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## Scaling heritage.

### The construction of scales in the submission process of alpinism to UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list

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#### ABSTRACT

For the last two decades, the polysemous notion of 'scale' has drawn an increasing amount of attention among scholars studying heritage policies and practices, often with regard to UNESCO conventions. Significantly, in many of these works, terms such as 'global', 'national' and 'local' are connected to categories of 'scale' or 'level' that are taken for granted by the scholars who use them to guide their analysis. This paper, in contrast, promotes a different, constructivist understanding of the notion of scale. From our perspective, there is an added value to be found in focusing—without using any preconceived or external conception of scale—on the ways in which stakeholders conceive of and use scale throughout the processes of heritage making. Using the case of alpinism and the creation of its file for submission to the Intangible Cultural Heritage list, we show that the interest of this approach lies in its comprehensive ability to highlight how people define, elaborate and use scale in order to qualify their practices or to achieve specific goals.

#### KEYWORDS

Scale; category of practice; heritage studies; UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage; alpinism

#### Introduction: thinking the links between heritage and scale

Over the last thirty years, the scalar dimension of heritage claims and practices has been addressed by an increasing number of scholars in the social sciences (e.g. Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000; Harvey 2015; Berg 2018; Lähdesmäki, Thomas, and Zhu 2019). Some of these scholars, mostly historians, have focused on how the rise of many nation-states in the Western world politically shaped, and in turn was shaped by, heritage, tradition and folklore (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Nora 1996; Bendix 1997; Poulot 1997; Harvey 2008). Since the beginning of the 1990s, scholarly attention has focused on the growing importance of UNESCO conventions<sup>2</sup> for various heritage regimes and on the rise of a 'global' frame of action with respect to heritage making. But the understanding of 'global' remains highly heterogeneous in many of these recent works.

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<sup>2</sup> This primarily concerns the two core UNESCO conventions, namely the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972) and the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003).

Some of them focus on how UNESCO, as an intergovernmental agency, copes with the territoriality and the political projects of its member states in the process of communicating its vision and negotiating the implementation of that vision (Meskell 2015; Ubertazzi 2015; Bortolotto 2016). Others emphasise the production of global norms and their impact on the definition of heritage at so-called 'local' scales (Wilk 1995; Turtinen 2000; AlSayyad 2001; Salazar 2007; Hay-Edie et al. 2011; Cocks, Vetter, and Wiersum 2018). The globalisation of heritage regimes is sometimes seen as being, in fact, a 'glocalisation' (even when it is not called that), through the appropriation of such 'global' regimes by 'local' stakeholders; these stakeholders aim to promote 'local' projects (Labadi and Long 2010; Schofield and Szymanski 2011; Bondaz et al. 2014) or to take state policies and politics into account along with global ones (Munz 2015; Munz 2016). The importance of the 'translation' process is decisive here because states and so-called local 'communities' are described as adopting UNESCO's concepts and vocabulary, with adjustments (Bortolotto 2012; Brumann 2015; Berliner and Brumann 2016; MacRae 2017).

Nonetheless, when scholars use terms such as 'global', 'national' or 'local', it is not obvious whether they are referring to specific scales and, even when that is the case, what the exact nature is of the scales mentioned. Does 'global' refer to a large geographical scale, such as the planet, on which UNESCO's objectives and norms must be addressed and applied? Does it rather refer to a set of general values that lies behind the whole process of heritage making and connects with other terms such as 'universality' or 'humanity'? 'Global' and 'national' also happen to constitute a convenient way to refer to state and intergovernmental institutions and to the mutual adjustment of their conception and implementation of heritage policies. Lastly, as Bortolotto (2013b) suggests – arguing that all interactions always take place in specific contexts qualified as 'localised' – the spatiality and scalarity of the 'global' deserves to be contested. Consequently, this author describes people as always acting in one 'localised context' and norms, examples and 'best practices' as circulating from one 'localised context' to another.

More crucially, it is worth noting that, with very few exceptions (Bondaz et al. 2014; Strong, Cannizzo, and Rogers 2017), and in spite of the constructivist claims that many of them make, the above-mentioned works approach scale as an often-unquestioned preexisting reality or as a scientific category. In other words, the issue of scale in the analysis of heritage making has so far been addressed mainly from an external and objectifying point of view, an approach that does not fully fit the constructivism paradigm. Although the notion of 'heritage' has been critically discussed as a vernacular category by many scholars who take the social stakeholders' points of view into account in their analyses, very few similar analyses have been done for 'scale'.

