used to define the changes in
other countries in Eastern Europe (Caldwell 2007, 2009). The bitter sensation of being cheated politically expressed in the discourse of podmiana takes on two other key dimensions.

The second dimension of podmiana is psychological and spiritual, when people refer to the podmiana in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, where during socialism most priests and certainly the higher-level clergy were believed (and recently proven with the opening of their secret service files in 2012) to have been secret service police spies, thus instilling in the general people a bitter sense of mistrust towards a historically cherished institution that many still claim “saved the Bulgarian spirit” and identity during the Ottoman times yet “betrayed” the people during the much shorter period of socialism.

The third dimension of podmiana and the surogat lives it has nourished takes on a very physical, visceral, and embodied dimension expressed in people’s sensations of being physically cheated and abused through the low-quality, “fake” (mente) foods people complain to have been often unknowingly consuming in the post-socialist period without awareness about the ingredients and the added substitute chemicals, and bread in particular has been one of the food items with decreasing quality that Bulgarians have gotten most vocal and indignant about. The loosening of national control over the quality of food within the context of post-socialist free-market economy was abused by producers who competed in making foods with the lowest production costs and thus lowest quality, which turned Bulgaria into a profitable market for importers of preservatives, colorants, and flavoring agents. People started being acutely aware of this fact in the past five-six years due to the tightening of food quality control required by the
European Union and the few large media scandals driven also by a few consumer organizations protesting the plummeting food quality.

Eating cheese without milk and sausages made without meat have become jokes in Bulgaria based on people’s tangible sensation that not only their food but their whole life has been cheated, distorted, and become a surogat (replacing, artificial substance): a life that is not really their own and not authentic in its material expressions but a life made to look “real” yet controlled by outside forces that enter beyond one’s professional and social spheres even the most intimate spaces of the human body through the surogat foods that the private system shamelessly produces and the public authorities shamelessly fake not having the administrative capacity to monitor and control. The indignation at the “surogat” lives is expressed also by many younger people, who returned to Orthodox Christianity after socialism² hungry to discover what their parents and grandparents had not taught them.

These young members of the Church comment on the old people coming to the church service only in order to be given at the end the nafora bread as “preferring the surrogate bread before the real”. The word nafora in Bulgarian comes from the Greek anaphora meaning “not the gift,” or “instead of the gift”, as the gift here denotes the Gift bread placed on the altar and believed to become true body of Christ, which together with the cup of wine which becomes the blood of Christ form the Holy Eucharist (Communion). The more theologically adept young people in Bulgaria know that

---

² Young Bulgarians seeking spirituality after socialism took two main routes: Hinduism and Buddhism, with the basic practice of meditation and healthy living, and Orthodoxy learned through contemporary Serbian and Greek theologians emphasizing Eucharistic communion and constant Jesus prayer. However, some theologians and priests see in the wide talk about the Jesus prayer a dangerous exoticization of this practice as a kind of meditation, while it is, in fact, a very complex spiritual undertaking with its particular discipline and rhythm: a subtle rhythm of the five parts constituting the human according to Orthodox anthropology - heart, body, mind, spirit, and soul – which are complementary to the common notions of five senses of the body.
according to theological principles people are encouraged and expected to be active participants in the Liturgy and to regularly take Communion, and only for those who for some serious reason (health problems, menstrual aches, etc.) are unable to partake in the Eucharist - the real Bread (prosphora) - then anaphora (simple blessed bread that has not become body of Christ on the altar table) is distributed as a symbolic way to alleviate people’s spiritual (while no substitute is ultimately possible for the Bread above all breads). However, as the tradition of taking regular Communion got lost during socialism in Bulgaria when people were discouraged from attending church, the practice of taking the anaphora at the end of the Liturgy became the norm, rather than the exception. This distorted practice of cherishing “the wrong bread”, or in other words, to not be able to distinguish the real bread from the inauthentic/surogat one, is what fuels the indignation of many people who learned the Orthodox doctrines from their sources, not from the transmission of their relatives’ own misunderstandings. They now discuss actively in Internet fora, meetings, churches, and university conferences ways to revive the Eucharistic communion in Bulgaria, or to get people to recognize and want again the taste of “real” bread – Communion. This sensitivity for the real and authentic taste extends from church practices to the daily practices of ever more ecologically-aware young adults who seek good-quality, “real” and “live” (sourdough) bread, later examined through the struggles of a young baker to revive the sourdough in Bulgaria.

I often hear among the people at the chitalishtе cultural centers in Bistritsa and the Bread House in Gabrovo, my two main ethnographic sites in Bulgaria, people’s comments on a variation of the theme: “Our whole life has become a surogat (replacing, artificial substance)!”. In was a few times in conversations that people were further
employing the association with “surogat” in juxtaposition to the “real”, “genuine”, and “authentic” experience of the traditional dances, songs, crafts, or breads, which were perceived as a return to the search for the real things in life, from the vibrations resonating in their throats with the century-old polyphonies - commented as “new to our throats” and provoking “strange sensations in the stomach” - to the textures and tastes of home-made and locally grown foods, some hard and pungent, some soft and sweet, some chewy and bitter, but importantly natural and real.

The economic and social insecurities and psychological traumas that people experienced under capitalism have provoked a certain degree of idealizing of socialism for, according to many, the regime provided for basic economic security and therefore less stress and more quality free time. The desire (and struggle) for leisure and the return to religion increasingly appear in people’s post-socialist resistance to the neo-liberal work efficiency-driven system, which has been converting social relations into commodities and commodities into the currency of life. A common joke is that the spiritual void is so deep that the new Bulgarian form of “molene” (praying) is “going to the mol (mall),” playing on the root similarity between the English word “mall”, directly adopted into Bulgarian language without translation, and the Bulgarian root for “prayer”. Striving to find alternatives to an ever more aggressive market economy which is becoming a commodity-based moral economy, for many of my interlocutors the chitalishte and the church remained the two last “havens” nurturing “values”, and within both places I discovered food to be a central, informal channel for the establishment and maintenance of social relations.
Caught in the vicious cycle of exploited and mechanized work (often in the cubicles of foreign companies, sweat shop-type factories, and outsourcing call centers) with what little leisure time is available gravitating towards the mall, creative leisure at the chitalishte presents a particularly good entrypoint to observe and participate in people’s struggles over neo-liberalism and the alternatives for social transformation: in this case, arts, traditional culture (including heritage foots), and religion, as I examine all through the symbol of bread in various contexts, from a bakery to the altar church table to the chitalishte celebrations.

**Bread and Circuses: The Social Life of Furni and Chitalishte in Bulgaria**

Before socialism, streets across Bulgaria were dotted by children or women carrying on their heads large trays with bread loaves covered with hand-embroidered cotton towels. They were heading to or coming from the community ovens (furni) where people brought home-made bread to be baked and taken home. Different from the Western European kind of bakeries selling their locally-made breads, the furni functioned much more as spaces for socialization being hubs for baking what had already been made at home (including pots with meat and vegetables, whole lambs or pigs for holidays such as New Year’s and Easter, and pumpkins during the fall) and during the waiting period the furna also became a lively site for social interactions, especially for women who were the rest of the time confined to the house by their daily chores. Similar furni still exist across the Arab world (I observed some in Egypt, Morocco, and Palestine), and indeed the word comes from the Arabic furn which spread in Western Europe with the Mores in
Spain (horno) and from there into France (four) and in Eastern Europe it spread through the Ottoman Empire. Currently, taking home-made bread to the community furn in the Middle East is a practice only common for the lower-income classes and therefore an activity that people from the upper levels of society do not have access to. In this context, when the Center for Cross-Cultural Learning (CCCL)\(^3\) in Rabat started planning a summer school program for upper-class children to get to know various aspects of Moroccan intangible cultural heritage, the organizers did not expect that what the children would enjoy most would be making bread and taking it to the furn, particularly because it was something socially and culturally inappropriate for them.

The exhilarating sense of breaking social boundaries sensed by the children in crossing the line of the formerly culturally-inaccessible space of the furn and breaking the bread they made and baked, is similar to the conscious and exciting defiance of social and cultural norms when people from the upper-classes (from personal stories I gathered in Morocco and Lebanon) sneak to indulge in street food, which is otherwise not considered appropriate and is usually prohibited to the children of rich families. Street food nonetheless in some cases, as I have observed in Morocco and Brazil and Cuba, becomes an intriguing site for serendipitous encounters and interactions among classes, professions, ages, and ethnic groups. The sentiments of liberation in the transgression across borders of the official notions of pure and status-suitable resonate from the

---

\(^3\) Farah Charif D'Ouezzan, the founder of CCCL, remembered while we spoke (June 2\(^{nd}\), 2011, Beirut, Lebanon, Conference on Cross-Cultural Learning) about the community furna in our countries, how when she was a child she loved placing the bread stamps on their loaves of bread: a wooden stamp that each family would have and hold dear almost as its “family logo”, as she expressed it. Since their family was a descendant of a holy man, it was their family vow and obligation before God to serve the people without shelter as a safe haven, or what was called a “house of guarantee” which guaranteed people fleeing from tribal areas for some reason to come and find safe refuge from the state persecution until their case was settled. It was due to their constantly having various additional people at the house that the family made so much bread, thus bread very basically yet also symbolically in her mind connected to the tangible practice of hospitality.
Moroccan children going to the *furn* to the experience of upper-class businessmen and politicians, especially men, making bread along with teenagers, children, and grandmothers, some poor and not well educated, others with disabilities, as dipping hands in flour and dough for the first time as a form of creative activity at a cultural center offers an unusual form of entertainment and art, provoking again a sensation of liberating border-crossing yet this time of the borders between high arts and popular culture (at the Bread House *chitalishte* in Gabrovo). Indeed, what happens when the traditional meaning of an activity is replaced by a new frame, and the same text is read in a new context? What happens with bread-making when it occurs in an unusual place, not the traditional kitchen but a cultural center, and when it is not limited to women but open to men and any age group? I try to give some ethnographically rich insights to these questions in the episodes from the Bread House narrated below.

The imaginary of – and craving for a return to - a Bulgaria where the streets were buzzing with people with steamy trays of loaves on their heads was alive in my great-grandmother’s nostalgia up until her death in 2010, even if she could already see around children and women carrying cell phones instead of trays, busily typing messages while passing by more pharmacies than bakeries. In fact, pharmacies in post-socialist Bulgaria sprang on almost every corner often at the spots that had once been community bakeries (furni), and along with pharmacies, another entity covered cities all over: the *banicharnitza* baked goods shops selling various dough-based fast food but not actual breads. The *banicharnitza* got tailored more after the American fast food model than the traditional Bulgarian furni as they did not revive making bread (which is much more labor and time consuming) but focused on the production of take-away pastries made
with rather unhealthy ingredients. Most banicharnitza are owned by Turkish families, the reason being the undisrupted transmission of knowledge (of heritage) among the Turkish minority in Southern Bulgaria as well as the Turkish families who had moved to live in Turkey during socialism and returned after the “Changes” to open mostly food business, banitza and duner places (Turkish lamb and chicken wraps).

It is intriguing how a popular ritual among young people in Bulgaria has become to cluster around these banitza holes in the wall in the early morning hours after long night of partying, waiting for the first hot pastries to come out of the oven. In Western European countries and in some Latin American countries, as in Brazil, similar rituals exist, yet in Western Europe (France, Germany, Spain, Italy) where small artisan bakeries are still preserved, it is often bread that people get in those hours of the breaking dawn. And a kind of similar ritual can be observed among Americans, particularly in the Southern states, lining for Krispie Kream donuts hot off the frying pot (and considering this a much “cooler” thing to do than going to any other fast food restaurant open 24/7).Though the baked product might be different, I would argue that the beloved ritual of waiting for the first hot baked goods to come out performs the same function: balancing out the practices and places of transgression (bars, pubs, clubs, etc) with practices and places of tradition, conformity and therefore comfort (bakeries and baked goods aroma most reminiscent of the home space among other public food spaces, such as more modern fast food burger spots now open non-stop) in order for a smoother transition into back into the status-quo system that the temporary transgression (Carnival-type experience of revelry) attempted to turn upside-down, yet only to realize that permanent
disorder is not a viable alternative, to apply here Turner’s analysis on the role of Carnivals as social pressure valves.

While in many particularly smaller residential areas or towns or rural areas the bakeries remain the only public food establishments open late at night and this very simply explains why people would turn to them during late-night hours being the these sole foci of life and light. Yet, what is intriguing nowadays when young people have many other much more modern food alternatives open at night, is why and how they would often take pride and pleasure going to a particular old-time bakery, pointing to it as “old-time”, “traditional,” “neighborhood,” “communal,” which during the day-time would never be considered a “cool” place to buy food from with your friends. Youth in Brazil and in Cuba often resorted to the local bakeries in the long nights of Carnival weeks as well as on regular party nights, pointing to the early-morning bread as “reminding of home,” “giving sense of safety,” “going back to childhood”, and at the same time the name “Padaria” (Bakery) was employed as one of the most up-and-coming clubs in Salvador (Bahia) where only top musicians played live for high fees and where youth considered it extremely “cool”, in their terms, that you could buy bread inside the same space as the concert and dance. Similarly, in Bulgaria, a famous Bulgarian experimental artist working in New York, Kosyo Minchev - who started a famous alternative modern arts movement in Bulgaria at the turn of the Changes, marking the transition period through provocative and critical art works and installations - talked for an hour, inspired by the Bread House activities in Gabrovo, how he imagined the “coolest intervention art project’ being to incorporate a bakery and the aroma of fresh bread inside the most posh club in Sofia, Chervilo Club (the hub of the Bulgarian mafia).
The inversion and transformation of space in this case is something, Kosyo argued, much more doable and exciting to do in Bulgaria than in the USA, since:

In Bulgaria, the whole environment of aggressive directness and brutality, the total lack of political correctness, keep you in constant friction, which inspires you to challenge, to do something bold…comfort, as here in the USA, turns you into a marionette.⁴

Again, in these cases it was that ambiguous mix of tradition and transgression, innocence and promiscuity, purity and dirt/danger that produced the appealing ambivalence with which people treated the traditional symbol of bread and ritual practice of bread breaking across the friction zones of continuity and change. The old-time bakery, even when not preserved but, as in Bulgaria, replaced by a “surogat” (pseudo) bakery making greasy fast food yet nonetheless offering the culturally-pleasing and soothing baked dough aromas and textures, is a space illustrative of people’s mixed strategies for coping with continuity and change by bridging binary opposite sites – the bar and the bakery – each one with its particular sets of symbols, expected behavior, social and cultural value accumulated and circulated, and sensorial experiences generated, precisely in order for people to re-enter more smoothly into the world of the status-quo rules after a night of transgressing those same rules⁵.

---

⁵ In Bulgaria, a particular and peculiar idiomatic expression, “Ако ще е гарга, да е рошава!” (Ako shte e garga, da e roshava!), or ‘If you put up with the craven, then let its fur be bold’, which points to a culturally acceptable and enjoyable level of transgression when the transgression is not seriously damaging to society, through breaking conventional norms, and thus emphasizing that if one is transgress (for example, get to drink alcohol), he or she might as well do it well (indeed, get drunk, and then go to the communal bakery to soak the alcohol from one’s stomach while cheering to childhood memories of going to the local bakery for morning bread) to then return to home and work. The expression could also be used for work and express a desire for a job to be done well, yet it is most commonly used to facetiously express one’s willingness to embrace transgression and take pride in it as long as it is not seriously socially disruptive to the extent of
In this sense, the bakery becomes a liminal space where the rite of passage gets reversed, re-establishing people’s positions in society, yet it is a liminal space nonetheless since it serves the purpose of a threshold between two distinct dimensions of social rules and behaviors. This is precisely the reason why I believe the social function of the community cultural center can be perceived much better by drawing an association with the communal bakery and the multiple meanings that it holds as much as the multiple modes of using it, as I explore below the disjunctures between the cultural perceptions and the legal terms and frameworks of categories of bakeries and public food facilities as illustrative of the dilemmas around the chitalishte’s functions.

In the other chapter on the developments around the Bread House cultural center, at play was this particular ambiguity in people’s attitudes towards bread and bread-making as “traditional,” spelled out by young people as both an unworthy, “old-fashioned” activity and simultaneously embraced, when offered at the Bread House, as unconventional practice of self-discovery and self-affirmation in the safe while innovative context of collective bread-making rather than conventional community arts.

The question of how and why bakeries did not continue operating after socialism in Bulgaria is important one to consider when analyzing public and private space as factors in the formation and bargaining over identities, which is the overarching question enveloping the ethnographic study of the community cultural centers networks as particular sites of these bargains. I was told the story of post-socialist market “changes” and “replacements” through the personal story of Raicho, the master baker at the only one risking long-term marginalization (whereas short-term falling through the cracks could be acceptable and in some cases even desirable).
still functioning old-time bakery (with big wood-fire oven) in Sofia. Raicho\textsuperscript{6} prides himself on using a wooden shovel to bake, which, in his words, is a guarantee that his bread is made with live yeast (sourdough) since otherwise it would stick to the shovel.

Raicho commented on the political changes through the change of bread realities:

After the “Changes”, the old furni were privatized and revived making bread but they survived only a few years while they could sell freely, benefiting from the chaos in the transitioning tax laws and their weak implementation, yet soon many shut down because of rising taxes and ever more rigid hygiene regulations coupled with the strong competition from the “bread mafia” that privatized the bread factories, flooding the market with cheap bread. Only those bakers who truly love what they do… like me and the other master (maystor) with me … we decided to keep fighting to preserve the tradition. We hardly make any profit… we have to wake up at 2 am every day… it takes us much more time and effort because we use a shovel and not metal trays to bake… we work in high heat summer and winter, but we just love it, love the touch of the dough in our hands and just cannot imagine making anything else but bread. All small bakers, we have to pay the “tranquility tax” (danuk spokoistvie, данък спокойствие) because of the permanent fear from fines from the hygiene revisions or from reket by the mafia [physical attack on people’s shops or bodies]. But whatever happens, I will keep on throwing [shte produlzhavam da miatam (breads with a shovel), ще продължавам да мятам (хлябове с лопата)]!

Raicho’s pride and sense of worth he gets in his life from performing with care and love his craft is enacted in the very tangible statement of insisting on using the bread shovel rather than the more comfortable, efficient, and thus profitable metal trays. He often jokes about his shovel, referring to the common joke that politicians act like “a baker’s shovel” (furnajiiska lopata), saying “Here at least you see what a real baker’s

\textsuperscript{6} Interview conducted by Nadezhda Savova on April 15, 2011. Sofia, Bulgaria.
shovel does and how it works, because politicians do not even produce real bread. Nothing about their words and acts is real!” Raicho refracted politics through his personal prism employing a popular saying and connecting it to his craft as a tool of agency and power. Despite his complaints about the dropping profits, his sense of constantly paying the “tranquility tax” of fear from being fined or hit by the bread mafia, Raicho felt he had a weapon: the bread shovel and the knowledge, skill, and sense of responsibility as heritage guardian to preserve using this tool that hardly anyone nowadays masters.

Raicho’s insistence on using real sourdough was framed in a discourse of indignation against the packets of fresh yeast from Turkey, which marked the opening of the free-market economy in Bulgaria as the market good flooded with cheaper foreign products, and the Turkish yeast killed the Bulgarian yeast, which used to be produced in one plant for the whole country (in the town of Russe), which was not prepared to face the competition from the economies of scale developed in Turkey over half a century of private enterprise and fairly free-market competition. The Bulgarian privatized and newly-started small-scale production was reliant on old machine, technologies, and most importantly, on old mentalities still embedded in the socialist logic of lax discipline and lax control in a milieu missing competition. In her comments as a Bulgarian bread technology expert from a socialist factory, who visited the yeast factory close to Istanbul, she noted in our conversation her amazement at the discipline and hygiene standards followed at the enterprise: “something we in Bulgaria still have to learn under capitalism,” she noted.

It is intriguing how quickly Bulgarians turned their backs to tradition, which had it that the new yeast for each year would be ritually started by women dancing around the
new yeast overnight in silence dances at 12 alternating households each night and would never let the yeast leave any particular household, let alone be given to or touched by another group of people. Keeping the yeast as a sacred Bulgarian object away from contact with Muslims – unlike the exchange of yeast in Morocco between Muslims to Jews at the end of the Passover period when the Jewish households needed yeast and it was exchange not of a sacred element but of the practical staff of life marking symbolically a basic coexistence contract (Hammoudi 2012) – is explained by the key ritual role of yeast in the Orthodox Christian tradition, where new yeast is sanctified on the Thursday of Holy Week and new yeast is produced on the day of the Holy Cross in September.

Similar to the way bread shovel is Raicho’s enterprise staple and guarantee for quality, older people remember how before socialism the furni used to operate on two basic competition principles - word of mouth and personal relationships (what is currently called “brand loyalty”). While back then almost all bakers used shovels, each furna had its own technique, from the different types of wood used to the flour, the yeast, and the character of the furnadjia (baker) and the level of personal relationships established with him. My grandmother, for example, recalls being sent by her parents to a very far-away furna only because they used “mishi durva” which gave a particularly strong smoked aroma to the bread and also because the furnadjia had become a family friend. As the old furna disappeared from the Bulgarian urban landscape, and the church is not anymore a central site for socialization the way it used to be before Communism, one other social space remains still open and fairly vibrant in Bulgarian society and it is the institution that most Bulgarians take pride in defining as “our unique Bulgarian”: the
chitalishte, which is precisely the spaces where most of the following food stories evolve though they were never foreseen or endorsed by the state.

“What’s intangible about food?”:

Materiality at Stake in UNESCO’s Global Discourses on Culture

Ecological movements around the world that had initially addressed issues of pollution, deforestation, and energy efficiency, over the past decade started turning their gaze ever more towards food quality and biodiversity in the rise of global economic trends of genetically modified foods (GMO) and economies of scale in agricultural production. In the policy realm, these issues at first sight seem to lie in the domain of Ministries of Agriculture at the national levels and trans-nationally within the domains of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome, the UN World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) and their related summits, like the COP 15 Climate Change Summit. In addition to the natural scientific approaches to ecology, anthropologists have emphasized the connection between nature and culture, raising awareness about the global destruction of traditional agricultural and cultural practices in small-scale societies around the world and calling attention to the importance of local values and practices (Pratt 2008). And it is precisely these arguments that should have turned the ecologists’ attention ever more towards another key UN Agency, which deals in particular with issues of cultural diversity (claiming to represent and support the lifestyles of traditional communities) and science (including ecology and bio-diversity): UNESCO.
At UNESCO’s House in Paris, the dining hall is the only space where one feels in France rather than on the grounds of a trans-national, inter-governmental organization (also spatially expressed), and it becomes clear when in the dessert section one finds cheese and grapes rather than sweets! However, UNESCO paradoxically did not recognize until recently that as the UN cultural organization it has to also to work with food – in fact, some would argue it has to understand the centrality of food – as the key unity of practice, place, and periods of time that develop and maintain basic cultural and social relations. In 2003, UNESCO ratified the Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity in order to recognize cultural practices, customs, and traditional knowledges from around the world in a way similar to the recognition of historic monuments and sites of exceptional natural beauty.

Purity as a Western cultural paradigm underpins the very definitions of heritage adopted globally by UNESCO. In the case of tangible heritage, the tangible dimension implies places and buildings not meant to be touched or inhabited – not to get “impure” and “inauthentic” - notable in the discussions I witnessed at UNESCO in 2008 and are still continuing on banning traditional tribal groups from inhabiting the cazbahs in Morocco or the ruins of Petra in Jordan the way they have done for centuries. In the case of intangible heritage, its very name denotes knowledge without tangible, material expressions (though it often has such in terms of crafts and ritual foods) and thus implies limits to the hands-on, physical engagement with this heritage, which is meant to remain in unchanged – untouched - in order to preserve its authenticity.

Within the larger context of my dissertation, living with three “Masterpieces of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity” groups (the Bistritsa Babi group (Sofia,
Bulgaria), the Samba de Roda Suerdick (Bahia, Brazil), and the *Tumba Francesa* (Santiago de Cuba), I discovered that understanding the local impact of UNESCO’s Conventions on ICH and Cultural Diversity passes through taste and smell and texture as people engage with – and are transformed and transform on their part - politics through food, festivities, friendships, and faith. In both Convetions food is paradoxically not officially mentioned as a sphere, among many others, part of culture – it is, for example, not considered a “cultural industry” even despite the enormous number of restaurants and coffeeshops spaces for the “culinary arts” discoursively yet not recognized officially. In my research, instead of and much beyond the Convetions’ documents, I lived the struggles and hopes of the three groups and their communities often in the kitchens that they had fought to build at their state-provided cultural centers (where kitchens are hardly ever planned as not an intrinsic element of “arts and culture”, despite the term “culinary arts” being widely circulated yet not present as programming in arts schools. While the kitchen space became ever more conspicuous as a public space for social interactions and a sign of social status in modern architecture in the USA and Europe since the 60s, the kitchen remained absent or hidden in the back at cultural centers and in the museums, where only over the past decade has the “demo kitchen” space appeared to educate about particular historic and cultural foods. Yet, even in this case, the cycle of one-directional, passive teaching is preserved similar to the way the traditional museum taught the masses the codes of beauty and “civilization” at the turn of the century, as noted by Tony Bennet

---

7 The first museum in the world that had as part of its architecturual plan a spaced for a cafeteria was a museum in the USA in the mid-20th century. This was revolutionary, as up to this time museum were only meant to be spaces for high-value objects and, thus, “consumption” of culture not in the literal sense of the word as occurred with the introduction of food in the space of the museum.
as ways to control the masses through the representations of power enacted by the museum through the cultural capital of their collections.

The case of the community cultural centers is offering, however, a new and intriguing perspective on the role of food and food-related spaces. Noting people’s creativity in improvising spaces to bring food, wash dishes, and try to make and share food together in public spaces started evolving as ever more present along my question about the role of non-professional arts for the (re)generation of social capital. I discovered that the leisure forms of arts were almost always accompanied by the sharing of food, and the cultural centers became hubs for opposition to the increasingly homogenizing institutionalized, capitalist food control, and the reason why in this piece I examine the intriguing story of another “Living Human Treasure”: not a group but rather one young man in Bulgaria, whose love for bread and passion to share it with people spinned on their heads the static, “hygienic” institutional notions of authenticity.

Before exploring the Bulgaria case, whose micro-level translations of the global Convention provide important insights, it is useful to first understand the global context within which the baker was framing his struggle. Using the platform of the 2003 ICH Convention discourses as a stage for cultural diplomacy, in the summer of 2008 President Nicolas Sarkozy declared French cuisine as "the best gastronomy in the world" announcing that France submitted a proposal to UNESCO to add French cuisine to the world heritage treasure list. However, the proposal spurred heated debates Assembly of States Party Members to the ICH Convention (June 2008), which I witnessed personally while researching and working at UNESCO. The Assembly President Mr. Cherif Khaznadhar stated that gastronomy does not fit the criteria for ICH, since there was no
official category for food within the Convention: formal categories include "social practices, rituals and festive events" and "know-how linked to traditional craftsmanship," but the delegates kept arguing whether food fits any of these practices, and, if it does as many agreed, what aspects of food concentrate its intangible cultural value: the knowledge about its preparation, the traditional ingredients used, or the rituals around its consumption?

