

An aerial, high-angle photograph of a sandy beach. The sand is light-colored and shows some darker, textured patches. Several people are scattered across the beach, walking or standing. The people are mostly seen from behind or in profile, and their shadows are cast on the sand. The overall tone is sepia or muted brown.

Waiting for Yesteryears

An ethnographic exploration of ecological nostalgia in the contemporary Dutch intangible cultural heritage context

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Glossary

<i>Elfstedentochten</i>	Plural of <i>Elfstedentocht</i> . Translates as the Eleven Cities Tour. Historical Dutch long-distance tour skating event on natural ice in the province of Friesland. Also referred to in the text as the Tour with a capital T.
<i>Friese doorlopers</i>	Frisian skate.
<i>Fryslân</i>	Official Frisian designation for the province of Friesland.
<i>Gezelligheid</i>	An ambience and feeling that is experienced when one is with (a lot of) other people whilst enjoying oneself. It comprises feelings of cosiness, intimacy, friendliness, happy- and cheerfulness and joviality.
<i>Hardrijderijen</i>	The very first short track ice-skating competitions in the Netherlands. Precedented in Friesland.
<i>Hollanders</i>	The term used by most of my interlocutors to talk about all Dutch outside of Friesland.
<i>Ijsmeesters</i>	Plural of <i>ijsmeester</i> . This is the one in charge of the quality of the ice.
<i>Ijspret</i>	Having fun and enjoying oneself on the ice. This could mean while skating but also refers to socializing, <i>koek en zopie</i> and social events on the ice. Synonymous with <i>Schaatsplezier</i> .
<i>Klunen</i>	The practice of walking on land while wearing skates.
<i>Koek en zopie</i>	Food- and drink stands alongside the frozen canals and lakes.
<i>Noren</i>	Dutch designation for speed skates. Speed skates have a low boot, with a thin and long blade that is longer than the foot itself, at the front and at the rear end.
<i>Pootje over</i>	The practice or technique of putting one foot in front of the other in order to take a seamless, fast and proper turn while skating.
<i>Vertrouwd</i>	When the ice is trustworthy.
<i>Verzuiling</i>	The process in which society is segregated on the basis of politico-denominational beliefs. This is reached by establishing separate social institutions for each individual pillar, such as educational and caring facilities, political parties, stores, banks, media, and (sports) clubs. Meaning that individuals from one pillar, have little or no personal contact with members from other pillars. This process of pillarization features most evidently in Dutch and Belgian history and can still be witnessed in society today.
<i>Wakken</i>	The plural of <i>wak</i> . Holes in the ice that are not yet completely mended, kept open by animals such as ducks or are created when people fall through the ice because it was not yet strong enough.

Introduction

“In the few minor ice-winters that we’ve had in the past 10 years, you immediately notice that when people enter the ice, they instantly become more relaxed. A whole new ambiance arises. You loosen-up and break free from everything, a little bit zen I take it to be. You give way to people, pass some people, make some small talk. We completely change. You’ll even recognize this in 17th-century writings by foreign visitors who ask themselves: what happens to the Dutch when it starts to freeze? There is even a saying: ‘when it starts freezing, the Dutch start thawing’. And I maintain that you can still see this today whenever we skate.”

“And of course, overtime, something has come to symbolize this ice-skating culture and that symbol is the Eleven Cities Tour”.¹

What happens to the Dutch when it starts to freeze? Some people will silently start complaining about all the inconvenience it will bring, others cuddle up on the couch and try not to leave the house if not necessary. But for many, the ice-fever starts to rise: they start checking their weather apps and work schedules, hit up (old) skating-buddies, and pull out their skates from the attic. And predominantly, people start speculating about the *Elfstedentocht*. The *Elfstedentocht*, which translates to the Eleven Cities Tour, is one of the most renowned long-distance tour skating events in the world. The about 200 kilometres long tour takes place on the frozen canals and lakes that connect 11 cities together in the province of Friesland, the Netherlands.² The 113-year-old event is a race as well as a recreational event, and has gained an almost “mythical”³ status within the Dutch cultural heritage of ice-skating on natural ice. The Dutch are known for their ice-skating culture internationally (Diemen 2010; Corder and Dejong 2021), and also nationally, it is internalized by many as part of their national identity: “it is the most Dutch thing that we’ve got! I reckon”.⁴ Accordingly, ice-skating on natural ice, with the *Elfstedentocht* as its summum, has been registered on the Dutch intangible heritage list since 2017, safeguarding this heritage for future generations.