This paper is an attempt to address this unquestioned assumption. Therefore, it aims to underline the heuristic relevance of studying heritage making and, more specifically, submissions to the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) list<sup>3</sup>, in the light of a radically

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<sup>3</sup> Concerning spatial and scalar issues, it is worth underlining that the format of the ICH list contrasts with that of the World Heritage Sites (WHS) list. The WHS list gathers sites understood by experts as being 'of exceptional value' due to their natural or cultural features; the ICH list highlights living cultural practices that express the cultural diversity of humanity, seeing them as deserving safeguarding because of the collective attachment of their bearers to these practices. Contrary to the WHS procedure, which requires the definition of its sites with

constructivist position. While we characterize heritage, in contrast with memory, as a formalized type of connexion to the past (which does not necessarily mean an institutionalized one), constructed in the present time and dealing explicitly with discursive categories, we hold that scale should no longer be understood as a 'category of analysis' but rather as a 'category of practice' (Moore 2008). To this end, this paper is organised in two sections. The first section, arguing for an epistemic shift in this field, builds on existing proposals external to the field of heritage studies in order to understand scale as a category of practice and to programmatically promote the analysis of heritage practices in accordance with that understanding. For illustrative purposes, the second section will focus on an ongoing survey of alpinism and of the related application for inscription which is currently under submission to UNESCO's ICH list.

Alpinism, according to a formal definition given by the alpine practitioners who submitted this application, is 'the art of climbing peaks and walls in high mountains, in all seasons, in rocky or glacial terrain, by one's own physical, technical and intellectual abilities using adapted techniques, equipment and very specific tools'. Using a longitudinal survey conducted in the transborder Mont Blanc region (Chamonix in France, Courmayeur in Italy and several towns in the canton of Wallis in Switzerland), in France (Paris) and in Switzerland (the cantons of Bern, Geneva and Neuchâtel), we show how alpinists are framing heritage in order to match UNESCO's ICH standards and how decisive the scalar issues involved in this framing are. We end by examining how this particular case study allows us to broaden the understanding of the notions of 'scale- making' and 're-scaling' within the field of heritage studies.

### **Drafting a research program on scalar issues in heritage making**

Researchers in the human and social sciences have worked with a constructivist understanding of scale since the late 1970s. Anthropologists such as Fredrik Barth (1978) and Marshall Sahlins (1985), for example, emphasised the necessity of working from the categories of scale that were already in use by 'natives' and 'actors' themselves in order to better understand their systems of thought and to qualify interactions.

This was faithful to Franz Boas's admonition (1943, 314) that 'to understand the thoughts of a people the whole analysis of experience must be based on their concepts, not ours', and to the later distinction between 'emic' and 'etic' categories as conceptualised and used in the American anthropological tradition. In recent decades, this epistemic issue related to the relevance of the concept of scale has been addressed by anthropologists and sociologists, some dealing with cultural globalisation (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; for a recent synthesis of the debates, Trémon 2012) and others questioning the scalarity of the 'local' as conceived by the collective they are studying (Appadurai 1996; Hertz 2009).

### ***Scale as an epistemic and methodological issue***

Starting in the 1980s, scale has become a core issue thanks to the contribution of constructivist researchers within the field of the 'politics of scale' (PoS). This field of research

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their precise location and description, inscription on the ICH list does not require a particular spatial delineation but only a simple statement about the 'geographic location and range of the element'. This is mainly a way of making sure that the state(s) that is/are submitting an item has/have good reason to do so.

has been mainly fueled by geographers and sociologists, addressing the conceptual, epistemological and methodological dimensions of three main issues.

The first issue is the criticism of the frequent conflation, already noted above as related to heritage studies, of the scale, level, size and extent of a spatial phenomenon. Several authors, including Brenner (2001), recall that the value added by the concept of scale lies in its capacity to point to specific levels incorporated in a system of interconnected levels. Consequently, Brenner proposes to name such a system a 'scaffolding of spatial scales'. Delaney and Leitner (1997) use 'scale' to refer to the system conceived as a whole, keeping the plural form – 'scales' or 'scale levels' – for specific items within that system. Following previous papers (Gaberell and Debarbieux 2014; Debarbieux, Price, and Balsiger 2015) and contrary to Jones, Jones, and Hughes (2016), we use 'scale' hereafter exclusively to refer to each of the interconnected levels, using 'scalar systems' for the overall system.

The second issue, which has arisen gradually over the last twenty years, concerns the denaturalisation of scales or levels. The debate within PoS highlights the tendency of scholars, already noted above for heritage studies, to take scales or scalar systems for granted, as dimensions of the reality with which the actors have to deal. On the other hand, there are also many contributors to the PoS field who have adopted a constructivist stand. With regard to the production of academic knowledge, some (e.g. Jones 1998) take the position that scales and scalar systems are outputs of analytic research itself (epistemic constructivism). Others (e.g. Marston 2000) hold that scales are inherent to social practices and are, as such, social constructions. More precisely, 'scales are performed by sets of actors through the scalar stances they take within particular sociospatial contexts as they engage in the politics of everyday life' (Kaiser and Nikiforova 2008, 541). Mansfield (2005, 468) therefore invites us to study 'scalar dimensions of practices, rather than practices occurring at different scales'. In the same vein, Delaney and Leitner (1997, 97) state that scale 'is not simply an external fact awaiting discovery but a way of framing conceptions of reality', but that it is through the 'fusion of [scalar] ideologies and practices' that political constructions of scale emerge. This way of thinking is a serious challenge to how actors usually refer to scale as a way to frame social reality and to act on that reality. Moreover, it proves that while scale is an efficient category of practice, as a category of knowledge it can be contested on epistemic grounds (Marston, Jones, and Woodward 2005).

