

Preserving the Cultural Identity and the Intangible Heritage of Migrants

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Abstract

The present paper is based on a case-study about a Milanese project which has begun in 2016 and which is going to continue in the next years. Italy, which in the past has been a country of emigration – especially to Argentina-, is now being a host country for thousands of African migrants escaping from their dramatic situations of war, poverty, and political discrimination.

The project specifically concerns the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage of people leaving their native countries: it aims at getting in touch with migrants who reach our Italian cities (in particular Milan), giving them the chance of keeping alive their cultural richness. Intangible heritage is particularly fragile, especially in extraordinary situations - such as a war or a diaspora-, and it risks to die forever: for this reason, it is important to collect the memory of people escaping from Africa to Europe. People who come to our cities are disoriented, their identity is deeply mined by many factors: they have lost almost everything, they haven't any more a homeland, but not even a "promised land" to go to. Thus, communities have not any more the time, the places, the conditions and the material instruments to live their intangible heritage and to put it in practice, or to transmit it to the youngest generations. The project tries to remedy this situation, at least partially, in order to benefit the migrant communities but also –on a broader level- the entire human community, who otherwise would lose an important part of its cultural richness.