

# Emotion networking: heritage and citizenship education in the 21st century<sup>1</sup>

Hester Dibbits

**What we do and do not consider to be heritage is not fixed, but rather defined by people together through dynamic dialogue. Awareness of this process is an important skill that contributes to civic competencies. Hester Dibbits, in collaboration with others, developed a method to acquire that skill: emotion networking. In this article she describes the background of this method and practical experiences of heritage professionals who have used it.**

Our increasingly complex world demands such competencies as critical thinking, cooperation and creativity to help us deal with this complexity.<sup>2</sup> These competencies are also important in our interaction with heritage. By branding certain places, buildings, objects, customs or ideas as heritage, we attempt to give meaning to the rapidly changing world around us. Everyone makes different choices in this respect and tensions can run high. After all, heritage creation often involves conflicting emotions and interests.

In order to teach both children and adults 'respect for heritage', numerous educational projects and programmes have been developed, often in the form of (museum-) object lessons. Sometimes curriculum developers explicitly link heritage to citizenship (Vroemen, 2018) – as such, showing appreciation for heritage would then be a form of active citizenship.<sup>3</sup> The problem with this approach is that it sees heritage as given, and as something that people as a group possess. This ignores the dynamic interaction: people variously claim and renounce ownership, take cultural expressions from each other, make changes in form or meaning, or fight against such changes. In order to gain a better understanding of these dynamics and to be able to determine a position for ourselves, a critical (meta-)perspective on how we deal with heritage is necessary. But is this at odds with the pursuit of social cohesion?

The question at hand is how we can find a balance in heritage education between social bonding and critical reflection. In my opinion, the solution lies in developing educational tools together with professionals in practice, in which they make their dealings with tangible heritage items comprehensible and discuss them with each other. It is an effective way for the teachers, educators and other professionals involved to investigate for

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<sup>1</sup> This text is a translation of: Hester Dibbits, 'Emotienetwerken: erfgoed- en burgerschapseducatie in de 21ste eeuw', in *Cultuur en Educatie. Special: Erfgoededucatie en de omgang met emoties*, 19.55 (2020), p. 8-27.

<sup>2</sup> 'There is ample evidence all around us of the many changes the 21st century has brought to our lives. We live in a more competitive, yet more interdependent world. [...] Such an unpredictable context requires an increased capability of humans to engage with complex challenges and agility to adapt to new situations, along with a diverse set of individual competencies', Thus an excerpt from an OECD report on 21st century skills (2013), drawn up at the request of the Education Platform 2032. <https://www.21stcenturyskills.nl/onderwijs-2032-presenteerde-23-januari-eindadvies/> consulted on 10 March 2020.

<sup>3</sup> See in this context the critical consideration of the culturalist approach to citizenship in W. Oosterbaan, *Ons Erf*. 2014, p. XX.

themselves how to find this balance and where the challenges lie. In this article, I elaborate on this using experiences with the development of a new method and idea of emotion networking.

### **Emotion networking**

Emotion networking is the joint exploration of the complex interactions between people and heritage and between people themselves (Dibbits & Willemsen, 2014). Our assertion is that emotion networking makes people 'heritage-wise'. Being 'heritage wise' means that someone is able to relate critically to heritage and to engage in discussion about it through consideration of the dynamics surrounding heritage items and one's own position; these competencies can help us deal with the often emotionally charged past in the present (Dibbits 2017).

The method of emotion networking has now gained an important place in the educational programmes of Imagine IC and in the bachelor's and master's curricula of the Reinwardt Academy.<sup>4</sup> Other institutions and organisations that use it include a number of primary schools.<sup>5</sup> In addition to its use as an educational tool, there is also increasing interest in emotion networking as a research, design and decision-making tool.<sup>6</sup> In this contribution I only focus on education.

Although not conceived as such, the method can be seen as a form of *design anthropology*, with a cycle of reflection and action. Design anthropology makes use of tools such as video feedback, prototypes, curated interactions and games. It is characterised by interdisciplinary collaboration, aimed at developing concepts and prototypes, setting up collaborations with stakeholders and various audiences, and by its focus on facilitating and contributing to change. The use of theory for the development of concepts and new frameworks or perspectives is also characteristic within design anthropology (Gunn, Otto and Smith eds., 2013, p. 11). The results of this type of research cannot be quantified, but can be described.

In the case of the project discussed in this article, the empirical data involves notes taken during meetings where people practised variations of the method, reports of meetings of the core group of researchers and critical friends, at least two hundred photographs, a number of audio (and some video) recordings, detailed interviews and e-mail exchanges. Part of this research material is publicly accessible via the websites of various partners.