The third issue addressed in the PoS field has to do with how individuals and collectives seize on the ideas of scale and scalar systems for dealing with each other, especially in connection with political issues. The very name of the research field of PoS derives, of course, from the main paradigm adopted by those who launched it, namely political economy (Smith 1990; Jonas 1994; Swyngedouw 2000; Brenner 2001). The first papers that used this label strived to understand how social actors choose to re-scale an issue, whether up or down, following their own interests. As a result, the expression 'jumping scales' became popular for describing opportunities 'whereby political claims and power established at one geographical scale can be expanded to another' (Smith 2000, 726). More specifically, the scalar effects of globalisation, analysed through the analytical lens of the PoS, have attracted a lot of attention and led to the wide adoption of the notion of 'glocalisation': the 'mythical resurrection of the "local" or "regional" scale – both in theory and practice – is an integral part of the "myth" of globalisation' (Robertson 1994; Swyngedouw 2000, 63–64).

Taken together, these multiple ways of questioning the nature of scale have led many scholars to deepen a constructivist approach to scale and to draw related research programs from it. MacKinnon (2011, 21), for instance, invites geographers to analyse ‘the social construction of scale through the strategies of various actors, movements and organisations’, thereby overturning ‘the traditional conception of scales as fixed and external to social processes’. In a similar vein, Vainikka (2016) states that ‘there are multiple discursive scales of “we” through which people formulate their identities’. In the epistemic discussion that he promotes, Moore (2008) calls for analysing scale as a meaningful cognitive, narrative and political tool for understanding actors’ respective worlds. He defines scale as a ‘category of everyday experience, developed and deployed by ordinary social actors’ (207, quoting Bourdieu). In order to get rid of any ‘commitment to the (objective) existence of scales’, Moore eventually adds that the ‘recognition that scales are not substantial categories of analysis, but categories of practice, directs our attention to the ways in which scalar narratives, classifications and cognitive schemas constrain or enable certain ways of seeing, thinking and acting’ (214).

However, very few works within heritage studies have referred to the field and methods of PoS (Jones, Jones, and Hughes 2016; Lähdesmäki, Thomas, and Zhu 2019). What the radical constructivist approach offers, as an alternative to the dominant objectivist way of referring to scale, is to use actors’ own ways of conceiving of, classifying and describing scales as relevant units of analysis. The heuristic relevance of such an epistemological and methodological stance will be demonstrated in the following case study.

### ***The re-scaling of alpinism through the ICH claim***

This second section analyses how alpinists and their partners in the ICH list inscription process invoke scale. A close observation of this process sheds light on the various negotiations and trade-offs that these stakeholders experience in articulating multiple scalar systems.

The epistemological stance that we presented above leads us to ask how alpinism stakeholders think and speak in scalar terms when they are engaged in heritage claims, and how that affects their behavior. It further leads us to identify which terms they use to invoke various differentiated scales, potentially different from the ones that researchers commonly use, such as ‘local’, ‘national’ and ‘global’. In addition, since heritage making always involves different kinds of stakeholders, we must also ask how each stakeholder or set of stakeholders copes with the scalar systems used by the others and how this diversity can lead to conflicts, trade-offs or compromises in the adoption of a common scalar framework. More specifically, within the ICH realm, we address the skills implemented by ICH bearers in order to adapt to UNESCO’s own scalar systems and to negotiate scalar framings with state administrations and heritage experts.

Methodologically, this section draws on qualitative research, conducted for almost ten years leading up to the official submission for the inscription of alpinism on the ICH list in March 2018, by France, Switzerland and Italy. This research involved participant observation in various situations (mainly the formal events organized by alpinist organisations, the meetings of the steering committee set up for the UNESCO application and the meetings among the steering committee, public administrations and heritage experts) and more than fifty semi-structured interviews with a wide variety of stakeholders.

### ***How heritage making became an issue at the foot of Mont Blanc***

The explicit idea of inscribing alpinism on UNESCO's representative ICH list dates back to 2007–2008; nonetheless, the idea was directly linked to a set of events that took place in the early 1990s when the Italian, French and Swiss ministers of the environment proposed the creation of an international park for the Mont Blanc massif. The proposal was rejected at the time by local authorities, who worried about the potential restrictions or regulations that such an initiative might involve.

The ministries then agreed to allow local authorities to create their own project, combining environmental protection and local development initiatives. This made it possible for dozens of municipalities to set up a transboundary partnership called Espace Mont-Blanc. At the same time, environmental activists, frustrated by the ministries' renunciation, quickly advocated for an inscription of the Mont Blanc massif on UNESCO's World Cultural and Natural Heritage List, hoping that this initiative would strengthen the protection of the site against mass tourism and infrastructural development. This proposal was then registered in official documents, such as the tentative lists of WHS (in France in 2000, and in Italy in 2008) and a list of potential WHS sites drawn up by the Alpine Convention, a transnational organisation set up in 1991 by eight countries (Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Liechtenstein and Monaco) to coordinate their public policies for the Alpine range. The idea was also promoted by some associations, especially those involved in Pro Mont Blanc, a network of environmental activists created in 1991. But because they received no support from local authorities, who were reluctant to back a project that they saw as strictly protection-oriented, the project was never formally submitted to UNESCO's WHS committee.