However, climate change has endangered this heritage and since it is meant to be safeguarded for future generation one can wonder “how?”. Dutch winters have always been known to be capricious: they can be extremely cold or extremely mild. The latter, however, is

¹ Interview 22-4-2021.

² See appendix 1.

³ Interview 16-2-2021; Interview 23-2-2021; Interview 1-3-2021; Interview 17-3-2021; Interview 28-4-2021.

⁴ Interview 1-3-2021; Similar sentiments are shared in: interview 23-3-2021b; Interview 28-4-2021.

becoming more and more common. The frequency and length of ice-winters has decreased in the last few decennia due to climate change. According to climatologist Rolf Schuttenhelm (2021), the average temperature of Dutch winters has already increased by 2 degrees since the 1950s. And although the last Dutch winter had an “old-fashioned frost period”, the overall winter of 2020-2021 is classified by the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI) as a mild one. In our current times of climate change the possibilities of the Elfstedentocht are decreasing steadily, and the prospects of the KNMI concerning a future Elfstedentocht are rather bleak (2019). According to the KNMI the annual chance of the Tour taking place has decreased from 20 to 8 percent in the last hundred years. And they predict that when global warming continues at its current pace the odds will be diminished to just one percent by 2050. These developments do not only jeopardize the Elfstedentocht but the Dutch ice-skating culture as a whole. To date, the Elfstedentocht has not taken place for over 24 years – since January 1997 – marking the longest drought ever between Tours. Nevertheless, the possibility of the event causes great excitement all over the country as soon as a few days of sub-zero temperatures pass. Furthermore, people are invested annually in their preparations for the Tour. This paradox forms the premise on which this thesis is build.

The first 1.5 week of my fieldwork in February 2021 conveyed the first real ice-winter since 2012, enabling me to capture and study this ice-fever up close. The first few days of frost resulted quickly in the nationally well know speculations about the Tour. Even in The Hague, politicians started to engage in discussions about how the Tour – if the conditions allowed - could and should go on despite the Covid-19 pandemic. On February 8th 2021 a majority of the Cabinet was already in favour of organizing the historical event, since “ice-skating on natural ice” according to Rob Jetten (D66) “is our national pride” (Winterman 2021). However, as early as November 19th 2020 the Royal Society of the Frisian Eleven Cities (KVFES) - in accordance with the Safety Region and the province *Fryslân* - had already publicly announced that the Elfstedentocht would not be organized this winter due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The KVFES reaffirmed their discission on February 9th, making the Elfstedentocht impossible. Nonetheless, the public and political debate on how to organize the event despite the Covid-19 pandemic already caught fire and became unstoppable. Hence, neglecting to take into consideration the authority of the KVFES’s earlier decision. This demonstrates the mania the ice-fever induces, and also how the Elfstedentocht held the country in its grip, at least for the few days of its short winter.

Discourses of loss, whether they are about cultural or natural changes, are according to David Berliner (2020), endemic today. Heritages studies and anthropology are embedded in articulations of cultural loss, that have existed since 19th century industrial Europe (Berliner 2015). Yet, climate change as an instigator of this particular loss has just recently been taken into question (Barnett et al. 2016; Fatorić and Seekamp 2017). Worries about losing heritage as a result of climate change are increasingly addressed by various scholars (Berliner 2020; Bourgeois et al. 2006; Harrison et al. 2020; Ghosh 2016; Fatorić and Seekamp 2017). However, in regard to the Elfstedentocht it is important to understand that this intangible heritage is not yet perceived to be lost. The Elfstedentocht, at least in wider cultural imagination, is very much alive. This is exemplified by the mania described above, or by the fact that organizational structures for the annual organization of the Tour are fully operational all year round. The reason for this is that whenever the weather conditions allow, the Tour must start within 48 hours of its announcement. The time-consuming annual organization is efficiently captured in the documentary “Always ready for the Tour” (‘Altijd Klaar voor de Tocht’ NTR 2019) in which the news director Hans Kema brings to light the commitment and personal investment of the Elfstedenboard, 22 district heads, meteorologists, police forces and the hundreds of voluntary workers that the organization of this historical event demands. The following statement from one of my informants clearly illustrates this personal investment:

“What we suffer most from as Frisians? When you work really hard for it [the Elfstedentocht] and eventually it does not come through. It is cancelled. You really suffer from that; you can feel it in your body. When this happens, you need a couple of days to find back your own rhythm. Because you’ve been so busy with it and there is this tension. It is thrilling. And then at the last moment it does not come through”.⁵

Research project and theoretical outline

Since this heritage is very much alive despite its absence, this study comprises those who stand to lose instead of those who have already lost. It investigates the interplay between climate change and intangible heritage by adopting *ecological nostalgia* as an analytical lens. Ecological nostalgia provides a potent way to study how people navigate possible loss due to climate change and how heritage transforms in this process. By exploring ecological nostalgias in the contemporary intangible heritage context of the Netherlands, and more specifically in Friesland, I seek to gain insights in how people position themselves in (climate) history

⁵ Interview 23-3-2021a.

(Chakrabarty 2009) and how they orient oneself to the future (Bryant and Knight 2019). The central research question of this thesis is:

How is ecological nostalgia experienced and articulated in the contemporary Dutch intangible heritage context?

Besides showing how heritage is transforming due to climate change, the broader implications of this research project are how and why people ought to wait for something that might never happen again, and how different temporal orientations form people's ideas, actions and social relationships in the present. By doing this, this research project contributes to a better understanding of how people experience climate change and what sense of loss this creates. Moreover, I touch upon the wider implications of nationalism and heritage, since heritage and nostalgia are a product of late 19th century Europe and are inherently connected to nationalism. Although this is not the main focus of my project, I maintain that it is important to address this, since a study of the interplay between heritage and climate change on a smaller, more local scale, eventually will have broader implication on a national or even international scale.

Positionality

Before I turn to my theoretical framework, it is important to address my positionality. As an anthropologist and a researcher, I am aware that in ethnography there is no such thing as an objective truth. There will always be a certain bias (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 93). However, the practice of self-reflexivity throughout my research helped me to understand my positionality within the field and the impact I have as an observer on my research (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). It is important to consider that this thesis is based on the referential framework of me being a white, blonde, twenty-five-year-old female, who grew up as a middle-class, highly educated Dutch citizen. The fact that I am Dutch means that the heritage I am talking about is also my heritage, and the heritage I grew up with. The imagery, stories, art, media, education and experiences I have been exposed to throughout my life, have formed my attachment and opinion about this being part of my national heritage. I went ice-skating when I was little, I did get my very first brand-new pair of skates from my grandmother when I was 12, and my grandparents took me to the ice-skating museum in Hindeloopen as early as I was 4. But of course, this is the way I was raised. Therefore, I am well aware that some generalized statements might not be applicable or as heartfelt by all Dutch citizens. Nor will all Dutch indeed identify with this heritage. Hence, I aim to stay away from these kinds of statements and keep myself out of the narrative to the best of my abilities. Moreover, since this heritage is in an inexplicable way important to me, I am probably an eco-nostalgist myself. However, I cannot compare my

nationalistically felt sentiments towards the Elfstedentocht with how the Frisian population relates to this heritage. This provides me a slight distance from my interlocutors.

Ecological nostalgia and Heritage

As stated above ecological nostalgia - defined as a “longing for past forms of life in earthly environments” (Olivia and Berliner 2020, 1) - is a useful analytical tool to study potential loss of environment-related heritage and the wider implication I mentioned earlier. Hence, nostalgia and heritage form the two main conceptual lenses of this project. I maintain that there is a constant interplay between heritage and nostalgia, and many similarities in their research objectives.

The pioneering authors on nostalgia and loss in anthropology are Olivia Angé and David Berliner, who in 2015 released their publication *Nostalgia and Anthropology*. Herein they argued that, although anthropology and nostalgia were bound from the start, the conceptualization and ethnographies on the concept have been rather scarce. My ethnography contributes to this field of study, and more specifically to the emerging subfield of ecological nostalgia in anthropology. In their recent publication, Angé and Berliner (2020) advocate for the singularization of eco-nostalgias as an ethnographic object since they are becoming more pervasive in contemporary societies upset by climate change. Nostalgia has come to be understood as a response to rapid change and the experience of rupture, insecurity, and uncertainty (Creighton 2015; Davis 1979), or in the case of eco-nostalgias degeneration. Hence, eco-nostalgias are generated in search of resuscitating “past ecological connections against experiences of degeneration” (Olivia and Berliner 2020, 3). Various scholars argue, in line with Rebecca Bryant (2015), that nostalgia manifests itself as a break with the past in relation to the discovery of loss, bestowing the object of nostalgia with a status of the lost and irretrievable. In this case, nostalgia as a melancholic longing for the past, can have a paralysing effect and prevent people from moving forward in their lives. However, other anthropologists suggest that:

“Nostalgia can also have positive effects, and help enable people to redirect themselves toward future goals. Nostalgic recreations of the past can inspire people to attempt to create deeper human relationships, and a stronger sense of community in their present lives. Nostalgia for the past can be part of a constructive process that allows people to deal with the uncertainty of the present in order to move forward.” (Creighton 2015, 38).

This latter idea of nostalgia as a way to reconfigure the present stems from early ethnographic accounts on post-socialist nostalgia in Eastern Europe, that formed an important contribution to further the theorization of nostalgia in anthropology. This conviction is still prevalent today and is oftentimes related to coping mechanisms and sense-making (Todorova and Gille 2010; Boys 2010). Nostalgia, thus, says a lot about contemporary social configurations and orients itself towards the future. Similarly, eco-nostalgias - just like other nostalgias - are very much future-oriented (Atia and Davies 2010; Davies 2010; Olivia and Berliner 2020). They hold hopes and aspirations for the future, since awareness of the past gives insights on future possibilities. Eco-nostalgias provide a potent way to speak about a desired present and future in the face of major environmental challenges (Irving 2020). Moreover, eco-nostalgias are creative and innovative and seek to materialize what is said to be vanished, as well as recognizes potentiality even when what people are longing for is not available in the present. This corresponds with Erin Seekamp and Eugene Jo's (2020) notion of heritage transformation, in which they link adaptation to the resilience of culture and heritage. They advocate for transformation and claim that heritage should be allowed "transformative continuity through applications of persistent and autonomous or anticipatory adaptation." (2020, 47). This conception of heritage as something that should be allowed to transform due to climatic implications is important to understand the creative side of ecological nostalgias, that are able to recognize potentiality. However, it is important to note that heritage is fundamentally never something fixed. Heritage is an open-ended process that is constantly transforming, and it requires a tremendous amount of work to make it seem as if it is indeed fixed.

Furthermore, literature on the impact of climate change on intangible heritage is rather absent. Most literature on heritage and cultural loss due to climate change encompasses material or natural forms of heritage - the latter, referring to landscapes and nature reserves. Since the Elfstedentocht exists in a cultural relation to nature, and therefore is an intangible heritage form affected by environmental conditions, my research contributes to a better understanding of the impact of climate change on intangible heritage and the lived realities of this process. As stated above, eco-nostalgias often spur initiatives to retrieve and materialize what is still available in the present, to materialize the traces of a cultural aspect that is about to be lost. A pioneering work on the materialization and musealization of intangible heritage is *Intangible Heritage and the Museum: New Perspectives on Cultural Preservation* by Marilena Alivizatou (2012). The book contains several of her case-studies on the relationship between the museum and

intangible heritage and “how local communities engage and participate in the preservation of collections, safeguard traditional knowledge, and express local identity” (Su 2013, 129). In this process she questions the idea of the museum as a repository of material culture that is still prevalent in museology today. Her work is relevant to understand the materializing turn of the Elfstedentocht, from an intangible heritage form, to tangible collections in museum, homes, and archives.

Generations

Throughout my fieldwork it became clear that there is an important distinction between those who have experienced the Elfstedentocht in the past, and those who have never experienced the event. Although my informants span several generations, for analytical purposes I have decided to implement a generational divide between those who have really experienced the Elfstedentocht (34 and older), and those who were either too young to remember the event taking place or were born later (33 and under). It appeared to me that both generations have a different relationship and attitude towards this heritage. In order to better understand these different perceptions of what is going on, and to what extent people are experiencing a sense of losing something, I draw on the academic debate about generations.