Indeed, the delegate’s dilemmas discussed more freely and informally in the coffee breaks were mainly about the “tangibility” of food and the question of what about its tangibility made it “intangible”. Food is essentially materially sensed and immediately experienced to an extent of bodily engagement – in particular through the act of internalization of food becoming one with the body – that is not paralleled in music, dance, story-telling, and other crafts, at least not at the same somatic and sensorial, visceral level. While never stated officially and publicly, the debate over food as intangible heritage at UNESCO was ultimately about the body and its senses – with the international delegates bringing to the discussions their own distinct, culturally-defined somatic experiences and conceptions of food – clashing against dry definitions, categories, and formulas.

The heated debates finally started crystallizing a notion of heritage as a “collective practice,” not a product, defined by a set of rituals and knowledges of preparation and consumption. This led France to reorient its application towards presenting food in its cuisine recognition application as a central social ritual rather than a set of recipes: in a sense, the table – or, as in Adam Gopnik’s (2011) book *The Table Comes First: Family, France, and the Meaning of Food* organized in four chapters based
on who, when, and how comes to the table, chooses what to eat, talks, and leaves with what network of relationships – rather than analyzing what exact ingredients composed the meal. France was then followed by several other countries that had vied for political recognition through food, in particular Italy, which ended up teaming up with Spain, Greece and Morocco to get UNESCO to recognize the traditional "Mediterranean diet.” In November 2010, ICH Convention experts gathered in Kenya accepted France’s revised dossier, and French gastronomy got recognized not as a set of actual food elements – thus, not as Sarkozy initially argued it to be "the best gastronomy in the world" meaning the one with greatest variety and flavors - but as culturally valuable in its essence of a “social custom aimed at celebrating the most important moments in the lives of individuals and groups”. In addition to the importance of commensality, Prime Minister François Fillon quoted in the NY Times⁸ singled out the French “genius in the arts of the table,” involving the intricacies of how wines are paired with dishes, how the table is decorated, the precise placing of glasses and utensils, all seen as parts of the rite. France’s ambassador to UNESCO Catherine Colonna noted that the “multi-course gastronomic meal, with its rites and its presentation” “makes a contribution to cultural diversity”, which was scaled-up by another French delegate arguing that: “It’s very important that people realise, in villages in Africa and everywhere, that when you have knowledge of food it is a treasure for your community, and something worth cherishing.”

The French discourse here extended France’s ownership of the symbolic capital of recognition to other cultures as potential beneficiaries of the same capital. Nonetheless, food was masterfully used here to emphasize France’s global contribution as a guiding light for other countries to cherish food as part of national identity and social life, which

follows a long tradition of political rhetoric on French cultural and culinary uniqueness as legitimizing forces before its claims on global cultural leadership. The same claims were the main driving force before the 2005 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* aiming to offset the global dominating impact of American cultural products by arguing for higher taxes and limits on foreign cultural imports. Finally, a similar claim has been made by officers from the French Ministry of Culture in our informal talks at UNESCO that their network of “houses of culture” (*maisons de la culture*) is the original model that set forth the example for many other countries to organize such networks, which is a statement that does not take into consideration the large networks in Eastern Europe and Latin America predating the French by a few decades.

What is anthropologically and sociologically important here, however, is not the chronology of cultural concepts and models but how they are used as discourses and practices locally to produce certain social relations and cultural values. With the case of food as “intangible heritage of humanity”, Ethnographically France’s global claims can be localized through Levi Strauss’ seminal works for the anthropology of food, such as his famous example of wine gift exchanges between strangers at a French bistro that has clearly marked anthropologic thought on the intricacies of commensality. For UNESCO’s recognition crucial was not so much the “what” question but the “how, where, and when” people live gastronomy, and it is precisely this embeddedness of cultural practices rather than simple objectification that marks an important anthropologically-oriented shift in cultural policy thinking at UNESCO and, as I will show below, in countries around the
world through various “trickle-down effects” of what the notion of living intangible cultural heritage entails and how it can be a force to change and improve local lives.

Along with French gastronomy, Mexican cuisine was also recognized as intangible heritage but on another premise: on the proven interweaving between food and the religious rituals and songs and dances. Mexico had its dossier revised and rejected a few times since 2005 on the basis that it was either too narrow or too broad, from focusing narrowly on the corn tradition going back some 7,000 years, to expanding to other staples such as chile, agave, beans, and squash, to including a variety of cultural practices involving food exchanges, such as the Day of the Dead. As the Guadalajara Reporter noted⁹, inside Mexico various interests were invested in the long-awaited recognition: authorities hoped it would strengthen national identity through educational programs focused on national cuisine and native plants; teachers and health workers deemed it a tool to lower the childhood obesity rate by promoting healthy local foods; indigenous people hoped for more recognition of their local knowledges and emphasis on inter-cultural education. At the same time, however, indigenous groups around the country protested that they felt their particular local traditions were being appropriated by the state calling them “national heritage” – let alone “heritage of humanity” – when these were claimed to be local creations with particular meanings understood only in their original cultural contexts. Contested notions of creation and ownership rights in food further echo the global debates on intellectual property rights analyzed by Merryman and Coombe.

Much hope was invested in the application for recognition of the Mediterranean diet headed by Italy (which politically teamed up with Greece, Italy, Morocco, and Spain), recognized as a true “diaita”, or “way of life” from Greek, involving “a set of skills, knowledge, practices and traditions ranging from the landscape to the table [emphasis added], including the crops, harvesting, fishing, conservation, processing, preparation and, particularly, consumption of food. […] rooted in respect for the territory and biodiversity, and ensures the conservation and development of traditional activities and crafts.”10 These culinary traditions framed as rituals were vying for recognition alongside songs, dances and traditional know-how from 31 countries, ranging from Spanish Flamenco to Chinese acupuncture and what the Daily Telegraph11 called “more obscure contenders”, including the art of gingerbread making in northern Croatia, carpet-weaving in Azerbaijan, the folk dances of Rajasthan and Okinawan musical theatre.

Ratified by 132 countries, the Convention’s ICH list now numbers 178 cultural practices from 77 nations. The shift from the material ingredients to the immaterial social relations they nourish in the discussions around the French and Mexican gastronomy dossiers illustrates the victory of a long struggle, mostly lead by third-world countries with predominantly oral cultures and less monuments, to shift recognition from the tangible heritage of buildings (1973 Convention) to the realm of intangible practices, knowledges, and values (2003 Convention).

The growing global discourses on the role of traditional cultural knowledges for ecological preservation at inter-governmental organizations like UNESCO and

---

international non-governmental organizations like Slow Food get echoed, modified, and re-framed in the post-socialist context of Bulgaria where people employed the tool of “intangible cultural heritage” to frame their food-related claims: the struggle with state food hygiene rules for the creation of a separate category for small, traditional artisan bakeries in Bulgaria. Both food production, sales, and consumption practices were framed in terms of “intangible cultural heritage” in a creative appropriation of the symbolic capital of international recognition – an interesting spin on other cases of local cultural practices vying for recognition as a form of legitimation.

UNESCO’s global recognition of food as ICH was locally interpreted – or better, “digested” – in the French region of Pays Cathare, heritage was “put on the plate” with the creation of a network of étape terroirs, or houses demonstrating how local food is produced. As globalization changes food supplies and habits of sociality, “Sunday dinner is becoming something of a public statement and a political act” (Kockel 2007: 94), where the metaphor of the common meal of globalization in Harvey (2006, 2007) raises the question: Who meets at globalization’s table? While this question has multiple aspects, I choose to focus on who sits at the table in the casa do samba, casa de la cultura and the chitalishte, what they talk about, eat, sing, and dream about. If, as Foucault (1977-78) argued, the “art of government” is based on the governance model of the household, I argue that cultural policy as a cultural house-building and heritage house-guarding program is a process that can – and often does without planning it, as in the case of Cuba - leave open and flexible space for house-animation that can be often critical of the status quo and feeding on the local resources and traditions within the local community. This flexible and reciprocal relationship is expressed in the dynamics of the
three “l-s” (*loosenes, lapse of time*, and *locality*) of network dynamics in the shekere net that I develop in the last chapter as a metaphor of the global networks of these community cultural centers, where the flexible physical and social architectures of the living houses network have proven – even when state-funded, monitored and controlled, as still the case of Cuba – they still leave space for people to develop and exercise subtle reversals of the status quo, even when only rehearsed. The rehearsal space itself takes its place in the bargains over roles, acts, and plots in daily lives.

**The Politics of Porosity: “Live” Bread in and out of “Living Heritage”**

We can read the pages of UNESCO’s ICH Convention and try to understand how people scribble on them their own local narratives of heritage and scripts of arguments for legitimacy through the real-life story of a young Bulgarian computer engineer, Bogdan Bogdanov. Bogdan discovered his passion for bread five years ago, when he felt hunger for hands-on experiences away from his computer work. “I simply loved the touch of dough and that was it!”, Bogdan often sums up his life-changing encounter with bread. Bogdan got deeper and deeper into studying about and experimenting with century-old traditions of sourdough bread-making. And when his bread turned with such a unique taste – unknown to people as no one else was still making sourdough in Bulgaria - so that friends started ordering him loaves, Bogdan had the dream to open a small bakery and turn his passion into a livelihood away from his computer job. Yet, this is when he faced the iron wall of Bulgarian bureaucracy and the absurdity of regulations, which he later decided to fight by resorting to the symbolic capital of “heritage” as a tool
in his struggle with bureaucracy. When Bogdan researched the regulations for opening a bakery, the problem was that there was no particular category for small artisan (bread hand-made in a traditional way) bakeries, or artisan places for any other small-scale traditional food production (cheese, wine, meats, etc). Bogdan argued before the authorities that such traditional places should be allowed to use traditional utensils and materials without having to conform to all the hygiene standartization rules that make the undertaking impossible financially as well as impossible to preserve the original process. The issue goes down to even the seemingly simple but crucial detail that the sourdough would not rise well if you use metal containers and utensils, yet the law stipulates the use of metal and the sanitation with special chemicals! In fact, particularly for traditional sourdough you need not wash but only scrape off the wooden bread-kneading bowls so that the old remnants of yeast enrich the new yeast. Bogdan exclaimed with perplexity in the catch of the vicious cycle:

But how are you to tell the bureaucrats you are not meant to wash the bread bowls for years! The pores scare them – they imagine all kind of bacteria and microbes go in and then get into the bread, when the pores actually act like little homes for good microorganisms that actually guarantee the sourness of the bread since they make the dough ferment better. It is all a living organism: older microorganisms help the new yeast bacteria you have placed to cooperate and work better to raise the bread. It is kind of like culture and heritage: you simply need to build on the old to get the new generations and new traditions going, to have a living culture that is rooted and strong. Otherwise, if you use non-porous metal as they want you to,

---

12 Bogdan’s story echoes the adventures of William Alexander, described in his book *52 Loaves (2010, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill)*, trying to carry across the US border a pack of 12-year old wild yeast to a three-hundred-year-old monastery in France, arguing before the perplexed customs officers that they had saved religion, the arts, science, and culture at the monastery for centuries but they had forgotten how to make real bread, and William was on a mission to bring the sourdough tradition back to live. It was only the argument on history and heritage that got the customs willing to let go and support his historic mission.

13 Interview with Bodgan Bogdanov, Stara Zagora, March 25, 2011.
you always start from scratch and never have a base to build on. Again, it is like a society that forgets its past and always starts anew, which is the main problem we have in Bulgaria. We constantly destroy the base under our feet!

Bogdan’s observations on the parallels between bread-making processes and cultural processes became his discursive tool to legitimize his right to use porous materials against the official regulations and in support of his masterhood. Trying to find a higher institution than the local hygiene inspection office, he decided to seek recognition from UNESCO applying to the Bulgarian Commission for the title “Living Human Treasure” for mastering the tradition of sourdough bread-making. However, Bogdan discovered that he was not allowed to apply as an individual but had to be represented by an institution, and the Bulgarian Commission for UNESCO had designated the chitalishte (community cultural centers) as the recognized representatives for any traditional local cultural practices. Bogdan pointed facetiously as to how the system made him use the chitalishte

---

Bogdan’s use of “bread heritage” as a way to combat the bureaucratic hygiene regulations reminds the recent struggles of people in Tunisia and Egypt, where the slogans of protests included the words “bread” and “justice” and “freedom”, with a famous photograph that came in world media showing a man holding a baguette bread as a gun in the face of the Tunisian police forces advancing against the protesters in a tear-gas filled street (where the protesters protected their eyes by splashing them with Coca-Cola, a proven remedy against tear gas). The claims for human rights, from freedom to the most basic of all rights which is access to food, were expressed through the creative appropriation of Western objects and symbols: French baguette in a former French colony and Coca Cola against the [supposed] US-supported regimes. Intriguingly, while currently a paradoxical source of protection in the Middle East, Coca Cola in Bulgaria during socialism was the target of desire, especially among the youth, up to the point that I will never forget the vibrant stories of my grandmother, an opera singer, drinking her first Coke at the British Museum on an opera tour in London. Returning to the symbol of bread, there is a deep cultural relationship to bread in Arabic cultures, in particular Egypt, where people give a vow to before a piece of bread. The key role and symbol of bread explains people’s resort to bread as the symbolic and also tangible “weapon” in the 2011 protests in Egypt and Tunisia against the politicians’ failure to keep their vows – vows by bread - of serving the people in even the most basics of providing bread and shelter(home) with some people in Egypt forced to live in the cemeteries and to eat from trash. As Ahmed Nagib, a key figure in the recent uprising in Egypt, spoke at the Anna Lindt Foundation meeting in Bulgaria, “bread, dignity, and social change” were the two main slogans used in the uprising along with the strongest of all other weapons: humor. “Humor,” Nagib argued, “has been our survival strategy over thousands of years: even the oldest papyrus has a joke about the Pharaoh’s rule”. Humor has also been the key survival tool for Bulgarians, in particular during the Ottoman rule, and I further explore it in my ethnographic work in Gabrovo where most of the jokes come from.
“pro forma” as if he belonged to it, whereas he had no connections to the institution and his craft was clearly tied to a bakery rather than a stage, reading room, or a rehearsal space!

Bogdan believed his craft deserved the highest possible form of symbolic recognition, since sourdough breads in Bulgaria used to be a tradition and the country is known by scholars to potentially have one of the best sourdough breads in the world for the amount of special bacteria in the air (*lactum bacillus bulgaricus*). However, it stopped being practiced in the 60s in cities and around the 70s in the village *furni*, when commercial yeast became massively introduced to Bulgarian bread production across factories and the nationalized urban *furni*.

However, to Bogdan’s astonishment, it was precisely the fact that the tradition had died that the UNESCO Commission did not want to recognize him as a “heritage bearer”, since he could not show that he had learned his craft from a particular old master or in a collective ritual – literally, no one had “handed him down” the skill – as the official requirements, developed by the Bulgarian Institute of Folklore drafted under socialism, were that for a practice to be recognized as “heritage” it must have been alive for at least three generations or a minimum of 50 years.

While Bogdan had hard times being recognized for his skill, it is intriguing that the Bulgarian Institute of Folklore, charged with administering the “Living Human Treasures Program” in Bulgaria, places ritual breads within the category of crafts and production of ritual objects, while the other category related to baked goods does not include bread but rather pastry and pancake type products\(^{15}\), thus pointing to the key

---

ritual and culturally significant role of bread as particularly connected to special celebrations rather than a daily food, and thus Bogdan’s. Similar to the problems faced by the French and the Mexican experts preparing the dossier for UNESCO, where the missing elements were the ties to particular communities of people, Bogdan’s claims on the uniqueness of the actual food – as far as technique of preparation and taste - did not count for the Commission, which wanted proofs that the tradition was still living and meaningful to a community of people, the word “community” being the key discursive element emphasized over and over again.

Bogdan tried to seek legitimizing value in the historic evidence in the archaeological findings from the oldest necropolis in Europe dated 7000 BC in the outskirts of Stara Zagora, Bogdan’s hometown, where ground grain seeds and marks of fermentation show that live yeast (sourdough) was most likely invented in these lands and only then spread to Egypt around 4000 BC (considered up until now the cradle of leavened bread). Yet still, this long history of sourdough bread in these terroir did not account for the required living heritage history – much shorter as a time period, only requiring past three generations – for the claim of heritage, whose conceptualization clearly comes from the notion of “inheritance” of the practice, and which is an issue ultimately about movement: who passes tradition onto whom, how does it currently move people to re-create and come together to live the tradition, and who would they transmit to in the future? Bogdan kept talking about the importance of “experimenting” with bread recipes and, he would argue, in general in culture and in society, and his flexible concept of “heritage,” which Bogdan stood up for employing the symbolic cultural capital of a long-lasting and recognizable institution like the chitalishte yet arguing for change in
continuity, echoes the ways in which Hammoudi (2012) analyzes the recreation of rituals building on Gadamer that these processes are never a “reconstruction of an original”, but a “thoughtful mediation with contemporary life”(Gadamer 1989: 167-169 in Hammoudi 2012).

Eventually, after long debates, Bogdan managed to convince the Commission not with his historic and discursive arguments, however, but with taste! Playing on their senses, he brought to the Ministry of Culture aromatic loaves which revived a flavor that the older committee members recollected with excitement, and the younger ones had never tried but were immediately impressed. The unknown taste for the younger people was in itself a proof of why Bogdan, being only 30-year-old, could not have learned the traditional craft from the old masters, since they were no longer living, and taste was also the reason why he was awarded the title not based not on the criteria of “transmission” or “tradition” but on the criteria of “unique local knowledge.” Bogdan’s emphasized this uniqueness scientifically, arguing that Bulgarian bread is supposed to be the most flavorful in the world, since sourdough bread is made using the natural lacto-acid fermentation of dough (the same one occurring in the famed Bulgarian yogurt) when the dough picks up bacteria from the air, and in the case of Bulgaria, there is the largest concentration of lactum bacillicus bulgaricus (LBB) bacteria per square milimeter in the world (due to the particular micro-climate), and thus its abundance in bread, as in yogurt, preconditions that the bread flavor would be uniquely rich. Bogdan jokingly says that through taste he proved to the Commission that a “community” – “their favorite word” – would certainly evolve around the making and consumption of this kind of unique bread,
even if a community did not exist at the time he was developing the craft. “Taste is the best guarantee for the unity of a community around a heritage!”, Bogdan smiles.

Bogdan is happy with his victory, which he considers a “moral obligation to bring back the forgotten taste of real bread to Bulgaria”, and is willing to teach the new generations to distinguish and value the flavor of the “live bread” our ancestors used to eat, ensuring the transmission of the tradition, even if is a tradition he invented, or at least revived by experiential learning: a tradition of trial and error with his own twist on it. He sums it up:

I keep learning through experience every single day, and this is important to understand for any tradition: once passed on, it is not something static, but a material in your hands that you have to keep working with and understand that you always also put something of yourself in it, which is the reason why it always changes.

While Bogdan’s story is a rich ethnographic example of the politics of discourses around what constitutes tradition and what its invention – an issue examined historically in Hobsbawm (1992) - what Bogdan was aiming with this struggle was not simply the symbolic cultural capital of placing the framed award on his wall, but to have a wall where to place the frame, working within the framework of a new category of food spaces in Bulgaria allowing and preserving tradition.

Locally, not as an official category in the national food regulations, Bogdan managed to convince the authorities that he needs to use a porous material for his bread since it is crucial to preserve the tradition, “which is not only a Bulgarian tradition, but
also a heritage of *humanity*”, he had kept emphasizing the universal value of his practice in the meetings with the officials. Yet again, as with his arguments before the UNESCO Commission where taste eventually had more weight than the millennial history of the tradition, the Stara Zagora authorities were truly impressed he finally brought some bread in the office. Then the head simply said “Well, we’ll allow what is needed to get this flavor” and became among his most regular customers. Paradoxically, the global recognition did not have the same convincing power, as Bogdan thought it would, but even high-level institutional and regulatory decisions were made in response to bodily and sensorial stimulus. Currently Bogan has a large “community of supporters” as he calls them rather than simply consumers, since he believes all willing to pay 3 levs (three times the price of a factory-made loaf at the cost of 1 lev) are people who share his vision of traditional, good-quality food as an ethical choice. Because of his rising popularity, every now and then Bogdan has to deal with checks that his competitor other small bakeries in town, however using mainstream technology and yeast, request to be sent to take probes for microbes from Bogdan’s wooden boards and vessels where he kneads the dough. The probes have consistently shown zero microbes and a plenitude of healthy bacteria.

In France, artisan bakeries equipped with just a few wooden bowls and cupboards (and certainly no fridges!) points to a phenomenon of large-scale practice that does not require derogation any more, unlike the much more rigid regulations imposed on the new European Union member states, whose government do not know how or do not wish to put effort into securing exceptions to the law: as it would be, if applying the principle of *home oikonomia* I have developed in another chapter as the flexibility of the law for the
sake of traditional values and co-existence. Rather, a hierarchy of hygiene and of permissible tastes and practices is evolving within the European Union and it points to what Bulgarian more and more call the new Iron Curtain denoted with the notion of the Iron Cap limiting local flexibility, creativity, and cultural particularities.

Bogdan often quotes this radical inequality of treatment that hit him upon his visit of a local baker in France, pointing with amazement at the small space and lack of machines, metal, as well as lack of hygienic regulations:

In a bakery in France, you enter, and on side there are a few bag of flour and a cat sleeping on top of the bags! A cat! And then just a wooden board to knead and a few wooden shelves to let the bread rise. It is so simple: bread is meant to be simple and good, why kill it with regulations? Why rush it to rise?

Bogdan’s observations on the French bakery’s lack of hygiene is intriguingly contrasted with the projects of hygienization and sanitization promoted in France as much as in the rest of Europe and the USA, and later in the socialist block in the first half of the 20th century, by the state to affect people’s private lives and habits through home economics campaigns stretching from public schools to factories, churches, and invading the private home through colorful posters and community lessons (as the Red Tents in Central Asia teaching people how to knead Russian breads and use the samovar for tea). The current bakery with the cat sleeping in the flour bags stands in stark opposition to the turn of the century Open-Air Schools movement, as France (Green 2011) and later other European countries aimed to cure Tuberculosis by developing new school architectures imagining children immersed “in a continuous bath of light and air” cured by the “microbicidal rays of the sun”: a program coordinated by the Ministry of Education and
the organization *l’Hygiene Par l’Example* (Exemplary Hygiene) to set up strict hygiene regulations at schools, which transitioned from being called “sanatorium” (therapeutic establishments) to “preventorium” preventing disease through good food, exercise, and access to nature. At that time in Bulgaria, it was mainly the big industrial factory owners that developed such school and treatment facilities, the most famous one being the “Ship in the Mountain,” which is indeed a lung-disease sanatorium and school built in the form of a ship on a hill above the city of Gabrovo, being the main center of factory industry and also intellectual life at the time.

While initially products of private philanthropy, these schools and sanatoria were nationalized under socialism and the social-democratic French regime, which later also develop a whole system of house for leisure (from similarly planned vacation facilities to community “houses of culture”, *maisons de la culture*, in France in the 1960s and the *dom na kutlurata* in Bulgaria, which were added to the already existing *chitalishte* as bigger and more impressive central cultural buildings). Strict hygiene was to be imposed in all these spaces, particularly visible in the dining hall arrangements in the vacation dormitories and in the houses of culture lacking kitchen spaces. Yet, for the private businesses preserved in France and tracing their heritage back generations there were always exceptions made as their practices were deeply embedded in local social and cultural habitus and locally-defined economic system of exchange.

Yet in Bulgaria, the disembeddedness of private enterprises (including bakeries) during socialism opened the way for the national hygiene to enter any food-producing facility, from the factory to the few local bakeries preserved as back-up in case of a nuclear war. And after socialism, the Bulgarian government kept the similar attitude of
passive subservience toward the top, whether before the Party directives or now the EU regulations. However, this opened spaces for frictions with local desires for certain foods, as the cases of Bulgarian and Portuguese cheese show how due to the laziness of local bureaucracies that did not leave space for traditional local products people were prompted to resort to various means in order to make their case before the hygiene authorities, such as struggling for the highest possible international recognition as UNESCO’s Living Human Treasures, or the case of the green cheese from a small Bulgarian village, awarded the Slow Food international cheese award and now finally reconsidered for approval as market product at the Bulgarian Ministry of Agriculture. Space for local products is usually reserved through the European Union’s Traditional Specialty Guaranteed trademark protection system, which introduces internationally recognized certifications for typical national food items, yet this also requires a lot of work on part of the Ministry of Agriculture and for now it mainly undertook this initiative for Bulgarian yogurt, now that the Greeks already placed the trademark on the feta cheese.

However, there could also be clashes between the Ministry of Agriculture’s trademark and local producers claiming to be producing traditional foods but in their own particular ways, since the system tries to systematize and formalize a practice that in many places had been home-centered and informal for centuries. Such is the intriguing case with Georgia, where along with my research on their remnants of the socialist houses of culture, I discovered that there was a large flux of immigration of Georgian bakers into Armenia, since the Armenians love the taste of Georgian bread mostly because it was always sold hot since it is baked on a dome oven (similar to the Indian tandoori) and its smell and crusty texture became contagious around Armenia with the
craving for juicy Georgian puri. Yet, the flux of bakers was countered by the Ministry of Agriculture, which applied with indignation for a EU trademark on the puri recipe and technique in order to make sure that Georgians outside the country were making the real product and not making fake claims. The Ministry reacts in an effort to cut the production of fake Georgina bread since the bread bakers in Armenia could otherwise product unhealthy and inauthentic Georgian cultural diplomacy through a puri bread flavor that is not real! At the same time, howeve, the author of an article for Eurasia net argues that such massive appearance of Georgina bakeries is informally changing the Armenian rivalry and antagosism against its neighbors, since in this case Georgia gets constantly, on a daily basis where sometimes people go a few times to the bakery in particular to get hot, fresh puri out of the tone oven, and so these regular trips and the soaking of streets in Yerevan with the aroma of hot Georgian bread is a subtle, perhaps subconsciously registered, way of establishing friendlier relations and bring closer the two neighboring cultures. 17

In Bulgaria, the taste and aroma of real bread also attracts people, in this case surprising not for the overcoming of cross-cultural barriers but for paying a price three times more than for regular bread and also having people order bread all the way from Sofia. However, despite his UNESCO recognition and the popular taste of his breads, Bogdan still struggles with occasional hygiene expection checks sent to his bread workshop by other competitor bread producers who keep trying to catch Bogdan in violation for using wood rather than the officially allowed metal. At the same time, it is interesting that the EU has left the food regulations quite flexible and interpretable

(precisely so that the gamut of French, Italian, Spanish and other rich cuisines can preserve all their local unique products), but these doors towards preserving heritage foods require creative and sensitive thinking and efforts on part of the authorities to open them so that the local producers can make use of this allowed freedom to maintain the particular. Since 1990 under the push of food sociologist Stephen Mennell, ERICarts, the European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, argued for a "European cultural food policy" as “an integral element of international cultural relations” and “an interesting, possibly even important addition to the set of policies of the EU and /or of the Council of Europe, UNESCO or the OECD, aiming at a closer European integration”\(^\text{18}\).

While in the case of small-scale traditional food production the authorities do not care to help but would rather support the massive production facilities through promoting national “food standards” like the Bulgarian National Standard “Stara Planina”, it is paradoxical that the multiple doors in laws are constantly being opened and kept open for the small group of ruling political and business elites. The corruption and law manipulation in Bulgaria is so wide-spread that it not only no longer obscured but politicians even openly joke about it, as a recent case when Bulgarian Minister of Finance Simeon Diankov come up on National TV and joked that when he asked his lawyer whether a certain procedure could pass the law, the lawyer corrected him that the right question to ask is not whether but how the law can be interpreted and bypassed to make anything happen. Indeed, the question for the people with power is “how,” never “if”!