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview see <https://www.reinwardt.ahk.nl/en/research-group-cultural-heritage/emotion-networking/>

<sup>5</sup> In 2020 a project started with several heritage centres and a primary education teachers college for the development of an educational track for primary education, based on the idea of emotion networking. To this end, Landschap Erfgoed Utrecht successfully submitted a project application to the *Fonds voor Cultuurparticipatie* under the title Erfgoedwijzer. See also the memorandum of the Vakoverleg Erfgoededucatie, 'Erfgoededucatie in het nieuwe curriculum', dd. 24-01-2018. [https://curriculum.nu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Erfgoededucatie-voor-curriculum.nu\\_-2.pdf](https://curriculum.nu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Erfgoededucatie-voor-curriculum.nu_-2.pdf) (consulted May 2020).

<sup>6</sup> The method will be used and further developed as a research, design and decision-making instrument within the framework of the HORIZON-Europe project CENTRINNO (2020-2024) with Waag and Metabolic as partners, among others, and the SMART-Culture project Tipping the Balance led by the University of Wageningen. Waag is also a partner in this project (2020-2024).

For this article, I focused not only on the experiences of those involved from the outset, but also on the workshop participants who practised the method: (future) professionals working with heritage in an educational setting. I believe that the key to finding a good balance between critical reflection and social bonding lies with them. Involving professionals in the development of the method from the outset not only provides them with a number of important tools, but also enables them to quickly grasp the basic idea of a dialogue-based approach to heritage. Before dwelling on a number of practical experiences, I will first share a bit more about the institutional and academic frameworks within which the method was developed, as well as about the design of educational projects.

### **Institutional context**

The idea for emotion networking, which originated in a collaboration between Imagine IC and the Reinwardt Academy, has since 2011 been further developed together with numerous additional partners, through research in, with and for practice. Imagine IC is an institution in the southeast of Amsterdam that aims to document and improve current social relationships through participatory heritage work.<sup>7</sup> The Reinwardt Academy, one of the faculties of the Amsterdam University of the Arts, is a training, research and knowledge centre for cultural heritage.<sup>8</sup> Over the years, many Reinwardt students have completed work placements at Imagine IC. A number of them continued to work there. Director Marlous Willemsen was a researcher for a number of years in religious heritage and emotion networking within the Reinwardt Academy research group.

The first idea for emotion networking arose in discussions around the design of a series of public programmes in which we wanted to approach heritage not as an established fact, but as a cultural practice. These conversations resulted in *Immaterieel Erfgoed met Prik* (Intangible Heritage with Pop), a programme around a set of concrete rituals, everyday practices, songs and sounds. In 2014 we used the term 'emotion network' for the first time in an English-language publication relating to this program (Dibbits & Willemsen, 2014). The subsequent series of meetings, entitled *Stadsgevoel* (City feeling), had a slightly different format, but the idea behind was the same: to discuss concrete (heritage) cases with a deliberately mixed audience.

Starting in 2016, Imagine IC, the Reinwardt Academy, Landelijk Kennisinstituut Cultuureducatie en Amateurkunst, Waag and other partner institutions have translated the idea of emotion networking into an educational method. This was done step by step, with people from the field. Mila Ernst, Jacquélien Vroemen and Arja van Veldhuijzen, professionals in museum and heritage education and involved in this project from the start - worked with socially topical cases that evoke different emotions.

What should happen to house of the house of Pim Fortuyn (a popular Dutch politician who was assassinated during the 2002 national election campaign)? Is Jamie Oliver's paella with chorizo really paella? Does the sinking *Pyramid of Austerlitz* (a 36-metre-high pyramid of earth built in 1804 by Napoleon's soldiers on the Utrecht Hill Ridge) have to be restored

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<sup>7</sup>See [www.imagineic.nl](http://www.imagineic.nl).

<sup>8</sup><https://www.reinwardt.ahk.nl/de-academie/>

and preserved over and over again? Heritage professionals, school teachers, pupils, lecturers and students of the Reinwardt Academy and many others were presented with these and other cases for emotion networking sessions.

### **Academic context**

The basic idea of emotion networking is that together, a group of people question/study a concrete phenomenon step by step, paying particular attention to underlying emotions and unspoken stakes. Attention to this is important, because in processes of heritage making and heritage unmaking (Welz, 2015) not every voice weighs equally. After all, in practice, a small group of 'experts' often determine what we should or should protect or cherish as heritage. But what is dear to one person can be offensive to another.

