

BUENOS AIRES, MECCA OF TANGO: ACTIVATION PROCESSES, MEGA CULTURAL EVENTS, TOURISM AND DILEMMAS IN THE LOCAL HERITAGE¹

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we go through the history of the construction of tango as heritage. The period analyzed here begins in the late 90's and extends until 2010. We analyze the factors underlying the cultural policies that came to surface after the "turn" of tango as heritage in Buenos Aires, that is to say, after the activation and promotion of this popular genre on part of the political power (Morel 2009). Through a process analysis, we outline the official efforts behind this recognition. Simultaneously, we examine the impact of tourism as a decisive factor in the political-cultural approaches of the successive administrations. Our aim is especially focused on two main aspects: first, we highlight the heritage-driven policies that went along with the activation process of this genre, and, secondly, we note the consolidation of the cultural policies and actions which had to do, mainly, with the organization of tango events in relation to the promotion of tourism in the city. Under this framework, we explore the negotiations and disputes which, later on, led to the creation of the Buenos Aires Tango Festival and its institutionalization within the official cultural program.

Keywords: political heritage, festivals, tourism, tango.

RESUMEN

En este artículo nos proponemos realizar un recorrido por la trayectoria de construcción patrimonial del tango, abordando el período que abarca desde fines de la década de los 90 hasta el año 2010. Principalmente, analizamos los lineamientos en términos de políticas culturales que irrumpieron luego del "giro" patrimonial del tango en la ciudad de Buenos Aires, es decir, de la activación y puesta en valor de este género popular por parte del poder estatal (Morel 2009). A través de un análisis procesual, delineamos las iniciativas oficiales que dieron impulso a este reconocimiento, al mismo tiempo que examinamos la incidencia del factor del turismo en las orientaciones político-culturales de las sucesivas gestiones de gobierno. En particular, nos enfocamos en dos aspectos: por un lado, destacamos la legislación patrimonialista que acompañó al proceso de activación del género y, por otro,

¹ This article contains aspects discussed in one of the chapters of my doctoral thesis (Morel 2011b). This paper was published in the *Revista PUBLICAR en Antropología y Ciencias Sociales*, AÑO XI, nº 15, Buenos Aires, 2013, pp. 55-74.

observamos la consolidación de acciones y políticas culturales vinculadas con la realización de eventos públicos de gran envergadura ligados al tango y al fomento del turismo en la ciudad. En el marco de esta coyuntura exploramos las negociaciones y las disputas que supuso la creación del Festival Buenos Aires Tango y su institucionalización dentro de la agenda cultural oficial.

Palabras Clave: políticas patrimoniales, festivas, turismo, tango.

INTRODUCTION

Equally as occurred with other popular South American genders², during the past 15 years the varied city's cultural policies have contributed to form an image of the emblematic Buenos Aires, situating it as the "mecca of tango". In fact, for tourists from all parts of the world, the city of Buenos Aires has turned into a central place where to journey to get to know and experience the most of the "authentic Argentinian tango". In this regard, the artistic-cultural activity around tango has started to grow in relation towards tourism (Marchini 2007) and has, at the same time, begun to acquire a singular heritage value in relation to cultural expression of the River Plate³. According to the complex value put on this gender, which extends to different scales and responds to both local and global processes, the role carried by the official policies in relation to the revaluation process is not minor. In previous articles to this one (Morel 2009, 2011a) we questioned how the heritage related to tango had created a profound interest for the local governments, considering it not only a possible means to foster local development, the cultural industries and tourism but also as a reaffirmation of the identity aspects connected to the cultural authenticity.

In this article, we aim to describe the course of tango's construction as heritage including the periods from the end of the 90's decade until 2010. Basically, we will try to analyze the cultural politics guidelines underlying the "turn" of the tango heritage in the city of Buenos Aires, in other words, after this popular gender received activation and appreciation on part of the political power (Morel 2009). Through a procedural analysis, we will outline the official initiatives which drove this recognition; at the same time, we will examine the influence of the touristic factor on the political-cultural orientations of each of the successive administrations. We will focus, in particular, on two main aspects: on the one hand, we will highlight the role of the heritage legislation in the activation of this gender and, on the other hand, we will observe the consolidation of actions and cultural policies related to the greater public events in connection to tango and other touristic promotions in the city. Within this framework we will explore the disputes and negotiations originated during the creation of Buenos Aires Tango Festival and its institutionalization within the official cultural agenda. In the course of the consolidation of these official projects around tango, we will outline which

² Among other contemporary examples, we can mention the case of cultural affairs developed in Cali (Colombia), which seek to impose the city as the "world capital of salsa" (Castaño Quintero 2011).