Over the last 25 years, the Espace Mont-Blanc partnership has generated several transboundary initiatives in various fields (alpine pasture management, networks of walking trails, cultural events, etc.). Despite their limited reach, many of these initiatives have contributed to the intensification of formal and informal exchanges between elected officials and various stakeholders located on the different sides of the transboundary region. As a result, some individuals involved in cultural and tourism policies on the Italian side (mainly Courmayeur and Aoste) and French side (mainly in the Chamonix valley) of the massif became familiar with each other. Sharing a common interest in mountain climbing, they decided to organise events and exhibitions to cultivate the public image of alpinism and its importance in local history, among several initiatives undertaken in common. Most of these initiatives were explicitly directed at the Mont Blanc range (the high mountain area made of glaciers, rocks and alpine pastures) or the Mont Blanc region (the area made up of the territories of the involved municipalities in the three countries).

In 2007, as references to UNESCO heritage policies gained greater visibility in the public debate around Mont Blanc, a small network of people, including mountain guides, private consultants, elected officials and researchers, started to explore the idea of inscribing alpinism on UNESCO's ICH list. Their motivations were numerous. One such motivation, quite specific to promoters in Chamonix, was to deepen the attachment of inhabitants to the place and its surrounding landscape in order to strengthen the social ties that had been weakened by a high level of immigration and social diversification, triggered by the previous three decades of tourism development. In the 1990s, the municipality of Chamonix had launched a

communication campaign for this purpose, focusing on the long tradition of mountain climbing and the values associated with it ('liberty', 'respectfulness', 'open-mindedness', 'mutual trust'). Other motivations were much less specifically related to the Mont Blanc range context. Firstly, some initiators had the feeling that the public image of alpinism was inaccurate and that the media, mainly covering accidents and unreasonable risk taking, was fueling the idea that the practice should be regulated and that any accident should be treated on a judicial basis. Secondly, other people, who sometimes overlapped with the first group, believed that the pursuit and publicising of often solitary sporting achievements by high-level alpinists was overshadowing the more usual and basic way of doing alpinism: two or more alpinists performing a climb involving mutual trust and cultural transmission between friends, older and younger climbers, or professionals and amateurs.

It was in this context that the municipalities of Chamonix and Courmayeur decided to support and finance the project, and a small steering committee was set up. The official declaration launching the process for inscription on the ICH list took place in April 2011, during an annual event celebrating mountain climbing, the Piolets d'or (literally Golden Pikes). It was clear, at this first stage, that the promoters of this inscription had no clear idea of the differences between the WHS list and the ICH list. The promoters of the ICH inscription, like those involved in the WHS project, framed their initiative with the scale of the Mont Blanc range in mind. For both collectives, the transboundary Mont Blanc region, i.e. the range and its immediate surrounding valleys in France, Italy and Switzerland, as well as its institutional form, the Espace Mont Blanc, was the social and institutional scale at which their projects were shaped. In the case of the WHS project, however, the inscription of the Mont Blanc range on the list was conceived as an alternative to the Espace Mont Blanc project, while in the case of the ICH project, the safeguarding of alpinism during the first stage of the project (2007–2012) was a by-product of the Espace Mont Blanc project. These two collectives of promoters also looked at the Mont Blanc with different lenses, each lens expressing priorities that had been developed for decades: the promoters of the WHS inscription were primarily concerned with the protection of nature, while the promoters of the ICH inscription focused on social and cultural identity. It is interesting to note that environmental activists resisted the ICH project when it was first mentioned in 2011, because they saw it as a way of burying the application to make the Mont Blanc range a heritage site.

At the same time, the two competing projects were also conceived at a global scale by their respective promoters; for one thing, both collectives were quick to see a UNESCO inscription as a worldwide recognition of the importance of their concern. The supposed efficiency ascribed to the inscription processes lay partly in the (false) belief that UNESCO (whoever is imagined behind this name) could guarantee what other institutions could not (strict protection of nature, official recognition, etc.), and partly in the prestige associated with the UN agency. In addition, each project expressed a 'global' vision with regard to its respective issues. The promoters of the WHS scenario argued that the major mountains of all the other continents were either already protected by strong state regulations or already on the UNESCO WHS list as part of a collection of mountain sites and representatives of the natural diversity of the Earth and that Mont Blanc, said to be the highest mountain in Europe, should therefore obviously join the collection. The promoters of the ICH scenario, for their part, as either professional mountain guides or amateur mountaineers, were all familiar with the

practice of alpinism in different parts of the world and were eager to promote a universalist conception of alpinism. This point will be developed below.

The scales of state and nation, in contrast, were not spontaneously mentioned during this preliminary phase (2007–2012) of the submission to the ICH list. For various reasons, the initial promoters only gradually began to refer to them at the beginning of the implementation phase of the project (2012–2017).