According to Sarah Lamb (2015) generations often do not form the central dimension of anthropological enquiry, but rather form a powerful analytical tool. Generations are useful to gain a better understanding of social/societal changes and to indicate differences and connections amongst members in a society within a temporal perspective. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1977) generations are often in conflict since their habitus was produced under different circumstances. However, in line with Edward LiPuma (2000) I maintain that ethnographies of generations are vital to understand transformations. As climate change engenders heritage transformation, taking into consideration generations to uncover different attitudes, approaches, and nostalgia towards this heritage has been a valuable asset to my research. Berliner’s (2015) analytical categories of *exo-* and *endo-nostalgia* have also proven fruitful within this analytical framework. With *exo-nostalgia* Berliner refers to a form of nostalgia for a past one has not experienced personally but is rather vicarious. Although the direct experience of losing something is absent, this form of nostalgia can still trigger a whole array of affects. He parallels this form of nostalgia with *endo-nostalgia* which he defines as a nostalgia for a past one has indeed personally lived, calling on the Proustian madeleine as being the reference of this kind of experience (2015, 21). These, according to Berliner, are the two

fundamental forms of nostalgia, and have been useful to study generational differences in affect and memory.

During my fieldwork I noticed that many of my interlocutors belonging to the older generation perceive the long wait for the next Tour as an inherent part of the uniqueness of the Elfstedentocht, remain hopeful, and still expect the Tour to be held in the future. While the younger generation perceive the long wait as an indicator of climate change, are more anxious, and experience hope for the Elfstedentocht in a longing sense. However, my informants from the older generation were often no climate sceptics and were well aware that ice-winters are becoming less frequent. Yet, they rather referred to this as part of a “normal” process of ecological change. In contrast, the younger generation linked the absence of ice-winters and the Tour to discourses of human-induced climate change. In what follows, I use “ecological change” and “climate change” as discursive tools to mark these two distinct views. I aim to maintain an emic perspective by adopting my interlocutor’s language.

The field, methodology and operationalization

For this thesis I have conducted three months of fieldwork in the province of Friesland, the Netherlands. I chose this location because this is the cradle of the organized ice-skating culture and the Elfstedentocht. My initial research plan was to start voluntary work at the ice-skating museum in Hindeloopen, one of the Frisian eleven cities. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic the government decided that all museums would remain closed throughout the full period of my fieldwork. The founding family of the museum shunned any contact after they informed me that it would not be possible for me to help or visit the museum and archive in any way. And with that, my initial gatekeepers (O’Reilly 2012, 114) lapsed and so did my initial research location. Hindeloopen appeared particularly deserted, since normally it is a touristic and commercial city: now in lockdown and without visitors. Fortunately, a family friend brought me in contact with Wim who lives in Dokkum, also one of the eleven cities. He is an experienced Elfstedentocht skater who became my gatekeeper. And so did the hosts of the houses I resided in. They enabled me access to many other Elfstedentocht skaters or people who support, or are involved in, the ice-skating-culture. As Tessa Diphoorn has repeatedly said this academic year “you don’t do ethnography, ethnography does you”. I decided to shift my focus to more than one of the eleven cities and take on all contacts my gatekeepers introduced me to, as long as they were from the cities. This briefly turned in to a snowball effect, in which initial contacts are used to generate further contacts (O’Reilly 2012, 44).

My research was fundamentally reliant on this snowball principle and is multi-sited. Meaning that I have pursued ethnographic fieldwork in more than one geographical location. Throughout my fieldwork period I have resided in three different places – Stavoren and Workum; two of the eleven cities, and Balk; the bottleneck of the Elfstedentocht - stimulating the multi-sitedness of my research. Since the Elfstedentocht is about the freedom of movement from one place to another, and forms the connection between these different cities, taking a multi-sited approach allowed me to follow the people, stories and objects that themselves travel from one place to another. Moreover, following George Marcus' (1995) notion of multi-sited ethnography, I was able cross-cut the local and global dichotomy by studying the impact of systemic environmental realities in local places. However, the Elfstedentocht does not only take place within the cities. It also takes place alongside the canals and lakes, which together create a vast body of water that runs through the province. Therefore, I have aimed to let go of the idea as though life is “lived at a scatter of fixed locales” in order to incorporate “the highway and byway on which they lie” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008, 3). Since “research methods for a non-static setting should not be static either” (Low 2014, 25) I have done this by inviting a few of my interlocutors to go for a walk, hike or car drive with me. They took me through the cities, province and nature reserves alongside the canals. During these activities I did not only pay attention to the conversations that happened *en route*, but also attended to how we were moving (Ingold and Vergunst 2008, 3). What route did they chose? Where do we stop? How did they prepare? What pace do we take and how do we arrive?