³ Tango is a popular city music (which includes music, dance, singing and poetry) emerged at the end of the 19th century in the River Plate shores, both on the Argentinian and Uruguayan side.

gender's identity aspects and cultural activities were promoted, which ones were excluded and which implications brought that about.⁴

Over the last decades, the studies in cultural affairs have increased the debate about the problem of cultural heritage (Martín and Rotman 2005). In fact, within the context of Latin America and since the decade of the 80's, the preservationist and predominant approach, which usually understood heritage as "a static cultural asset", started now giving way to new perspectives which recognize the heritage as a "social construction", in other words, "... as a quality attributed to determined assets or capacities, selected as players in the heritage, according to the hierarchies, which value some productions and exclude others" (Rosas Mantecón 1998: 4). Parallel to these changes in the perspective about heritage, the implications towards the globalization phenomenon revitalized new articulations between the processes of homogenization and differentiation, exactly as Aguilar Criado observes:

The new dynamic of cultural heritage can be generally explained as the emergence of local values, the power of the singular, the importance of the different as what is inherent to the same global logic that leads to more homogeneous cultures. It is within this search of differentiation that the local culture gains importance, turning its particularity into added value (2005: 53).⁵

Within the framework of these transformations, the cultural and heritage field are seen as a "resource" for the intervention both from the public and private interests, resulting in a consolidation of the different modalities of trading and private appropriation of the cultural heritage (Yúdice 2003). In this regard, the economic dimension of culture in relation to the public policies gains importance in the states, covering up the idea of profitability in the relationship between the local heritage and the touristic activity.⁶ To this, Aguilar Criado adds:

The heritage, beyond its symbolic value and from its intrinsic capacity of being a reflection of a concrete culture, acquires now an "added value", one about its economic profitability, this fostering new and recent interventions in it, both coming from the public administration as well as the private entities, which promote a recovery and revitalization of the cultural elements in specific areas

⁴ This study is part of a wider ethnographical investigation in which I examine the political affair and the processes of cultural heritage activation referred to the city of Buenos Aires. The details supporting this analysis stem, on the one hand, from some instances of field research work done from the beginning of 2006 in the context of the festivals and dance championships organized by the city government of Buenos Aires and, on the other hand, from different secondary sources: the press, specialized magazines, official documents, legislation, etc.

⁵ "La nueva dinámica del patrimonio cultural tiene como explicación general la emergencia de los valores locales, la fuerza de lo singular, la importancia de lo diferente como sustantivo de la misma lógica global que conduce hacia culturas más homogéneas. Es en esta búsqueda de la distintividad como la cultura local cobra fuerza convirtiendo su particularidad en un valor añadido."

⁶ With respect to the processes of valorization of heritage in relation to tourism, some authors highlight a certain modality of touristic consume, attracted and interested, particularly in the local cultural expressions and the experience of the "authentic", phenomenon which is called "cultural tourism" (Santana Talavera 2003: 34). In relation to heritage and tourism, see Prats (2003).

and its reutilization as new recreational spaces and leisure time for a constantly increasing and more specialized demand of the tourist activity (2005: 54).⁷

Besides, in order to interpret the characteristics assumed by the tourist-economic exploitation in relation to the cultural heritage, Prats (2005) distinguishes the differences in “scale” existing between what he calls “local heritage” and “localized heritage”. According to this author, the *factor scale* introduces significant variations to the conceptualization and the forms of administrating the local heritage. By local heritage he refers, preferably, to the places with heritage repertoires which are a reflection of the community residing in that place and that expresses little concern or value beyond that of the local one.⁸ In relation to the localized heritage, it is usually associated with expressions repertoires or local cultural assets which, on the other hand, arouse the interest of a particular external audience, in other words, beyond the local space. As we will see, this characterization of the localized heritage is applicable to the case of tango, particularly in the last decade, when this gender began to attract a massive wave of international followers into the city of Buenos Aires.

Thus, the formulations mentioned above have implied not only comprehending cultural heritage as a social construction historically situated, but also notifying a group of versions, positions and cultural proposals of diverse sources, which coexist, complement and/or confront each other’s social senses and interests around heritage (Prats 1997). From this network of relationships among the different versions of cultural identity expressed by the different actors and groups involved in heritage, it appears to be fundamental to analyze the role of power as concerns heritage, signaling how these social processes not only display determined identities but also how supporters who see this as legitimate consider it worth conserving and disseminating (Rosas Mantecón 1998, Cruces 1998).

THE HERITAGE TURN OF TANGO

In October 2009, tango gained notably public attention through the means of communication and the official promotion made by the government of the city of Buenos Aires, after being declared Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by the UNESCO (Morel 2011a). Thus, the importance of this recognition of tango at a world’s scale paved the way for initiatives that created more valorization, safeguarding and spreading of the gender. However, a series of heritage activations in tango were generated much earlier than its mere international recognition, through practices created at both at national and local level.

⁷ “El patrimonio, más allá de su carga simbólica, de su capacidad intrínseca de ser reflejo de una cultura concreta, adquiere ahora un ‘valor añadido’, el de su rentabilidad económica, propiciando nuevas y recientes intervenciones sobre el mismo, tanto desde la administración pública como desde entidades privadas, que promueven un discurso de recuperación y revitalización de los elementos culturales de determinadas zonas y su reutilización como nuevos espacios de recreación y ocio para una demanda cada vez más grande y especializada de la actividad turística.”

⁸ Even though Prats may formulate this concept bearing in mind smaller communities (small villages), this notion can be applicable, from our point of view, to the activities performed by the *murgas porteñas* (carnival groups from the city of Buenos Aires). In this regard, even if their practices were declared cultural heritage of the city, they are rarely promoted by the cultural affairs as an attraction for tourists (Morel 2011b).