In the European Union, there is an unwritten yet de facto hierarchy of power expressed in a hierarchy of hygiene shown in how the HASSEP hygiene standards

applied to public establishments were only forced on the former-socialist countries as a requirement for accession to the EU, reflecting as much a hierarchy of hygiene as hierarchies of power. Bodgan told me how he used to go to the hygiene authorities office with his UNESCO Living Human Treasure certificate in hand before the HASSEP authorities and on the wall of his bakery, yet he is always in the constant danger of fines from any new-coming bureaucrats who could override the weight of his symbolic capital of recognition as often the interpretation of the regulations ultimately depends on personal interpretation of the law and personal dispositions bordering corruption. Which hierarchy weighs more and which situations – the hierarchy of hygiene or the hierarchy of heritage – reflects the on-going struggles over value and meaning in the bewildering transition.

From the Iron Curtain to the Iron Cap

The Slow Food Movement in Bulgaria, led by a botanist researcher at the National Academy of Sciences, Dessislava Dimitrova, took up Bogdan’s claims along with the struggle of small cheese, meat, and vegetable and fruit producers to get the government to allow direct sales from local producers, as Bulgaria was the last in Europe to continue regulating sales only through third-party intermediaries that, of course, seriously cut the profits for producers. In addition to direct sales the issue also comes to traditional processes of production that cannot respond to the generic food standards. Similar to the symbolic capital of UNESCO’s recognition employed by Bogdas as a tool to fight
regulations, Dessislava hoped that the recognition of Slow Food of a kind of unique Bulgarian cheese called “green cheese” and produced in only one village in Bulgaria, the cheese having been given first award at the Global Slow Food Terra Madre food fair in Torino in October 2010, would serve as a symbolic capital to influence the Ministry of Agriculture to pass laws endorsing special production technologies for heritage foods. However, when she came to the Head of the Foods Section at the Ministry with the certificate and the cheese, Dessi was literally chased away with the angry warnings that she should not even mention the “stinky green cheese” which “should not at all exist in a civilized European country” which Bulgaria is aspiring hard to gain as an image, and bureaucrats often consider the easiest way to be direct adherence to rule dropped down by the EU rather than negotiation based on local specificities which is what most Western countries on-goingly do. “It is simply a matter of laziness and lack of concern for biodiversity: it is much easier to control when all is the same and complies with the exact same standards. It is easy, yes, but it is not interesting, it kills uniqueness!,” Dessislava commented19 with indignation when sharing this story during the Terra Madre Global Meeting.

The iron walls that Bogdan, Dessislava, and myself have been facing when dealing with bureaucratic categories reflect a deep institutional fear from lack of control. In fact, intriguingly Dessislava used the Iron Curtain metaphor claiming that while during Communism it was in front of people limiting their gaze beyond towards the West, now under capitalism the Iron Curtain became a de facto Iron Cover that works vertically rather than horizontally, not separating borders between nations as the Curatin but limiting local freedoms with ever more rigid national restrictions covering from above.

19 Interview with Dessislava Dimitrova, Turin, Italy, October 22, 2010.
and limiting people’s ability to grow spiritually in the stagnant situation of economic
hardship, competition, work exploitation, and rigid control on all sides. The EU and then
national bureaucrats imposed what I will call the Iron Cap of capitalist regulations,
contrasted with the Iron Curtain, based on people’s discourses on their sense of stagnancy
and rigid EU regulations, as well as limited access to large funds unless you have
personal connections, which leads to often result much less navigable than under the
supposedly centrally-planned socialism.fear that allowing dirt – in food, in the labels
(such as the EU labels on local food specificity tied to the French concept of terroirs,
ACO, as the ultimate locality of uniquely interconnected elements from soil to air and the
bacteria in fermentation), in the machines, on the documents sent to the EU – would
loose their control: in Mary Douglas’ (1975) words, the fear from “dirt” is the fear from
the time and space of obscurity and ambiguity. Food authorities, much like cultural
policy makers when giving money to a contemporary art performance, fear a constant
flexibility where neither the process nor the product are fully predictable (and, indeed,
green cheese sometimes comes out stinkier than other times!).

While the Bulgarian bureaucrats hide behind the EU legislation arguing that they
are simply implementing the rules “coming from above”, ecological lawyers who studied
the law in detail discovered small open doors leaving substantial freedom for the
countries to creatively allow and even encourage the production of traditional local foods,
which is precisely what Italy and France have mastered, not despite but alongside the
strict, homogenizing hygiene regulations for the mass-scale production facilities.
Bulgarian bureaucracy simply continues to think and act as it did under socialism, when
no one examined or questioned whatever trickled down from the top but directly put it in
place with eyes and ears shut, yet often with hands and mouths wide open for local bribing and corruption to make things work *despite*, not alongside, national regulations.

The lack of flexibility and sensitivity to cultural traditions characterizing the Bulgarian system of food control reminds the initial resistance at UNESCO’s ICH Assembly when dealing with the French gastronomy applications in 2008. Assisting the various meetings at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in the summer of 2008, I observed the elaborate bargaining processes between the ICH Commission and the French delegation, but from the position of power through the symbolic capital of its already internationally acclaimed cuisine and also leadership role in international cultural politics, France managed to convince the Commission to work with it to clarify on both sides the social and cultural meanings of gastronomy and help the applicant draft an application suitable to the Convention’s language. In Bulgaria, Bogdan also tried to argue with the authorities using the power of the symbolic capital of UNESCO’s recognition he fought over for months.

Place again, as in most policy discussions, was left out of the attention of policymakers, and place again, as in real life, turns out to be the key to the actual materialization of the ethical food movements as lifestyles in Bulgaria. The case of the non-existent “artisan bakery” category echoes with its silence the situation of the non-existent “community cultural center” category in the official global UNESCO cultural statistics, where there is paradoxically no notion of the spaces for voluntary arts, in-between the professional arts institutions, the libraries, and the arts schools. In a global economy driven mainly by symbolic capital, having categories – whether “artisan bakery

---

20 Interview with Alfonso Castellanos. September 23, 2009. Johannesburg, South Africa. World Summit on Arts and Culture, organized by the International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies, IFACCA.
[allowed to use wooden utensils]” or “community cultural center [allowed to produce food for collective use]” – as definitions of places and their corresponding – acceptably “pure” - practices and products are prerequisites for a healthy and publically-sanctioned public life. This is the reason why the blurriness of these categories in cultural and agricultural policies shows how the connection between food and culture – culture as the mix of tradition and modernity – is still an unthrodden path, which, nonetheless, more and more individuals and organizations get on to walk.

Related to the issues over the relation of place and the practice of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, I have previously noted how cultural transmission often depends on the existence of community spaces (cultural centers) to host the activities and frame them as leisure entertainment (key to attracting youth based on their contemporary lifestyle), a process which I have been referring to as house-guarding of the intangible heritage (Savova 2011c). Policy-makers rarely put efforts into developing such community-based, inconspicuous arts spaces, while many in the case of the former socialist countries simply forget or do not care that such places exist in big numbers scattered over their territories as “houses of culture” and need to be re-filled with meaning and social movement. One interesting way to imagine the animation of such community cultural centers with new meanings linked to food is examined below in the vision with which Carlo Petrini initiatied the Slow Food Movement.

**Slow Depletions: Humus – Humility – Humor – Humanity**

__________________________________________

210
A year before the Bread House cultural center was established in Gabrovo and joined the Slow Food Network, the first Slow Food event held across Balkan countries in October 2008\textsuperscript{21} was celebrated as the local convivia (communities of people sharing their love for or producing traditional foods) decided to share a common, traditional gesture to affirm their willingness to collaborate and to strengthen the Slow Food network in the previously war-torn region: breaking bread together! Throughout the region, it is a shared tradition to prepare a large loaf of bread when welcoming guests, as each guest is asked to break a piece and eat it with salt before entering the house where a celebration is taking place. During their Terra Madre Day celebrations, all the convivia from the Balkan countries performed this ritual: at the opening of an Earth Market at a farmers’ museum (Bucharest, Romania); when entering the schools engaged in education activities in Sofia (Bulgaria); on arrival at a traditional house for a dinner organized by the Gorazde Convivium (Bosnia) and many others. The Slow Food movement is growing rapidly and steadily in Eastern European countries (now counting more than 40 convivia), and convivium leaders from the region decided to increase their effectiveness by uniting and building common strategies and working together to hold a regional Terra Madre meeting together in Bulgaria in 2009, when the Bread House Cultural Center in Gabrovo joined the Network as a Convivium reviving the various bread recipes and rituals marked by the breaking of bread.

The house of bread in a sense became the spatial embodiment of the Pan-Balkan bread-breaking, the inheritor to carry regularly forward and on multiple occasions the traditional performative gesture enacted by the Balkan convivia the previous year. The symbolic capital of unity got hosted at a house where it could be further produced,

exchanged, and accumulated, as the Bread House model soon became one of the most distinguished initiatives not only in the Balkan network but also in the global Terra Madre Network, which in 2010 recognized the already international Bread Houses Network as one of the best practices in food heritage transmission and education in the world for its particular approach that brings together all generations and ethnic groups as well as actively links food-making with art-making activities.

To return back to Petrini speaking at the Sydney Opera about the connection between Italian community cultural centers and Slow Food, Petrini noted how the ArciGola “evolved from *eno-*gastronomic local movement in Piemonte to an *eco-*gastronomic global movement”, as it extended beyond food as a combination of material ingredients to the whole immaterial life-style and values nourished by food cultivation, production, consumption, and exchange (indeed, *diaita* as argued by the UNESCO-recognized Mediterranean diet). Petrini noted, however, a key paradox resulting from the fast living and the fast food trends around the world: “Normally, ‘we’ are the subject, ‘eat’ is the verb, ‘food’ is the object. The paradox is that the subject-verb-object relation is now reversed: *food is eating us!* [emphasis added]”, Petrini pointed to the ways massive food production, genetically modified foods, and economies of scale around the world destroy the planet, kill 5 to 6 species of fruit or vegetable every day, deplete water and soil, and erase whole cultural groups. What humanity lacks, Petrini noted, is humility.

Humility comes from “humus”: humble person is someone close to the earth. Slow Food supports humble people! When you meet an arrogant person, it is clear that this person is far away from the earth!
Bringing these arguments back to the discourse of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church against the GM foods as ultimate expressions of lack of humility - and the emphasis on slow food and life in the Orthodox Liturgy with a whole set of practices that can be defined as *Slow Food Christianity* - “humility” in the discourse of the global Slow Food Movement comes again as a discourse on the relation between man and nature, culture and agriculture, ultimately the relations between *habitus* and the *humus*.

A year later after the speech in Sydney, I heard Petrini’s words about humility and humus echoed and further developed (independently from one another) in the ideas of Spanish design professor Carlos Jimenez. Jimenez elaborated on the cross-connections between humus, humility, humor, and humanity as four key resources in sustainable community development. Arguing that two of the main issues with ecological degradation include arrogance (lack of humility) that is leading to exploitation, rather than needed use, of resources, and particularly linked to humus is the rapid depletion of humus in soils around the world due to massive plantations of genetically modified plants. Without realizing it, Carlos struck a sensitive cord in Bulgarian society, as only a few months earlier Bulgaria was shaken by massive protests against the proposed law to legalize planting GMO\(^2\) in which I also took an active stand and spoke on national media about my personal observations on lands, cultures, and human lives destroyed by GMO in India, Brazil, Ethiopia, and Mexico. It was precisely in the context of the discussions around GMO and humus depletion in Bulgaria that the virtue of “humility” was also widely conjugated but this time on behalf of the Orthodox Church that for the

---
\(^2\) The EU officially allows two types of GMO, maize (corn) and one type of potato, to be farmed in the EU territory. There are currently 5 EU member states where they grow GMO crops: Romania, Czech, Slovakia, Portugal, and Spain.
first time took such an active stand against a political issue. According to the Church precisely the lack of humility in all areas of life caused the massive global problems, from ecological catastrophes to armed conflicts, poverty, human trafficking, and drug and alcohol abuse. We will further examine the connections between humus and humility as metaphors as well as guiding moral principles in Bulgarian society, but let us first return to the Slow Food Movement and examine another movement I will refer to below as the *Slow Movement of Food*.

Jimenez developed his ideas during one of the workshops within the First International Summer School on Arts and Sciences for Sustainability in Social Transformation23 held in Gabrovo, Bulgaria, in August 2010 and co-organized by Cultura 21 and the International Council for Cultural Centers (which I currently preside). A few of the ASSIST workshops were held at the Bread House cultural center, where experts from 20 countries and 6 continents were brainstorming about ways to connect art and ecology in innovative methods of approaching sustainability. In the workshop I led on the ways in which street food animates and adds flavor to public spaces, the participants from Cambodia, India, and Indonesia became very much involved sharing personal stories from their particularly rich street food traditions, and together we then launched informally the *Slow Fast Food Network*24, which is currently an online platform of exchange for anything related to street food as an art form and a way of life and, most importantly, co-existence facilitating social relations across economic classes and ethnic groups. It is precisely street food that I will explore here below, rooted in ethnographic data I gathered in Cuba and Brazil.

Street food, though often negatively looked down on as “fast food”, could be re-considered “slow food” within the values promoted by Slow Food International in the sense that it often is perceived as traditional local food and also it has a particular benefit to society as it brings strangers closer together with its aromas, colors, and tastes. Street food can intriguingly bring shoulder to shoulder people from diverse classes around the common, make-shift space (whether a cart, bicycle, or just a tray) and thus enables a unique form of public, street “commensality” where people do not necessarily share a physical table but do exchange smiles, emotions, humor, regular chats and even long-term friendships.

Globally, the Slow Food Movement of “eco-gastronomy”\(^\text{25}\) has been a driving force for the so-called “virtuous globalization” appealing to a humanity that has been (often unnoticeably) driven away from the simple habits of eating and living slowly placing commensality as a central social ritual. Inverting the Movement’s name, I will call the phenomenon of ambulant food vendors the Slow Movement of Food, where the slow movements of street food carts across the streetscapes and the related taste and soundscapes they create all coalesce in a peculiar, alternative attitude towards public space and social relations. Paradoxically, ready-to-take or quickly made-on-the-spot street food is often seen by adherents to the Slow Food Movement as its precise enemy, and, indeed, people are not likely to eat street food during prolonged periods of

commensality – and, quite practically, in street food very rarely there is a common table to share.

However, there is a different issue at stake here and it is one not about the speed of eating but of the social distance that food reconfigures between people and public space and between people and other people. Cutting radically the physical and symbolic socio-economic gap between the vendor/maker of food and the consumer has its particular contribution to the “virtuous globalization,” since it starts with a virtuous localization of people connecting ever more to their street, their neighborhood, their city which, through the food shared in public, become ever more personalized and internalized. It is here, in the passing of hot acarajé from hand to hand, that street food interactions challenge the anomie of public space - with delicious taste even if not with elegant eating manners. Street food is its own implicit “social coexistence” project.

People often know their street food vendor by name. Under the influence of tourism and the on-going discourses about intangible cultural heritage, Brazilians for example are more and more willing to consume street foods as a ritualistic return to “heritage” that their healthy, clean, and refined lifestyles do not allow to be “lived” daily but heritage that is needed as a charger of identity and belonging to a place – as the living and life-giving substance of the “art of placemaking” (Flemming) - to the city of Salvador that smells and tastes like a succulent fritter (acaraje). Munching on the same food and yet all seemingly different in dress and background, bunches of strangers often engaged in all kinds of improvised conversations: if the tempting smell had not stopped them for the few minutes to savor a bite and a petty talk, people would have otherwise kept on
fleeting down the street for work or back home with hardly any sense of connection to either place or its inhabitants.

The few minutes of street food-centered interactions coalesce in interesting instances of what Victor Turner (2002) called “spontaneous communitas,” in relation to the new sociabilities formed in the liminal, undefined state when previous social boundaries are diluted. Turner focuses much on Carnival26, but in Santiago de Cuba and Salvador, not only their Carnivals but the more regular dynamics of moving street food which I will broadly refer to as ambulant culinary kinaesthetics (though not always ambulant as the carts are sometimes parked – see more on kinaesthetics in the public space in Savova 2009).

Researching the Cuban casas de la cultura, I discovered intriguing ways in which people were translating UNESCO’s cultural terms and employing the symbolic capital of global cultural discourses on “intangible cultural heritage” and tailoring the international frames to address local issues by naming “heritage” practices that do not quite fit UNESCO’s standard definitions. The Cuban Ministry of Culture conducted research (through inquiries mostly channeled through the network of the houses of culture) to discover what people viewed as their most cherished “intangible heritage”, and it turned out to be herbal medicine and traditional food recipes. This national recognition brought along a whole national program carried out by the local houses of culture to seek and engage the local curanderos (traditional healers) as well as local food recipes and traditional ritual/festive food-related practices. In particular in Santiago de Cuba, the house of culture addressed the art-food-politics issue of the pregoneros street food.

vendors, whose trade was limited by the state as a ‘private business,’ but was re-vindicated through the Pregón Festival in Santiago de Cuba that helped ‘legalize’ the practice not as street trade but as a form of “intangible cultural heritage” or the art of selling by inventing food-related humorous songs.

My journey with the ambulant food songs, which surprising arrived at the end at the municipal House of Culture, began in the small house hosting the foco cultural (cultural focal spot/center) of the Tivoli Carnaval group in Santiago de Cuba. This small, colourful place with unique character was perched on top of a hill in the mythical Tivoli neighborhood, cradle of French café concerts started by the French colonizers who came to Cuba form Haiti and the former home of the now-long-gone Mercado del Tivoli that nurtured the tradition of the vivacious pregones, ambulant street food vending songs. One evening, walking back from a practice with Luis, the saxophone player, we heard someone singing about the mango he was selling. Luis smiled and said:

The pregón shows you how agriculture is inseparable from culture [meaning the arts]. Both nourish you, in different but complementary ways.

Luis’ big loves in life were music, food, and nature. Since the pregón for him embodied the union of the three, a year before I met him he had done an ambulant performance together with Bertha La Pregonera, the most famous food vendor and pregón singer in the city. Luis had crafted a beautiful cart overflowing with fruit and vegetables, and strolled around Santiago with Bertha singing and him playing his saxophone during the Carnaval days. I would have never found out about this project and shifted my whole research focus on street food vendors and their invisible art of place-
making and community building, had I not walked with Luis and heard a mango pregón in the twilight of Santiago. Ethnographic vagaries take us interesting places, and it is usually the winding paths to them that show well how the multiple spheres of life that Western thought has so neatly tried to compartmentalize, from economics to the arts, actually cross, overlap, and form integrated – and certainly complex – systems.

The merry pregones, though a few traditional singing vendors remain today, break routine apathy by producing smiles wherever they walk. Almost every person I asked about the pregón – more than a hundred people, from government officials to artists, sanitary workers and academics to anyone in the street – often laughed and many actually sang me an improvised pregón. The food song touched memories of vendors’ songs, sounds, ringing bells, shouts, and the floating aromas that woke people up with the sensation that they knew where they were, where they came from, and how and why they belonged to that particular place. These people lamented the waning of the pregón tradition – no young vendors ever really sing anymore - and dreamed of its revival. But revive it how?

Maria, an enthusiastic woman working at the Municipal Department of Culture, had the passion to stimulate the pregón singing among young people, and after a lot of struggles to get her idea across the authorities she managed to start organizing an annual Festival del Pregón. The Festival brought together dozens of real-life pregoneros and that many more amateurs from the casas de cultura (community cultural centers) to

---

27 Intriguingly, ice-cream vendors differ from the others in that they apply bells and not so much shouting/songs, and they apply bells in other cultures as well, such as Germany, India, and Turkey, to mention a few personal experiences. Perhaps, since ice-cream is generally targeted at children, it is the bell ring that somehow more distinctly draws their attention from their games.

28 Interview conducted by Nadezhda Savova on June 22, 2007, Municipal Department of Culture, Santiago de Cuba.
participate in public parades with colourfully decorated food carts and baskets. Though the difficult economic situation in Cuba made the event ever smaller, people still remember its delicious festiveness and pregoneros talk about it as the sublime moment of public recognition of their work as “art” and “heritage” (*patrimonio*).

Such state-organized festivals are controversial productions of controlled public culture. It is often an artificial manner to “culturalize” a lived practice that spontaneously came into being and turn it into a structured “spectacle.” It is, indeed, the inverted process of what Elizabeth Povinelli (2002) calls “the cunning of recognition,” where indigenous Australians needed to perform before the state a set of cultural heritage practices in order get their land rights – and with them, their space, time, and mode of being and presence – recognized. “The cunning of recognition” in the case of the *pregón* is one not of bottom-up solicited but top-down awarded recognition in the hope of symbolically adding value to a tradition and its unique values and sensations that connect deeply – “through the senses” - the residents of Santiago with their city, as Maria emphasized.

It is important to think the State conceptualization of “tradition,” “people,” and most of all “sustainability of practice” before the agentive possibility where recognition is collective and empowering, when the people start re-evaluating and finding meaning in what was taken for granted. What does this process of recognition disable and enable? Certainly, the State has its own need for legitimacy, and while the Festival was certainly one of many public attempts to do precisely that by bringing “popular revelry,” it also became an important stimulus for the *pregón*, as many pregoneros told me they used to look forward to the event all year round. The problem, however, was precisely that it was an *event, a festival*, and not an ongoing project of revival of the tradition, through, let’s
say, the *casas de cultura* which could have organized seminars and even workshops for old *pregoneros* to teach youth. In fact, when Bertha the Pregonera approached the Casa de Cultura of her village of Caney to organize a workshop, the authorities decided it did not fit their scheme of methodological classes.

Street food vending certainly has its politics and its economics, as much as it has its art and spices. While in Santiago officials organize the *Festival del Pregón*, in Habana selling is purposefully made difficult for street food vendors who have to have a special permit to sell in the tourist-demarcated zones. Perhaps initiatives such as that of the Bangladesh and Sri Lankan governments to provide energy sources for cooking in the street (Chowdhury, N.A., S. Llyanarachchi, and L. Tedd, 2001) can teach other bureaucratic minds that generating *culinary kinaesthetics* is important to urban vitality, and energy sources could be not only plugs for electricity, but festivals reviving the ambulant food vending that has already disappeared in many parts of the world, in particular in its most beautiful form of improvised singing.

If conceptualized as a sustainable project – with a certain dose of economic thinking always needed in cultural policy as far as the stimulation of self-sustained local practices - the public intervention in the case of the Cuban *pregón* could have, indeed, functioned as interesting counterbalance of a pervading “free market” pragmatics where selling is not an art, except perhaps the fairly impersonal art of marketing and cheating, and singing to and about food is seen as bordering lunacy. Most studies done on street food vendors relate explicitly to economics – and certainly not singing - either in the informal sector economics, focused on alternative markets and their alternatives to state
regulations (Almeida 1996; Cattani 1996; Ghersi 2007) or the issues of food safety and health.

These last points echo with the Western organic food movement that is less related to actual environmental concerns and rather symptomatic of a “phobic relation to the other, to an ‘external’ implicitly perceived as poisoning or poisoned” (Mieli 1999: 172). This Western phobia of touching others or touching food that others have touched with hands before us is clearly sensed in the lack of street food in Western European and American streets, or the fact that the street food available comes mainly from immigrants from third-world countries striving to survive (or bypass) the hygiene regulations. Street food in the West has gotten ever more dependent not only on food hygiene regulations as well as public space and order regulations, but also on technology and the ever wider use of particular technology (custom-made caravans, ice-cream fridge carts, hot-dog grill carts, doughnut frying machines, etc.), as potential street food vendors in the West progressively consider street food as intrinsically dependent on purchasing particular equipment rather than creatively combining available utensils, materials, and cooking devices as done in Third-world countries, where usually vendors use their own home kitchen equipment taken into the public. Intriguingly, the increased mechanization of street food in the West is also reflected as a trend in the increased use of raw milk vending machines which has been crafted as a supposed way to support the organic food trends and allow small milk producers to sell their milk to urban consumers, however it cuts ever more the personal connection with the food producers that the organic food activists (including the Slow Food Movement) argue is a key point in regaining the overall organic, slow way of life. It these dynamics, street food technology and hygiene
regulations interestingly play against notions of tradition and heritage as well as a particular kind of “cultural intimacy” – enjoyment taken in breaking the rules of hygienic eating by venturing into food that has dubious qualities – sensed in the words and reactions of many of the street food consumers I observed.

I spent a total of two months in Cuba and two in Brazil observing daily interactions and involvements with street food, and noticed how often Western Europeans and North Americans expressed disgust at the greasy hand of the Bahian (Brazilian) woman handing them the fried *acaraje* or the direct refusal to eat any of the cooked street food that was to be consumed in a plate and with utensils that the women had brought to the street from their private homes. In fact, sharing at the Ministries of Culture in both countries while interviewing experts and attending seminars I observed usual surprise or straightforward disgust at my courage to consume something so “unclean” and “dangerous”, employing the terms usually used by the respective country elites. Nonetheless, I often saw man and women in formal work attire to enjoy listening to the *pregón* in the street and buying cut mangoes from the street carts, or munching on the acaraje after work, sometimes accompanied with a light gesture untangling the tie and with loud laughter and comments about work or the food itself being “unhealthy, but so good”.

For some people from higher social classes who did not need to consume street food for economic reasons, street food became the tool, the place, and the time for liberation from formal schemes of behavior, etiquette, and communication. At the same time it was intriguing to note similar reactions in some foreigner tourists who found street food to be a major challenge and adventure that they were putting an effort to embark on and that usually ended with exhilaration from the simultaneous stimulation of the senses and the
deconstruction of social norms. From the street food carts to the improvised kitchens inside the community cultural centers, rather than examining food-sharing around the private dining table in the nuclear family, which is a common research field in the anthropology of food, the above cases of the liminal “third food places” beyond home and work open up new questions and ways to comprehend intangible cultural heritage, continuity, and change as negotiated through perhaps the most bodily immediate – indeed, embodied – cultural traditions: food.
CHAPTER 4

Contested Commensalities:
Communion and Community around the Table
(The case of the Bread House Cultural Center, Bulgaria)

Tables of Confluence and Conflict

It was a hot evening, August 21st, 2011, at the Bread House Cultural Center in Gabrovo. It was one of the regular Saturday evenings, which, since December 2009, had been bringing diverse people to come to make, bake, and break bread together. Nikolina, an economist from Sofia working for a large international surveys think-tank, had learned about the Bread House on the Internet while searching for hands-on things to engage beyond her intellectual work. Inspired by the idea, she decided for the special event of her best friend’s daughter’s wedding to travel with her family more than 300 kilometers to Gabrovo to make a ritually-decorated bread together with strangers of different ages – strangers with the potential to become literal and symbolic “companions” (indeed, as etymologically analyzed from Latin, people with whom one shares, “com,” bread, “panis”).
The Bread House began as a simple idea out of my interlocutors’ craving for fresh bread, which is currently hard to find in Bulgaria because most bread is sold packaged in supermarkets. It is through their talk that I started imagining the difference it could make if the *chitalishte* cultural centers started smelling like hot bread. I was led to inquire about this situation by people’s comparisons, metaphors, and complaints about the lack of good, artisan-made bread in Bulgaria after the decades of socialist bread factories. In people’s craving for hot, fresh, hand-made bread, I started unpacking the power of this charged cultural symbol, rooted in both the Orthodox Christian ritual breads and in the wide variety of daily rituals, superstitions, and idioms employing bread.

