

Public folklore in the Netherlands

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The Netherlands can boast on a vibrant tradition in public folklore and in folklore research. As the Meertens Institute in Amsterdam takes care of the research, the Nederlands Centrum voor Volkscultuur in Utrecht, is the public folklore institution. Our institute in Utrecht undertakes a number of activities, including a website (www.volkscultuur.nl) and a popular magazine called *Traditie*. In addition to that we organize years like in 2006 the year of the circus (www.jaarvanhetcircus.nl), to attract popular attention to specific folkloristic themes.

Brokering culture

Public folklore is a form of brokering culture, which is very much in demand nowadays. The term 'public folklore' was coined in the United States of America. An important institution in this field is the Smithsonian Center for Folklife, well known for its American Folklife Festival which is held every year on the National Mall in Washington. In Europe 'public folklore' was first viewed with suspicion, because of its connotation with 'fake' folkloristics. Both traditions met in a symposium in Bad Homburg in the late nineties, the lectures were published in German and in English (the English version in a special issue of the *Journal of Folklore Research* in 1999). What in the American tradition was felt as a useful way of brokering culture to the public at large, in the German tradition had a connotation of 'fake' folkloristics reminiscent of 'Folklorismus' or second hand culture.

The UNESCO Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage, which was adopted in 2003 and came into force in 2006, gave rise to new and fresh discussions on the subject. 'Heritage' has become a part of cultural policies all over Europe. It is said that 'heritage' is a way of fostering cohesion, that is to say of managing ethnicity in a society which has become ethnically divided. Folklore Studies is also trying to address these new questions, whereby folklore, to put it bluntly, is once again used for political ends, albeit more sympathetic than was the case in the thirties and forties. Public folklore is only a small part of this new attention for 'public heritage', but not an unimportant one. As the American folklore scholar Simon Bronner has stated in a recent interview: "tradition is part of a rhetoric along with heritage, community, custom and culture used to signify a need for social connection and sense of past and place that offers an identity shared with others from one generation to another. (...) [By the media] the folklorist is seen as an expert on tradition, that is differentiated from the historian's past, the sociologist's society, and the psychologist's mind." How are folklorists to react on this growing public demand?

Public folklore in the Netherlands

As in Germany, in the Netherlands the political uses of folklore where for a very long time viewed with suspicion. At the same time the Netherlands have a long tradition in what is now called 'public folklore'. Already in the fifties there was a 'Beraad voor het Nederlands Volksleven', a consultative council for the ministry of culture in the field of folklore. Issues that were discussed were, among others, cultural tourism and education. In 1984, with support of government funds, the Informatiecentrum Volkscultuur was created, a professional bureau for popularising knowledge about

tradition and trends. In 1992 this bureau renamed itself in the Nederlands Centrum voor Volkscultuur, as a further momentum in the professionalisation of this sector.

Nowadays the Nederlands Centrum voor Volkscultuur is a vibrant centre, located in the central part of the Netherlands, in the old medieval town of Utrecht. We undertake a number of activities: we issue practical guides, organize long lasting projects on diverse subjects, cooperate with other institutions in the field like the Open Air Museums in Arnhem and Enkhuizen and the Meertens Institute in Amsterdam, the research institution. We also publish several magazines: our popular magazine is called *Traditie*. For people active in the field of folklore we have another quarterly: *Volkscultuur Magazine*.

Living Heritage

As to the popular uses of folklore in the society at large, we find it important to reflect on our activities within the broader field of 'public heritage'. For professionals in the field of public heritage we issue our magazine *Levend Erfgoed. Vakblad voor public folklore & public history*. This magazine addresses itself to cultural brokers employed for instance in museums and archives. In our magazine we want to reflect on issues concerning the cultural brokering of folklore and history. *Levend Erfgoed* is published in a frequency of two times a year and reflects on cultural policy, public projects in museums and the tourist sector, projects of heritage institutions like for instance the Nederlands Centrum voor Volkscultuur. We devote much attention to practical examples, for instance specific educational projects of heritage institutions. But we also publish reflective essays on new trends and developments. The articles in *Levend Erfgoed* [literally: *Living Heritage*] are mostly in Dutch.