In this regard, during the decade of 90s, a new series of projects, decrees, institutions and cultural events stemming from different sectors were established with the objective of preserving and promoting the assets and expressions in connection with tango. The gradual emergence of a new legislative framework established throughout this period aroused interest by the official agencies related to tango as such expression of cultural heritage. In legislative terms, a first precedent with respect to this interest became apparent with Carlos Menem's presidency, when he created the "National Academy of Tango" under the national decree n° 1235/90. In particular, this decree the following makes explicit:

That tango as a musical, choreographic, poetic and interpretative art has been through the century a profound and authentic expression of the Argentinean people of an unaltered validity (...). That such national artistic heritage must be compiled, organized, studied and safeguarded permanently from any risk of loss or destruction (...) That the traditions treasured by tango must be preserved, subject for teaching, as a stimulus to new creations and to be disseminated national and internationally, all in an organic way.

On the other hand, in 1996 and through the legislative power, the declaration of tango⁹ as a national heritage came into effect, forcing the above decree to become valid. In this way, the national law n° 24.684/96 declares tango as a cultural heritage member of the nation "... comprehending all its artistic manifestations, such as its music, dance, lyrics as well as any allusive plastic reflections of it" (article 1°). With respect to these official initiatives and referring to the content of these normative declarations, Lander (2000) identifies two main lines which appear related to tango as a heritage reference of the national identity: on the one hand, the search for promotion and dissemination of tango in the international context¹⁰ of the time and, on the other hand, the idea that the national state must react to safeguard tango from an "irreparable loss" as an "authentic and profound" expression identified by the "Argentinean people".

It will only be after the late 90s that new and different political initiatives and cultural actions on part of the city government and related to the heritage preservation and the promotion of tango¹¹ will start to take place. That is how two years after the heritage declaration of tango at national level took place, that the city legislative power passed the law n°130/98 on 14th December 1998, activating tango at municipal level. Such law recognizes tango as a member of the city's cultural heritage, safeguarding the "preservation, recovery and dissemination, it promotes and facilitates the development of any artistic, cultural, academic, educational and urban activity, amongst other related activities to tango" (article 1°).

⁹ Project promoted by senator Eduardo Menem and supported by the National Academy of Tango.

¹⁰ It is worth highlighting here that law n° 24.684/96, through its third article, establishes that "the departments of the national state in charge of the promotion and dissemination of the culture and tourism abroad must include in their programs and informative material references to the Republic of Argentina and "tango" as one of the typical cultural expression of this country". Following this, the international meeting in Paris (Francia) took place in 1997, organized by the national executive power and (Carlos Menem was in office) and his civil servants, which was nominated with the First International Tango Festival.

¹¹ Parallel to these heritage activations mentioned here, during these years there will be an emergence of other relevant official initiatives of diverse backgrounds, see Morel (2009).

Now, referring to the above laws, it is worth highlighting some of the similarities and differences in content of both the national and city legislation. On the one hand, even when the city law n°130/98 includes more articles (19 against 6) than the national law n° 24.684/96, both laws state measures for the protection, preservation, teaching, exhibition displaying, etc. Moreover, both look forward to promote the touristic value of tango, both inside and outside the nation. Nevertheless, we would like to highlight the fact that law n° 130/98 differs from law n° 24.684/96 in that it encourages the preparations and realization of public massive events which, as we will see later, involves the local state in a more active and protagonist role towards tango than that of the national administration. Moreover, we appreciate that this emphasis put on making big events for tango within the city of Buenos Aires, are clearly stated in the structure of the body of law n° 130/98. In this law, and over a total of nineteen articles, eight articles (11 thru 18 in the second title of the law) are associated to the creation of a new event which, according to the law, will be called “Popular Tango *Fiesta*” (Fiesta Popular del Tango).

TANGO AND THE POLICIES OF MEGA EVENTS IN THE CITY

As observed by some of the authors dedicated to the studies of “performances” in Anthropology (Stoelje and Bauman 1988), the analysis of “special events”, such as public rituals, festivals, fairs or shows, constitute a fertile ground for the exploration of the diverse meanings, values and viewpoints associated to the producers, actors and groups involved. This approach understands that, in such events, the most profound meanings of a group or society are intensified, symbolized, shaped, played, and exhibited in front of an audience that contemplates them, evaluates them, manipulates them and or experiences them (*op.cit*). Singer (1972) calls “cultural performance” to any discrete and complex event, characterized by aspects including a program of organized activities, interpreters, audiences, space and time setting. These cultural activities are usually linked up with socially constructed *time* and *space*. On the one hand, due to the fact that cultural performances represent temporally limited events, programmed and planned, they appear as having a manipulated *temporal reality*. As observed by Stoelje and Bauman (1998) these events usually follow a periodicity to establish a regular position in the calendar and this periodicity of the event usually connects the life of people with multiplying significant dimensions (such as the natural cycles, change of seasons, religious celebrations or commemoration dates of a historical event). On the other hand, the *selected space* for the making of the event will be particularly meaningful in that the performance occurs in spaces specially designed for the activity. In some cases, the buildings, stages and stadiums or other type of infrastructure are created and used exclusively for the performance while, in other cases, the cultural performance picks and transforms the everyday space (the street or public areas) such as places chosen to dance, play music, make rituals or compete in tournaments. Thus, this space, which has been especially designed for these practices and the making of these events, will give us information about how to participate, to whom it is addressed and the audience expected for the cultural activity.