In this chapter I explore how place can change an ordinary daily practice into a special, extraordinary experience, and then how adding the possibility for engaging the different senses in new combinations and within a new spatial and social context can further change acceptable categories and redraft social dynamics. For example, why are people willing to work out in a gym with other people rather than doing the same thing alone at home, when it would save them money and time for travel? Why would people who do not like to cook at home enjoy taking cooking classes? What transforms an activity from a chore into a pasttime and leisure?

In the case of collective bread-making being invented as a new kind of communal event and an ambiguous mixture of tradition (artisanal bread-making) and modernity (workshop, discussion, and group therapy dynamics), I analytically approach these gatherings through the conceptual framework of ritual analysis, grounded in the classical works of Durkheim ([1912] 1995) on “collective effervescences.” I will explore how rituals are invented, produced, and evolve when there is a special space destined for them
— such as the chitalishte cultural center and, in the case of the Bread House, a chitalishte with a wood-fired oven and a kneading table. Do the sensorial experiences in that space trigger dormant individual and collective memories, and what do these mean in people’s daily lives? Do these experience create and nurture the production of new collective memories and invented traditions, and again what are some of the meanings of these new rituals?

Furthermore, I started wondering why: “If people of all ages and professions in Bulgaria get so excited talking and thinking about hot bread, then why do they choose to engage in this particular activity collectively rather than just bake bread at home? Finally, on the basis of the heated debates at UNESCO concerning whether French, Mediterranean, and Mexican cuisines qualify for protection as intangible heritage why was food never explicitly mentioned in the ICH Convention, particularly since “culinary arts” as field of study is not officially included as a subject in arts schools and arts departments? If people value food so much as an experience, as a medium of socialization, and as an expression of creativity and care, why is food absent from the formal artistic discourse and praxis, both at the level of professional arts and organized community arts networks?

The fact that in the special spaces destined to preserve “culture” — the chitalishte in Bulgaria or “houses of culture” in other countries - kitchens were missing as much as tables around which to share food, shows the narrow vision of the state as to what constitutes the notion of “culture,” limited to modern and traditional (“folk”) cultural expressions. Even when food is central to “culture” in the minds of Bulgarians and most people around the world, this lack of factoring food as an element to be exchanged in the
houses of culture is thus a kind of an indicator to measure the degrees of separation and friction between the state and the local, community-rooted notions and practices of “culture”.

The socialist Ministries of Culture around the world, impacted heavily by the Soviet vision, viewed culture as mostly limited to three areas: professional arts; cultural and historic heritage sites, thus tangible cultural heritage; and “folk” culture, which was often choreographed according to the professional stage aesthetics and thus far from the recent, UNESCO-led emphasis on living intangible cultural heritage.

This Soviet notion of culture started being redrafted only after the 1957 so-called Socialist Cultural Revolution when the new period after Stalin’s death tried to rethink “culture” as people’s whole way of life, including more and more cooking classes and home economics classes in Poland and East Germany (see Kyril Kounakovitch, Princeton history dissertation in progress), yet again in didactic and controlling terms rather than letting informal celebrations take place.

In Bulgaria, many of my interlocutors recollected with fondness the diverse activities and the vibrancy of social life inside the chitalishte, which in their words seem to not have been as heavily under control and censure as in the Soviet Union. At the same time, a noticeable comment related to socialism in Bulgaria related to smell in two seemingly separate domains. One smell that was widely commented was the bad smell of the chitalishte (cold and moldy) both during socialism and at present times, where the smell for many was an indicator of the few changes or of the negative changes taking place in the chitalishte and, as often people took the chitalishte as an larger epitomy, of Bulgarian society in general. The second type of smell came up in many conversations
with a sense of nostalgia, as people were missing the aroma of hot bread in the streets from the last years of Communism, when hot bread was delivered at certain times from the factories and thus children were sent ot get the bread at the exact time when it was still fresh (even if not the same sourdough that was made in Bulgaria before the factories were built).

Based on these recurring discourses about the same kinds of smells becoming at times speech tropes, I started wondering whether introducing the bread aroma and bread-making as an activity at a cultural center would make people come more to it? And how would their use of space and their relations with each other change when the multiple senses are engaged?

This chapter is organized in three main sections that trace issues about meaning-making and identity formation, or why and how do people come together to experience collective rituals, which I examine through the issues and practices negotiated and enacted within and around the Bread House: 1) exploring the process of establishing the Bread House as a process of making a private home public, which is a process different from the process I examined at the Bistritsa chitailshte in Sofia with the UNESCO recognized Bistritsa Babi group, where I was examining how through informal practices off and behind the stage people were domesticating (privatizing) the public house of culture, whereas in the case of the Bread House I experienced the reverse process of making public the home, or the publicization of private space; and 2) exploring the various inter-generational and cross-gender dynamics triggered by collective bread-making as evolving leisurely activity and somewhat sacred ritual (when making festive church breads), which opened up intriguing questions about gender roles – and indeed,
provoked the redrafting of gender dispositions and performances of the self; and 3) exploring the negotiations over religion and religious identities and practices around and through bread as the central symbol and praxis in the partaking of the Christian Communion (Eucharist), opening multiple questions about “community” linked to the notion of “oikonomia” as the ultimate system of love as governing principle above “law” in social relations.

Building the Bread House: Volunteering as Gift Exchange

Led by my questions about smell, senses, and space as factors in the developing of identities and sense of belonging, I ceded my great-grandmother’s house for collective use as a test ground for a volunteer-run chitalishte that we called the Bread House cultural center. Surprisingly it grew into an international network across five continents as other people and organizations started hearing about this very simple but successful method of bringing people together. By that time, I had discovered in the ways people talked and behaved that one of the central problems and reasons for low activity at many of the chitalishte consisted in the fact that many buildings smelled badly of mold and humidity as people both in Bulgaria and at other houses of culture I have visited across other former socialist countries (Croatia, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Hungary, Poland, East Germany, and Cuba) often pointed to the communist-time red carpets placed over linoleum floors and both having a very particular smell, as they were both most likely produced in the same place, due to the Soviet Block’s distribution of specialized production hubs in each country, and then distributed just like the same detergents used
to clean the carpets and the floors. People also often noted how the building lacked warmth in both temperature and decoration, noting the grey walls on the inside and on the outside of the houses, which is the reason why so many chitalishte administrations focused explicitly on remodeling works and repainting their buildings after the fall of socialism, similar to the way Brazilians and Cubans placed importance on the colors of the walls of their *pontos de cultura* and *casas de la cultura*. But ever more so than lacking colors and having bad smells, people noted how the cultural centers lacked pleasant smells whenever there would be a food festival or an event or simple rehearsal accompanied by food! The comments about “how nice the room smells” and “it feels at home here” are usually linked to experiences of smells, which in the case of the Bread House became an intrinsic element of the experience, and even in the summer when it would be too hot to fire the oven, people still pleaded to bake bread in the oven, willing to support the heat for the sake of the hot bread aroma.

The importance of the somatic *feel* of the *chitalishte* for Bulgarians could be read and sensed in the ways in which people described going to church not as a social act of affirming belonging to a community at Sunday services – in fact, still few people go to services - but as a work-day activity, when people often stop by churches before or after work or during lunch breaks “just to soak up the atmosphere,” as a common expression goes. The people at the Bread House, as well as many other Bulgarians I have interacted with, would define the church’s “pleasant church “atmosphere” through the aroma of incense and the visual warmth of fire from the burning candles, and some of people’s comments echo the smell-based spiritual experiences examined by Susan Ashbrook Harvey (2006) in *Scenting Salvation*. While the officials at the Ministry of Culture and
the administrators of those chitalishte where greyness and coldness were prevalent (here I summarize impressions from about 30 chitalishte across the country) complained that they did not know why and how to address the ever decreasing number of people joining workshops and groups, it became clear to me that the sensorial starvation at the chitalishte and the sensorial stimulus at competing leisure spaces such as movie theaters and malls, full of shiny colors and fast food aromas, was one key factor in the poverty of human interactions at some chitalishte. Indeed, the chitalishte I found successful in creating vibrant communities around them often had colorful walls, plants, and, again, an improvised kitchen for various informal interactions.

Similar to Bogdan’s struggles to get the production of traditional bread allowed in the traditional space for it explored in another chapter – on wooden boards and not in fridges - issues of art, food, and hygiene evolved across the community cultural centers I was studying in Cuba, Brazil, and Bulgaria, as people struggled to develop kitchen spaces inside their centers, where kitchens were never planned as part of official arts programs. Bogdan’s bureaucratic bargains, however, ended up speaking directly to the issues I personally faced with the Bread House chitalishte.

The Bread House evolved in my mind as the idea of a chitalishte cultural center but one suffused with a particular aroma, unusual for an art center but constantly talked about and loved by all: the smell of hot bread. Sharing this image with local people I observed how the mouth-watering images of hot bread inspired people to want to contribute, everyone in their own different way, and this is how in just a month people of various walks of life joined efforts to get the space ready despite the below-zero temperatures: one man volunteered to build a wood-fire oven, others painted the walls,
others donated old home furniture, others cleaned and brought the other workers warm food, etc. The son of a priest, Vassil, even gave me an object of high symbolic value and emotional importance for him: one of his father’s church bread stamps (wood-carved round pieces with religious inscriptions on them, usually saying *IC XC NI KA*, or Jesus Christ Nika meaning Christ the Victorious in Greek and traditionally placed on Liturgical/Eucharistic and holiday breads).

Vassil’s hand trembled as he was handing me the old stamp, pierced by the small holes of termites drilling in it for decades and still bearing vestiges of dough from the multiple time it was used for the church services his father had served in his life. Clasping my hand and the stamp in-between our two palms, he said while looking at the stamp and as if talking to himself:

I simply hope the Bread House will help tradition be passed on from generation to generation, the same way families used to pass it on at the home when the mother would give the bread stamp to the daughter at her marriage. It is so simple, but if we lose it, if we stop using the stamps, we will lose our spirit! I want to see people use these stamps again…here, use them!

Many others gave to the Bread House old objects of important historic and emotional value yet objects that they would not put to use anymore but that could be used and animated at the Bread House. A young carpenter, friend of the people rebuilding the roof, gave as a gift an almost two-hundred year old through (big wooden bread bowl), saying that he had kept it as a memory from his great-grandparents but he knew his kids would never use it to make bread. At the official opening of the Bread House, however, he was amazed to see his daughter use the old through by dipping her hands in the flour
for the first time in her life, laughing with her teenage friends in the company of about forty other strangers from all generations. The carpenter exclaimed with enthusiasm:

I never expected my daughter to make bread, at home we could never get her in the kitchen but here it is all so much fun for her…and to all these other young people! It’s amazing!

The carpenter’s comments point to the particular social dynamics propelled and produced by having a specifically-destined public space to engage in the living of tradition and to open the possibility for co-creation. When tradition, whether harvest songs or making one’s daily bread, is no longer lived on a daily basis as a regular part of people’s routine, it requires its particular places for re-creation, where cultural centers operate along much the same logic as in why we have gyms to help us keep fit now that we do not work the fields anymore and physical exercise is limited, or the way we have TV sets now that we no longer have the fire-place/hearth in the center of our living room and an engine for story-telling and conversations. Thus, the specific destination of the Bread House as a space for the preservation but also re-living of tradition inspired people to bring a variety of objects, memories, and stories that seemed to fit the place – now that they did not fit the people’s own modern homes – and also the practices that it was meant to promote.

The various acts of giving to the Bread House, however, were not perceived or talked about as “volunteerism” or “civil society activism” but “simply giving,” a way in which they expressed an agency that had been taken from people under socialism when volunteer work was centrally planned, organized, and imposed on people. Furthermore, at the Bread House intriguing dynamics started occurring when at every collective event it was lower-income people that tended to bring more food and contribute more time and
even more money. In fact, the two most significant cases involve the two people who ended up being most committed to the Bread House: Kalin, a sculptor in his mid-twenties, and Iva, a shop-vendor in her mid-thirties. Kalin often had no pocket money for the month and depended on selling his sculptures in galleries in other towns, and yet contributed enormous amounts of time and effort to fixing the Bread House which he considered “an epitomy for a common home”. Iva, on her side, was living on 300 lev (150 euro) a month, donated the huge for her standards sum of 500 lv which she had been saving for years! Furthermore, Iva assumed such sense of ownership of the Bread House that she would come in every week to clean, to water the flowers, she donated hand-embroidered pieces from her grandmother to decorate the bread-making table.

On various occasions Iva shared with me that taking care of the Bread House made her feel happy because of a “sensation of purpose,” of being “useful and appreciated and loved by others,” and of “contributing to something larger and socially beneficial” outside of her mechanical work as a grocery shop vendor. Other low-income or unemployed people would always come with an edible gift – or, as a Bulgarian expression says, “never come with empty hands” considered an extreme sign of rudeness and stinginess - usually a cheap or home-made food that included home jams or pickles still typically made in households across the country and employed mainly as a vehicle for hospitality and gift-giving (see more on home pickles employed in hospitality in Moldova in Jennifer Cash 2011), which points not only to a behavior in which giving affirms and legitimates a sense of self-worth but also the bringing of food marks how people’s relationship to the Bread House remained for a while mainly associated with me as the owner of the house, treated as someone’s “private home”.

_____________________________
At the same time, many people felt uncomfortable gathering at the Bread House when I was not around as they referred to it as “my house” and thus not feeling comfortable “opening the house when the host is not there.” The fine line between private and public space was this constantly being re-negotiated at the Bread House and a lot of the process of appropriation of the space by the local people was channeled through their investment or perceived contribution to the space through volunteer work, time, financial contributions, or food giving and sharing.

Indeed, these gift exchanges spurred a surprising amount of local participation in rebuilding and then animating the space, and, in fact, revealed a process of collective action – what local NGOs labeled “civil society building” using the pre-packaged project language from grant applications – yet it really was a re-enactment of a practice – what UNESCO would label as “re-creation of intangible cultural heritage” – of what people used to do together before socialism (and the oldest people coming to the Bread House still recollected those times): coming together, without the government initiating or financing the initiative as well as without the present-day NGO grants and EU project funding – previously analyzed as the aesthetics of the project imaginary - but collecting money and donating labor, gifts, food, and time to the co-creation of a collective home for creativity. It is intriguing that while on many levels Bulgarian habitus in the 19th century seemed still to be preoccupied with individual and close-family survival from Ottoman attacks – physically sensed in the high stone walls (duvar) surrounding each house to protect it from the outside intrusion – at the same time Bulgarians also engaged

---

29 It was intriguing to observe the appropriation of and creation of a communal space during the spring of 2012 at the MIMA Studio Cultural Center in Brooklyn where there entitlement to domestification was channeled through membership (100$ per month) and in the American context such clear-cut monetary form of belonging and, indeed, “entitlement” which has not translation in Bulgarian as a concept, was much more appropriate culturally than it was or would have been in the Bulgarian context.
in a collective effort to preserve their language, religion, and cultural traditions through education and creativity open to all age groups as in the case of the various mixed age and gender music/singing groups, and later small theater troupes.

**Domesticating the House and Making Public the Home**

After the *chitalishte* got co-opted by the socialist state to become a quasi-state body, retaining a hybrid legal status as a “citizen-run organization” but ultimately funded, censored, and controlled by the state, cultural officials decided that it was time to establish clear and clean, so as easier to control, parameters of *what* and *how* the *chitalishte* was supposed to do for the people. The *chitalishte*, like all the “houses of culture” across the socialist world though it pre-dated them and was rooted in a non-state-run context, were meant to serve the regime by showcasing in mini versions and at the local level the overall national concept of heritage and identity, which required folklore to be cleansed from its religious content and staged as a performance of the state’s cultural richness and achievements and at the same time the state’s institutional support for popular creativity (see Kaneff 2004). This was a perfect case of monopsony (from Ancient Greek monos ("single") + *opsōnia* ("purchase")), which defines a market form in which only one buyer faces many sellers thus imposing imperfect competition, similar to a monopoly, where only one seller faces many buyers. As the only purchaser of a good or service, the "monopsonist," in the case of socialism the state, may dictate terms to its suppliers in the same manner that a monopolist controls the market for its buyers, which is case often happening with economies of scale rising in the capitalist system. The
economic term and dynamic is relevant to the economy of cultural products and in particular an economy where these products are not necessarily ascribed monetary value but rather, as in the case of the state “buying” cultural performances so as to offer them for free to the general public, it was dictating the context and form of both the performances and the places where folklore was to be performed or rehearsed.

The similar situation occurred with cultural workers and artists being employees, who kept joking that they were “pretending to be working as much as the state was pretending to be paying wages,” but the same dynamic transferred to democracy when the wages for public institutions remained the lowest in the European Union particularly for teachers, cultural workers, social workers, and doctors (with monthly wages ranging between 350 USD for teachers and about 600 USD for doctors!): paradoxically, those who would be expected to work most directly with developing the human capital of the nation. Monopsony is the case of the state functioning as a main employer, for example in Bulgaria where it is the main employer of doctors and teachers and thus the state can dictate the absurdly low wages compared to the USA where there are many private employers.

The cleansing of folklore however also meant cleansing the space of gatherings and celebrations that were informal, messy, and potentially disruptive, and eating and drinking in particular opened space for criticizing the status quo and forging strong social ties that could escape control. Such dangerous commensalities that were personalizing and domesticating the formal “house of culture” had to be hidden. However, despite the official aversion towards food in the context of the arts at the chitalishte, informal food-centered gatherings nevertheless took place in the back rooms behind the stage of the
*chitalishte,* and people in Bulgaria and Cuba often recollect with fondness the circulations of jokes and songs subverting the regime paradoxically inside the regime-sponsored houses: a dynamic that still occurs to a certain extent in Cuba, when youth hip-hop groups rehearse and perform songs that are critical of the status quo inside the state-supported *casas de la cultura* (see more in Fernandez 2006).

In Bulgaria, during the transition period and the accession to the European Union, however, EU hygiene and food safety regulations replaced the previous socialist regulations on politically-correct artistic content “hygiene”. Currently, nothing is supposed to enter one’s stomach at the chitalishte for issues of health security, or otherwise one could expect fines for trespassing “food safety”.

After having been observing these processes of domestication of the public “houses of culture” on various occasions across chitalishte in Bulgaria and in *casas de la cultura* in Cuba and *pontos de cultura* in Brazil, I inadvertently ended up engaging with the opposite process – the dynamics of making public my own private home in the process of becoming a chitalishte, the Bread House – which then intriguingly helped me better understand the meanings and dynamics of these institutional domestications. Since the Bread House was legally my property, I had to go through multiple state agencies and institutions juggling two spheres and their distinct and often conflicting regulations, through the spheres connect in people’s daily experiences: a) food, and b) arts and culture. The division of spheres of public and private life and of different types of activities in separate fields has been well examined by Habermas (1989), and my navigations of the ambiguous and conflicting regulations of the different ministries and agencies. Each level of bureaucracy performed its own culture of communication and its
own language of framing processes, from the local hygiene commission and the municipal Culture Department to the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Ecology, to UNESCO’s guidelines on framing “intangible heritage” and “preserving biological and cultural diversity” in distinct Conventions that hardly enter in contact or communication despite their overlapping interest in “culture” and “diversity.” I examined the potential loopholes in the regulations and the laws and the options for using the symbolic capital of UNESCO’s categories and recognition to argue for exceptions the way Bogdan the baker did. These negotiations over acceptable categories and legitimizing labels were experienced through series of seals on documents and intriguingly echo the seals on the breads as metaphors that I believe can help us better comprehend these ambiguous processes.

**Seals of Sanction and Sanctity**

Even though cooking is formally called “culinary arts,” the concept of mixing food and arts at cultural centers – in particular food made by people, not simply brought and shared as it has already been accepted at certain chitalishte celebrations and food festivals - seemed so strange to the bureaucrats that the various cultural and agricultural agencies I talked to about registering the Bread House as an institution did not know what to advise me. The more extreme ones directly tried to prohibit me from engaging people in whatever way with food preparation and most importantly its consumption, which turned out to be the main issue. The act of making could be framed as a “workshop” (kruzhok, кръжок), yet concluding the cycle with consumption seemed to the agencies
like a bakery or a restaurant, which required particular hygiene standards, regulations, and payment of taxes. Similar to the case of Russia, noted by Ledeneva (1998), more than 80 percent of all commodities under socialism were subject of state certification, but under capitalism the decentralization (actual dismembering) of the state has made these standards even more difficult to follow as they often contradict one another after having been produced by different ministries (Ledeneva 1998: 24).

To avoid all these issues and risks, for a whole year the Bread House functioned without any legal registration as an organization, simply as activities taking place at my private home where no one could keep me accountable. However, then another problem arose as people around the city got suspicious about our activities and started asking “exactly what kind of institution” the Bread House is, and some started filling the void left from the lack of clear answer with gossips about it probably being an American Protestant sect (infamous for their aggressive attempts to proselytize during the 1990s). Some of these associations must have come from the fact that I had come back from America, which methodologically posited enormous challenges before my work as a “native anthropologist”, in addition to the need for self-reflexivity in such an engaged, action research as the Bread House evolved to be. I was told others called it a “sect” because on major Bulgarian Orthodox feasts people made ritual breads. Paradoxically, the connection with the Orthodox church on these occasions did not prevent people from imagining the Bread House as a sect, since it did not possess any clear legally, socially, and culturally recognizable identity.

The blurriness of the Bread House as a cultural space that did not fit official categories led me to seek the symbolic capital of a legally recognizable and socially
respectable institution – the *chitalishte* - whose title suggested publically-sanctioned activities within a place officially meant to help the transmission of heritage and people’s creativity. In this case, however, if the bread-related activities were to persist inside the Bread House as a *chitalishte*, they could not be termed simply bread-making – which is what, in reality, they were – but they had to fit the national definitions of what a *chitalishte* was. These definitions and regulations were crafted during socialism, while before that period, the *chitalishte* had few limits on their activities and did involve cooking classes as well as ritual food preparation for Christian holidays (Chilingirov 1930). However, according to the current definitions of “culture” among officers at the Ministry of Culture and professional cultural workers, food-production could not pass as a creative activity – despite its official title “culinary arts” – but could pass under another category, fairly open for its blurren boundaries, which is “amateur circle” (*kruzhok*, *кръжок* по *самодейност*), or, when linked directly to traditional cultural forms, “custom re-creation” (*възстановка на обичай*). The Western concept and English word “workshop” is ever more popularly used in the chitalishte field, yet when it came to bread-making, the few times I used this word to describe the gatherings turned people away, as they commented that it is probably something “formal,” “educational,” “requiring skill or knowledge,” “requiring focused attention and time”, and a variety of other associations with work and learning, very much implied in the very root of the word. Thus, the already familia category of “amateur circle” (*kruzhok*, *кръжок* по *самодейност*) fit well the informality of the events. As time passed and more people were coming, some also started labelling the gatherings as “evening circles” (*vecherinka*, *вечеринка*), which was a word traditionally used up until the 20th century for the
gatherings of young men and women, when the women would weave and spin while all
would sing together and would use this kind of forum as the socially licensed form to test
each other and express affection within a communally-controlled environment. Using this
term to describe the bread-making events where gender and age categories were mixed
and redrafted with men and women sharing freely knowledge, skills, jokes (and yes,
sometime signs of affection) pointed to an event that was not a revived tradition since
people never used to make bread together in the vecherinka of the past, let alone men and
women cooking together. Rather, what people were referring to was a new “tradition”
that was in the making, constantly evolving with each new gathering, and feeling
“traditional” in the sensorial experiences of engaging with a traditional and often long-
forgotten food and with the traditional wood-fired over an ambiance that most visitors
defined as taking them back to the past. Indeed, the Bread House made possible an
ambiguous “time-travel” being itself an ambiguous chronotope (time-space formation).

The negotiations of labeling the activities of the chitalishte and the search for the
right label so as to avoid bureaucratic impediments (such as troubles with the food
hygiene services when it comes to communal cooking) can be understood well through
the metaphors of the seal. On the one hand we have the seals of the Ministry of Culture
that chitalishte members strive to have on various awards and diplomas recognizing local
amateur ensembles and “Living Human Treasures”, such as the case of Bogdan’s struggle
to obtain the diploma and set it on his bakery wall as a protection for his traditional
bread-making techniques. On the other hand, we have the bread stamps, whose use was
revived through the activities at the Bread House chitalishte and were the occasion for
multiple discussions and sharing of personal family stories and nostalgic recollections of
the role of these stamps as signs of family heritage and transmission of values, now long forgotten or outdated. In both cases, what we have at work is the affect of symbolic language, and it is at the friction of these contested meanings of seals that we can comprehend how politics and economics ultimately affect, enter, and are digested – even if sometimes far from palatable – in the human body.

We can explore at a more international scale the power struggles over legitimacy and meaning in food, heritage, and hygiene (versus traditional production techniques) and also the question of whether food can fit the sphere of arts and culture in the personal and later institutional struggle of the founder of Slow Food International, Carlo Petrini. Petrini30 spoke in October 2009 at the Sydney Opera House about the ways in which food connects to the performing arts and creativity in general, using the metaphor of the “house of music” where the event was taking place to narrate the story of the Italian left-wing network of houses of popular arts (community cultural centers) called Arci that inspired Slow Food’s vision to connect communities across the globe around food as if around the arts (collective creativity). Currently the biggest civil society movement in the world connecting 4000 communities in 153 countries, Slow Food started small and slow in 1986 as a local act in which Petrini and other residents of the town of Bra in Northern Italy opposed the construction of a McDonald’s fast food restaurant. Currently, the Slow Food Movement is expanding in Bulgaria, which is the country that became the regional hub for the Balkans, coordinating the Balkan Terra Madre Network, and many people around the Bread House started linking its bread activities to the ever more popular vision

on preserving local seed varieties, up to the point in which a group of 6 people at the Bread House formed in 2010a Slow Food Convivium (group of people not necessarily producing food but committed to preserving local biodiversity).

Related to Petrini’s vision, it is intriguing to note the theory of the Macdonaldization of the world developed by Thomas Friedman in his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (2000), where he argued based on empirical and historic research that no two countries having a McDonald’s would go to war with each other. What is it about McDonald's that creates peace? The theoretical framework argues that if a country has stabilized to the point where someone is willing to invest close to a million dollars per store in a franchise operation is very unlikely to be a threat to its neighbors, or have neighbors who are a threat to it. Since McDonald's restaurants are owned by the mother corporation or by individual franchisees, neither one is interested in violence or corruption which could destroy their investment. In a way, the country and the particular city have to earn their McDonald's. The theory fit the reality on the ground, yet it was challenged – and Friedman acknowledges this in his book - with the Balkan wars in particular the one between Serbia and Croatia. A few acquaintances of mine from Bulgaria and Serbia, studying International Relations, discussing the war commented on the McDonald’s theory of peace noting that “Surely it would be the messy Balkans to show the exceptions to the rule!,” thus expressing a poignant cultural intimacy that takes pride as much as pain in re-affirming – in the distant hope for change – the failures of their culturally produced social, economic, and political systems. At the same time that the Macdonaldization theory of democracy and peace failed on the Balkans, McDonald’s also entered triumphantly the former socialist countries as a globally recognized capitalist
symbol promising fast and easy – though quite expensive for the post-socialist pockets – access to imaginary power, lifestyle, and cosmopolitanism. In a way, it was the breaking of burgers rather than the breaking of breads (whether traditional sourdough or church prosphora) that took much more over people’s imagination. But after the initial craze of celebrating anything from birthdays to weddings at McDonald’s, ten years later in Bulgaria at the turn of 2000 more and more people started reclaiming healthy and ecological food, which was nonetheless once again a discourse echoing the Western fashion of “organic” foods and, hopefully, lives. While the fascination with McDonald’s marked the hunger for a particular Western vision of the world, the fast food vision got challenged by the slow food alternative worldview crafted also in the West, in Italy and supported by France, championing the soft power of “heritage foods” and “biodiversity” through the development of the Slow Food global movement.