#### ***Re-scaling the project with regard to state territoriality***

The first reason for referring to the scales of state and national territories is quite obvious to anyone who is familiar with UN agencies; it relates to the specific territoriality of statehood as specified in the first section of this paper. Since any practice existing within the three state territories studied here, in order to be submitted to the ICH list, first has to be approved by a 'national committee' and inscribed in a 'national inventory', alpinism, whatever the geography of the practice and the spatial imagination of the bearers, was required to be inscribed in the inventory by the state administration of the corresponding countries. Informed of this condition, the Chamonix Valley stakeholders got in touch with the French Heritage administration during the fall of 2012, and the project's promoters discussed their idea with the regional office in charge of cultural affairs, located in Lyons. Following the advice provided by that office with respect to formal administrative requirements and wording, the project was shaped as an official file for inclusion in the national inventory of ICH. Finally, in October 2015, the file was discussed and approved by the relevant committee within the French ministry of culture.

The parallel process on the Italian side started much later. Although they had formal encouragement from the Courmayeur municipality, the Italian supporters of the initiative needed some time to identify the procedure to be followed in their own country, because ICH inscription in Italy follows a variety of tracks and involves different administrations (Bortolotto 2013a). The supporters eventually got in touch with the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities, and Tourism and received support from that office.

Eventually, a third state, namely Switzerland, also became involved in the process. Since the Mont Blanc range is shared by France, Italy and Switzerland, the Chamonix and Courmayeur/Valle d'Aosta initiators wanted to involve Swiss partners very early on. But they had trouble finding their counterparts because of Swiss politics specificities. According to a tradition of subsidiarity, Switzerland's Federal Office of Culture invited cantonal administrations to submit cultural practices, called 'living traditions', for registration on the federal inventory required by UNESCO (Hertz et al. 2018); in this context, the canton of Wallis (where the Swiss municipalities that include the Mont Blanc range are located) decided that they would only support proposals submitted by the municipalities themselves, but none of the municipalities contacted by the French and Italian initiators (first Orsières and later Zermatt and Evolène) decided to join the project. In 2016, however, the Swiss Federal Office of Culture decided to launch a call for complementary proposals for its national list of 'living traditions'. This call, which was open to everyone, resulted in dozens of new proposals, which were then discussed by a federal commission and cantonal administrations. After hearing about this opportunity, the French organisers contacted some Swiss organisations that eventually submitted alpinism to the list. Later, the proposal was formally supported by several cantonal administrations, including that of Wallis, and in 2017 it was approved at the federal level.

Thus, the formal ICH convention requirement that any candidate for inscription on the ICH list first had to be approved by one or several 'national lists' forced the promoters of alpinism to become familiar with the relevant state administrations and to master their respective rules and procedures. In this context, the scalar issue was not neutral: the project had to go through the expertise of several expert committees and administrative services, each one having its own conception of ICH at the scale of the corresponding territory and its own appreciation of the relevance of the item in this context. The project also had to take into account the diversity of political and administrative systems as well as territorial issues in public practices in three different states with specific features: strong federalism in Switzerland, administrative regionalisation in France and relative uncertainty about the level of regional autonomy for this kind of topic in Italy.

### ***Re-scaling the project according to national spatiality***

The second set of reasons why alpinism's ICH project had to be gradually re-scaled to account for country has to do with national imaginaries and societies. Although the state imaginary and the national imaginary of space and scale often refer to the same areas and the same notions (such as territory), they may also differ in some of their particulars (see Debarbieux 2019). While the state imaginary of space is heavily inclined toward administrative subdivisions, legal features and accurate cartography, the national imaginary of space tends to rely on areas of belonging, meanings associated with specific places and behaviors within them and the structure and functioning of national societies. Throughout the inscription process for alpinism, no form of ethno-nationalist rhetoric was called into play (at least so far): despite a long tradition of nationalist exaltation of high mountains and alpinism, sometimes called oropolitics (see Debarbieux and Rudaz 2015), neither the institutional structures of the 'community' made up of ICH bearers nor the state administrations ever used such rhetoric during the ICH inscription process; the characterisation of alpinism remained far from the warlike exaltation that was common among practitioners and nationalists in some decades of the 19th and 20th centuries.

But the 'nationalization of societies' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) that took place over the last two centuries did indeed play a role. Though the professional mountain guide companies are strongly organised at the communal level (the mountain guides companies in Chamonix and Courmayeur are the oldest in the world, dating back respectively to 1821 and 1850, and Chamonix's is also the largest, with about 280 members), most of these guides are also members of the French or Italian Associations of Mountain Guides. Most of the amateurs are also members of Alpine clubs, and most of those have been organised at the national scale since the 1860s and 1870s. The French Federation of Alpine and Mountain Clubs, the Swiss Alpine Club and the Italian Alpine Club<sup>4</sup> quickly became official bearers of the inscription. In addition, the secretary of the Swiss Association of Mountain Guides, the vice president of the French Association of Mountain Guides, and the director of the Museo della Montana, located in Turin and owned by the Italian Alpine Club, soon joined the steering committee. And in all three countries, where alpinism and mountaineering are common in many Alpine areas beyond the Mont Blanc range itself (areas such as the Oberland, Engadine, and Valais in

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<sup>4</sup> Italy also has an Alpine club that is specific to the Alto Adige/South Tyrol region, but that club has been barely involved in the project.