Many heritage professionals are aware that opposing emotions and interests play a role in heritage. They experience it for themselves in their work and through the media. A number of them are also aware of the research and development of theories in this field, especially the relatively young network of Critical Heritage Studies, with well-known figureheads such as Laurajane Smith and Rodney Harrison.<sup>9</sup> Critical Heritage Studies in turn builds on disciplines such as social history and ethnology with long and rich traditions of thinking about cultural variation and dynamics, processes of group formation, and everyday dealings with the past. For the development of the method of emotion networking, these fields of study were important sources of inspiration, particularly European Ethnology.

Ethnology focuses on the study of widespread cultural phenomena in their historical, social and geographical dimensions, and considers these dimensions as dynamic, group-based processes of meaning making and appropriation.<sup>10</sup> An ethnologist looks at concrete cultural phenomena, usually in their own environment, asking questions about place, time and group, while being aware of their own position and trying not to judge directly (Schmidt-Lauber 2012). Ethnologists interested in heritage investigate where, when and by whom item X is named and made heritage. They consider heritage as a form of 'curating', as a practice of cultural innovation. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes:

'I define heritage as a mode of cultural production that has recourse to the past and produces something new. [...] Heritage as a mode of cultural production adds value to the outmoded by making it into an exhibition of itself. [...]. Central to my argument is the notion that heritage is created through metacultural operations that extend museological values and methods (collection, documentation, preservation, presentation, evaluation, and interpretation) to living persons, their knowledge, practices, artifacts, social worlds, and life spaces.' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2010).

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<sup>9</sup>Laurajane Smith, *The uses of heritage*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006 and Rodney Harrison: *Heritage. Critical Approaches*. London: Routledge, 2013 are just two works from an extensive oeuvre of much-quoted classics.

<sup>10</sup> The website [sieffhome.org](http://sieffhome.org) offers a good introduction to European Ethnology. The disciplinary labels European Ethnology, Social Anthropology, Volkskunde and Folklore Studies are often used interchangeably.

The documentation and analysis of such often unconscious practices is at the heart of ethnology. A common method is ethnographic research. Emotion networking has an important connection with this method, especially with regard to the role of observation. Participants in an emotion networking session are asked the question: 'What do I see happening here? Observing and asking questions without directly judging are skills that are also important in exploratory learning. They help people deal with the uncertainty and complexity of existence. In *Anthropology and/as Education* (2018, 37), Tim Ingold distinguishes between two forms of education: '[...] the strong sense of education as the delivery of grand, powerful statements that provide a kind of founding charter for civilization-as-we-know-it, and a weak sense of the hesitant overflowings or deviations that pull us out of certainty, out of our defensive positions and standpoints - that disarm us.'

The idea of emotion networking is that the exercise helps people deal with unpredictability and uncertainty. The assumption is that an understanding can be found in shared meta-skills, such as being able to listen to each other and work and live together without having to agree or be the same. In this respect, system thinking skills are important: to (learn to) see and (learn to) understand or investigate coherence in complex matters. De Wolf c.s. names three skills that belong to system thinking: discovering relationships, making connections and changing the level of analysis (De Wolf ed., 2011, p. 33). According to educationalist Jutten (2015), children are system thinkers by nature, but it is as if schools 'make every effort to put an end to the understanding of relationships and to the natural learning of children'. This is a missed opportunity, says Jutten: 'If we are able to better understand the complexity of reality, we will also be able to exert a positive influence on this reality'. This also applies to adults of course.

In emotion networking, attention is paid to the individual, by focusing on the feelings, interests and positions of individual participants, but the exercise is about observing and investigating together. The question here is how the participants can visualise their perspectives, feelings, interests and interrelationships in a way that helps in the interaction and meta-analysis. What visual language can facilitate observation? With these questions we enter the field of network theories. An important source of inspiration for us was Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory of (1996), in which much attention is paid to the complex dynamics between people and things. Other network thinkers who brought us valuable ideas, include sociologist Hannerz who showed the added value of a network approach in his book *Exploring the City* (1980). Network theories can help us think about relationships between people and things, and challenge us to look beyond borders or to negotiate them, rather than simply accept them. In doing so, system and network thinking fits well with ideas about active citizenship and democracy, with individuals connected in a loose system in which ever-changing alliances can be forged (and broken).

### **Heritage and citizenship education**

Emotion networking is intended as an exercise in heritage and citizenship together: it allows people to look at their own and others' positions and behaviour in mutual interaction and to see the interconnectedness. The idea is that they find each other in a shared experience of getting in and out of the 'bubble' together (Dibbits 2017; Willemsen

2018). The 'bubble' being the trusted, the familiar, the unambiguous, that which you share or think you share as a matter of course. Emotion networking helps people to map out and discuss together the diverse emotions of everyday cultural phenomena that a group or individual has put forward as heritage. This makes it a form of heritage education. Emotion networking reflects on the phenomenon of heritage in general and on specific items of heritage in particular.