From the successful protest that rallied thousands of people against McDonald’s, Petrini and supporters decided to start an organized movement called ArciGola, playing on the name of the Italian community cultural and social centers (Arci Network) and mixing it with the word “gola” for “throat”. The intriguing connection of the Slow Food Movement to a network of Italian community cultural centers shows how historically the ethical food movement evolved out of a principle of social organization where the ultimate goal to enhance social capital is common to both, but the vehicles are different, respectively food/agriculture and performance/applied arts. In my ethnographic research on the networks of community cultural centers in Bulgaria, Brazil, and Cuba I discovered a revival of this connection between arts and food which is not historically connected to the Italian ArciGola movement but reveals how a similar model of collective organization
around shared community spaces designated for creativity often end up hosting a variety of food-related events, as food exchanges are the most immediate (and arguably, pleasant) form of human creativity and the easiest (and arguably, pleasant) vehicle for human communication.

It was with a similar idea, though developing without my awareness of Slow Food, that in May 2009 I experimented with developing a cultural central around the culinary arts called the Bread House, which then surprisingly grew into an international network across 5 continents as I was sharing informally about the collective bread-baking events at various international academic and arts-related conferences, and this started inspiring other people and organizations to try the evolving bread and arts methodology.

**Significant Informality - Intimate Strangeness**

After months and months of dozens of chitalishte across the country, I realized that one of the central problems and reasons for low activity at many of the chitalishte consisted in their unpleasant smell or sometimes in their lack of smell coupled with the coldness of the grey concrete walls and huge corridor spaces typical of social architecture. Many people around the country, both people actively participating in them and some who never visited the chitalishte, would often react to my mentioning of the word with a visceral comment on the “moldy” smell (*muhliasal*) of the buildings.

It was in similar terms, through the category and indicator of smell, but in an inverted situation that people would describe the high appeal of the Orthodox churches for their aroma of incense. I could observe throughout the day how people all the time
come and out of the churches, before, during, or after work, during lunch breaks, etc., staying inside for a short payers and lighting candles to commemorate departed or pray for the living. As many defined it, they come in even “just to soak the atmosphere” (*da popia atmosferata*), as a common Bulgarian expression goes in particular related to soaking the aromas of a place\(^3\). While smell is perhaps the most powerful sensorial stimulus for embodied memories, exerting affect which is an effect far beyong the immediately emotional and often operates subconsciously and viserally/somatically, from the sensorial starvation at the *chitalishte* it was clear that human interaction would also be starved of touch. Then I was provoked by people’s comparisons, metaphors, and complaints to imagine a *chitalishte* having the most pleasant aroma in the world and this, not only in my opinion but according to many people I had interacted with across countries and cultures, that aroma was the aroma of freshly-baked bread!

The idea to link the chitalishte to aroma and from there to food, led me to start more meticulously observing what is the role of food at the chitalishte. I found that the general lack of welcoming ambiance in the *chitalishte* does not mean they do not have anything to do with food. On the contrary, people employed food to make the spaces feel warmer and home-like, in their terms. Most formal and informal celebrations and even just regular rehearsals are accompanied by the sharing of food. Most of the *chtialishte* organize at least once a year in their respective community local traditional food festivals, as well as larger regional festivals such as a few food festivals funded in 2010 by the America for Bulgaria Foundation. The chitalishte were traditionally the organizations charged under socialism with researching local “folklore and ethnography”, and in the

\(^3\) Similar smell-based spiritual sentiments are examined by Susan Ashbrook Harvey in *Scenting Salvation*; also in the work of Jelena Trkulja on the synesthetic experience of the Orthodox church space and the Orthodox Liturgical choreography.
post-socialist period when the term “folklore” was widely replaced with UNESCO’s discourse on “intangible heritage” they continued with the same activities, yet much more oriented towards the very local particularities and unique elements that under Communism were often made invisible or blurred in the homogenized “national folklore” that legitimized one socialist identity.

As Kaneff (2004) points in her ethnography of a model Bulgarian village in the last years of Communism many traditions were banned as most Bulgarian rituals are rooted in the Orthodox faith and often involved ritual breads with cross decorations or bread stamps. Therefore, the presence or lack of such breads in celebrations at the chitalishte or at private homes, as well as the distinctions clearly drawn between those people who did and those who did not place food in the coffins of the deceased (symbolically “for their afterlife”) (134-137) marked performances of silent opposition and at the same time demarcated the lines along which tradition was officially replaced by state-supported folklore (143), cleansed of religious connotations in a process that Silverman (1983:60) calls “selective preservation and directed innovation.”

My ideas about the Bread House chitalishte as a space of collective bread-making as a method and vehicle for conversations, meaning-making, and perhaps cooperation were ideas first tested during my visit to the Slow Food Headquarters in Bra in July 2009 during my participation in the STPA Conference and World Art Biennale in Venice. I consulted with Lilia Smelkova, Head of Slow Food South-East Europe, and General Secretary Paolo di Croce, who affirmed that the idea was very good and unique – or, as Bulgarians like to say, that “there was bread in the idea” - but Slow Food had no money to support it (and help me rebuild the old house to serve the public), so I decided to
continue sharing the vision, adding to it ideas from people that could, I hoped, help it shape well and, as any good bread, rise with its due time for rest. During my travels from conference to conference in what ended up being a round-the-world trip between June and October 2009, taking me across Italy, Peru, Japan, South Korea, South Africa, and Spain, the idea did, in fact, rise and it also inspired Bread House programs (as I tested the method and organized free public bread-making events at various non-for-profit local organizations), forming an initial network of Bread House programs before the actual Bread House as a physical space planned in Gabrovo became a reality in November 2009 due to vibrant local participation and giving.

Intriguingly, the summer of 2009 at the same time as I was testing and developing the collective bread and arts making method and the Bread House cultural centers network was expanding place by place, in another part of the world another woman, defining herself as “Bristol mum and Transition Town group member Inez Aponte” was doing a rather similar thing: organizing what she calls “bread baking circles”, whose ‘Loaves of Love’\(^{32}\) initiative began on 5 July 2009 propelled by the words of Satish Kumar that: ‘If you haven't got time to bake a loaf of bread, you haven't got time to save the planet’. Inez shares on her site that she realized baking is one of the best alternatives and solutions to our fast-paced mindset and lives: “Baking bread and in particular collective bread-making in group, not as a private act at home where it is mostly experienced as cooking rather than a celebration, fulfils so many of the criteria that make people happy: spending time together doing the same thing, showing creativity (both learning as well as enjoying competing in comparing one’s skills), exchanging ideas and knowledge as well as jokes, eating good food, feeling in control of and understanding

\(^{32}\) Available at <http://www.thefreshloaf.com/node/12547/loaves-love>.\)
where our food comes from. With bread making, the natural action of the yeast demands that you wait as the bread rises. *It can't be hurried* [emphasis added] - and it's a wonderful opportunity to spend time with friends and at the end of it you have a feast of home baked bread." She called the initiative “Loaves of Love,” for its idea is to simply bring strangers together and help them feel connected: as she puts it, one of the ingredients for a Loaf of Love is a ‘friendly stranger’ or ‘companion,’ which from Latin means someone you break bread with. Ines concludes: “Maybe a stranger is just someone you haven't made bread with yet!”

Indeed, in my long-term observations of the bread-making gatherings at the Bread House, I noticed an intriguing dynamic of what I call intimate strangeness, which characterizes the dynamic in which a particular social context can take off people’s inhibitions and inspire them to open up before a stranger in unexpected ways. From a sociological perspective, however, such free exchange of intimacy makes perfect sense, because people are often willing to pour out and share with a complete stranger such deep personal traumas or dreams that they would be much less likely to share with close family or friends for fear of affecting the strings attached in their carefully established relationships. In short, intimate strangeness is so powerful, because while it might not be significant sociologically it is largely significant emotionally.

Conjuring the idea of bread as a symbol and a universal experience of human unity seemed to be quite simple and running as inspiration in the minds of a few disconnected people: Inez, myself, Warren Lee Cohen in his book *Baking Bread with Children* based on his teaching experiences. In my discussions with psychology scholars at Princeton, they have explained to me how the finger touch of natural materials and
especially dough as a material that is warm, pleasant, and can be eaten connects to many other parts of the brain and stimulates them, thus producing richer associations and deeper memories. From a cultural perspective, anthropologists have shown in their work that bodily dispositions and sensations differ among people as they are defined culturally and socially, and cultural categories affect the extent to which we register objects and processes as meaningful – in this case bread and its baking and breaking. In this sense, clearly the experiences of people around the table at the Bread House and around other tables around the world where I have hosted such gatherings differ largely, and yet intriguingly people acted with quite similar immediacy and enthusiasm around the kneading and the bread-breaking despite cultural differences. People surprisingly to me associated bread with home even if some had never made bread at home with their parents – similar to my case, when I made bread for the first time when I was 26 as a result of my interlocutors’ discussions of the topic. Thus I realized bread as a staple food for large part of humanity has become a universally powerful symbol with two main dimensions: bread and its aroma have been organized in the category of private, safe space linked to concepts of home and motherly care, of basic sustenance and the security of the hearth; and bread-breaking has been organized in the category of public space as an act of unity and fellowship: it is an image that seems to have spread globally and is most likely historically and culturally rooted in the Judeo-Christian traditions for bread’s centrality in religious ritual and its seeping out into multiple other daily domains.

Kneading and Re-forming Age, Gender, Class
Let us return to the warm August 2011 evening at the Bread House. It is an evening that could be, in many ways, representative of what regular evenings at the Bread House look and feel like in their messy informality, improvisation, surprise, conviviality and conflict within a group of people that have come from multiple walks of life.

When Nikolina, the economic consultant from Sofia, arrived that night, there were already about 20 people at the Bread House: people of all ages, from two grandmothers with their grandchildren to a few teenagers, a young family, a few single young women, a young anthropologist Yana Staynova doing her PhD in the States, and people with professions as varied as theater director, shop vendor, farmer, university professor, teachers, sculptor, and an economist – all exclaimed with enthusiasm at the idea of decorating a wedding bread. Once the exciting discussion of how to decorate and who was to prepare what shape with dough, scratching on pieces of paper the debated designs, the surprises did not end as more and more people continued coming from other parts of the country. Bobi, a documentary filmmaker from Sofia, who had been travelling the world from Australia and New Zealand to Malaysia and Singapore and Greece and Italy to film Orthodox Christian traditions particularly around the symbol and ritual process of making and sharing bread, had heard about the Bread House from a friend and came all the way from Sofia to film.

Soon after Bobi, at the door appeared a middle-aged man with his son (Dinko and Moni) who had been to the Bread House about two weeks ago and liked the experience so much that had decided in the last minute to come, after having worked at the family shop until 7pm and driving up the mountain for 2 hours to reach us. With them was a man in his mid-fifties, with a sun-burned face and coarse hands testifying to his daily
agricultural labor, who blushed and sweated, perhaps both because of the heat of the over
and shyness and embarrassment amidst so many strangers and their loud and cheerful
chats and jokes. Dinko brought him forward by the table and presented him, Stefan.
Stefan then dared tells us, with a bit of stuttering and blushing, that he had not left his
village for more than 25 years – he was working as a blacksmith and had his own
subsistence agriculture, and had no desire or time to leave his land – but he had liked so
much the Bread House idea that Dinko told him about that it made Stefan dream about
making bread with many different people. Feeling he could not come as a guest (na gosti)
without a gift – his own use of words showing the personal relationship he had already
imagined towards the Bread House, most likely precisely because of the wide-spread
cultural trope connecting bread to “home”, even if the Bread House was already
registered as a formal chitalishte cultural center – Stefan had decided to make gifts for
the Bread House and he brought a few iron-wrought utensils for the over. People quickly
surrounded Stefan and started asking him about his craft and his agriculture, interested in
their own ways to start or keep up their subsistence agriculture which was often framed in
their discourse on “oikonomia” as the aspiration to become independent from the
capitalist system. This aspiration was operating in people’s minds essentially through the
image of the gift exchange economy, which, some people remember with fondness, did
de facto take place in Bulgaria during socialism as neighbors would regularly exchange
small amounts of ingredients, foods, light bulbs, toilet paper, etc. due to the scarcity of
goods and the need to cooperate to survive. In this type of social economy, the system of
reciprocity and rewards is often measured in symbolic capital. Indeed, as Stefan said
upon giving me the iron gifts:

[Page 254]
My best reward is people’s smiles at the beauty of my objects. I have been making and selling iron-cast objects and crafts all my life but never presented them before people and never made things together with…it gives me such a joy! I just had no idea how wonderful it is to do things together, in group, with your hands…to share what you know and then you also learn so much from others 33.

Stefan’s coarse hand witnessed clearly his life off the land, not a debit card, and people exclaimed with amazement at his stories about cultivating local varieties already lost across Bulgaria and engaging in barter with fellow peasants through his wrought-iron goods. Stefan was answering with visible enthusiasm, happy that people showed interest in his work - adding enormous symbolic value to his labor, as Marx would argue - especially when he received substantial praising from Nikoleta from her position as a high-level economic consultant from Sofia – as people place enormous value not only on the efforts of his hands, but to “how much heart was invested” in all he was doing. For many of them whom I had previously heard talk so much about their vision of agricultural “oikonomia” – seeing God through taking care of nature – their imaginaries of oikonomic living were being now materialized, and it is this tangibility of a previously intangible idea that made the room buzzle with exclamations and enthusiasm. It was clear in this case that living off your won hand-cultivated food without need for money mediation was not valuable only as a basic survival need, but it had the symbolic capital

33 The Bakers without borders NGO program has been developing programs in which professional bakers from around the world take their vacation time by going to a country and helping a local artisan baker or bigger facility to improve its work. A volunteer who went to Bulgaria to help a newly privatized large-scale bakery argued that what was mostly missing after socialism were pricing and marketing skills. His ultimate reward, however, was “the achievements and enthusiasm of his hosts” in a gift economy of skill exchange. More available at http://subscribers.supermarketnews.com/mag/bakers_without_borders/global.
value of witnessing and legitimizing one’s freedom from “the system”, as people across Bulgaria in these two years widely referred when talking to the capitalist order. As economist Amartya Sen (1987) points in his work on the relationship between food and freedom, the two are seen as “not just a way of achieving good life, but constitutive of the good life itself” (4). In the imaginary of Bulgarians over the past few years, the resurgence of the discourse and preoccupation with the quality of food and organic agriculture, as I show here, did not simply link to the freedom of the stomach but the freedom of the mind, as people were hungry to recover a lifestyle where relationship to food as much as to other people are not commodified and mediated by money and standard economics but a re-visited from of what they imagined as the new Christian oikonomia, or what I call home oikonomia examined in detail in another chapter.

The discussions around land cultivation that night were suddenly interrupted by another man standing at the door: Plamen, who had also come a few previous times, used to work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and had travelled Africa and the Middle East to monitor elections. Plamen arrived from Sofia as a result of a last-minute decision after a work meeting he had and saying that he “could not stand Sofia and needed to set free,” he took the last bus to Gabrovo and came just for the evening. “I could not stand to get out of that meeting…I was so upset I kept thinking of the fire…and the bread, and just the peace…meeting new people.” So he came, the way he had been coming a few other times, like the previous Saturday when he had come again to make bread and offered to paint one of the rooms of the Bread House, arguing that he felt “need to do something hands-on” after all the “boring institutional work: only talking and talking.”
That night, Plamen brought as a gift a bottle of wine he had bought during a Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and he wanted to mark with it the importance that the Bread House had in his life – already clearly manifested in his willingness to travel 4 hours from Sofia for just an evening, yet made much more tangible and semiotically meaningful through the bottle of wine, charged with the symbolic value of the sacrality of its terroir the Holy Land. He also knew the bottle would speak to many in this particular context, as many of the people coming to the Bread House were also people interested in the revival of Orthodox Christianity, which they associated deeply connected with wine and bread read thorough the ritual use of wine and bread in the Liturgy.

Plamen started chatting about African music with Yana Staynova, who had come from the USA where she was going a PhD on music in Venezuela and had heard about the Bread House through her mother who read about it in the media. Another person who had heard about the house from third sources was Dora Iltcheva, who had come from Germany where she worked, and where she had found the Bread House website and dreamed ever since then about the time when she would be back to Bulgaria for the summer holidays to come bread with others at the Bread House. At one point, even the mother of a Bulgarian couple doing their PhDs at Princeton and who had taken part in one collective bread-making I organized on campus also appeared, as her daughter had highly recommended her to start coming to the events and she joked that the event sounded so unusual that she was willing to leave her two Turkish soap operas and come to see “what kind of an animal”, as she laughed, the Bread House was!

What brought all these people from so far that night without any particular pro-active organization? Why were they willing to put the time, effort, and money to come to
a small town and an old house with a group of strangers? While the explanations could be multiple, some of them already summarized in Ines’ description of Loaves of Love, as an anthropologist I believe crucial factors to understanding the power of bread are memory and the senses. In the ever expanding anthropology of the senses (see Classen 2010 and her extensive bibliography), as a primary concerns is “to go beyond the audiovisual and recover the senses of smell, taste and touch as subjects of serious inquiry” (Classen 2010: 404). Classen points how the historic marginalization of these senses occurred:

As sight and, to a lesser extent, hearing were deemed to be the predominant senses of ‘civilized’ Westerners, smell, taste and touch were assumed to predominate among ‘primitive’ non-Westerners (414).

Analyzing widely in writings on food and memories, and in particular the power of smell as the major sensorial trigger of memories - Proust in his famous recollections of childhood through the Madelaine’s aroma; Seremetakis (1996) in her return to the past through the smell and taste of a peach variety disappearing in Greece - I noticed that most of the comments about the importance of the place evolved around the aroma it effused, which was an aroma missing from the urban streetscapes in Bulgaria, but also around the unexpectedness of interactions.

People were interested to see who would they meet on a particular night, and once at the house, the aroma and the fire made them feel at east, willing to open up to one another and sometimes to share before the large group of strangers very personal stories and not be embarrassed to express deep emotions: Nikolina, the economist, recited her poems about love and suffering with tears in her eyes; Stefan, the old blacksmith, was telling also with watering eyes how this smell and the joy of the people took him back to
his childhood, “I can almost touch and taste the same bread my mother used to make and sense the same joy I sensed when I was around her in the hassle of kneading!”; some of the children were exhilarated that they touched dough for the first time and promised their grandmother, former cultural worker at the Theater, that they will teach their mother how to make bread!; another child turned out to be the son of a neighbor from a house on the same street who had prohibited him from coming to the Bread House because he was afraid it might be the meeting place of a Protestant sect (as after socialism people became wary of some aggressive American groups like Jehova’s Witnesses): the next day, after the boy had taken hot bread home, the father tasted that the place must be “good” and even came to ask if he could bring along Russian tourists from his job to make Bulgarian breads.

All these shifting relations and evolving interactions would not have been possible had there not be a place, a house to welcome and make meetings possible. In fact, the establishment of the Bread House is the one thing that most vividly showed me the key importance of the physical space for the sustainable production and exchange of social capital, which is overall true for why the actual house is one of the strongest factors that have kept the chitalishte alive, respected and loved, and visited and sought in the mind of many people. Thus, the meanings of place and its relationship to human interactions is key to understanding why a cultural center that is not normally imagined as a space for collective bread-making would attract such wide interest so that people would be willing to travel hours to just be present. One of the main reasons why people enjoyed the collective bread-making events – shared in their comments and observed in their reactions – was due to the way these gatherings offered a subtle rearrangement of gender
roles in the form of play. Gender roles in Bulgaria navigate between the ambiguity of what appears as a traditionally patriarchal society with male figures acting strong and openly discriminatin alongside a strong maternal figure or what some Bulgarian ethnographers have called “cryptomatriarchate”, i.e. the hidden powerful role of the mother developed over centuries of Ottoman dominion when men were often missing after murder, army recruitment, or guerrilla fight. In the context of arts and play around the bread table these gender roles were ever more easily questioned and joked about, as the rethinking of gender roles was nurtured by the new contextualization of bread-making itself not as simply pragmatic food preparation but as an unusual time for creativity, learning, and relaxing, thus creating a new form of ritual that never existed before: all ages and both gender to make bread together, bargaining anew over values and social norms. The act of men physically feeding others by preparing food – rather than being the monetary “bread-winner” distant from the actual sources of material production – offered a field for accumulation of prestige, power, and legitimacy through performing feeding in the public context. The dynamics I observed resembled much the importance that feeding others held for Hawaiian men as observed by Tengan (2008\textsuperscript{34}) in particular rituals, when they had to pound the taro root into a poi mush, which “allows men to ritually perform the unification and sustenance of the people and culture by making poi and feeding people” (137). Tengan participated actively in these ritualcookings and helped frame the context for their reenactment by founding a group whose goal was to revive Hawaiian heritage, and thus presents an interesting parallel for my methodological experiences of action research.

Up to the 1950s in Bulgaria before women started massively working in factories and leaving the house space, gender roles were clearly distributed across the various stages of bread making, baking, and consumption, as bread was predominantly made at home by women while baked at the community *furna* - a baking, *not* bread-making and selling place – where the bakers (*furnadjii*) were exclusively man. Thus, the bread-making tradition remained intrinsically associated with women inside the intimate space of the kitchen and the private home, while taken out of the home milieu and inserted into the market logic and commodity circulation bread became the domain of men as they were the main ones dealing with money, or “earning the daily bread”. In the collective bread-making at the Bread House, however, as no money were exchanged and the activity was not measured monetarily, the value and meaning of the experience and the fluidity of the mixed gender roles formed a performance where the dynamic of all age groups of both gender making and breaking the same bread formed a polysemic time-space formation – a polysemic chronotope – which offered a soft, innocent, and most importantly easily palatable, both through its flavor and its friendly play, experience of social restructuring that was not upsetting but rather liberating and empowering, even when it also served as the stage for the negotiation of issues of authority and power. Often such instances occur between women arguing which one knows better the technique and proportions of bread, on other occasions women start teaching the men what to do and they get angry and uncomfortable because their authority has been challenged, yet when children come up to the men the dynamic changes completely and the serious working professionals let with smile the children to teach them and help them knead their breads.
From children teaching men and younger men teaching older women how to knead bread, the re-negotiation of gender roles and class and age difference is an on-going process at the Bread House as at the other chitalishte, but at the Bread Houses there processes are much more vividly and vibrantly visible and sensed as people express emotions and thoughts in a very immediate, genuine manner. Noting the pleasure with which they touch the dough, they smell the dough, the fire, and finally the bread, the mesmerized gaze at the fire, all these sensorial experiences stimulate people to open up their other senses beyond vision that way few arts help the body calm and open up. I argue that the somatic and sensorial opening through the smells, tastes, and touches of dough is registered much more deeply than if working with other similar materials, for example clay or plasticine, since dough is a densely charged with memories (usually of childhood and home) and symbolic meanings that make many barriers, raised by the ever more rigid somatic, sensorial and sense-based (rational) divides between spheres of thought, action, and of the heart. Like with dough where the kneading and the rising take time and patience, the process of building communities is also a cyclical one where groups disband and collapse and then convene again much the way the bread that is consumed crumbling away is at another moment again made and broken, and shared, and crumbled away.

The table at the Bread House and at the Bistritsa chitalishte, however, did not only host laughter and joy. Sometimes people would enter into heated discussions, erupting into loud fights, and other times conversations could lead to sadness and tears. Similar to an extended family gathering for a big holiday, such as Christmas or Easter, these moments of charged interactions in a limited space and condensed time could often
explode into fights and arguments. Yet, even the fighting and the temporary ruptures turned out to be processes ripe with the possibilities to refresh relations and give birth to new forms of connectedness and exchanges, from a revived friendship reaffirmed through forgiveness to reconsidered political, religious or social positions and crafting of creative solutions to anything from election and economic to small, pragmatic daily issues.

It is precisely the fermentations of conviviality and contestation that showed me how communities that have houses of culture, destined to foment interactions even when they sometimes de facto limit membership and participation, things cook much the same way that bread is: vibrant communities like good bread do not need additional artificial agents to rise, but time for the elements and people and ideas to consolidate. People at the Bread House and the Bistritsa chitalishte did not need the state or US-based NGOs to give them grants to meet, talk, sing, or dance, yet they did need a space to be able to and inspired to animate and turn into “their own”, often in struggles with the state even if the state provided the basic maintenance. As already argued in previous chapters in my development of the concept of heritage house-guarding where a physical place is crucial to ICH safeguarding, in the case of the Bread House as an example that can be extended to other community development projects it is clear that much more than money the key was the space so it could become a contested site, and it is in contestation that bargains and solutions – community dynamics par excellence - are born and evolving in both contestation and cooperation: a contested space means much more than a static lump of money – often simply bedazzled in private pockets - typical of community development projects where the giving donor side does not expect reciprocity.
A way to understand why bread spoke to so many diverse people could be to resort to the semiotic framework developed by Barthes (1973, 1979) noting how food and the body are “polysemic” (possessing various levels of meaning) as particular foods are associated with particular gender or class (steak with men, coffee and sweets with women, etc). Bread, however, is a food that is perhaps most universally shared and not limited to particular groups of people, yet it did become polysemic in the dynamic of the bread-making activities, since the collective action offered each person an entryway to memories and meanings of bread from the past as well as a chance to craft new meanings through bread for the present and the future.

But why were people coming to the Bread House regularly, sometimes from far-away neighborhoods almost an hour away and after a whole day of work at factories or offices? Why would they travel not one but four hours from Sofia just for an evening? And why dream about collective bread-making while away in Germany months before returning back home? Most of the people who came to the Bread Houses, as I discovered from interviews and questionnaires, came inspired by the idea of eating hot bread, as simple as that. But next to that was the group of people who were interested to discover more about traditional bread decorations and more about Christianity, which was speaking to them through bread; some felt connected to a tradition that was disappearing and felt the urge to save and revive it; others simply liked the touch; yet others liked more the smell and would not eat for dietary issues; some loved the coal-charred crust crunch; some were inspired by the interesting conversations among people from diverse ages and backgrounds that would have otherwise never met; some called bread-making a “therapy” while others called it “art;” some called it “food” while others called it
“heritage” and “identity.” The polyphony of sensations and semantics around the polysemic nature of bread – yet polysemic in its collectively meaningful nature – echoed intriguingly the call for monophony when coming to the terms with which the collective bread-making was framed in order to be considered a “legitimate” activity befitting an art center, a chitalishte, and then on its part the cultural capital of designation and recognition could further have its weight in dealing with the state and its discourses and regulations on food and art.

The polysemic nature of bread was expressed in both the way it spoke to all as in the way it spoke to each person differently, bringing around the table different people that experienced the process, the product (bread), and the sensorial stimuli in varying ways: some did not eat for reasons of diets or allergies (even though gluten allergies are still new to Bulgaria unlike the USA); others rejected to eat because of the cross on the bread stamps placed on traditional holiday breads; others (the low-income and homeless people) embarrassed to show that they were hungry and thus loudly rejecting the bread to perform dignity around the power to reject to take; rejecting to eat bread could also lead to occasions of marginalization, as in the times when I was scolded for rejecting to eat bread with meals, which people labeled with pejorative intonation my “Americanization.” And yet again, bread did speak widely to the local and from there national media, which picked it up as a key national cultural symbol, and used the charged signifier to show alternative forms of social organization in the midst of the economic crisis, arguing that alternatives were out there in non-monetary relations, which was always the theme that the media emphasized most: the simple fact that bread was not sold but made, baked, and broken for free and collectively among strangers.
The table of the collective bread-making events at the Bread House is a site as much of sharing and unity as it is a stage for conflicts and performances of power and authority. Building on the way Richard Wilk (2010) analyzes the family dining table as a space to understand contesting agencies, further noting how the increasing disappearance of the dining tables in lower-income households is a problem not only of changing cultural values but of complex socio-economic issues and deficient public policies.