Going back to the case of tango, and as we described in the above section, the political situation of activation of tango as a city’s heritage itself lead to the creation and establishment of a new public event, the “Popular Tango *Fiesta*” (Fiesta Popular del Tango). Nevertheless,

as we will see, this event will end up being called “Buenos Aires Tango Festival” (Festival Buenos Aires Tango), a festival which will be periodically repeated year after year till the present. Thus, based on the course that this singular event took, we will try to outline some of the political-cultural guidelines that characterized the intervention of the local state in relation to tango. In the following section, we will analyze how, through the same process of construction of this event, the meanings of *designation, dates and marked places* were redefined for the making of the event. In other words, based on the analysis or the transformational circumstances of these topics, we will detain to observe how these cultural events intertwine a series of agreements, negotiations and disputes among social agents which, at times, complement each other and, other times, express a profound divergence.

First of all, the way the name for this tango event (considered one of most important to the city) was chosen and the change of the name since tango was declared a cultural heritage (law n°130/98) were quite significant. It is clear that the designation employed for this tango event in the city ignored what was stated in the text of the law: “Popular Tango *Fiesta*”. Thus, while rejected to call it “*fiesta*” and moreover “popular”, and it was decided to call it “Buenos Aires Tango Festival”¹². And so we highlight that these revised designations of the event are not totally unintentional since they are trying to stress certain meanings over others. On the one hand, the decision of designating this event the name “Buenos Aires Tango Festival” allows us to clearly delimit the ownership to the *porteño* world, that is to say, to the culture of the city of Buenos Aires; whereas, on the other hand, the notion of “festival” is responding more to the logic of the cultural industries aiming to create mega shows¹³ rather than addressing the idea of a “popular *fiesta*”, implying a space for shared entertainment in which a variety of actors and social agents are involved in active participation and direct interaction.¹⁴ Nevertheless, seeing it in context, it is important to highlight that the official political strategy of making a big show for tango in the city stems from end of the 90s and as a “reaction” to the different private initiatives around tango¹⁵ (Festivals, Summits, Congresses) that were spreading around the world’s cities at the time. In this sense, the creation of this festival aims at reinforcing, typifying and delimiting Buenos Aires as the

¹² Pay attention to the fact that context of debate as well as law n° 130/98, passed on 14th December 1998, were preceded by the organization of the first tango festival in the city, designated for that occasion “Buenos Aires Tango, International Festival”, organized between 8th and 12th December 1998. Based on this “trial” first festival, the idea of a cultural project with state initiative, oriented to the making of mega events around tango, started consolidating as a pragmatic and effective strategy, mainly given the support and massive attendance of the audience.

¹³ It is worth mentioning that the creation of the tango festival is defined by a number of other mega events that were occurring in the city at the moment. These cultural policies around the organization of festivals and concerts (live shows, with a massive attendance, usually happening on the streets, parks, squares) were part of and a response to an artistic-cultural offer already tried and developing with anticipation in the city (Fischman and Bialogorski 2000).

¹⁴ For an analysis of the conflict around popular *fiestas*, consult Bajtín (1985), Abrahams (1981), among others.

¹⁵ These initiatives did not only consolidate and spread around the capitals of the world (it is worth mentioning here, for example, the International Festival of Granada made since the decade of 80s) but also emerged at a local level; an important series of private initiatives, such as the International Congress of Argentinian Tango (CITA), a dance festival basically oriented for foreigners in the city of Buenos Aires since 1999 are an example of it.

“mecca of tango”, in such way that the city can find a place regionally and globally to arouse interest on part of the international tourism and boost income (Crespo and Lander 2001).

A second point we would like to highlight is referred to the date selected for the making of the festival in the city. In particular, according to law n°130/98 (article 11°), it has been agreed that the event must coincide with the “National Day of Tango” (11 December)¹⁶, date of birth of two main commemorative characters for the history of the gender: Julio de Caro¹⁷ and Carlos Gardel¹⁸. Thus, considering that these two important dates, the first two editions of the tango festival (years 1998 and 1999) were celebrated in December. However, from the third edition on (2001) the celebration suffered a sudden change in the calendar and ceased to be in December and were moved to the end of February or beginning of March¹⁹. With regard to this, the new choice of date in the calendar for 2001 implied a direct link between the tango festival and the touristic industry. The decision on this change of date was suggested by a study run by the Secretary of Tourism together with the Secretary of Culture of the city. This study mentions the importance of modifying the date to integrate the festival into a circuit, making tango an attraction for the tourists coming, in particular, from the Rio de Janeiro Carnival (Crespo and Lander 2001). According to the press, the benefits of it were seen as follows:

It is true that both the classes and the festival have not only the support from official institutions but also the sponsoring on part of France and Japan. The project was channeled by the cooperation of both Secretaries of Culture and Tourism of the city and the idea was to introduce this event to make it attractive for tourists through the travel agencies as done usually, for example, with the package holidays offered to tourists for the Rio Rock Festival.²⁰

Eventually the official strategy was to be able to establish a fixed and periodical calendar towards the festival with the purpose of having a tourist plan for their trip in advance before they travel to the city. In this regard, the compromise of establishing continued public policies (that is to say, independent the changes in administration) through the calendar held by advocates for tango was seen as a central marketing tool to position the city in a

¹⁶ Decree n° 3781/77.

¹⁷ Julio De Caro (1899-1980) was a violinist, composer and director of the tango orchestra. Creator of a very peculiar style, considered one of the most important musicians in the history of tango.