Switzerland and the Dolomites in Italy), as well as in areas besides the Alps (such as the Gran Sasso massif in Italy and the French Pyrenees), the scope of the project was then broadened to encompass many more places and alpinists. Even though it was initially conceived at the scale of the Mont Blanc range and depended partly on issues associated with these municipal and transboundary contexts, the inscription process, as it progressed, gradually had to take into account the national dimensions of the practice and to be re-scaled accordingly.

In sum, during the period from 2012 to 2017, the project had to adjust to territorial issues in each of the three states, for reasons proper to UNESCO's way of organising the inscription process – involving conceptions of the (inter)state imaginary of territory – and to the spatiality of the national organisations that regulate most professional and amateur practices linked to all high mountains located in the corresponding territories. However, as noted above, this nationalisation of the process took place without any attempt to cultivate any form of nationalism. On the contrary, the state heritage administrations proved eager to emphasise and promote the ICH convention's locally or regionally based rhetoric of cultural diversity. For example, in a discussion that took place in January of 2018, during a meeting between the promoters of the inscription and representatives from the three state administrations, the French and Italian representatives, commenting on a draft of the movie that was being made as part of the submission, suggested that the music used in the movie (an electronic composition combining allusions to heroism and to the quietness of the environment) should be more 'regional', without explaining what regional alpine music might be. The alpinist 'community' representatives responded with some surprise to the suggestion, and said later that it would make no sense to associate alpinism with any kind of 'local' or 'regional' music, because the practice is globalised and similar across most geographical contexts.

This anecdote clearly reveals a feature of the spatial imaginary of the project's bearers: though its initial promoters were consistently eager to anchor the project in the Mont Blanc range, they have not been reluctant to re-scale it to the (tri-)state/national scale nor to keep in mind the globality of the practice: in fact, they have wanted to emphasise that their ways of conceiving the practice, and the cultural values associated with it, do not differ across the various regions of practice.

### ***Think globally; act regionally: a mid-scale compromise?***

Thus, throughout the whole process, the promoters of the ICH file have consistently referred to the 'global' scale: alpinism as a practice adopted by people in high mountains all over the world, the intense circulation of practitioners among mountain ranges in order to enjoy their geographical diversity and the supposed common fundamental values shared by the world 'community' of alpinists. During an informal discussion that we had with him at his office in Bern, Flavien, 50, the head of the Swiss mountain guide association and a member of the steering committee for the inscription on the ICH list, made a point of noting that 'In the file submitted to UNESCO, we have been eager to involve all our partners in the process launched in Chamonix. . . . For us, the goal of this submission is also for all of the mountains of the world to recognize themselves in the practice of alpinism.' Significantly, the description of alpinism given in the ICH file by the stakeholders of alpinism (quoted at the beginning of this article) was very generic, mentioning no specific place or range. Later in this section of the file, they specified the importance of the cultural dimensions of alpinism (know-how, aesthetic experience, an ethical concern for the environment and for the duty of mutual assistance,

etc.), but again in a very generic way, in order to make it clear, again according to Flavien, ‘that all of these features were shared by a majority of climbers all around the world’.

During a meeting in Paris, while experts from the French national committee for ICH submissions were interviewing the tri-national ‘community’ representatives on the specific nature of the practice, Simon, 60, an amateur Italian mountaineer and independent cultural officer, emphasised that there were very few differences in the motivations and characteristics of the practice in different parts of the world: ‘In the beginning, alpinism was located in the Alps. Nowadays, the practice has been diffused throughout the entire world. Even in the Himalayas, where local people climb mountains as well, the values of the practice are the same as those that make up alpinism here!’

This global scale of the spatial imaginary of alpinists is reflected in institutional initiatives: the three Alpine clubs and the three national associations of mountain guides involved in the process belong to global associations – the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation (UIAA) and the International Federation of Mountain Guide Associations (IFMGA) – that embody the desire to share global values and promote similar practices. Some members of these (mainly national) clubs and associations (including some promoters of the ICH inscription) have also supported the creation of similar associations in countries such as Nepal, Morocco or Bolivia. This system of associations of alpinists and guides was an asset in adjusting to the ICH convention’s procedures. Because UNESCO is an intergovernmental organisation that promotes initiatives framed at different scales, but that also needs to remain respectful of the autonomy of member states, the promoters of alpinism could see the scalar system of UNESCO’s representatives as not very different from the system they were used to in defining their own practice.

Moreover, reciprocally, this framing of alpinism at the global scale also affected the ways in which some mountain guides connected their vision of the Mont Blanc range with their visions of the mountains of the world as a whole. During an interview conducted in Chamonix, one of the alpinists’ ‘community’ representatives, Léonard, 66, a mountain guide and the former head of the tourism office of a French town located at the foot of Mont Blanc, told us: ‘Sometimes, in the valleys surrounding the [Mont Blanc] range, mountain guides think that the mountain belongs to them. “This is my office, this is my territory”, they say. But it’s wrong! The Mont Blanc doesn’t belong to guides, even though they are from Chamonix . . . it belongs to the whole world! When you see Slavic or Japanese guides here, thanks to the worldwide fame of Mont Blanc, you must then adapt your vision of the range to the one that the entire world has!’