Wilk’s analyses of interactions around private home dining tables – and the impact of their disappearance on inter-generational relations - offer insights to a recent trend in UK schools to educate children about how to behave at a dining table and to value having a dining table at home rather than eating on the sofa in front of the TV, similar to the US program run by Cornell University “Cooking family meals together.” The disappearance of the dining table in the West is also a process observed ever more in Eastern Europe and, in fact, across the globe, as living rooms dominated by the TV screen become improvised dining areas, where people sit and eat mechanically and not communicating with each other. This process is accompanied by the gradual re-purprosing of the kitchen oven turned into a cabinet drawer for the storage of archives and objects, and the disappearance of the wood-fire oven and fireplace being replaced by the TV set.

In the context of a rising global paradigm of collective silence – being alone together especially in the home, but also observed in public when people meet but spend more time searching through their iPhones than talking to each other - the experiences around the table at the Bread House point to intriguing imaginations and practies of alternative economies of affection and exchange, or what I have called home oikonomia. One insight into this processes of why people were starting to search and recover the
touch with nature and natural materials and foods came one cold night in December 2010, when a group of my students from Sofia University were sitting around the Bread House table, chatting vivaciously while all gazes were fixed on the fire in the bread oven. Suddenly one of them exclaimed:

I can’t believe it! We’ve been talking for 4 hours straight in the freezing room, with jackets on, yet no one noticed! I think it shows how the hearth was the TV of the past, with the difference that it did inspire people to talk to one another and lose sense of time.

The 20-year-old man’s realization echoed with a genuine innocence and at the same time a painful sensation of emptiness, of having been deprived of something beautiful and meaningful. For young people in Bulgaria, the hunger to discover local traditions was also competing with the aspiration towards Western lifestyle performed in owning the newest cell phone or shoes, and these bargains over meaning propelled ongoing dynamic relations at the Bread House and other chitalishte I had observed. The love-hate relationship towards foreign foods, goods, services, and lifestyles that Wilks (2007) observes in the context of Bulgaria surfaced on many occasions in the vivid interest of local people towards other cultures’ bread traditions. People often came to the Bread House asking to know more about other countries or, if not pro-actively asking, intrigued when I would share stories about rituals and festive breads in other cultures. It was precisely the international and inter-cultural character of the Bread House as already having developed a network of other similar spaces around itself and on its simple model around the world that really captured people’s imagination and also sense of local pride,
worth, and personal value derived from participating in and contributing to a global initiative.

The participation in the global intangible heritage of humanity – from bread to music and crafts - was made thoroughly tangible as people kept asking me about the other countries I have studied for my dissertation: they were especially fascinated by Cuba, because of the long-lasting close relations between the two countries under socialism, and recently the public imagination was captured by Brazil, because of the 2011 election of Dilma Rousseff as President and her father’s lineage from Gabrovo. As I played music from Sara and the Tajona in Santiago de Cuba and Dona Dalva from Salvador de Bahia, the network of community cultural centers was “coming to live”, as people would frame it, through the rhythms of the music, the colors, but also, and in fact mainly, the bread we were making and then eating while talking. It has been evolving from chitalishte to casas de la cultura and pontos de cultura and their symbolic unity in the network of the International Council for Cultural Centers (I3C), which I mentioned before as my practical weaving of the network of networks of community cultural centers I discovered while working for UNESCO. Sharing food, cooking, and especially making the local traditional breads of these countries with various groups of people at community centers and other community organizations I visited in my studies opened the possibilities to sense the local rhythms of life, as much as literally of their music, through more subtle rhythms and textures up to the distinctive rhythms of munching, as for example the very particular chewiness of the mandioca-based Brazilian pao de queijo breads. When Brazilian pao de queijo bread was first introduced in Bulgaria in 2010 at a chain of restaurants, Bulgarians often exclaimed with enthusiasm how unique the texture and taste
were, and how this unusual “chewing-gum bread”, as some defined it, “must be something that reflects their (Brazilian) culture.” At the Bread House Cultural Center in Gabrovo, evenings of Brazilian music and bread, incited further commentaries on the distinctive rhythms of Bulgarian and Brazilian cultures based on the different breads, while other comments also pointed to the nonetheless intriguing connection that we all share some kind of bread that is a staple of life.

The Bread Houses Network was materializing further when we connected through skype to the Bread House in Sardegna opened on the Bread House model in December 2010, when for the global Slow Food Terra Madre Day we made bread together, and people indeed commented “how close are Italians to us,” “just as loud and funny,” “how different their bread looks, but they talk about it similarly to us, as staple food and sacred food”, touching the screen as if trying to touch the intangible whiffs of the breads, some few thousand kilometers away yet almost tangibly present.

Non-memories: Recollecting Archetypes versus Archiving Collections

Over the two years that I became involved with collective bread-making, I observed many intriguing things about bread as a symbol and bread-making as an embodied cultural activity and collective memories. The smell of fire and of baking bread made people note how they immediately felt relaxed, “disarmed” as a few jokingly qualified their state of sudden insurgence of sensitiveness and sentimentality. Bread awakened the senses and through them emotionally-charged recollections or imaginations (what we can call “imagined memories”) of home, family, childhood, home-country and
immigrant travels, tradition and modern industrialization, friends and fights, faith and the bitterness of mistrust, love and loneliness. Bread revealed a unique capacity to unlock dormant memories of home and family. And it also unlocked a phenomenon that was quite surprising to me, and what I started calling *non-memories*. These are the times when people say “This smell/taste/texture reminds me of home”, yet when I ask if the person actually had a similar experience at home, he or she would often have to pose for a few seconds and realize such actual experiences had not taken place. The intriguing psychological games of memory echo in a larger context the perpetual power struggles and politics on who controls how and when collective memory, remembrance, make-belief, and forgetting, which is, in fact, a realm where UNESCO’s Convention on the Intangible Cultural Heritage has been attempting to introduce the concept of “community-based archiving” as a way of offering alternative to the centralized and highly politicized national historic and ethnographic archives (or folklore collections) dominating the world up until the 2003 Convention on Intangible Heritage. Without much deviation from the Bread House, this is the place to insert that under the auspices and concepts legitimized by the ICH Convention much good work has been done on the ground in communities over the past years to foster community-based archiving and collections, antique banks to preserve heritage objects, and “community/open-air museums” (Savova 2009) offering new paradigms around the politics of memory.

To return to the *non-memories* phenomenon I observed at the Bread House, *non-memories* can be defined as imagined culturally-framed associations that come not from already lived experiences but from socially produced frames and widely-circulated archetypes that accommodate, mould, and translate information in intelligible forms and
make it often feel so knowable, known, and close that, in fact, it feels as if we had had previous experiences with these categories and the social capital they are supposed to generate. Intriguingly, even if the *habitus* producing the cultural trope of bread as associated with the mother and the home got diminished, if not fully disappeared in many places decades ago with industrialization, emancipation movements, and more recently feminism, bread-making still persists today as an archetype of the mother role in society, in modified and fragmented yet still readable pieces.

While associated with the archetype of the home hearth, mother, and family - thus a secure space with all of its soothing predictability and comfort - bread and bread-making were also organized in a new form, not in the private kitchen led by the mother. Thus, the new format of a group activity with strangers, or much more of a modern workshop-type social activity with few strings attached and few bonding relationships to worry about, meant also certain freedom of unpredictability and liberating porosity in the ambiguity of relationships. This ambiguity flowed out of and across the uncertainties of who is teaching and who is learning from whom, who is hearing one’s intimate story and who is letting it pass unnoticed, who is helping whom beyond pride and prejudice.

Since many people started jokingly referring to the activities as also therapeutic – “bread therapy” (хлебна терапия, хлеботерапия) - I started discussing the dynamics of the events with arts therapists and psychologists and psychotherapists in order to better comprehend what might have been happening inside and among people in these gatherings that could heal certain internal states. First of all, most art therapist were very surprised to hear about the use of “real dough” and bread, and, in fact, surprised at themselves for not having thought about using this material themselves, now that “play
“dough” is already an officially acceptable material in mainstream art therapy methods alongside clay. One art therapist even burst into laughter, when she recollected that once she spent hours making children and their adults make “play food” out of play dough, including bread, as she was hoping that the association with food would help them bond better. Yet, the food was not real and could not be digested, but she realized quickly that the reason why real bread-making probably did not cross her mind was because of the deeply-ingrained fear of food-preparation and circulation in the public space due to the strict hygiene regulations and high rates of law-suits for food poisoning.

Another art therapist pointed that perhaps the reason why bread-making is so appealing to people to, in the first place, even come to an event without knowing anyone there, it that bread is ultimately all people have had some experience with and is thus well known and fairly predictable, and the purpose of the gathering – at the very basic level, eating good hot bread together and sharing recipes so that the tradition be preserved – was more or less clear to people versus the art therapy methods or various artistic workshop activities in other cultural centers, where people are less likely to go and skeptical to engage in the art therapy for fear of the unknown processes, meanings, and expected outcomes of the activities. Art therapy, while embraced by children, is often met with skepticism by adults, who are not willing to open up for “childish” activities and have many inhibitions when it comes to showing creativity and creating, since in the act of creation is when the deep fears and insecurities surface: people are either afraid to discover that they are creative and, indeed, have responsibility over their lives and are afraid to admit and take up the power to change; or people are embarrassed to create something that would not be good compared to others’ works, and thus having to face
humiliation, which is already the cause of many other traumatic experiences and
confused, self-protective reactions in their lives. In all of these cases, the deep root of all
problems, as Freud would also argue, is the experiences of love in childhood, and mostly
the perceived lack or insufficiency of love that the person tries to make up for, usually
subconsciously, throughout his or her adult life. With collective bread-making what
often happened is that people recollected moments of love and comfort with their
mothers, fathers, grandmothers, or extended families and were sometimes even surprised
that they had forgotten those moments of joy. An art therapist told me such memories are
called “the angels in the nursery”, and it is these memories that they try to dig and flesh
out through painting or music, but in the case of bread-making, the scent of hot bread did
it much faster than anything else: the bread breath is an irresistible channel of affective
memory.

The kind of activities at the Bread House turned out to be so unusual and
intriguing to the media that they became the subject of multiple coverages on the national
news, in two documentaries, radio programs, newspaper articles, etc., without us hardly
seeking media coverage. Much of the reason for this attention was the unusual character
of the activities - both taking a traditional activity reserved for women or cooks and
opening to wide participation, rethinking gender roles and classes - and at the same time
the unusual role I played as both a native anthropologist and an activist. The media
interest focused on my convoluted travels for previous research and academic
conferences, where I used the time in each country to volunteer at grassroots
organizations to share with them the bread-making method, and thus had by that point
spread the Bread House method from a small provincial town to other countries around the world.

However, the kind of gift economy taking place at the Bread House was, in fact, not that “strange” and “new” or “unfamiliar” to Bulgarians, if one got to conduct a deeper archaeology of meanings, habitus, and larger cultural epistemologies, through which one would discover that bread had never really lost its intense cultural role, but it had lost particular practices associated to its role, such as the practice of taking Communion regularly and forming and participating into a church community.

The growing post-socialist home oikonomia is characterized by people’s growing search for “community,” from the sacred space to the garden, growing organic foods and exchanging produce and pickles; doing social work while explicitly not calling it “volunteer” work, reminiscent of Communist times’ imposed “volunteerism,” but framed as “simply giving,” the way people were giving labor, time, money, objects, food, talents (songs, poems, paintings), and love to the Bread House. All of these practices of a non-money mediated home oikonomia can be unpacked and better understood in their cultural complexities and sensitivities through the struggles over producing bread without preservatives, using natural starter rather than artificial yeast. Such struggle was taken up by a young baker, Bogdan, who struggled with UNESCO’s commission for intangible cultural heritage at the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture and Institute of Folklore to get his skills as a baker recognized as “intangible cultural heritage” and he himself as “Living Human Treasure”. The bargains between Bogdan and the state over what is tradition were ultimately tested through the textures and tastes of bread explored in another chapter (on
the missing kitchens) as a revealing case of the varied meanings and unexpected modes of implementation of UNESCO’s Conventions.

**Artificial (Bread) Rise and the Capitalist Fear of Falling**

It was around midnight when the wedding *pita* was finally ready, shining glazed with eggs by the candle illuminating the hand imprints and chaotic patterns left across the flour-covered table. Strangers had become “companions” during the elaborate wedding decoration that took more than 4 hours, but as Nikolata cried with joy and gave people hugs and thanks on her way out to the car and off to Sofia to make it to the next-day wedding, people were exclaiming with exhilaration how the bread made them feel “as one family” and how “the beautiful bread reflects the love we put into making it.” Their comments on the texture, aroma, and look of the bread echoed similar comments in many other gatherings at the Bread House, when bread became the tangible thing that people employed to read their emotional conditions so as to try to make better sense of their entangled inner world by performing it to others and to themselves.

In the midst of the excitement around the wedding bread, only Bobi sat silent and pensative. While the last people were wishing me good-night, he remained quiet alone by the table covered in crumbs, sticky remnants of dough and scattered flour. Gazing at the last sparkles disappearing between the coal, he suddenly opened up – a man who is usually behaving brusquely and loudly rude - to share the pain from his failed dreams to start a bakery and to revive the same taste and smell he experienced that night at the Bread House. “Now I only have bitter taste in my mouth from so much fighting with bureaucracy and the fear from the mafia” he sighed quietly, trying to hide the emotion.
For almost two years Bobi had been trying to start in Sofia a traditional bakery to make the bread that the monks at the Bulgarian Zograf Monastery “St. George” on Mount Athos bake for their daily use. Inspired by the hope to bring to Bulgaria the taste and aroma of this holy place, Bobi found himself disillusioned with the unbreakable walls of bureaucratic and financial impediments before small-scale bread producers, threatened not only by the immanent fines dictated by the absurd official hygienic standards but also by the huge bread factory monopolies bulwarked by criminal groups called “the bread mafia” defending their distribution territories with punches and bombs.

Bobi wanted me to meet Ivan, a friend of his who works for the French company which is the largest producer and importer of improving agents (podobriteli) for bread in Bulgaria, so I would understand better what was happening with Bulgarian bread – “and all our lives becoming surogats,” as Bobi exclaimed. We met with Ivan one evening in a park in Sofia a week after Bobi came to Gabrovo. “Not dozens – hundreds! - chemicals go into our breads today!”, Ivan exclaimed with a painful disappointment, despite his well-paying but not satisfying job.

Rising agents are to be found in most breads around Bulgaria similar to the discourse on the “grant application” as if the only guarantee for the participation in or quality of activities at most chitalishte. A friend of the Bread House, Ivan, lives in Sofia (but has come to make bread with others in Gabrovo) and works for the biggest importer of food additives played on the word podobritel (improving agent), whose root lies tellingly in the word for good (dobur): as Ivan pointed fagsetiously, “paradoxically really good (dobur) bread is one free of podobriteli,” despite the way the term was crafted in Bulgarian as a camouflage discourse. At the same time, most Bulgarian bread is not
simply not “good”, but it is also not “live” (жив, жив), as “live bread” refers to one made with natural, wild yeast or sourdough (квас, or квас), but currently bread in Bulgaria is made with an artificially derived fungus (мая, or what the Russians call дрожди) rather than getting the old-time sourdough bread with the natural lacto-acid fermentation of dough (the same one occurring in the famed Bulgarian yogurt) as it picks up lactum bacillicus bulgaricus (LBB) bacteria from the air. While the discourse on (and the public quest for) “live bread” (жив хляб) spread through TV reports on bread and Internet discussion sites where people ask how to make or buy such breads, live bread surfaces in the intriguing personal story of Bogdan, whose adventures with UNESCO’s commission and their definitions of heritage expand my analysis of bread as metaphor in broader discourses on what is “living” and what is “dead” in the concepts and performances of heritage and culture, where food plays a contested yet central role.

Flour and bread are being treated as sick patients, as for every weakness of the bread there is a chemical that is like an artificially created antidote… it is a quick fix preferred before trying to correct the process of production, because this takes time, effort, patience… and really, what it takes most of all is love! You simply have to love bread to be able to make good bread!35

While improving bread agents are being treated as vaccines, the whole discourse on foods being treated as sick patients echoes the discourse of drug monopolies and public health institutions (suspected by many people to be playing together with the corporations) treating people similarly as potentially sick patients who should either take preventive drugs or, particularly in the case of food consumption, are encouraged to take

ad-hoc drugs “improving digestion” and “neutralizing acid gases”. The language of illness caused by food reminds Susan Sontag’s (2001) analyses on the way illness, in particular tuberculosis in the 19th century and more recently cancer and AIDS, has been vested as a metaphor blaming the victim, which often strips patients of the agency to live in a sincere and open, even if deeply painful, social life. Similarly, the food-related health problems are regularly directed at the human body itself (its digestive system being flawed and needing to “improve”) rather than seeking the flaw in the quality of foods offered on the market. Furthermore, it is not surprising that such media-based manipulations funded by the drug monopolies are also reflected in the post-socialist urban landscape largely dictated by businesses rather than public plans, where now there are many more pharmacies than bakeries in the urban landscape of Bulgaria, which reflects a particular attitude towards food as a source of sickness – and as a sick being itself – which many people associate as imported from the West and dream to change.

Ivan spoke with nervousness clutching his fingers and with a restless shine in his eyes where strong emotions were flowing and mixing. He suddenly smiled and his look got a sharply different air of calmer happiness.

I have always wanted to be a real baker like my father, who had to shut down his bakery because of competition and went to work at the big bread factory. I dream to stop testing breads with various chemicals in my lab, but to open my small boutique bakery with many different loaves, each one made by hand, with love – my bread will simply be good (dobur) without any need for podobrite!

Ivan played on the word podobrite (improving agent), whose roots is the word for good (dobur) in order to point that a really good (dobur) bread is one free of such agents,
despite the way the term was crafted in Bulgarian as a camouflage discourse. At the same time, most Bulgarian bread is not simply not “good”, but it is also not “live” (жив), as “live bread” refers to one made with natural, wild yeast or sourdough (квас or квас), but currently bread in Bulgaria is made with an artificially derived fungus (мая, мая, or what the Russians call дрождии) rather than getting the old-time sourdough bread with the natural lacto-acid fermentation of dough (the same one occurring in the famed Bulgarian yogurt) as it picks up lactum bacillus bulgaricus (LBB) bacteria from the air. While the discourse on (and the public quest for) “live bread” (жив хлеб) spread through TV reports on bread and Internet discussion sites where people ask how to make or buy such breads, live bread surfaced also in the intriguing personal story of Bogdan, whose adventures with UNESCO and their definitions of heritage, as well as his creative way of using the global ICH discourse to legitimize his local claims and practices, expand my analysis of bread as metaphor in broader discourses on what is “living” and what is “dead” in culture, food, and people’s daily lives.

Cut Bread Cruelties: Stories About Cherishing the Wrong Crumbs

Similar to some people’s indignation at the disappearance of dining tables and commensality traditions around the world, many people in Bulgaria get upset at the sight of the ever more popular sales of pre-cut bread, considered a cultural degradation in the ultimate distortion of tradition. Such backlash is intriguing when compared to the common American expression “it is the best thing since sliced bread” pointing at two very different cultures in terms of their historic evolution, as the USA historically took
proud of its kitchen appliances achievement to the extent that they limited and sanitized ever more the touch with food and posed it in contrast to the backwardness of the Soviet kitchens in the famous “Kitchen Debate” between Nixon and Kruschev.

In the Bulgarian case, bread has been such a powerful cultural category, embedded in to most of the traditional ritual celebrations and songs derived from both pagan and Orthodox times, that it is not surprising people pay so much attention to all the details and senses involved in the experience of bread at a time when Bulgaria is notorious to be one of the country with the worst bread, as noted by Bulgarians who travel abroad and by foreigners who visit the country.

In this context, cut bread is still a contested invention that only recently entered the Bulgarian kitchen, and it became particularly contested when it entered the sacred space of the church. Bogdan told me about his friend Irina, an anthropologist at a French university researching the ritual role of bread in the Bulgarian church traditions, who did her fieldwork observing the practices at churches around Stara Zagora. Together with Bogdan they were shocked at one petohlebie (offering of five breads) ritual they attended.

I could not believe my eyes: once for a petohlebie I took five of my hand-made loaves to church, while the grandmothers were bringing packs of machine-cut breads with candles stuck in the plastic wrap! How could they not feel embarrassed! Really, what kind of sacrifice is this, what kind of a gift to God is something that you have not put any effort from you hands and any feeling from your heart?!

Bogdan’s eyes were shimmering with emotion while exclaiming with a marked indignation, clutching one of his breads and pointing with his eyes to its hard, crispy crust to emphasize the difference with the sponge-like texture of the factory-made breads. It
became clear that in the whole situation of distorted tradition Bogdan got mostly upset not even by the fact that the offerings were not home-made, but because the bread was already cut and it had lost its crust, to which Bogdan often refers to as the “character of the bread”. Similar indignation at breads without proper crust echoes in my grandmother’s voice when she recalls moments from socialism when she was forced to buy bread from the state-owned restaurants (when the bread shops were out of bread) and the restaurant sold her cut slices of bread. In this case again the thing that irritated her most was not that the slices were much more expensive than a regular loaf, but that she was missing the hard crust! The hard crust of the bread is key also to the inmates at the prison where Bobi, the documentary film-maker often goes to show and discuss his films, as they rebelled against the old spongy bread and struggled for fresh-made loaves, which a few inmates learned to make and became the prison bakers.

Two former prisoners told Bobi how the regular rhythm in the rolling movement of bread-kneading helped them calm down their minds and ultimately change their disposition towards life – and to gain hope for their life outside the prison. The stories of the internal transformation through the rhythm of bread-making contrast starkly the stories about the disgusting “prison loaf” used a disciplinary tool in a Maryland prison: for the two years that the administration had crafted a "special management meal" to "discourage negative inmate behavior,” violence against staff had decreased.”36 The “prison loaf” is a concoction of wheat flour with vegetable ingredients that looks like a bread loaf – and even adheres to all nutritional guidelines and most special diets - but tastes and smells abominably and is served consistently three times a day for a week or

---

until the prisoner changes his behavior. Other scandals around bread related to prison occurred in Washington state, when bread made by inmates started flooding the market and supply all local schools, thus destroying local bakers, who then undertook a moral argument against serving prison-made baked goods in schools, as one baker noted: “I am positive that most parents would not allow a time-serving convict into their kitchen to prepare their child’s meals, yet I believe that is what your School District is doing.”

Another key debate around prisons at the moment arose from an experiment carried out in England to experiment whether food can affect violence, as scientists hypothesize that when the brain is starved of essential nutrients, especially omega-3 fatty acids, which are a central building block of brain neurons, it loses "flexibility", which shortens attention spans and undermines self-control; the study proves statistically significant connection between good food and less violence Oxford physiologists hope to apply these findings to impact nutrition programs at schools and other public institutions.

From breads of control to breads of liberation for the hands and mind, bread in the context of religion has been in the center of all Bulgarian rituals, offered for church holidays and family celebrations. Called “pita” or “pitka”, what is typical for all of these breads is that they are round breads and they are meant to be broken, not cut with a

---


39 Pitka is a round bread loaf, whose preparation and consumption often can have a ritual meaning. For example, on the night before Christmas Eve, (Бъдни вечер, badni vecher) each housewife prepares a pita and decorates it with symbols to bring fertility to the cattle and a rich harvest from the fields, as well as prosperity to each member of the household. She hides a coin in it. Whoever finds the coin will be the healthiest and the wealthiest of the family. Prior to marriage, a bride’s future mother-in-law prepares a pita for the newlyweds and sifts the flour seven times, so that the pita will be soft as their future life together. Pita is also prepared for guests. A traditional welcome in Bulgaria includes pita and honey or salt. The meaning of this ritual can be found in the expression "to welcome someone with bread and salt", since bread is the base of Bularan culinary traditions as well as ritual religious traditions – coded in the Bulgarian proverb "no one is bigger than bread" - and salt is the basic ingredient that gives flavour to every meal.
knife (while this ritual practice of consumption is constant, the decorations vary widely depending on the area and the holiday, as Bulgaria has among the richest bread decoration traditions in Europe and perhaps the world). This explains Bogdan’s indignation before a bread brought for ritual and not fit to be broken! The meaning and importance of the act of breaking bread in the Bulgarian tradition, as well as already a signifier readable around the world as a sign of fellowship, is derived from the century-old Orthodox Christian tradition based on the ritual act of Christ breaking the bread with His apostles at the Last Supper as a symbol of the new covenant of friendship and love – Love that was meant to upgrade and supercede the Law of the Old Testament – where bread was the marker of the ultimate friendship and equality through love between God and Man.

The on-going reenactment of the liturgical rituals and symbols has seeped out of the ritual space and into the daily practices of the Bulgarian home through the gendered roles of the patriarchal figure, which is the one breaking the bread, and the matriarchal figure who is the one making the bread and owner of the wood-carved bread stamp (prosfora) that she has the power and responsibility to transmit to the daughter upon her marriage. The woman is also the one responsible for making bread for the home and the church as well as taking the bread to church to be blessed and bringing it back home, where the father breaks and distributes it. These rituals mark gendered social roles both performatively in terms of action and spatially in terms of places and their appropriate animators.

Breaking the bread among the most powerful ritual marking emotional bonds is vividly present in Louise DeSalvo’s (2004) book *Crazy in the Kitchen*, narrating the story
of an Italian family from Puglia in New Jersey and their family quarrels revolving around
food, the table and the kitchen space, the story ends with the dream that the family finally
gets appeased around breaking off pieces from the same bread: an action that is hard as
the bread is a traditional Italian loaf with hard, thick crust: “hard, but not impossible”,
DeSalvo ends her narrative. The ending opens the potential for multiple relations as the
pieces of bread keep circulating as gifts tangibly marking the reciprocities of love and responsibility.

Similar indignation to the one sensed by Bogdan at the sight of the pre-cut,
crustless bread brought to church is expressed by many at the sight of people coming to
the church service only in order to be given at the end the nafora bread. The name of this
bread comes from the Greek anaphora meaning “not the gift,” or “instead of the gift”, the
gift here denoting the Gift bread placed on the altar that is believed to become true body
of Christ, which together with the cup of wine becoming the blood of Christ form the
Holy Eucharist (Communion). According to the theological principles set by the main
Church Councils in the first centuries of the establishment of the Christian doctrine
(before the schism between Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism), people are
encouraged and expected to be active participants in the Liturgy and to take Communion
regularly meaning “if three times in a row the person does not take Communion, he/she
has to be accountable before the whole community of practitioners for the reasons of
splitting from the collective partaking. For those who for some serious reason (health
problems, menstrual aches, etc.) are unable to partake in the Eucharist - the “real” Bread
(prosphora) - then anaphora is distributed (simple blessed bread that has not become
body of Christ on the altar table and is therefore a symbolic but not real substitute, as no
substitute is ultimately possibly for the Bread “above all breads”): this in a way “surogat” bread is a symbolic way to mark these people belonging to the community of practice even if they are not actually participating in the central ritual. However, as the tradition of taking regular Communion got lost during centuries of Ottoman dominion marked by lack of priests and low levels of theological education, and later on decades of socialism when people were discouraged from attending church, the practice of taking the anaphora at the end of the Liturgy became the norm, rather than the exception.