At the same time, it is an exercise in exploring and discussing an issue together, and as such, it is an exercise in democracy: participants in an emotion networking session are invited to listen to each other and position themselves in relation to the other. The idea is that participants (learn to) see that heritage is always political and that heritage sites, museums and archives cannot simply be seen as a source of knowledge about the past, but are also institutions that produce the past in the present. It is important that citizens know how to find a voice within this. Emotion networking is intended to provide instruments for this, as a form of active civic education based on the idea that citizens in a pluralistic democracy should not conform to a prescribed standard, but should be free to define their own views and identities from a sensitive, environmentally aware attitude. It is therefore not only about thinking, but also about doing.

### **Two ways of working**

Emotion network as a noun stands for a network of people with conflicting interests and emotions, who are in contact with each other and can change position from the moment they start talking to each other. In developing emotion networking as a method, we chose to make the networked interactions visible by asking participants to draw lines on paper when they shift position, creating a network of points and lines (variant 1) or to literally move around in space (variant 2). Both variants have often been used, resulting in a reasonable picture of them. We also gained a lot of experience with the combination of both variants with local and international professionals as participants.<sup>11</sup>

In the case of emotion networking on paper, we initially worked on a white sheet where participants were free to share their associations around a particular case - simply indicated in the middle by a single word, a small drawing, photo or article. Later, this blank page was replaced by sheets with a grid, based on James Russell's *Circumplex Model of Emotion* (1980). This is an axis system with words referring to different emotions, with negative and positive on the X-axis and intense and mild on the Y-axis. The facilitator invites participants to quietly write down in the diagram, with a cross, initials or otherwise, which emotions the heritage issue or item in question evokes. Subsequently, participants as well as the facilitator can choose to explain their feelings. After the exchange, participants again determine their positions and draw a line from their initial position to the new one.

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<sup>11</sup> We are also working on the development of digital variants. For an example, see the webinar: [lkca.nl/webinar/emotienetwerken-erfgoed-als-werkwoord](https://lkca.nl/webinar/emotienetwerken-erfgoed-als-werkwoord). Students of the Reinwardt Academy experimented with various tools, including digital ones, as part of an elective course. In the project Digital Dynamic Documentation (DDD), Waag and Imagine IC investigated how emotion networking as a concept in combination with interactive technology can be used to arrive at a dynamic 'caption' in which divergent and changing feelings, associations, opinions and interests around an object can become transparent. See Douwe-Sjoerd Boschman, Dick van Dijk and Danielle Kuijten, Voorbij je bubbel: Digitaal Dynamisch Documenteren (Amsterdam, 2020 - ter persse).

Participants are then offered different perspectives in the form of short videos and/or newspaper articles. The positions are redefined, and lines are drawn again. Finally, stakeholders (such as entrepreneurs, administrators and teachers) can optionally be added to the emotion network scheme.

From January 2018 we were able to take the next step in developing the idea into a concrete methodology, partly thanks to a subsidy from JOIN, the National Science Agenda's impulse incentive programme within the line Veerkrachtige Samenlevingen.<sup>12</sup> JOIN focused on the development of instruments to strengthen young people's participation in a rapidly changing, pluralistic society to make society more inclusive and resilient. Within the framework of the two-year project Emotion Networking around Heritage in Educational Settings (EmErEd), the Imagine IC team developed a variant in which participants are invited to stand in a circle on the edge of a round cloth, with an object in the middle on a pedestal. The facilitator then invites the participants to look at the object, choose from a number of emojis and place them on the cloth: close to or further away from the object, depending on the intensity of the feeling. Next, the facilitator asks the participants, if they wish, to give a brief explanation of the chosen emoji and position. The facilitator then introduces several new 'voices' or 'perspectives' by handing out information sheets or watching short videos.

After these steps, the participants are asked whether they have changed their feelings or position and to indicate this possible change with the choice and positioning of emojis. They are also given the opportunity to explain their choices if they wish. A final step is the question whether the object in question belongs in a museum or should be classified as heritage and why or not. This variant was tested within the EmErEd project in a series of educational work sessions with primary school pupils, and discussed and evaluated in various knowledge seminars.<sup>13</sup> Marlous Willemsen was present in the project team not only during the preparations and follow-up discussions, but also in most of the sessions with pupils and their teachers. Additionally, she conducted individual interviews with a number of teachers.