¹⁸ Carlos Gardel (1890-1935) was a singer, composer and cinema actor. By virtue of his success and charismatic image, he is considered the founder and first representative in tango singing.

¹⁹ Despite this change and given the symbolic importance of 11th December as the National Day of Tango, this date will continue to be celebrated, although in a more inorganic way, both in the capital and the rest of the country. Particularly in the city of Buenos Aires, the organization of commemorative events around this date will vary year after year and will be assumed by the different organizations related to tango, both public and private. For instance, since some year this commemoration is being produced under the name “*La gran milonga nacional*”, which was organized together by the Association of Promotion for Tourism, hotels and gastronomy, the communal government and the National Academy of Tango. Besides that, there are often different tango organizations or the same *milonguero* dancers of city commemorate this day with festivals and their own events. To mention some, in the case of *milongas*, Jorge Rodríguez has been consecutively organizing since 20 years a *milonga* to celebrate this date, in which many *milongueros* participate.

²⁰ *La Nación* newspaper (Shows section), 24/01/01.

framework of the most important cities in the world²¹. However, at the same time, the reorganization of the festival produced a series of disagreements and expressions of dissent on part of many artists and groups related to tango, who questioned this official measure as having a touristic-commercial goal (Crespo and Lander 2001). It is particularly within these circumstances and changes given that a new group called “*Autoconvocados por el tango*” (the independent for tango) arose and they produced a document expressing their complete disagreement by saying tango “is not just a trend”, “a product for sale” or “just a souvenir for tourists”, but “part of the life of our city”.

At the same time, and beyond these specific controversies, the 2001 festival’s program held activities throughout the months of January and February, anticipating the Buenos Aires Tango Festival itself. In that particular occasion, there were a lot of activities displayed around the dance and involving 150 tango teachers who at different points in the city offered courses, workshops, master classes, and *milongas*²² of free access to everybody. In this regard, the press said the following:

The importance of the dance in this gathering were already announced in January, when the Secretary of Culture of the city launched a program with free entrance for all classes and workshops in tango halls, clubs, and cultural centres, coordinated by Zotto. It was something like a pre-festival to encourage people to make the first steps and for others to improve their styles. And if it was not yet possible, from tomorrow until Sunday you will have a new opportunity of joining any of the 80 classes dictated in different *milonga* clubs and cultural centres.²³

The motto of this tango event, in this occasion, is “*Pa` que baile la ciudad*” [Let’s go tango in the city]. The priority established here was for the tango dance, since it experienced an enormous growth. Since beginning of this year, Miguel Angel Zotto (godfather for the festival) coordinated in different points of the city 400 open classes for the beginners to be well trained for the occasion. In the Glorieta from Versailles, in La Viruta-La Estrella, in Plaza Cortazar from Palermo Viejo, in Torquato Tasso from San Telmo and in all cultural centres involved in this event, there will be free lessons dancer channel their enthusiasm in the big *milongas* such the open air one in Avenida Corrientes or the closing event in Parque Sarmiento.²⁴

As we have seen before, both the activities previous to the festival as well as many of the activities planned for it took place in different points around the city such as parks, social clubs, halls, cultural centres, and *milongas*, intending in this way the participation and protagonist role of institutions, neighbours, and citizens in general from the different parts of

²¹ This decision will also become explicit in the flyers describing the festival’s program for the year 2001, which will continue to be printed from that day onwards both in the Spanish and English language.

²² We refer to “*milonga*” as the physical space and circumstances in which people gather together to dance tango.

²³ *La Nación* newspaper(Shows section), 27/02/01.

²⁴ *Página 12* newspaper(Shows section), 28/02/01.

the city. In other words, for one the official strategy that aimed at developing a complementary cultural policy, including both instances of face-to-face exchanges, intimate and linked to the neighbourhood, that is, instances evoking greater importance and participation on part of the neighbours all the different areas in the city, as well as more centralized and massive activities that permit to develop artistic formats inclined towards the touristic profitability.

All in all, based on the analysis of the topics discussed up to this point (denomination, choice of date in the calendar year and places for the event), we can assert that after the third version of the tango festival (2001) a new field of negotiations, confrontations and disputes has arisen around a political-cultural conception directly oriented towards the promotion of the tourist market²⁵. As a result of the tension generated, the symbolic, commemorative and participative value will start to lose importance while the necessity of building a policy linked to the idea of promoting the festival in connection to the tourist industry and the economic profit for the city will begin to gain power. As we will see later, these tensions are going to become more intense as the progressively dominant tendency will be more directed towards the making of centralized massive events, which will no longer be integrated in the neighbourhood as spaces of local scale.

