CASE STUDY 10

Community involvement in promoting the nomination of the Cantu in paghjella in Corsica, France

The Cantu in paghjella, a male Corsican singing tradition, was inscribed on the Urgent Safeguarding List in 2009. As both a secular and a liturgical oral tradition, it is performed on festive, social and religious occasions: in the bar or village square, as part of liturgical masses and processions and during agricultural fairs. The principal mode of transmission is oral, largely through observation and listening, imitation and immersion, starting as part of young boys’ daily liturgical offices and then later at adolescence through the local church choir. Despite the efforts of its practitioners to revitalize its repertoires, the Cantu in paghjella has gradually diminished in vitality, due a sharp decline in inter-generational transmission caused by emigration of the younger generation and the consequent impoverishment of its repertoire. Unless action is taken, the Cantu in paghjella will cease to exist in its current form, surviving only as a tourist product devoid of the community links that give it real meaning.

#### Practitioners and researchers highlight the need for safeguarding

Since the 1970s, practitioners of the Cantu in paghjella have tried to transmit this increasingly endangered song tradition to the younger generation, within the framework of the Riacquistu movement promoting cultural revival in Corsica.

In 2006 the Centre for Traditional Corsican Music, aware of the opportunities offered by the Convention, organized a symposium on the theme ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage and Transmission: can traditional Corsican polyphony disappear?’

Participants expressed their concern regarding the threats to the viability of the element and noted the urgency of reviving the process of transmission. Practitioners of the element met with other experts to analyse the threats to the element and develop a public safeguarding policy. The debate that began during the symposium spread to the broader community of practitioners and to the general public.

In 2007, following consultation with the community of practitioners, an association was created for ‘the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, formal and informal transmission of the Cantu in paghjella in relation to the regional, national and international instances and bodies’.

#### Inventorying and nominating the Cantu in paghjella

The Cantu in paghjella Association requested France to include the element on an inventory, which must be drawn up under the Intangible Heritage Convention. The Cantu in paghjella Association established a research team of five people (practitioners and experts) who established an inventory of the existing practices, working with the practitioners. Comparing them with practices existing fifty years ago, they noted a significant reduction in the number of practitioners of the Cantu in paghjella and the impoverishment of its repertoire. In this process, not all practitioners of the element agreed to be recorded.

At the same time, local media (*Corse-Matin*, France 3 Corse and *Journal de la Corse*) and national media (TF1 and LCI) informed the public about this work.

On 23 July 2008, during the preparation of the results of the 2006 symposium, the request for the nomination of the Cantu in paghjella: a secular and liturgical oral tradition of Corsica to the Urgent Safeguarding List was presented to the members of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of Corsica (CESC).

On 16 March 2009 the Corsican Assembly unanimously adopted a vote requesting the State to nominate the candidature of the Cantu in paghjella for inscription on the Urgent Safeguarding List. Thirty practitioners, who all participated regularly in the secular and religious Cantu in paghjella, approved the nomination to the Urgent Safeguarding List and the associated safeguarding plan.

For further information:

http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/USL/00315