### **Course of the workshops with professionals**

In the period 2016-2020 dozens of workshops with (future) professionals took place. The number of participants varied from eight to eighty. For larger numbers, the group was split up into small groups of about eight to ten participants, with one facilitator per group and sometimes an observer. An important feature of these sessions is that we explicitly invited participants to think along with us about the method. In doing so, they not only became researchers of the dynamics surrounding the heritage item in question, but also of the method. This created involvement and ownership: several participants indicated that they

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<sup>12</sup> Startimpuls-join.nl

<sup>13</sup> For impressions see the website of Imagine IC and De Vreede (2019). Museum Gouda, one of the partners in the EmErEd project, also developed educational programmes for students based on the idea of emotion networks. Here children talked to each other about objects from the collection using tools specially designed for this purpose. See: Melissa de Vreede, 'An open conversation about emotions - experiment in Museum Gouda', 10-12-2018, lkca.nl/article/open-gesprek-over-emoties/ (consulted May 2020).

intended to apply the method in their own practice.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, it also became clear how important it is to pay attention to the basic ideas of the method. In the meantime, the Reinwardt Academy and Imagine IC have started offering training in this method.<sup>15</sup>

### **The choice of the item**

Fixed elements in the sessions were, in addition to the general working methods already outlined and the invitation to give feedback on the method, a brief introduction to the institutional and academic context and the educational purpose of the method, and a discussion about the method. The exact composition of the group, the subject, the degree of participation, the input of additional information and the performance of the facilitator varied per session, as did the time, duration and location. Almost all workshops took place at congresses or study days with free registration.<sup>16</sup>

There was one question that came up again and again, and that is precisely what the whole method is all about: what are we actually talking about? If we (want to) talk about carnival, what carnival is that? And who are the 'we' actually? What exactly is carnival? If we (want to) talk about Saint Nicholas, what kind of image does that conjure up for us? And what happens to our feelings when we start talking about Black Pete? Or about the possible abolition of a term like the Golden Age? Is the feast or ritual in a general sense the starting point or is it about specific elements of that feast or ritual? Or do we take the issue of an object as the starting point of the conversation? Do we take something tangible or not? And what participation do we expect from the participants?

An example of a session in which participants were invited or, more precisely, felt invited to actively participate in the presentation (or 'performance') of the item in question, was a session about the Wilhelmus. We chose the Dutch national anthem as a case study a number of times, including at one meeting with a group of mainly historians and another meeting with mainly policy makers and heritage professionals. In both cases I started singing the Wilhelmus - unannounced - and in both cases most of those present were singing along.

### **Sharing emotions**

Reactions to the cases varied widely, even if they were the same case. The Wilhelmus turned out to have a lot of resonance as a case, especially in the meeting with historians. Several participants said they felt very uncomfortable when the singing started, and some became downright angry and agitated. The reasons for this differed from person to person: one felt ambushed, another felt it was disrespectful to sing the national anthem and yet

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<sup>14</sup> For an example, see: <https://www.nachtvandeutrechtsegeschiedenis.nl/page/405/emotienetwerken-utrechts-erfgoed> (consulted August 2020).

<https://emotienetwerken.nl/>

<sup>15</sup> For an example, see: <https://www.nachtvandeutrechtsegeschiedenis.nl/page/405/emotienetwerken-utrechts-erfgoed> (consulted August 2020).

<https://emotienetwerken.nl/>

<sup>16</sup> The composition of the group does not make much difference to the outcome of the exercise - becoming proficient in critical (heritage) reflection and social connectedness. Of course, this is different if the method is used as a research or decision-making instrument, but this application of the method is not considered here.

another felt uncomfortable because the majority of the participants seemed to feel very familiar with it and at the same time laughed at it: a mixture of feelings that this participant did not share and which caused a feeling of exclusion. When participants shared feelings, something shifted in the network of emotions, also in relation to the item in question. Discussing these dynamics - the core of the exercise - proved to be valuable to most participants.<sup>17</sup>

How much the dynamics depend on the framing of the subject in question at different times during the exercise, for example by introducing new information, was exemplified in another case study on playing 'cowboy and Indian'. Unlike in the United States, there is currently no broad debate in The Netherlands about the tradition of dressing up as cowboys or Indians. However, the moment a person was given the floor in a session, the subject immediately took on more meaning, even among participants who did not at first feel emotionally involved.<sup>18</sup>

Naming a certain phenomenon in very general terms and then making it more specific in a second round sometimes caused a landslide in the interaction. This was the case in a session in which Flemish heritage professionals discussed carnival. The session was initially friendly. However, the atmosphere changed when the carnival in Aalst and the accompanying anti-Semitic floats came on the table. Isn't carnival by definition a stigmatising feast of caricatures? The mood in the group became unpleasant and a number of participants went home with an uncomfortable feeling.<sup>19</sup>

In this particular case, it was an issue under recent media discussion. In cases that have long been the subject of intense public debate, participants often seemed cautious. We saw this, for example, in sessions about Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet. The Black Pete phenomenon - an obvious case, given the fierce debate about it - has only been dealt with in a few sessions. In those sessions, the positions did not appear to differ from each other very much, and the interaction was cautious. This phenomenon calls for more research.