In this regard, the official policies will produce not only festivals with an international projection, with the objective of having Buenos Aires as one of the cities “with the biggest tango event in the world” but also they will strategically aim at giving Buenos Aires a new personality and a thematic singularity that enables the reaffirmation and promotion as a city with its “own mark”, distinguishing it from other touristic attractions, and by trying to impose the label “Buenos Aires, the world capital of tango”. Regarding the entire successive Buenos Aires city mayors (Anibal Ibarra, Jorge Telerman and Mauricio Macri) they all agreed in this reaffirmation of the strategical approach for tango regarding the official policies. Thus, during the tango festival in year 2004 the city Mayor Anibal Ibarra (2000-2005) highlighted the following:

... The massive participation of *porteños* and the possibilities that this festival offered us to enjoy our own music, the shows, the open classes and the general tango move that was organized in the city. [The following year he asserted] (...) with this seventh edition of the festival, we reached international recognition (...) this festival belongs to the city of Buenos Aires, to Argentina and is beyond any government. [With respect to the dance championship for 2005 he pointed] (...) the world championship is growing year after year, this year we received couples of 29 cities of all over the world, and that restates that tango is a good welcoming card for the city of Buenos Aires and for Argentina in the world. We are installing in the international agenda both this world championship and

²⁵ This relevance given to tourism will become more apparent with the termination of the Argentinian policy of the peso pegged to the dollar (in December 2001), which brought about a great devaluation of the national currency, making Argentina an attractive place with competitive prices to be visited by the international tourism. This new wave of visitors caused the tango activities to start acquiring a great economic dynamic which turned into a determining and powerful cultural industry in the city (Marchini 2007).

International Tango Festival (...) the participation of so many young couples tango goes from one generation to the other one. We are proud of this event taking place year after year and that each of the winners becomes an ambassador of our city music and our country.²⁶

As we can see, in these different speeches there is a common ground of evoking the idea of expanding tango overseas and that the realization and promotion of these mega events follow the same official policies principle. Nevertheless, it can be said that in the search for more consensus and support on part of the local people, this speech is trying to evoke images of inclusion by constantly referring to “our culture”. These allusions to a notion of integrated and shared culture reveal an interest in building an atmosphere where the participants engage and interact harmonically in these mega events.

Later on Jorge Telerman (2006-2007), already in office as mayor, will continue to emphasize that tango is a “registered mark of Buenos Aires” in the international scenario:

Buenos Aires has an enormous comparative advantage on this new international scenario: the cultural endowment, the level of instruction, the social intelligence and the creative potential of its population. These factors, which do not always appear in an accountancy report, enabled our city to insert with our own distinguishing contents in the international network of culture and communication. *In this context, tango is an element inferring a strong personality to the place it belongs and, thus, it provides it with a notable registered mark (...).* The cities synthesize nowadays the articulation between the private and the public field, they belong to a territory offering encounters between the activity and power of their social actors, who are creative and productive when the public policies reaffirms and exploits their potential. Tango allows us to exemplify this phenomenon in the city.²⁷

In this regard, the public policy’s strategy trying to place tango and its creators as a tool for the development in the city will start consolidating and becoming more explicit over the years in office. Thus, tourism will play a crucial role as a source of economic profitability in the successive city administrations. Tango will represent from the official speech not only the most valuable heritage “product” or “mark” that the city possesses but also it will be referred to as the “*porteña soya*”²⁸, due to the extraordinary profitability and business opportunities it offers. And so was how the present city mayor Mauricio Macri stated it (2007):

We know for sure that one of the strongest and most dynamic area is the land, the agricultural industry and the famous soya (...) But the city must also find a place, for Argentina wants to find its place in the world. And in the city we cannot grow soya, there is no room for such thing. That is the reason why I say

²⁶ Taken from the website: www.tangodata.gov.ar. Consulted on 13/10/2007.

²⁷ In Marchini (2007: 8), our emphasis.

²⁸ In Argentina, the soya production is a highly profitable activity, and it has become one of the main countries in this kind of production.

that *the city has got its own soya, its own green gold, which is without doubt tango*. This is the position that permits us nowadays, after the original and creative idea by our Minister Hernán [Lombardi] together with our Uruguayan brothers to receive the world heritage declaration of the Rio de la Plata as tango representation. And together with tango, which is a passport of entry, we have now our own lectures in the University of Beijing, and the fact that tango is taking the world by storm and ends up here, in the “mecca” of tango, which is in the Rio de la Plata and in Buenos Aires.²⁹

As clearly stated above, the commercial tendency of orienting tango for tourism seems administration after administration, to be growing more and more. According to the latter speech, we can see the strong “utilitarian” sense given to the tango activities in the current administration. All in all, we identified here, through the process of creation and implementing of the tango festival, some of the priorities and legitimation principles which began to be manifested from the political power with respect to its value and activation of gender heritage. Taking into account that the official intervention shows a strong interest in exploiting tango for touristic market, which will be reflected in the progressive spectaclization of tango through the making of mega events, we will see below how these policies will start facing specific problems and address certain demands of the local population.

LOCALIZED HERITAGE: FOSTERING SUCCESS AND BREEDING FAILURE

Even though the city of Buenos Aires Tango Festival will continue to exist uninterruptedly to these days, being one of the biggest and most advertised events the city organizes in order to promote the gender, it will start changing some of the general characteristics overtime. In this regard, and from year 2002 and 2003 the activities around the dance came to be concentrated in championships (metropolitan and world championship), whereas the festival will celebrate the musical aspects of the gender. At the same time, the festival itself will tend to concentrate its activities in centralized points³⁰, leaving the city neighbourhoods outside.

On the other hand, as we pointed out before, the tendency of organizing mega events, evaluated according to their consumption of international tourism, was intensified as the years passed, characteristic which exacerbated especially more during Mauricio Macri’s administration. Thus, the tenth festival edition (2008) will stop taking place during the months of February-March to be postponed until August, coinciding with the World Dance Championship. Again, in this occasion the official speech will find convenient to change the date and “join” the agenda of these single events (Festival and World Championship) in order to boost the tango activities since, according to Cultural Minister Hernán Lombardi, in “August we receive more international tourists” for what it was decided to join the Festival to “... the World Tango Championship with the objective that both events become to Buenos

²⁹ Opening speech of the 12th Buenos Aires Tango Festival (2010), our emphasis.