The non-theologically grounded practice of cherishing “the wrong bread”, quoting some people’s words, or to not be able to distinguish the “real” bread from the inauthentic/”surogat” one, as well as the popular aversion towards regularity/frequency of Communion, are the two main issues that fuel the rising indignation of many Bulgarian young new-born Christians – or what a priest in the USA distinguished as “faith-based Christians” rather than “culture-based” or “cradle” Christians - ages 15-40, who discuss in Internet fora, university conferences, informal meetings, and at churches ways to revive the Eucharistic communion in Bulgaria. Many of these people frame the Eucharist as the summit, the fulfillment of God’s plan for the salvation of man, and thus the revival of Communion is often framed in terms of reviving the meaning of “oikonomia” (literally, “house management” in Greek), meant to define God’s plan for salvation enabling man to return to his original home (Paradise). Human nature is being elevated once again to its original purity through God’s own incarnation, and thus the ritual of partaking regularly in the Eucharist, or partaking physically as well as spiritually in God’s ongoing incarnation made fully present during the Liturgy through the
transformed bread and wine into Body and Blood of Christ, becomes the pivotal ritual in
the process of man’s “return home,” or salvation.

Concepts of time – expressed through the bargains over the meaning of what is
“regular” and “rare” partaking in the Eucharist – as well as concepts of matter –
expressed through the discussions on the meaning of physically partaking the Eucharist as
a way to participate in the divine energies and the divine oikonomia – and ultimately
concepts of space – expressed through the arguments over the meaning of church space
for collective prayer and the meaning of having or building communal dining
areas/trapeza which had usually not been planned as parts of divine oikonomia – are
contested concepts that define in different but completentary ways the complex picture of
Bulgarian post-socialist rethinking of religious practice in community, which illuminates
in many ways the contested meanings of similar concepts of time, matter, and space when
it comes to the rethinking and animation of the community cultural centers/houses of
culture.

The Greek term oikonomia became used in Bulgaria since about 2000 in various
contexts that do not correspond to the original meaning and application of the concept.
From the Eucharist and also the flexibility of applying church rules across board (but
rather apply them personally, such as when and how much to fast, etc.) extending widely
as a concept of restoring a non-monetary form of economy/relations evolving in the
sphere of charity and volunteer work, social and NGO projects, and ecology and
agriculture, as more ecologically-aware young adults increasingly seek good-quality,
“real” and “live” foods and leisure experiences in nature and in traditional culture
(heritage).
I often heard in groups around the *chitalishte*, in particular in Bistritsa and the Bread House but also across youth and other NGO organizations and universities and in the business sphere, the complaint that: “Our whole life has become a *surogat* (replacing, artificial substance)!”. Many of my interlocutors juxtaposed to this artificial living the choice to return to folk dance and music as part of their overall return to the “search for the real things in life,” from the musical vibes resonating their throats when they sing the century-old polyphonies to the varied textures and tastes of real food, some hard and pungent, some soft and sweet, some chewy and bitter: just like music and its fluctuations.

The further spilling of the ritual meaning of bread into daily practices is observed in the language formation and the multiple idiomatic expressions using bread to denote very distinct characteristics. The expression “no one is bigger than bread” pointing to bread as central to the main spiritual practice (partaking in the Liturgy) and other church-related rituals and the main and basic part in any meal, daily and festive. Similarly, the importance of a bread crust hard to be broken - the way relationships take time to settle - is expressed in Bulgarian culture through various bread-related expressions. For example, defining someone as *korav* (“crusty”) is a particular way of expressing resilience. It not to say “strong” or “flexible” (which could be *jilav*, жилав), but someone who has a certain way of protecting himself from the malicious impacts of the outside word. It is precisely the kind of resilience that “real” bread has, according to Bogdan and other knowledgeable old-time bakers: not hard, but rather firmly flexible bread, whose quality is tested when the master baker sits on the bread for a while and then it resumes its original shape rather than staying flat and sticky. The word *korav* follows in a set of other adjectives related to bread: *pechen* (baked), meaning someone who is wise and cunning, particularly after
having gone through a lot of hardships and lessons in life; zakvasen (with added yeast, not yet fermented), meaning having been brought up or socialized with certain principles, usually connected to positive traits in one’s upbringing but also noting that it is the person’s own responsibility to fulfill this inherent potential; izklasil (from the word for wheat-ear, klas, and in particular a growing wheat-ear) denotes a person who has matured, grown up, and succeeded; vtasal (yeasty, fermented), used in the active form of “Vtasahme ia!” meaning that someone has failed to make use of the right time and has committed errors (similar to noting when the yeast has reached the right time of fermentation to start baking).

The most wide-spread of all phrases related to bread in Bulgaria, however, is the one saying: “No one is bigger than bread,” and its roots go back to the Christian Orthodox understanding of the Bread above all bread (the Eucharist where bread becomes the Body of Christ). This takes us back to the first chapter, when Dina was the only one rejecting to partake of the chocolate candy that night at the Bistritsa chitalishte in Sofia, and she marked this resistance, willing to take the negative comments of the group members, in the name of a statement about her ultimate spiritual values and meanings she felt strongly about striving to save. Dina was pointing to a “heritage” that was not generally classified as Bulgarian folklore by the Ministry of Culture, as most Bulgarian folklorists were trained under socialism to value and search for the pagan vestiges in folklore and emphasize what they called “spiritual culture” as a social construct that proved Christianity as a made-up system of control.

Dina was striving to challenge this vision and told me she would regularly participate in their local church services and feasts hoping to get the youth ever more
inspired, which in fact is a trend which I later discovered was a slowly evolving movement among Bulgarians youth forming a network of “Eucharistic revival”. By Orthodox Christianity, Dina emphasized the word “practice” and not the marker of cultural belonging to which according to recent demographic surveys around 85 percent of the population ascribe. Out of these 85 percent, most churches on a Sunday for Communion would receive an average of 10 to 20 older women who would also not take Communion – a practice that is unpacked below in cultural, theologic, and phenomenological terms.

While collective bread-making evolved as a collective leisure and ritual activity, bread-breaking and partaking of the Eucharist in Orthodox churches around the country took its own form of a contested revival movement as most “traditionalists” priests rejected people’s calls for regular Communion and insisted on the “unworthiness of people” to partake often of the “divine bread Body of Christ” thus limiting it to a few times a year.

While Bulgarian cultural belonging is largely defined by greeting guests with home-made bread and honey, at home gatherings and chitalishte celebrations alike, being a Bulgarian Orthodox Christian is also centered on food – and this is how the central ritual role of bread evolved in folk traditions – derived from the sacrament of the Eucharist.40 I conducted participant observation research for a year between September 2010 and September 2011 at the Bulgarian Orthodox Youth Network (an online-based community of young people from around Bulgaria and also Bulgarians living outside the country) at their weekly gatherings at the parish hall of one of the churches in Sofia. Most

---

40 When I refer in general philosophic terms to Orthodoxy and the Eucharist I refer not to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church alone, but to all the ancient Churches of the East (the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Orthodox, and the Assyrian Church of the East).
young people based their claims on reviving the “Church” not as an institution but as the unity of all believers in their daily practices of building community, inspired by contemporary Greek theologians like John Zizioulas (1997) and their Bulgarian counterpart theologians organizing regular conference at the theology departments at the Sofia and Veliko Turnovo Universities, which affected very much the young theologian, Nikolai, who was giving lectures at the Bread House, and who often took the occasion of collective bread-making to speak about the “other” bread, the forgotten bread of the Eucharist that people were now taking once a year, if at all, but which was to be taken weekly.

Such Eucharistic revival vision was spread among the Orthodox youth as they often read the same sources, mostly the foundational Church fathers from the first centuries like St. John of Damascus and St. John Chrysostom. They argued that it is the individuals, not the institutions, that are meant to come together and start expanding the ripples to growing numbers of people and their circles of contacts, employing the image and metaphor of Communion as the partaking of one bread and one cup to a community of co-creators and participants in the divine oikonomia, or God’s plan for the salvation of Man. In these weekly gatherings, the issue of oikonomia appeared to be a recurring theme, and there was a fair consensus that oikonomia meant the ways in which God’s plan for living in love with Man ultimately meant man was God’s co-worker. In this sense, life’s ultimate meaning was perceived to be the on-going exercise of learning to apply the “rule of love” rather than the “rules of law” (kenosia). It was these contested concepts and relations between “law” and “love” that got materialized in the contested
commensalities of who eat or does not eat what and when, and such contested commensality occurred around the table at the Bread House one night in December 2010.

**Eucharistic Communities: Communion and Community as “New Traditions”**

It was during a regular evening of collective bread-baking in December 2010 at the Bread House *chitalishte* in Gabrovo, when a woman came with a box of chocolates to celebrate her birthday with the people present, most of them strangers she had never met before but she had come once and she liked the atmosphere and said she wanted to “share [my] joy with people that are neither family nor friends but kindred spirits”. However, it happened to be a day of fasting according to the Orthodox holiday tradition. When the chocolate box was unwrapped and about to start circulating the table, some of the people who were practicing believers and fasting at the moment started bouncing off each other questioning looks whether they should eat the chocolate and bread the fast. Nikolai, the theologian, dared to make the move, as the one who had already been a point of reference and authority for the community on various theological issues. He took a chocolate candy and ate it! To the astonishment of the pious, fasting people, Nikolai made a point that was later largely contested:

This is how we should understand the principle of the *oikonomia*. It is how out of love and in the name of unity, peace, and fellowship man is free to bend the rule and make it flexible. Breaking the fast out of a sign of love is more pleasing than separating oneself from the others and even potentially causing anger or disruption. The main principle is fellowship.
Unlike Dina who rejected the chocolate out of adherence to tradition that she perceived as the most important “intangible heritage” that was to be kept unchanged, Nikolai did not reject the chocolate for the sake of the more recent, for some Bulgarians and in particular most clergy, “invented tradition” of applying rules flexibly and taking regular Communion emphasized as an expression of God’s love rather than something one “deserved” after long fasting periods. In the revival of theological discourses among the “new-born” Orthodox Christians in post-socialist Bulgaria, the contemporary embrace of the values of love and fellowship started challenging many of the traditional practices and superstitions in the church enacted by the grandmothers (babi), who had like Dina been socialized in the church only how to follow the rules of the letter.

Already before the advent of Communism, Orthodoxy in Bulgaria was very much influenced by Russian Orthodox and Catholic scholasticism focused on fixed rules, and while Dina was enacting what her grandparents had taught her in secret at home before the home iconostasis (icon shelf) and she kept hoping to educate others, her young group members in particular, about the practice of Orthodoxy, Dina could not comprehend the principle of oikonomia - when, where, and how can the laws be flexible and changed on each individual case so that love may come first before the Letter – since such complex theological principles were not discussed by the priests and taught to the parishes in the past and still across the country, yet these issues were also becoming central among the revived Bulgarian Orthodox youth movement over the past decade.

Whithin the debates on what is the role of the chitalishte for local development, I noticed a trend of arguments about the main value of the chitalishte being that they promote and support non-monetary, non-market relations, exchanges, and performances, and are thus among the few, if not only, public spaces that do not require payment (even churches were sometimes quoted to
have become more commercial than the chitalishte, as people are asked to pay for all sacraments, from baptism to marriage and funeral, and for candles and even bottled blessed/holy water). I denote these dynamics as *home oikonomia* (from the Greek Orthodox *oikonomia*) encompassing people’s calling for alternative non-monetary economies, and building the term on the usage of the term *oikonomia* among Bulgarians over the past few years in their efforts to revive Orthodox spirituality in its most “authentic” form, deemed by many to have been preserved by the Greek church, and thus applying the Greek term *oikonomia*, denoting “the rules of the house of God” rooted in Orthodox Christianity.

In Bulgaria, some people started applying the term *oikonomia* to situations outside its traditional meaning in the sphere of religion and employed it as a larger, holistic worldview upholding an alternative view of society based not on money but exchange and support networks, of humanism above materialism, and most importantly of the principle of “love”, spelled over and over again, over “law” and the dry application of social and legal norms. The call for alternative, non-monetary economies has been advocated widely over the past decade in Bulgaria by various social and environmental groups in Bulgaria, in particular those resisting the genetically-modified crops with official representative of the Bulgarian church arguing that agriculture is one of the key elements of the divine *oikonomia*. In the context of Bulgaria, the word *oikonomia* got translated not as economy – which is *ikonomika* – but as *ikonomia*, which in a non-Orthodox context denotes thriftiness and parsimony in spending and allocating resources. In this sense, Gabrovo famous for its humor on the thriftiness of its inhabitants, can be called “the Mecca of Bulgarian *ikonomia*” (in economic terms), yet as I will show below, Gabrovo has also one of the most vibrant young Orthodox communities and presents a good vantage point from which to examine the revival of Orthodox Christianity in Bulgaria and to compare it to the dynamics of the revival of authentic folklore at the chitalishte, challenging the socialist-time censored staged folklore, and thus recovering
multiple songs and cultural celebrations rooted in Orthodox Christianity, lived as a leisure rather than a spiritual practice, yet employing the discourse on the importance of not using money to mediate or value objects, performances, exchanges and thus relationships.

In the cases of the use of humor in Bulgaria and to extend it here to the houses of culture in Cuba, particularly in the various political commentaries and critiques through comic performances and the informal kitchen spaces developed at the houses of culture in both countries, we already observed how particularly subversive nooks of agency are created and enlivened within the improvised kitchen spaces. We can understand these ambivalent relations within Merton’s classical frame of “sociological ambivalence”, applied to the ambiguous Orthodox notion of oikonomia that defines the subtleties of ambivalence and flexibility in the application of laws and norms of behavior and ritual adherence when it comes to the management of each individual and then to the relationship of the individual to the organization of a community or society imagined as one “household” or “house” (oikos), where the main principle of love in human relationships allows enough space for bargains over meaning and opinion.

I thus draw a parallel between the way the roots of the socialist houses of culture model were forgotten and not traced back to the Bulgarian non-socialist, civil society-based, grassroots chitalishte network and how this process of institutional lack of continuity and political amnesia resembles the processes through which the daily practices and the scholarly field of economics have drifted away and forgotten the roots of the term “economics” and its foundational principles as a non-monetary system of
exchange and management, rooted in the belief in collective support and coexistence in love in a co-creative relationship with the divine “plan for salvation.”

While the term economics comes from the Greek oikonomia, its theological meaning has been lost over the centuries in the market economy, but is currently being intriguingly revived both in the field of religion and of social exchanges that anthropologist would describe as a symbolic economy and gift exchange relations. The term oikonomia is becoming ever more popular among the new-born Orthodox Christians in Bulgaria referring to two principles they deem most missing in the older generation’s understanding of the practice of spirituality: 1) oikonomia as the flexible, not strict obedience to “the law”, or the “Letter”, but rather put the principle of “love” above “law”; and 2) oikonomia as the notion of the way God planned and created the world and in particular the path towards Man’s return to love and be in communion with Christ, which is believe to be achieved on this Earth through Christian communities where people practice together “Communion”, or the Eucharist (the transformed Bread and Wine). These revived church communities imagine the building of a community as a tight social network, and they attempted to organize it by extending the moment of Communion outside of the ritual context and trying to organize regular food gatherings after the Liturgy. However, they stumbled across a spatial impediment: the missing kitchen at the church. Thus, similar to the chitalishte spatial problem of the missing kitchen, the missing kitchen at the church - missing for different reasons – resulted as a key impediment in establishing and practicing communal life.

The place of kitchens in public institutions and organizations is an intriguing issue to research as it reflects the ultimate question about control and power in social relations:
who is allowed to associate with whom and in what ways and to what means. For example, at Princeton University professors had to argue strongly for a collective snack place in the Engineering Building claiming it would enhance socialization that would ultimately lead to more cooperation, co-creation and thus innovation; in some corporations and businesses, kitchens are not created so as not to distract people but rather limit them to eating their lunch in front of the computer screens; and yet in these cases, even the water fountain in the corridor could become a site of informal socialization, even giving rise to the expression “water fountain gossip.”

In the USA, at Princeton, I had a telling experience related to this issue of communal space. In the fall of 2011, I spent three months searching for a campus building or off campus old house with a functioning kitchen and/or fireplace where I wanted to continue organizing collective bread-making events for the Princeton community. I was shocked to discover that kitchens were frozen from any buildings considered as public spaces for events (only catering from certified industrial kitchens was permitted). As Raoul Momo, owner of a few local restaurants at Princeton, who came on the “kitchen hunt,” noted: “it has been institutionalized to rule the kitchen out of public spaces as if screaming: “No cooking! No Cooking!” Passively eating bought food, yes, but no cooking together!”

Within the contested area of food in public places and institutions, or what I distinguish as passive “feeding institutions” and interactive “feedback institutions” where you can actually make your own food with others, the issue of smell is perhaps even more contested that taste, as smell is hard to control and purify and certain smells considered inappropriate in certain places – again, considering Mary Douglas’ notion but

---

41 Raoul Momo, Terra Momo Group restaurant owner, Princeton. Comment made on November 11, 2011.
also expanding it to the immateriality of the “matter” she is talking about: kitchen smells were culturally not supposed to permeate the *chitalishte* or the church, which in Bulgaria has been traditionally reflected in the spatial organization of the house, as Bulgarian kitchens are still separated by doors from the rest of the house and smell is to be isolated, since it belonged to the sacred domain of the kitchen reserved for the woman and the preparation of both daily and festive and sacred foods. Similar sacralization of the kitchen space has been observed across traditional cultures, from the Kabile houses in Algeria and Tunisia studied by Bourdieu to the Brazilian pre-colonial and colonial homes explored by Da Matta.

In this sense, it is intriguing how with the increasing secularization of the Western cultural worldview, the kitchen became ever more a de-sacralized, public space until it fully opened up and fused with the living room, where kitchens became performances of status, power, and cultural capital (education, sophistication, sensitivity) vested in cultured tastes of and for food.

At the same time that smells are often to be confined and controlled so as not to disrupt the clean segregation of social spheres – work, home, play, intimacy, sport, art, healthcare, etc. – one smell in particular has been allowed and even welcome in various spheres and it is the smell of hot bread. Bread smell is welcome and used in contexts from artificial bread-smell sprays being applied to sell houses in the real estate business to letting bread smell infuse hospitals, schools, orphanages, and old people’s homes as I personally conducted experiments by offering to hold collective bread-making events – and potentially regular programs – at various public institutions, which in most cases were willing and even excited to have their spaces being infused with the smell of hot
bread (rather than the smell of curry or grilled meat). So why is bread an exception to other foods and smells? I would argue that this is due to its particular spatial – intangibly tangible – association with home, which is so key to the idea and experience of community and sense of belonging, thus implying the potential for cooperation rather than disfunction.

The issue of place in leisure practices has not been sufficiently studied, but the enthography *A sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (1996) by John Jackson offers intriguing observations on the difference in the meaning of dwellings for the Mexicans and the Americans in New Mexico, which reveals an important difference between the developed West and the developing world in terms of the meanings and uses of home and public space. The variety of dwellings Johnson describes varies from small adobe houses to trailers (or mobile home) as new forms of residence, appearing attached to houses or even on top of houses, evolving since the 1960s and reflecting people’s rising readiness to move in search of new economic possibilities (53). Though not expressed in mobile structures, traditional Bulgarian houses always had a special part with a secret exit as well as a hiding room in order to protect the family from imminent attack by the Ottoman army or bandits. On such occasions of sudden attacks, old people’s stories, including my greatgrandmother’s narratives about her grandmother, tell how people used to flee their homes making sure that in the rush they take what was perceived as of most value for the family: the home altar icon and the festive bread stamp (prosphora). These stories of objects with high intangible value echo the story analyzed by Megan Foreman in her Princeton University dissertation (2011) showing the various popular interpretations of
the narrative about a Hungarian baker who rushed and took only his bread-making tools with him when fleeing Communism.

Jackson discusses how the nomadic, mobile nature of the trailer dwelling is what places it in the twilight zone of uncertainty. A key topic in the experience of the trailer and why people decide to move from their old Spanish-Amerian adobe homes into trailers is “that indefinable smell of newness” (61) and argues that the dwelling of the laborer or peasant (as trailer homes are usually owned by low-wage factory laborers) can be examined vis-à-vis the upper-middle and high-class dwellings in terms of the functionality of spaces as a marker of social class and status. “Monofunctional spaces” with specialized use or reserved for a particular person, such as guests or the study or reading room, etc., as traditional for artistocratic homes, evolved into the emergence of the modern hi-tech kitchen becoming “a cluster of monofunctional spaces,” which Jackson analyzes as a “small-scale architectural version of a widespread modern tendency to organize all spaces in the landscape in terms of some special function” (65).

To further contribute to Jackson’s work on multifunctional home/private space, I find relevant to the chitalishte (as the epitomy of multifunctional public space) are the studies done by Jack Goody (1982), quoted in Karen Hansen’s African Encounters with Domesticity (1992), where he points to kitchens and cooking as reflecting economic production and differentiation, with “high” cuisine evolving where people have differentiated access to resources and thus able to allocate special foods to specific roles, offices, or classes, explaining the lack of differentiated cuisine in precolonial Africa, which I would argue, is the explanation for the lack of differentiated cuisine in the Balkans, however with the exception of specialty foods for religious feasts (rather than
classes), where the elaborate array of bread decorations enters as a particular illustration of a world view materialized in food as a channel for social network creation through bread-breaking rituals.

Furthermore, Goody shows how “high” and “low” cuisines are divided sexually, marking hierarchy and specialization in elaborate cooking as associated with men as cooks (thus in Zambian white households African women would serve as nannie but not cooks for the differentiated “high” cuisine), which I would argue functions similarly for men as bakers, while it is the women who bake and cook in the private home. Similarly, Hansen notes how the honorary job as a male cook has been reduced in post-colonial times to a general male house servant, which is a situation in which men refuse to cook complaining it is “women’s work” (279), reflecting the ongoing recomposition of the meanings of food and cooking as gender roles get redrafted under economic and social shifts. In a similar trend in Bulgaria, as making bread at home disappeared during the years of massive female employment under socialism, returning to these traditional forms of cuisine becomes a luxury experience more and more appealing to the educated middle and upper-middle classes and furthermore including men who find the tactile engagement with food as self-fulfilling which often discursively has to do with the pleasure and pride taken in the very tangible product of their hands which is not often the case at their jobs where the products of work are ever less tangible being virtual, computer and number-based.

To return to the notion of the distinction of class reflects in the distinction between mono and multi-functional spaces, Jackson notes how the working-class house seems to have been largely immune from the attraction of monofunctional space, as
Jackson notes how rooms change their uses and occupants from hour to hour, the dining room – as importantly noted, if there is one holding a dining table at all – shifts from dining to TV to homework space to bedroom with someone sleeping on the couch at night. The same occurred in the Bulgarian traditional household of the peasant families, where the “nar” (wooden platform) would be at the same time a table, a sofa, a chest for storage, and a bed, where multifunctionality signals lower economic status for it is the creative adjustment to the scarcity of space and resources.

However, when applying this analytical framework from private dwellings to community, public spaces, an inverted principle seems to be relevant: the chitalishte in Bulgaria were built with the purpose to be multifunctional and serving a variety of activities and people, and it was precisely their multi-layeredness that inspired people in various towns across the country to build them forming rapidly of network of about 2000 in only a few decades by the turn of the 20th century!

Indeed, the chitalishte’s multifunctionality included anything that was of interest to the local people, from arts and cultural celebrations to agricultural lectures and food festivals to reading clubs, adult education, taking care of the poor, and raising money for scholarships for local talented children to be educated abroad. However, once the communist regime co-opted the chitalishte and turned them into a state-dependent and state-controlled institution, their multifunctionality was cut to a fairly rigid monofunctionality that limited the arts and culture to particular censored folklore and modern artistic forms that suited the regime’s ideology. In this sense, monofunctionality was used as a tool of control, and a particular reflection of this strategy was the exclusion of food from the field of cultural creation – whereas previously people widely socialized
around food in the chitalishte – and again, as in aristocratic homes, multifunctionality at
the chitalishte was deemed a sign of low culture by the socialist aesthetics project to
control through purity and form.

The inherited wariness from messiness was often evident in Dina’s efforts to hide
any remnants of the Bistritsa Babi’s singing group’s coffee hour or the evening food
exchanges for the mixed generations dance group. Food’s place was not on the stage, yet
the stage without the food - in the back, on the lid of the hidden piano and in the back
room with table improvised of school desks put together - would otherwise lack flavor,
phenomenologically and semantically.

Jackson further analyzes how the provisions that a household makes for
hospitality is the element most skillfully used to perform socio-economic status and
employed as a channel for social capital: the formal front-door and lobby, the drawing
room (or library), and the guest bedroom and bath, as “each of these spaced contains
discrete symbols of status,” all speak of the luxury to afford to have guests but also
require the formality of pre-arranged visits through a schedule fixed well in visits. On the
contrary, in the vernacular dwellings usually there are no formal requirements for
arranging visits but there are also no formal spatial arrangements for hospitality, and the
guest is rather naturally included in the daily rhythm of the family. Jackson argues that
this is due to the distinct notions of what the home stands for: the vernacular dwelling is
perceived as “a place for the rituals of privacy, not for the pursuit of influence and
power” (66), and hospitality is less of an initiation into the private space as an
autonomous territory and much more “a celebration of the super-family.” In these cases,
the greatest expressions of hospitality are to be performed outside of the home, as family
reunions take over the school gymnasium, the parish hall, the hall of the local protective fraternal order, “and for the time being the super-family uses it as if it belonged to them and no one else” (67).

Johnson’s observations of the private uses of these public spaces in lower-income settings echoes the dynamics I have been observing at the chitalishte in Bulgaria, the casas de la cultura in Cuba, and the casas do samba and pontos de cultura in Brazil. These seemingly formal cultural centers are often informally used by families and community groups for private celebrations like birthdays, weddings, and funerals, and even if they differ in sizes, administration, neighborhood contexts, and cultural framings, they all share a potential for informality and multifunctionality that local people use in various ways by often engaging in negotiations with the center’s administrators over the meanings and uses of these centers, which are clearly bargains over the meaning of “culture” and the degrees of informality allowed in its living at the cultural centers. Jackson argues that the dependence of the vernacular family on its immediate environment for spatial use – for celebrations of family events like marriages and funerals – is a relationship not of “servitude” but of “something morally dependable,” where vernacular space is considered distinct from territorial space for “it belongs to us” (67). It is a place that no one has particular legal title over, but a common place, a “common denominator which makes each vernacular neighborhood a miniature common-wealth” (67).

The situation particularly with the Bulgarian chitalishte often ends up being far from this communal, shared, and in many ways utopian state of vernacular space, as many chitalishte in the post-socialist period shifted from vernacular spaces to territorial
spaces as the socialist-appointed and socialist-minded administrators that remained in office tried to use the chitalishte as vehicles for the new gains and benefits that capitalism opened and made possible: some chitalishte were secretly leased to private businesses for rent collected by the head of the board and thus closed for community events; some had their furniture stolen and placed in private homes; others were used for the import of various goods from abroad as using the face of a non-profit exempts them from taxes, as many stories go about chitalishte administrators importing TV sets and computers sent from friends from abroad after the 1990s; ultimately, those chitalishte with less inventive or less advantageous administrators who were no longer willing to work for such nominal wage, simply locked the buildings, yet did not resign from their positions clinging to the symbolic capital of their title.