### **The conversation about emotions**

Contrary to what the term suggests, emotion networking is about more than just emotions. We understand emotion as a combination of physical and mental responses to a specific situation which are shared with the environment.<sup>20</sup> Emotions can be expressed in many different ways: through words, images, objects, gestures or performances. The next question is, of course, how the environment interprets them. Early on in our research we started experimenting with emojis, although for us these emojis were only one of many possible forms of expression. The discussion about other options not only yielded new suggestions, but also encouraged participants to reflect on emotions: what exactly are they and how do they relate to the knowledge claims that also play such an important role in

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<sup>17</sup> For a report see: <https://www.immaterieelerfgoed.nl/nl/verslaghistoriecidagen2017> (consulted August 2020).

<sup>18</sup> For this case, see also: <https://www.lkca.nl/webinar/emotienetwerken-erfgoed-als-werkwoord/>.

<sup>19</sup> For a short report and reactions see: [https://faro.be/sites/default/files/bijlagen/e-documenten/GO2019-verslag\\_def.pdf](https://faro.be/sites/default/files/bijlagen/e-documenten/GO2019-verslag_def.pdf), p. 32-33 (consulted May 2020).

<sup>20</sup> See also: R. Kleyweg, 'Emotion Theories. Cognitive, non-cognitive or both' in: *Erasmus Student Journal of Philosophy*, 2012.3, 46-57, 55.

heritage interactions? Building on that: if we were to place item X in a showcase, could it be an idea to add the emotions we shared with each other? And what would that look like?<sup>21</sup> It is precisely these kinds of questions that often made it possible for participants to (re)connect with each other in their roles as active heritage producers and with a vision to the future.

### **Ethical aspects**

Emotion networking is an exercise that not only addresses tension and emotions, but also generates them, in the moment and afterwards. Is that really ethical? This question was asked by, among others, the ethics committee of Erasmus University Rotterdam to whom the application for the *EmErEd* project was submitted. The committee asked how the research with primary school pupils and teachers had ensured (social) care for the participants. Our answer was that emotion networking can be compared to the circle discussion at primary school. Here too, subjects are discussed that can unexpectedly evoke many emotions (as in any conversation). The aim to strive for the safest possible atmosphere during guided interactions goes without saying. But what exactly is 'safety'? And isn't the commitment to a more dynamic, constructivist vision of heritage purposefully 'unsafe'? Or is this lack of safety, this insecurity simply a given that we must learn to deal with? Isn't consciously experiencing insecurity or confusion a prerequisite for a more resilient society?

These questions often returned in discussions with (future) professionals. Interestingly, sharing emotions with participants who do not know each other was sometimes experienced as safer than with participants who do know each other. Also 'thinking for third parties', for stakeholders who were not present at the session itself ('what would the local shopkeeper think of this?') felt better for (some) participants. Thinking from the position of someone else seems to provide a safe environment. At the same time, there is something unsatisfactory about the absence of the 'real' voices.

A complicated aspect of the method is that a participant may feel overwhelmed by what is happening. As was the case with the Wilhelmus. A participant can quickly turn away from an object; sound is more difficult to ignore. The same applies to smell. With intangible heritage - rituals, traditions, customs - the question of how participants can withdraw from active participation if they wish to do so arises very explicitly. Talking about a dish such as paella as a case study without experiencing the taste, smell and texture leads to a different conversation than after having prepared or eaten the dish together on the spot.