³⁰ These places have been changing its premises along time: the Stadium Obras Sanitarias, the Dorrego Space, the Predio Ferial de Palermo, the Harrods Galleries, and the Luna Park Stadium.

Aires what the Carnival is to Rio de Janeiro, that is to say, a mark forever”.³¹ Together with these policies, towards year 2008, this same administration will cause the different festival city points get slowly reduced from the 40 existing in 1999 to simply 9 in 2010 for both the Festival and the World Championship.

We would like to highlight that since the tensions generated in the last years due to this orientation which privileges the tourist-commercial aspects of tango over the city neighbours’ participation, these tensions became publicly manifest during 2010 when the specialized magazines wrote articles as the one below:

Nevertheless, since the last administration is in office 3 years ago, it is more difficult to keep up happiness (...). We have been in the official Festival presentation [2010] (...) The Minister of Culture announced that they were expecting 100.000 tourists throughout those 15 days who would spend around a 1.000 dollars per capita. This type of messages, beyond any cultural pertinence, left the citizens with the feeling in that the image we give to tourists is more important than the one to ourselves (artists and compatriots) and to our heritage, being the most affected ones.³²

The new building designated to have the tango lessons, make *milongas* and offer shows -used originally for bank activities- was an insensible choice, a very small place to receive a massive amount of dancers; smaller than any dance hall in the city. The *milongueros* that just approached the place promised to death to never come back again (...). In conclusion, a beautiful building ended up being a fiasco when reutilized as a place for the Buenos Aires Tango Festival.³³

Evidently, the different actors will show their disappointment with the cultural offer linked to the logic of organizing mega events. As we could observe up to this point, in general since 2001, and more obviously from the current administration onwards, the tendency has been that the official political force stresses the strategic character of tango as a “resource” for promoting tourism and creating profits for the city. However, the so called “success” of tango that they pursue from the official speech will be interpreted by many actors involved in this event as a “failure” regarding the cultural affairs towards the audience and the local actors. Thus, it is observed a recurrent tendency with respect to the performance by the official interventions related to the “live” cultural heritage. I am referring here to a process that separates the cultural expressions from the ordinary social life or from habitual contexts of performance “...for which these expressions will go back to them, although yet this time codified, normalized and interpreted by a process of mediation” (Cruces 1998: 76). As we pointed out earlier, in certain cases, these modifications done by *the process of mediation* underlies traces of a commercial logic that intends a forced “spectaclization” of culture, more related towards a distant receptive audience than towards the relevant worries of the local population.

³¹ Hernán Lombardi, *Página 12* (Shows section), 18/12/07.

³² Magazine *El Tangauta*, n° 191, 2010: 12.

³³ Magazine *BA Tango*, n° 205, 2010: 31.

Nonetheless, the state of disappointment caused by such cultural policy inclined to the realization of the mega shows, brought about different opinions, positions and reactions. In this regard, the making a spectacle of cultural heritage did not necessarily diminished the claims but increased the demands on how a more inclusive cultural policy of public interest should be. In search of promoting more participative spaces and cultural democracy, this series of claims stemming from different groups caused the state politics to make changes in the course of cultural affairs decision-making, until the arising of “independent” cultural initiatives.

On the one hand, those groups which claimed a change in the cultural policies decisions were usually oriented by the positive dynamic that the festival showed at the beginning. After what was interpreted as a “reduction”, when all the activities were concentrated (both festival and dance world championship) in one single event, the demands started to point out the need for a greater citizens’ participation in tango:

I remember that in previous festivals -a long time ago- there were tango duos, groups or orchestras playing in squares [*plazas*] and parks, I remember open and free classes of tango dance both in plazas, with very prestigious teachers, and other interesting ideas were left out.³⁴

The light circuit has been reduced. It is too much to ask for the Tango Festival to reach all the points in the city [*barrios*] through their cultural centres, as it happened in previous editions, we are left with the question why hasn’t the city used its public theatres to extend an event as such.³⁵

On the other hand, the absence of a public policy to channel these demands ended up in pushing some cultural centres to start their own initiatives. Thus, the own active participation and the collective organization of a group of artists and social actors from different backgrounds started to consolidate a varied and alternative circuit of cultural events at a lower scale which began to arise over the last years without any support of the city government. Generally speaking, these events arise as a protest and differentiation against the public policies and, in response, they create their own logic to recover the local neighbourhood identity of Buenos Aires. That is to say, the common factor of these cultural initiatives is directed towards an audience that lives in Buenos Aires. Thus, in the course of 2010 there was an emergence of a series of different independent festivals, such as the “Independent Tango Festival”, “The Almagro Tango Festival”, “The Boca Republic Tango Festival”, and the festival “Gardel from Medellín – Style Parque Patricios”. These festivals at lower scale will begin to create themselves, multiplying and spreading in the following years across the city and beyond into the suburbs.³⁶ Emerged from heterogeneous social actors (represented by groups and cultural-artistic movements, communicators³⁷, social

³⁴ Magazine *La Porteña*, Tango n° 101, 2013: 8.