At the same time, many chitalishte during the transition to democracy and market economy put special efforts into becoming more and more vernacular spaces by outreaching to the local community, inviting people for various events for free so that they could expand their membership base and thus increase their popularity and attendance that would ultimately have monetary expression in the more inscriptions in their paid arts classes offerings. Furthermore, I experienced first-hand the complexity of transitioning from territorial to vernacular space through the experiences with the opening of my great grandmother’s private home to public use as a chitalishte and the months it took for people to develop a sense of ownership and belonging to the space, which was marked by the transitioning from people referring to the house as “Nadezhda’s home” to the recent references to the Bread House as “our chitalishte” as people had more and more chances to fill the house with their own old furniture, objects of daily use,
hand-knit table covers, wall decorations, bread stamps, flours, cups, plates, foods, plants, flowers, etc. The material culture that evolved through their gifting to the common house became the channel for nurturing a sense of ownership and collective belonging in which the on-going circulation of foods at every bread event affirmed – even if sometimes contested - the collective ownership over the house.

As time passed, a particularly powerful channel for belonging became the shared religious and spiritual values around the craving for reviving traditional Bulgarian breads not as mere markers of “folklore,” which is what many seemed to be tired of due to the socialist discourse and use of pita breads as signifiers of typical Bulgarian hospitality in various public events marking anniversaries or greeting foreign political delegations. Rather, the breads that arose more interest were the traditional church breads that people had stopped making for over half a century, yet the bread stamps still laid at the bottom of many drawers waiting to be resurrected. These unexpected overlappings and interweavings between arts, culture, and religion propelled my own re-discovery of faith, which was a milestones personal moment of catharsis that is important to factor in my methodological self-reflexivity. Such metanoic experiences have occurred in the paths of other anthropologists, as anthropologists in general cannot predict or expect as they set off to do fieldwork and ultimately do not know what in the local culture they are about to explore and how they would come into contact and change but also be changed.

Marhsal Sahlins analyzes these economic and cultural dynamics and evolutions of how concepts of ethics and morality have been used in capitalist and market developments in his collected reflections in *Culture in Practice*, where he notes how the developed capitalism and the Industrial Revolution required that people re-invest money
with meaning in order to explain and excuse the capitalist transgressions on notions of human kindness and this process of legitimation was done by affirming that life’s ultimate driving force was each individual’s pursuit of happiness understood mainly through the pursuit of the demands of the flesh and other sensorial pleasures. He notes the paradox in the inherent contradiction in the master trope of “progress” as the supposed victory of Reason whereas it is this victory of Reason that simultaneously lauded the satisfaction of the non-rational individual pleasures (539). Sahlins points how “anyone who defines life as the pursuit of happiness has to be chronically unhappy” (Sahlins 569), and he roots his cultural analysis in the historic and cultural study of sugar as the Western drive for self-gratification through various soft drugs (coffee, tea, chocolate). This point is further analyzed by Mintz (1985) to denote the failure of “retail therapy” where “the feeling that in self-denial lies virtue and in consumption sin, is still powerfully present” (1993:269 in Sahlins 570). Furthermore, sweet and salty have been taste signifiers for larger social spheres such as gender division along the lines of women being associated with the senses and irrationality and emotion versus men being associated with reason in most European folklore (see Lynes 1987 and Lloyd 1984).

While Sahlins shows how the Western economic growth evolved through the self-propelling convictions that life is about happiness and that happiness is about the satisfaction of individual pleasures, he does not talk about Eastern Europe and the Middle East, where a different kind of economic thinking was inherited from the Byzantine Empire and kept evolving in Eastern Europe during the centuries under the Ottoman

42 Coffee shops in the Balkans spread over the course of only a few decades since it was introduced in Constantinople under the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century and spread quickly all over and became hubs of male social interactions and politics, while later, currently, coffee is associated with women and gossiping (see Bachtin) while cigarettes do remain linked to men.
Empire, where the predominantly peasant and agricultural economic means sustained an economic culture rooted in what I would call a *spiritual oikonomic culture* grounded in the traditional Eastern Orthodox Christian vision of the ultimate goal of life being the accumulation of grace in one’s body and spirit as the way towards salvation, understood as a close relationship of love with God. In this *oikonomic* vision, the “rules for the management of the household” of mankind all are meant to lead to human salvation or the ultimate ”return home” (the real, lost “oikos”), which is the Heaven, the Kingdom of God. In this sense, in the *oikonomic* vision of the world, suffering and pain have an ultimate cathartic, transformational meaning, and I discovered how more and more people in Bulgaria employed the discourse and practice of rejoicing suffering. I would argue that this type of lament, different from simple lament speech as we already observed in Ledeneva (1998), is a talk where lived but also exaggerated, imagined, and performed suffering often serve the purpose of empowerment and agency.

Maya, the theologian leading the multi-age Sunday school in Gabrovo where many of the participants and volunteers at the Bread House go for Liturgy, talks a lot about suffering during her lectures. This group is the one where the notion of “oikonomia” already widely circulates and which defines in many ways their experiences of, what they define as, a Eucharistic community. Maya would almost invariably mention something about the significance of “sweet bitterness” in people’s lives. Being born on the day of St.Job, who in the Old Testament is known for thanking God regardless of all his inflictions and pains, Maya in her physical suffering from many allergies kept reading her own life through the script of the Saint’s life. She tried to constantly find the hidden meanings in the apparent lack of meaning in her pain.
Her talks often made others who were not undergoing suffering feel awkward and feel as sinners for not having deserved enough suffering. While trying to balance things out and joking about these extreme views, Nikolai, the other theologian, who sometimes leads the Sunday discussions but more often speaks at the Bread House, made a point that indeed such a positive vision on pain and difficulties in general is much different from the Protestant discourses on how it is rather health and wealth that mark your proximity to God (the essential formula of American pietism).

According to early Church Fathers, analyzed in Sahlins, it was the bodily needs that marked man’s distance from God’s self-sufficient perfection (in Feuerbach 1957), indeed, the very first sense of the fallen nature of Adam and Eve being bodily shame. Nonetheless, in the East the distinction between body and soul was never as pronounced as in the West, and thus Eastern Christianity in many ways avoided the Cartesian dichotomy between the carnal and the spiritual but rather kept the concept of deification, which made the central goal of life to be to transform the human flesh into divine, incorruptible flesh (seen in the incorruptibility of saints’ bodies even nowadays). Nonetheless, the road to deification is certainly hard, and it passes through dealing with all the bodily needs such as hunger and cold that came with the status of Man outside the perfect oikos, the Garden of Eden. On this point, Sahlins jokingly proclaims:

Still, God was merciful. He gave us Economics! By Adam Smith’s time, human misery had been transformed into the positive science of how we make the best out of eternal insufficiencies, the most possible satisfaction from means that are always less than our wants. (570)
To Sahlins’ joke, I would jokingly reply that Economics was taken to perfection by the Gabrovians in Bulgaria, whose humor on being “economical”, or parsimonious, was exported all the way to Ethiopia, where the word “Gabrov” entered the Amharic language in the 1980s to denote “stinginess.” Ethiopians whom I talked to during the two months I lived in the country kept telling me that stinginess had traditionally been a culturally alien concept and practice and this is why the Gabrovian jokes became so popular as a newly coined term to define more recently developed practices in Ethiopian culture. This import of the category of stinginess from one culture to the other reveals how Ethiopia, like many other countries over the past few decades and Bulgaria and the former-socialist states since the 1990s, has been transitioning into new forms of economic exchanges, where the possibility of accumulating capital has been cutting or transforming social relationships, which were previously mediated by the circulation of goods in traditional gift exchange economies, not the accumulation (let alone accumulation without spending, as in the case of stinginess).

I discovered that stinginess in the Gabrovian economic (parsimonious) economics, however, has a lot more to do with Orthodox Christian oikonomia than expected in the sense that economic relations were wrapped up in Orthodox values of sharing and exchange alongside not spending and saving, and what we will below explore as evolving current forms of solidary economy in Bulgaria and to some degrees around Greece and the Balkans, and what I call home oikonomia. The economic practices of Gabrovians from the past gave birth to many jokes since on many occasions they were practices out of category – thus, as Mary Douglas has shown us, perceived either as funny or dirty – while these awkward practices of self-control, not-spending, saving, and preserving were
actually very close to the Orthodox perspective on the **askeza (ascetism)**, or gradual self-control and limiting of desires, without damaging the body. In fact, many of the “practices-out-of-category” at the core of Gabrovian jokes if analyzed through theological prism would fit well Orthodox theological concepts since they are anything but logical (for example, humility considered to be the greatest strength in the world, similar to the way the Gabrovians considered it their strength to live as simply as possible, without too much comfort or abundance even when they could afford it).

Gabrovian economics, or *home oikonomia*, is well understood in its epitomy image of the famous figure of the greatest Gabrovian philanthropist, Minio Popa, who was a priest who lived in the mid-19th century and was known and respected both as the biggest donor to the local chitalshte, church, and school and as someone so economic and stingy in his daily expenditures that he used to stop the hands of his clock at night so they do not wear off! Gabrovian economic - but as we also see *oikonomic* in its social care and generosity – clout travelled through its woolen textile to world fairs in the 1910s and 1920s all the way to the USA and Canada. Later on, from the socialist-labeled “World Capital of Humor”, the appropriate cultural product, jokes, traveled across countries, well reflected in the book written by a Bulgarian diplomat serving in Scotland and impressed by the shared jokes (not knowing when and how the cultures had intertwined), called *From Gabrovo to Aberdeen*. Since the fall of Communism, Gabrovo has been developing another kind of “export”, which is that of intelligent young people fleeing the country with full scholarships to the USA and Western Europe, mostly graduates of the nationally-renowned first secular high-school Vassil Aprilov. However, unlike in the 19th century, when Gabrovians educated abroad came back to Bulgaria and brought ideas,
knowledge, skills, and capital to implement what they saw in the West, as for example the case of the first secular high school that was set up by Vassil Aprilov when he returned to Gabrovo from abroad. Gabrovo in this sense is what Sahlins (1999) saw as the rise of transnational communities, “a determinate community without entity, extending transculturally and often transnationally from a rural center in the Third World to the “homes abroad” in the metropolis, the whole united by the to and fro of goods, ideas, and people on the move” (521-522).

Exploring immigration, Sahlins develops the notion of “bilocal society” as “a single social and resource system”, a “non-territorial community network” and thus “social field” between countryside and city or “donor and host locations” (Bartle 1981: 105 in Sahlins). Sahlins masterfully argues that money economy per se cannot destroy traditional cultures and gift economies, as in studies of the Eskimos in Alaska and their participation in market economy, but the problem is rather one of traditional societies not finding enough money needed to support their traditional lifestyles. As noted by Bloch and Parry in *Money and the Morality of Exchange* (p.520 in Sahlins), what is important to note is how money is structurally positioned in the cultural schemata of generosities and reciprocities of kith and kin (519). Bloch’s emphasis on tracing money and morality can take us to comprehend better the Ethiopian case, where in the adoption of the term “Gabrov” to denote stinginess as a new form of behavior, we intriguingly observe how humor (“Gabrov” being not simply a foreign word, but one already associated with jokes) was employed as a method to mitigate and soften this non-traditional, aberrant, and potentially disruptive economic behavior so that it can be more manageable.
As I showed above, the Christian values and practices buried during Communism are now slowly regaining grounds and spreading roots in Bulgaria. The rising number of self-defined “Eucharistic communities” I got to know or hear about in Bulgaria is about twenty across the whole country, most of which I have visited and gotten to know as they know each other in a network of virtual links but also a few joint summer meetings. I do base, however, most of my observations on the Eucharistic community active in Gabrovo and visiting the Bread House. It is a community that, echoing the vision of the other ones, is defined by the Eucharist, since most of the people who ascribe to the group believe that the most central means to “return home to God” is through the divine materiality of the bread and wine in the Eucharist and thus emphasize regular (weekly or monthly) partaking of the Eucharist - nurturing belonging to a community through Communion, as noted by an author widely read among the group, Zizioulas (1997). This revival of the Bread and Wine, however, clashes with the standard Bulgarian practice of taking Communion only after the four main fasting periods, and multiple conflicts over who is worthy and dignified to “eat the Body of Christ” often arise inside the churches among the different generations.

In the processes of searching for spirituality, young people started employing ancient theological concepts, such as *oikonomia*, in order to apply the symbolic capital of the term being both historic and already known, yet not so well known and thus rather open to new layers of meaning to be added to its already gained legitimacy. In this sense, *oikonomia* is an imagined large frame of social relations, where “Love rules above the
“Law” (to quote Nikolai, the theologian from the Bread House). This way of measuring and justifying actions and thoughts is quite common among the members of these groups, were even an act of breaching the strict fast, as in the case of Nikolai partaking of the chocolates, is used an occasion to discuss and learn more about the flexible and all-encompassing of Love. An increasingly popular vision among people rediscovering Orthodoxy is to establish “community” and collectivity through return to closer social networks lived through emphasis on tighter-knit urban neighborhoods, organic farming in both cities and using the inherited land from the collapse of the cooperatives in the country-side after the 1990s, barter exchange social support: all principles shared by most social justice and ethical food movements around the globe. This new form of symbolic, solidary economy, which I term home oikonomia for people’s own recurring use of the term oikonomia to denote the social and emotional capital in exchange relations, is also distinct from both the socialist house society of centralized control and the capitalist house society of veiled de-centralized controls.

A recent stage of rebirth of religion evolved in the form of a partnership between the chitalishte and one of the local churches in Gabrovo, for the priest started holding group meetings and discussion with people with drug abuse and other problems, which, as normal as it sounds in the American context, is a very recent and ground-breaking phenomenon for Bulgaria. This is what hopes to break the stangnancy at the levels of the high administrative levels of the Church, as priests still suffer from the remnants of Bulgarians’ perceptions nurtured during socialist times that all priests are not to be trusted as many priests were, in reality, veiled secret service police officers. Thus, the priests of these nascent Eucharistic communities face the tremendously challenge of constant
skepticism and mistrust, as it takes much time to open up the eyes to the faith after centuries of lost tradition and belief.

The nature and transformation of the bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Eucharist consist in a quiet, introvert, both bodily and spiritual savoring of God, which as an introverted personal experience defines in many ways the quiet and non-obtrusive – however, often straightforward passive and uninterested - attitude of the Orthodox priests toward mission work or outreach, which was an issue that often came up at the Sunday School in Gabrovo and also at the Bread House, particularly among the Orthodox Christians participating in the gatherings. For many, the question in Orthodoxy is not about the quantity of people who take Communion or come to church, but about the power of the “quality,” the fire that burns in each one of the hearts taking part of the Body. At the same time, however, recent literature (Men 2011, Zizioulas 1997) stresses the needed for the Orthodox to undertake social service, ministry, and mission work following the example of the wide “outreach” that Christ conducted Himself. Talking and eating with poor, sick, and sinners, even breaking the fasting rules in order to preserve humility by sharing their hopes and participating in their daily pains, Christ came out, into the world of the marginalized, and this outside-in movement is quite clear in the inverted perspective of the iconography this. The perspective that sometimes looks naïve and certainly not realistic, actually reveals a cental theological principle: if Christ, God Incarnate, came down and entered the world and each heart, there is no more need to search for Him outside, as in the vast horizons expressed since the Renaissance art perspective..
The notion of “outreach,” however, has also gotten co-opted in the mainstream discourse of institutions and ever more clearly losing the intimacy of each human face in turn for an institutionalized way to perform social concern in project proposals. “Outreach” could often be an intrusive and aggressive tool stepping over local practices. “Development” is thus often conducted as a form of “out-teaching” the local knowledges, which have been proven over centuries of trial and error, yet are now being replaced by imported notions that could often destroy local bio and cultural diversity. The tensions between “outreach” and “out-teach” expose the dangers of earnest goodwill to turn into an imposing, didactic vision and practice of “development”, where Westerns assume that they could “teach” local people what is best for them. Both outreach and out-teach practices – and their varied degrees and mixtures in-between – were often present in the networks of community cultural centers in Brazil and Bulgaria and their connections with the secular, economic market exchanges and the symbolic religious economy of meaning and gift exchange.

The millennial Orthodox emphasis on the quiet, inner, ascetic communion with God, coupled with the recent half century of Communist emphasis on quiet, passive life and work with as little personal initiative as possible (and certainly without communion with God) produce in Bulgaria cultural debris that still cover the stages, the book shelves, and the computer desks of the chitalishte. “Active” and “passive” are, of course, highly subjective notions – as most anything is – but in the Bulgarian discourse the institutions of the Church and the chitalishte have in particular been charged with “passivity” in the transition period. While NGOs from Western Europe and the USA tried to fight the “passivity” in the chitalishte with massive “community development” projects focused on
“capacity-building” of the administrators, no one addressed the Church issue. But more and more chitaslihite understood that “development” as imported from the West could not find roots in Bulgaria, since they had not been sensitive enough to address the major problem: the fertility, the life of the soil, or people’s state of mind and soul. And for most, considering that statistically Bulgaria is 85 percent Christian Orthodox, the problem of the Bulgarian soul is a problem of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church: and, as this research will show, a problem of Bread and the whole range of spiritual practices, bodily preparation, and intersubjectivities that it could generate.

I discussed the difference between Orthodox and Protestant visions of mission work with a Bulgarian woman theologian, P., who is a psychologist at a center for children with disabilities, and she shared that the Protestant volunteers, mostly from the USA, “often perform salvation in an outwardly manner,” “as if it is already achieved, it is their reward,” or, indeed, “entitlement,” which as a concept cannot even be translated in Bulgarian and thus reflects a particular cultural schemata of expected rewards that does not match the Bulgarian oikonomic way for understanding the value of the process as a relationship. The notion that salvation could be a point in time and not time itself – a phenomenon already described by Weber in the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* – denotes how the emphasis on the product rather than the process, on the bundle of goods rather than on the on-going collection, reflects the capitalist focus on efficiency and effectiveness, which is hard for Bulgarians and their much slower, process-oriented epistemology to comprehend and perform.

The doctrine of salvation as an accumulation of actions legitimating salvation is similar to the notion of cultural and social capital accumulation, analyzed by Bourdieu
and Putnam, which is particularly relevant to the *chitalishte* community cultural centers. The striving for cultural capital accumulation for an investment banker as a process is similar to the cultural capital accumulation for a *chitalishte* striving towards recognitions at festivals and awards, which can be placed on the wall of the chitalishte much the way university degrees or a Protestants “salvation” license in an evangelical corporate leader.

Here I therefore want to distinguish the process of *capital accumulation* from the longitudinal process of *cultural collection*. During the *collection*, the collected is not capital set aside as a static symbol of status but a dynamic medium of exchange set in circulation in one’s relations with others mostly in processes of giving, whether giving a performance of a song, making bread for others or saying a prayer for strangers. The act of giving, however, is not to prove one’s license but to get on writing the pages.

Maya, the theologian coming sometimes to participate in the evening baking events at the Bread House, used a few times the metaphor of the stamp in Orthodoxy as distinct from the license in Protestant tradition:

While the Protestant salvation doctrine sees the human being as a license with a seal in the sense of a man being given a license of salvation once one accepts Christ, Orthodox philosophy sees human life as the long process of softening the heart so it can become soft dough where God can place the seal. It is not called the seal of “salvation,” because ultimately salvation depends on each person’s life, but it is the seal of the Holy Spirit that helps, strengthens the heart in its attempts to learn to love. The same way we materially express the presence of the Holy Spirit through the prosphora bread seal placed on the Liturgy loaves, it is this same way that we can imagine our hearts: like dough that we have to keep soft so God can keep placing the seal.
While the proshora bread seals mainly make possible the collective commensality with the divine and thus are meant to lead to the catharsis of the person, the distinction between seals and licenses in the discourses as well as the daily personal experiences of the doctrines of salvation in East and West offer an interesting friction zone for further understanding the different approaches that the Catholic and Protestant in the West and the Orthodox in the East have historically undertaken towards the building of communities of worship and practice, which are philosophical predispositions spilling into the wider constructs of community and society and the role of the individual. I have attempted to show how these processes have produced distinct dynamics in the evolvement of development thinking and in the post-colonial movements in the developing world, in particular in Latin America, where intellectuals and common people took up the arts as a means towards self-empowerment and liberation in the Theology of the Liberation. In Eastern Europe, a similar phenomenon existed in the 1850s, when the priests were the key figures in spearheading the local initiative for people to develop secular third places to meet and create and be educated, the chitalishte, not as an opposition but a complementary space to the church as a communal gathering hub for both gender and all ages, socio-economic groups, and professions to propel an economy of gift exchange of information, knowledge, skills, artistic talents, hopes, and suffering.

*Home oikonomia* in this sense defines a community-based vision of economics that is grounded in non-monetary notions of solidary economy mostly driven by the symbolic capital circulated in social relations, including emotions and religious and spiritual transcendental experiences. These exchanges and negotiations of meaning circulate within what is now being revived in Bulgaria and, beyond its Orthodox cultural
context, is spreading as a similar philosophy in social movements around the globe as an *oikonomic* understanding of economics.
CONCLUSIONS

Cultural, social, and ecological policy makers who call their policy strategies “integral” rarely consider the multiple connections among their respective fields, yet it is precisely at these crossroads that the most interesting and productive crosspollinations occur and can shake stagnant realities. The second chapter thus attempted to show how in cultural policy the various intersections of food and cultural and artistic practices – from dancing to singing and sculpting – are in local realities, and thus should be reflected in the policy, serving as vehicles for community-building particularly when there community spaces, community cultural centers, dedicated to local creative interactions.

The chapters cut across a few different social spaces from an artisan bakery and a community cultural center with a fire oven to the church altar and the street food cart, where the varied commensalities do not necessarily take place around a physical table (though the table does occur a bit unexpectedly as a central stage of interactions at the community cultural center) and these fluid gift exchanges create a shared space of relations among strangers where food often blurs the lines of differences and redrafts social borders and divisions.

In these third places distances are broken, if not eliminated, and, even when conflicts arise, the boundaries are walked across and negotiated. I examined the peculiar
dynamics that occur when the private kitchen is brought out of the house and into the public realm in the form of a street food cart or make-shift table, or as home-made food is regularly taken to the table at the community cultural center and the church. These third places are personalized by the ambulant vendor and by the first-time bread-maker at the cultural center as he or she breaks bread with a stranger and cuts distances with look, smile, and touch. Distance is rethought or at least better digested when strangers from different classes, professions, and ethnic groups rub shoulders as they munch on street food, similar to the way they rub shoulders kneading bread at the Bread House chitalishte, or as they file one after the other in their community partaking in the church Communion from one cup and with one spoon (and distances are, on their turn, created when hygiene worries take away the collective tool – the spoon- for Communion and emphasize multiple individual spoons).

Beyond the regular public food sites such as restaurants and coffee shops where mainstream monetary-based economic relationships seem to rule, the unusual public food places I explored throughout the dissertation - the mobile cart, the community cultural center, and the church - enable us to comprehend the polysemic “where” of the transmission of intangible heritage when it comes to traditional foods. Furthermore, these places also often host discussions and actions in-sinc with the principles promoted by the growing global ethical food movements, such as the Slow Food Movement. As I examine the case of a few community cultural centers also connecting to the Slow Food Movement and in general to integral food movements, I argue that these ethical food and ecological movements are not so much about food in particular but more “integrally” about the reclaiming of taste and touch in any sphere of human life - from food to art,
religion, love, work, and play - resisting the sensory impoverishment that had become norm with the currents of fast food, homogenized agriculture and cultural products, and digitalized entertainment and communication. I show ethnographically how people respond quite similarly to the threats posed to their food and cultural traditions by using the symbolic capital of the community cultural centers as institutions and of the national and international heritage discourses (UNESCO, Slow Food, etc.) as languages of power to legitimate their local knowledge and their rights to survival, living, and transmission.

Throughout the dissertation, I played the difficult role of a native anthropologist and of both a researcher and an activist, often more on the participant than the observer side in our key anthropological research method of “participant observation.” As such, I learned a lot and tried to flesh out in the community culture model about the key role of networks and their tensility, which I kept experiencing through the International Council for Cultural Centers and the evolution and growth of the BREAD Movement: *Bridging Resources for Ecological and Art-based Development*. Various people kept writing to me from around the world after having seen the Bread Houses Network website or heard from friends who heard from conferences, etc. to state their interest in developing collective bread-making events in their countries, and only then did I understand – from an analytical but also deeply experiential and personal standpoint - the power of symbols. Anthropologists have for decades been dealing with the reading of symbols as texts in order to discover, decode, and translate into analytically understandable language the local meanings of these symbols as well as the intricacies of their global circulations (Clifford 1998). Yet, until I experienced the snowball effect of a simple but widely
culturally-readable and meaningful symbol - bread - I did not fully grasp the intensity of associations and affects symbols provoke in the minds and bodies of people.

From these cross-national movements inspiring various people to come together and do the same thing – make, bake, and share bread – coming down to the local level and especially working with large groups of people and with cultural institutions made me come down from the clouds of imagined networks and the beautiful worlds depicted by UNESCO’s narratives, yet rarely made material, and plant myself in the communal reality faced with entangled webs of bureaucratic miscommunication and impossible hygiene regulations. The multiple difficulties around the physical remodeling of the Bread House in Gabrovo and its legal registration as a chitalishte helped me experience first hand and thus be able to then much better disentangle, analyze, and understand the hidden systems of logic and of acceptable absurdity in the daily paradoxes and ambiguities pervading the bureaucratic structures bargaining over power with the non-governmental and private sectors. The Bread House chitalishte started as a passion and hobby and grew into a fertile ethnographic site of action research, which helped me observe intriguing dynamics of community building and organization. While most discourses in post-socialist Bulgaria pointed at the lack of “civil society” and the lack of “social capital” measured in patterns of failing trust and cooperation among people, it was surprising to observe the enormous volunteer engagement in the Bread House initiative, which inspired people’s imagination by awakening memories, hopes, and desire to volunteer as a way to engage in gift exchange that could provide them with more secure social webs and sense of self-worth and belonging, made even stronger by the challenges faced when defending their rights to “tradition” and thus even to the
“dangerous” commensalities of bread which the state tried to control. Whether breaking bread, breaking boundaries between classes, breaking even financially in an artisan bakery, or breaking legal regulations in order to set up a small business or a community culinary-cultural initiative despite the high-cost hygienic and safety requirements, breaking comes down to movement: it is the passage from one state to another, the transition and its potential transformation that opens questions over the power of who breaks what, when, where and with whom, and what happens with the broken, transformed pieces.

The community culture model, understood and defined through the parallels between the community cultural center and the community bakery and the bread net metaphor, in in fact a flexible model, where multiple variables and factors are at play, shared across cultures yet also culturally varied in their degrees and forms of transparency, trans-use, and tensility. The liminal spaces of the community cultural centers form perhaps the biggest global network of cultural institutions (certainly bigger in numbers than that of museums, galleries, or theaters) yet still remain in the penumbras of UNESCO’s Conventions and national policies in many countries for their ambiguous nature hard to control for it is hard to place in category. Nonetheless, these invisible but intriguing sites are crucial communal crossroads of discourses and practices of the global ethical food movements and of the safeguarding narratives of the “heritage of humanity” that are defined by the varied rhythms of commensality: fast, slow, and all degrees of velocity in between, where the rhythm of making (collectively or individually, socially or commercially) and sharing (giving away, exchanging, or selling) food is as much about the pace of munching as it is about the movements of the heart.
REFERENCES


Hungarian Pavilion Exhibit, Venice Art Biennale Catalogue 2010.


WORK DOCUMENTS