On several occasions we have been asked: do you not make difficult issues even more complicated? And what if things go completely wrong? These questions touch directly on academic discussions about the role of conflict. According to some researchers, conflicts are a prerequisite for long-term trust; according to others, they drive people apart because

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<sup>21</sup> This question was discussed at various workshops and experimented with in the educational programmes of the EmErEd project. We elaborated on this in a follow-up project of Waag and Imagine IC, co-financed by the AFK: Digitaal Dynamisch Documenteren. See <https://imagineic.nl/projecten/digitaal-dynamisch-documenteren/> and <https://waag.org/nl/article/voorbij-je-bubbel/> (consulted October 2021).

they get stuck in their position.<sup>22</sup> Political scientist and publicist Marcel Ham (2009) states: 'Conflict thinking is popular. In sport, but also in the rest of society, there is a widely shared belief that conflicts are good for creativity and innovation, are useful to prevent frustrations and to create respect and trust in the long term'. In his article, however, he also quotes psychologist Carsten de Dreu, who states that 'Polarisation drives people apart, because they begin to identify personally with their position. Then, after a while, you can no longer say that your position is wrong, because then you also say that your identity is wrong - and that's not possible. So there is no longer a solution'. This is counterbalanced by the vision of political anthropologist Nanke Verloo, who states that moments of conflict can be used 'as a handle to make underlying frustrations visible, to interpret them, to share emotions, and to enter into a real conversation with people who apparently own a problem. [...] Often it stops at waiting until emotions are appeased, until something happens again, that's a shame' (quoted from Ham & Ten Houte, 2015).

### **Experiences of participants**

Participants were generally positive about the method. Some of them had to get used to it: 'I find emotion networking on paper a nice exercise, but complex. At first I wondered: where exactly should I put a dot? The great thing is that you can follow the track back for yourself afterwards. It would be nice if you could visualise even more precisely how you are touched by the other person'. Others found the result on paper messy: 'I would like it more if the drawing would be a bit neater. It confused me. Maybe one person should take care of the visualisation? Somebody else thought that this made the complexity and dynamics clear: 'If you make it neater, you create the feeling that it has to become something, while you want to do something out of the feeling'. One participant had difficulty with the assignment to position himself on paper: 'It is easier for me to express myself verbally. In this way I can make more clear about the context of certain emotions'. One researcher was most interested in what exactly the participants shared in terms of experiences and knowledge: 'I would prefer to record the entire session on video and have a transcript made (or have a transcript made). It's a nice way to focus a conversation'.

A recurring point of discussion among participating researchers and researching participants was the question to what extent it is important for people to change position during the exercise. Ultimately, this is not the case: not changing position or feeling also offers interesting starting points for a meta-level discussion about heritage and heritage creation. The conversation is therefore more important than the change of position. Incidentally, a participant who maintains their own starting position has also taken a step, albeit a pass in place.

Will participants now become more 'heritage-wise' and more proficient in the instruments and discussions concerning the method? This is difficult to measure. At the workshops with pupils in Gouda, an attempt was made to include a pre- and post-measurement in the programme, but this proved to be ineffective. Marlous Willemsen, as a researcher present at the working weeks in Amsterdam and Gouda, noted: 'We tried to add quantitative

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.nemokennislink.nl/publicaties/liever-polderen-dan-polariseren/>

methodology, but it did not fit in well enough with the pupils' play: it required actions they did not understand. After day 1, the teachers took these actions out of the game'.

Offering adjusted measurements might have provided relevant insights into the learning outcomes. However, there was no room in the project to discuss this carefully with the teachers involved. Ideally, the exercise in emotion networking should not be a one-off intervention, but should be common practice in education. Maud van Tongeren, educator at Museum Gouda: 'It has certainly enriched us in dealing with polyphony and exchanging with pupils about the changing emotional value of heritage. But as a teacher from the first work session also pointed out: pupils will only really start to live if it is followed up in a continuous learning track such as media literacy'.<sup>23</sup>

From 2018 onwards a simple pre- and post-measurement was added as an element of the workshop, based on the recommendations of fellow researchers. We put this in practice particularly in workshops for professionals. In advance, we asked participants to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 how 'heritage-wise' they considered themselves. At that time, they had only been shown the definition for 'heritage wise'. After the exercise and discussion we asked the same question again. In practice, most participants showed little enthusiasm for this exercise, and the response rate was generally low. For us as researchers, the qualitative data - interviews, emails - are more meaningful. In the discussion, things come together. This is the part where participants often 'hit the mark', as one of the researchers involved remarked: it becomes clear how complex and dynamic heritage interactions are and how everything is connected to everything. Then there is room for connection: not because everyone feels the same about the item in question, but because there is a shared awareness of the networked relationships.

### **The role of the facilitators**

The session facilitators have a crucial role to play. They explain the purpose of the exercise in advance, supervise the interaction during the exercise and ensure a good conclusion. It is important that they are familiar with the ideas underlying the method, with the practical challenges and ethical dilemmas. One question that came up in several sessions is how to deal with confusion among participants when different sides of a case are highlighted. Many people need a clear outcome, a decision at the end of a session. As a facilitator, how do you handle it when that is not achieved? Are we, as facilitators, in the process of lowering the score of our evaluation?' one facilitator wondered.