The joint initiative by the French, Italian and Swiss alpinist ‘communities’ can thus be understood as a scalar compromise combining two rhetorical processes: first, it is an up-scaling of a project initially conceived at the scale of the Mont Blanc range to a tri-national initiative of the three countries for which the Mont Blanc range is a major reference, in order to meet the requirements of the ICH convention; secondly, it is a down-scaling of the global vision of the practice for the sake of efficiency: a tri-national application is much easier to build than a broader one, although the possibility of other countries joining the project in the future was repeatedly mentioned.

The UIAA, in particular, was informed of the ICH application, because some of the project's promoters were well-known members of that international body (and the submission to the ICH list was promoted at the UIAA General Assemblies in the United States in 2014, South Korea in 2015, Italy in 2016, and Iran in 2017; the official call for letters of consent was published in the UIAA newsletter of February 2017; and the UIAA wrote an official letter of support for the submission project in March of 2017). This willingness to communicate about the project proved to be useful in two ways: first, national associations that were unable to be part of the project because their respective countries (e.g. the United Kingdom and the United States) had not signed the ICH convention could give symbolic support; and second, the process spurred other associations (such as the German and Austrian Alpine Associations), based in countries that were recent signatories to the convention, to start thinking about their own possible future contributions to the project.

Besides, throughout the submission, the representatives of the alpine ICH 'community' addressed two main questions related to the political economy of alpinism: the first one has to do with the long colonial history of the practice, and the second one involves the legitimacy and standing of the French, Swiss and Italian institutions to sponsor and submit the application. Within the alpinism 'community', the colonial history of the practice is well-known; it is especially well-known that alpinists took part in global exploration (during the Victorian period, for instance) with the aim of a symbolic conquest of the world, operating within a specifically Western understanding of the relationship between humans and the natural environment. The Western, (neo)colonial dimension of alpinism is not totally in the past, even today: the alpinism 'community' is aware of the fact that some expeditions, such as those in the central Himalayas and Karakoram, continue to cultivate strongly asymmetrical relations between Western alpinists and 'local' guides, and that certain mountain climbers are sometimes disrespectful of the beliefs of some indigenous groups, for instance in Australia and the Central Andes, where the sport of mountain climbing is considered to be a profanation of their religious sites.

The stakeholders in the ICH process are especially concerned with the asymmetries and power connexions that are framed around cultural, economic and political issues. These stakeholders have been fighting some of these issues for decades, in various ways. To begin with, the entire ICH project has aimed to promote a vision of alpinism that is an alternative to the large commercial expeditions, mentioned above. In addition, several of these stakeholders have been involved in long-lasting partnerships devoted to continuing training with alpinists in Nepal, Morocco and Bolivia. And finally, events organized by the Alpine clubs and mountain guide associations in the three countries frequently drew the attention of their members to intercultural issues linked to the practice of alpinism abroad: for example, an event called the Sustainable Summits Conference held its fourth meeting in Chamonix in June of 2018, where the first keynote speech was given by a Maori leader who explained the special relation of his people with high mountains; the second lecture was a presentation of the ICH project. The interactions between the speakers and the audience following the presentations revealed that they considered the parallel practices in the high mountains of Maori's territories and in the Western European Alps to be compatible, and that alpinists from the two areas had respect for each other.

Another topic of discussion was the legitimacy of the French, Swiss and Italian Alpine organisations within the global alpinist community. From the beginning of the project, its promoters were aware that the application could have been legitimately submitted by any one of a large number of organisations located in other states (some of them older, like the British Alpine club; or bigger, like the German and Austrian ones). As there is a long tradition of communication and cooperation among Alpine clubs and mountain guide associations world- wide, the French, Italian and Swiss promoters have regularly informed their counterparts about the progress being made and discussed with them the opportunity to join the process later: thus (as mentioned above), announcements about the project have been made at UIAA events for the last five years and the letters of support requested by UNESCO<sup>5</sup> were collected from national Alpine unions beyond the perimeter of the three countries. On these occasions, the standing of the stakeholders located in the western part of the Alps to carry the project was never questioned.

The name of the element that was submitted to UNESCO could also have been an issue. In the mid-twentieth century, some alpinists more familiar with ranges other than the Alps suggested that 'alpinism' should be used for the Alps only, and that mountain climbing should be given different names in other places, names such as 'pyreneism', 'himalayism' or 'andinism' (see e.g. Henneberg 1989; Duez 2007). This point of view, however, was not finally represented in the UNESCO inscription process. The international associations that were consulted tended to agree that the Mont Blanc range was where alpinism had been invented, and that this range therefore served as a flagship for the global community of alpinists; the associations also recognised Chamonix as the world capital, or 'Mecca', of alpinism, recognizing that this way of understanding and climbing high mountains had spread from the Mont Blanc region and been appropriated all around the world, influencing the ways in which some people living in the high mountains of Asia and South America interacted with their own mountains. These associations around the world were also appreciative of the possibility for their respective states and associations to join the inscription process later on. The bearers of the alpine ICH application have raised crucial questions regarding the cultural and political characterization of alpinism within, and in interaction with, the extended 'community' of practitioners. But as far as we have been able to determine, neither the alpine element nor the legitimate standing of France, Italy and Switzerland to submit the application has ever been contested by any stakeholders or organisations based on any political issues.