³⁵ *Página 12* newspaper -Culture and Shows section- 28/08/2012.

³⁶ Festivals with these characteristics were organized in the subsequent years in San Telmo, Barracas, Caballito and Valentín Alsina.

³⁷ To mention the most important: “*Unión de Orquestas Típicas*” (UOT) and “*Fractura Expuesta*” radio program.

organizations, neighbours and private sectors) they will look forward to consolidate more participative and inclusive environments, allowing at the same time the incorporation of new artists and new forms of expressions not necessarily yet “recognized”, in many cases with proposals and brand-new aesthetics in relation to the gender. In this regard, so was the first Independent Tango Festival promoted:

Because there is no tango that constructs identity without testimonies, tango that lives in the neighborhoods and resists any music club shutdown and that journeys both the city and the suburbs and because there is a tango that must also be promoted, the Union of Typical Orchestras [*Unión de Orquestas Típicas*] (UOT) together with Open Fracture [*Fractura Expuesta*] Radio Tango, organizes the first Independent Tango Festival. This initiative is there to stay in the Buenos Aires city agenda, just in the space the Buenos Aires Tango Festival left, when it was decided to change the South Hemisphere’s summer to satisfy the North’s Hemisphere’s one, which is our winter. What is at stake is simple. Tango throws at present a scenario sharing essence, experiences, styles and different ways of conceiving tango, which lives among us but in an isolated form. The creation of a new audience for this gender is the challenge for this century and the Independent Festival is offering a new path for the activation among tango groups (...). As the Festival manifesto states -with words by Allora from *La Guardia Hereje*- “it is more than possible a tango without hair gel, a tango that sings to us”. A festival thought for the people of the neighbourhoods, an “anti-postcard” [*antipostalero*] festival.³⁸

All in all, as we have seen until now, the predominance of a politics favouring the organization of cultural mega events started causing a general state of discomfort and conflicts among some sectors of the citizenship. The later generated the creation and consolidation of new social networks and groups working together to develop new uses for tango in the urban space and that boosts new modalities of cultural appropriation. Creating cultural action, beyond the official policies delimitation, these initiatives fight for a greater democratization and participation towards the local duties of tango, trying to extend the agenda in the city, promoting the recognition of innovating expressions, opening new possibilities for the strengthening of alternative projects, as well as favouring the access and gathering together of (new) audience for tango.

CONCLUSIONS

Along this article we describe in which way the establishment of a festival, as an *display event* (Abrahams 1981), brings to a forefront the diverse negotiations, confrontations and tensions among the participants intervening. Taking into account the analysis of some of the political guidelines that characterized the process of implementation of the tango festival, we described certain hegemonic mechanisms that affect the dynamic of the reproduction and appropriation of local heritage. In the case of tango we notify how the official heritage

³⁸ See <http://www.fracturaexpuesta.com.ar/noticias/20200302.html>. Consulted on 8th July 2010.

revalorization is articulated mainly with the attraction it means for the international tourist market. In this regard, the idea of conceiving tango as a “resource” which complements the economic development of the city with the demand of the international tourism arouses at least a series of problems and paradoxical conflicts. With respect to that Aguilar Criado points out the character of inherent instability towards these tendencies trying to commercialize heritage:

...the excessive sustainability of local development projects in the touristic sector seems less arguable, for many reasons, within which we can stress the factor of fragility of the tertiary sector, subject to the changing circumstantial demands that are not basic and that can go back over during global economic crisis or, simply, due to the course in fashion of the objects of consumerism (2005: 65).³⁹

In relation to a study made by an initiative impulse by the city government itself⁴⁰, there is an explicit reference to some of these controversies (Marchini 2007). In general terms, this study points out the polarities and contradictions created when this short-term commercial logic plays a part, that is to say, a logic that is looking forward to clinch “quick business deals”, at the expense of and in presence of the local market, with favourable conditions for a greater variety of production and reproduction of artistic-cultural proposals. In other words, the official strategy of aiming at maximizing the “market of opportunities”, linked to the circumstantial tourist boom, does not seem to prioritize the creation of better of conditions for the local people and their direct access and participation as well as to favour and welcome the new artistic-cultural expressions not usually “recognized” as part of the gender (*op.cit.*).

As Cruces (1998) states it is important to conceive the cultural heritage as a space of power and negotiation mediated by diverse social agents, who are struggling to make their own different appropriations around heritage valuable, sometimes reaching the point of conflict. In this regard, the emerging organization of the neighbourhoods’ festivals we mentioned above, we notify how different actors and groups related to tango at present seem to have been disputing a new context of possibility for the music, the poetry and the “2x4” dance. Thus, these cultural initiatives expose other strategies, experiences and projects, at a circumstantial present, which in terms of cultural policies, do not reach to attend the varied and extended demands of the protagonists who produce, consume and experience tango day by day in the city of Buenos Aires.

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³⁹ “...la excesiva sustentación de los proyectos de desarrollo local en el sector turístico nos parece cuanto menos discutible, por muchas razones, entre las que destacan el hecho de la fragilidad del sector terciario, sujeto a la cambiante coyuntura de demandas que no son básicas y que pueden retrotraerse ante crisis económicas globales o, sencillamente, por un cambio en las modas de los objetos de consumo”.

⁴⁰ This study was made during Jorge Telerman’s administration.

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