Reflecting with involved partners revealed how crucial it is that session facilitators feel comfortable with the basic ideas of emotion networking and heritage wisdom, and have

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<sup>23</sup> Over the next two years, we will be working on such an educational track with funding from the Fonds voor Cultuurparticipatie (Fund for Cultural Participation) in the project Erfgoedwijzer under the leadership of Landschap Erfgoed Utrecht. Several heritage houses, the Marnix Pabo, Imagine IC and the Reinwardt Academy will take part in the project. Jacqueline Vroemen is also involved in this project. For her master's thesis at the Reinwardt Academy, she conducted research into heritage method projects in education and has since been involved in the research into and implementation of the method in education.

training in dealing with conflicts. Facilitators reported that they were able to respond reasonably adequately to emotional situations. However, they did need more training in conversation techniques. As a guide for the facilitators, counsellor Amanda Diemel drew up a document to support facilitators. Training and experience help to develop the sensitivity needed to accompany a sensitive conversation, but we have also experienced that some aptitude is necessary. In all cases, a toolkit alone is not enough. However, it was interesting to see how much importance facilitators attach to a toolkit and how 'stuff' matters to people. Switching from simple post-it's to pre-printed sheets, abinder with instructions and a training with a certificate, immediately created a sense of support in everyone involved in the method's development. We also see this more broadly in professionals' desire for concrete 'frameworks for thinking and acting' and instruments.

One of the risks is that the method gets stuck in asking participants about the emotional value of an object, while it is about jointly investigating the dynamics of heritage objects.<sup>24</sup> The conversation about the meta perspective should not be absent. Training or instruction is also important to avoid encouraging participants to choose or to convince each other with the acquired knowledge and meanings - 'come and stand with us, yo') - without reflecting: what happened when this was insisted on?

Individual heritage workers and teachers are approached in the method as subjective participants in the collective process of heritage-making. All emotions **count in this process**, including those of the facilitators. For this it is crucial that the educator, teacher and pupils enter into dialogue with each other and then investigate together what is happening. Ultimately, for both educators and researchers, the most important goal appears to be to stimulate dialogue among the participants about the process of heritage creation, social interaction and cultural dynamics. It always comes down to the meta perspective and stepping in and out of the bubble.

## **Conclusion**

Emotion networking is a method in which people jointly make their diverse emotions about heritage items clear and discuss them with each other. It is a combination of heritage and citizenship education, based on insights from ethnology and anthropology and it trains skills that belong to systems thinking. The hypothesis is that the method can help in dealing with complex interactions in the field of heritage. Participants will see how heritage acquires meaning through negotiation and that the relationships between people and things can change. This insight gives them an alternative perspective in dealing with heritage, which helps them to operate as resilient citizens in a changing society.

Professionals from the heritage and education sectors who participated in workshops were explicitly invited to give feedback on the method. This approach does not work with quantitative measurements and analyses, but seeks to understand what is happening by looking and listening as closely as possible and questioning concrete situations. Responses

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<sup>24</sup> We also speak of 'objects of heritage' in the context of emotion networking, in line with the idea that heritage is a label that is assigned to objects (material and immaterial) in interaction.

during and after the workshops showed that many participating professionals find it an eye-opener to see heritage not as the product of a shared sense of belonging, but as the preliminary outcome of an ongoing negotiation process. The use of insights from system and network thinking in the form of visualisations on paper and in space, proved helpful to gain a better understanding of the interactions between people and things while working with heritage and emotions.

The method of emotion networking seems to be able to offer a good alternative course of action for professionals in heritage and citizenship education. The balance between social bonding and critical reflection is created by researching together. The social bonding becomes visible in and through the joint practice of critical reflection: practising together the skill of stepping in and out of a bubble. To this end, the session facilitator must not only be familiar with the ideas and principles behind the method (ethnological tradition, systems thinking, network theories), but also know how to deal with tensions and emotions that arise during the exercise.

The development of the method will enter a new phase in the coming period. We will once again invite numerous professionals to think along with us. Attention will also - and perhaps especially - be paid to online variants. We have already taken steps in this direction. As long as we do not lose sight of each other as human beings, the practice of 21st century skills in heritage wisdom and critical citizenship can also take place online.

Hester Dibbits is professor of Historical Culture and Education at the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (EUR) endowed by the LKCA and professor of Cultural Heritage at the Reinwardt Academy (Amsterdam University of the Arts).

Email: [hester.dibbits@ahk.nl](mailto:hester.dibbits@ahk.nl)

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