In sum, the project was seen by its promoters as simultaneously regional, transboundary, transnational and global. In this case, the practice was not said to be the expression of a regional culture, to result from a sort of regional idiosyncrasy, or to be a component of a specific regional identity. This project was regional in a different, somehow metonymic, way: the Mont Blanc range and, more broadly, the western (French, west-Italian, and Swiss) Alps

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<sup>5</sup> UNESCO's guidelines stipulated that such letters had to be added to the ICH application to prove the support of the 'community'. The steering committee asked unions and Alpine clubs other than the French, Swiss and Italian ones to write such letters. However, they could not be attached to the application itself, since the French Ministry of Culture stated that only letters written by members of the 'community' located within the three countries involved in the application should appear in the file. This is another illustration of the kind of trade-offs that took place in order to make the application compatible with UNESCO's way of conceiving scalar framing.

were said to be the symbolic core of a globalised practice, which meant at the same time its original location, its living heart and its emblematic place.

### **Conclusion: towards a research program on scalarity and heritage making**

Alpinism is a very specific example of heritage making and an uncommon kind of candidate for ICH inscription due to the complexity of the scalar system involved in the inscription process. The lessons drawn from this case study make it possible to formulate a research program on questions of scalarity within heritage, combining epistemological and methodological issues, as follows.

First, this paper invites researchers to enrich their analysis of the scalar dimension of heritage making. This case study, dealing as it does with a highly formalized acceptance of heritage, underlines the importance of social imaginaries of scale in the institutionalization of 'communities', as defined not only in the ICH procedure but also within state administrations and intergovernmental organisations. The case shows that scalar imaginaries are at stake in heritage claims and it also specifies how they shape practices and become social issues. This case also reveals the ways in which these imaginaries are negotiated and adjusted by each stakeholder or group when they have to become more familiar with and interact with other collectives' scalar references.

Second, the local/national/global triad that is so common in the literature of heritage studies and in the human and social sciences, in which each level is associated with a kind of stakeholder, does not fully work as a way to understand the issues that the alpinists encountered when working on the inscription of their practice on the ICH list. It probably does not work for many others either. The case study analysed above underlines the fact that the alpinists deal with a broad set of spatial entities belonging to different scalar systems: places, municipal and national territories, transboundary regions, transnational entities, regional (sub-state) areas of public competency, various mountain ranges, and the globe as a common reference for conceiving of humanity and universality. The local, national and global can therefore be understood not as the exclusive scalar focus of stakeholders and organisations, but only as levels in the spatial imaginary and practices of many, if not all.

More broadly, this allows us to frame a more general statement about the importance of scaling in heritage studies: when scalar issues are at stake in researchers' understanding of heritage making, it is necessary to get a clear idea of the various meanings given to scalar references by the individuals and groups themselves who are the bearers of the heritage. Consequently, research on heritage-making processes must take into account the heritage practitioners' scalar systems, and their specific articulations, without assuming any a priori set of levels, since any given set might be irrelevant to those practitioners. In addition, researchers should not postulate any epistemic gap between the scalar systems of the 'communities' and those of experts and of state and UNESCO organisations. Scale is a feature of the spatial imaginary and a category of practice for all of them.

Third, this case study emphasizes the reflective work that the spokespeople for the alpinist 'community' had to undertake while engaging in a process of institutional recognition that required validation by other stakeholders. These spokespeople had to achieve this task for at least two reasons: first, they had to make explicit the definition of the practice that they recognized as their own living heritage, and second, they had to clarify the expression of their

own scalar system in order to align it with those used by the external groups they had to deal with (such as state administrations and national expert committees). Beyond this specific case related to ICH, we think that the self-reflection that is directly or indirectly required from any groups of stakeholders involved in the submission of an application to UNESCO lists deserves more systematic attention from researchers. So far, scholars have been particularly interested in the impact of such self-reflective work on notions of 'community' or even of the 'ICH'; this interest could be usefully extended to the development and reflection associated with the scalar characterisation of each item submitted to UNESCO's intangible, tangible and natural lists.

Reflection by other groups, such as state administrations or UNESCO experts, on their own scalarity appears, by contrast, to be less crucial for any application process to UNESCO. Such processes, therefore, are highly asymmetrical: the scalar systems of state and interstate institutions always appear as more stable, binding and influential than those of the heritage bearers submitting applications to ICH. Researchers, however, would profit both theoretically and methodologically from paying attention to the complex adjustments that take place among the respective scalar visions of all the stakeholders involved in a UNESCO nomination.

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