I have studied those who have affinity with the Elfstedentocht in several of the eleven cities, ranging from tour and competition skaters to heritage initiators, spectators and residents of the cities. I consciously sought to include a wide range of participants and interviewees in my research that differ in age and sex to create a balanced and diverse research population. My research mainly relies on unstructured interviews that take shape in daily conversations and chats, and semi-structured interviews. In total, I have conducted 18 semi-structured interviews and spend four (half) days on the move. Furthermore, I have conducted several elicitations based on the material object that I either asked my interlocutors to bring along or they brought out of themselves. Object-elicitation is a technique that should be considered as an extension to more widely used sociological interviewing methods, rather than a separate method (Banks 2001). In their anthropological study on nostalgia Angé and Berliner argue that physical objects play in important role in the fabric of nostalgia: “materialities mediate people’s relationship to their past and, often, they trigger powerful mnemonic responses” (2014, 8). However, objects

are not just a mere trigger for memories. The objects people decide to collect or keep are bestowed with meaning and uncover vernacular processes of representation and materialization. These objects provide insights in how communities go about maintaining their heritage themselves. Material objects are in a sense entangled in the politics and poetics of representations.

In addition to interviews, I made use of participant observation. As stated by Karen O'Reilly (2005), to gain insights on (aspects of) people's lives from their own perspective and from within the context of their lived experience, we should not only talk to them and ask questions, "but also learn from them by observing them [and] participating in their lives" (86). I applied this method mainly during the short winter and during activities with my informants. The arrival of the ice-winter really was the best thing that could have happened during my research. Because of this I was able to observe people's interaction on and alongside the ice, the fever and the fun, and participate in ice-related activities myself. This latter aspect led me to conduct some autoethnography during these weeks. I wanted to capture my personal experience of ice-skating to get a better understanding of what kind of affect it triggered in me, in order to better understand the feelings, stories and anecdotes my interlocutors shared with me. Since I am no experienced ice-skater myself due to the absence of ice-winters, and I learned to skate on *Noren* during my fieldwork, I went through an amazing process within a short number of days. This self-reflexive exercise gave me the opportunity to feel more connected to my research participants and gave me a better grasp on what my research was about.

Lastly, during one of my interviews I was presented the opportunity to distribute a questionnaire amongst the community that is involved in the production of the spectacle musical "De Tocht" (The Tour) that will be performed next year. I used the data I collected from this questionnaire solely for triangulating my ethnographic data.

Ethics

Before starting my research, I was aware that I might be more sceptical about the Elfstedentocht ever happening again than most of my research participants, and therefore more critical of their heritage. In this regard, I remained mindful not to harm people's livelihoods and pondered about the effect the disclosure of my research findings might have on my research population. In a similar vein, I have been mindful not to dismiss their heritage as a fantasy of times gone by or a mere form of nostalgia. For some people we are talking about real memories and experiences. In other words, I remained attentive not to over-theorize my interlocutors and

always treat them with respect. As an anthropologist I have the ethical obligation to avoid inflicting any harm, and if this looms, I should exclude particular data from disclosure.

Lastly, throughout my research period I have strived to obtain as much free and informed consent as possible. Of course, the degree and breadth of informed consent depended on the nature of the situation and was regularly renegotiated. Moreover, all my informants are anonymized in respect of their privacy. An exception will be made whenever a person can serve as an authoritative source and I have explicit consent of this individual to use his or her name.

Structure

This thesis progresses chronologically. Since nostalgia and heritage are useful tools to explore people's relation to the past, present and future this is exactly what I did. The first chapter entails a brief history on natural-ice-skating in the Netherlands, and more specifically in Friesland, as well as it explores its place within the Dutch heritage landscape. I will emphasize the historical fundamentals of skating that are still prevalent today, namely: equality, freedom, fun, and social cohesion. By explaining the history of this cultural phenomenon, I demonstrate how contemporary attitudes towards ice-skating are historically rooted and illustrate on what sentiments ecological nostalgias are grounded. Thus, I address what people are nostalgic for. Chapter 2 focusses on the present and explores what ice-skating on natural ice means to people and how people go about the ice: the interactions, the knowledge and the passion. I elaborate on what happens when a few days of sub-zero temperatures arrive (the "ice-fever") and the social structure that surfaces when this happens. Furthermore, I will tackle why people value this heritage, what it means to them and how people identify themselves with this heritage. Chapter 3 expands on the present by bringing in futural orientations. This chapter charts the worries, hopes, loss, and regrets of my interlocutors in regards of their heritage in the future. Moreover, since nostalgia goes hand in hand with hope, this chapter engages with the ever-changing nature of culture, resilience and human creativity by means of looking at how people seek to preserve their heritage: how is it passed on, monumentalized and materialized. Hereafter, a conclusionary discussion will follow, in which I elaborate on my most important findings.

Chapter 1 – The Past

“Talking about a sense of cultural-historical awareness”

In 1941 the Frisian publicist W.J. Wiersma (1894-1973) released a publication to celebrate the 50th jubilee of the Elfstedentocht. The publication discusses 50 years of Eleven Cities Tours, the Frisian ice-skating tradition and its skating industry. The book opens with a foreword written by the publicist himself, in a celebratory and proud tone:

“In the winter of 1890/’91 a few hundred Frisians brought a visit to all of the Eleven Cities in the mere timespan of one day. On the 21st of December 1890, the gent W.J. H. Mulier accomplished by skate his now well know Elfstedentocht. One can perceive the tour of the sportsman Mulier as the beginning of the historical Elfstedentocht, that we know today as the largest ice-skating tradition of the Netherlands, a winter sports event that remains unparalleled anywhere in Europe. [...] While in its early years the fame of the Elfstedentocht did not reach the other provinces, the last Tours were of interest to the whole nation. Mainly the Tour of 1940, in its rigid winter cold, spoke to the imagination of hundreds of thousands of people. Yes, we can easily say that the lovers of the ice-skating sport, until far abroad, sympathized with Friesland that day. [...] The Elfstedentocht under the aegis of the Elfstedensociety, is organized in the spirit of sportsmanship and ice-skating-enthusiasm. In the heyday of mid-winter, the Frisian atmosphere is filled with something, which is not easily put into words. But which is also felt by the non-Frisians as beneficent, as soon as they become part of it and are contained by it. For thousands, who spend their lives elsewhere, and only by exception came to Friesland to join the famous Tour, the Elfstedentocht belongs to those memories that will never be forgotten, and always bring joyful thoughts. As well as ignite an old, ineradicable, affection.

Without these Elfstedentochten one can barely imagine Friesland: they are entangled with the term „Friesland”. They belong to this people. The Tours evoke the best in mankind, they encourage top performance, they appeal to their entire human strength, their courage, and their perseverance. On that day, their sportsmanship grows into something like ice-fraternity. Not only amongst the participants, but also amongst the people, that emphasize with them and cheer to them from the shore. Well now, since this Elfstedentocht is a valuable possession of our people, because they are glory days of Frisian folk life and ice joy, we want to take this opportunity to commemorate the Elfstedentocht. And we will do that in the form of a book”.

(Wiersma 1941)

This text, I contend, marks a significant moment in the history of the Elfstedentocht and its heritage narrative. For it marks a heritage practice on the verge of becoming part of not only local, but national heritage and pride. The text encompasses a strong sense of Frisianness, bestowing the heritage with local meaning and pride. It emphasizes its Frisian roots by mentioning its Frisian history, its early participants, and how this heritage belongs to the people of Friesland. It shows how one constitutes the other, since the province and the heritage have come to be inseparable. And although it does not only capture the hearts of the Frisians, but of all of those who get acquainted with the site, it is still the Frisian atmosphere that evokes this sensation. This foreword contains a strong us-and-them dichotomy between those from within the province and those from outside.⁶ It is the whole nation, and people abroad, that sympathize with Friesland. This attention, in turn, makes the Frisians proud of their heritage. However, the text clearly indicates a growing interest in the Tour within Friesland, and beyond. Notwithstanding, the reference to the shared sentiments and memories by all of those who participated in the Tour (Frisian or non-Frisian), evokes a sense of *communitas* (Turner 2012), that is, the sense of social togetherness and belonging that is induced by partaking in this heritage ritual. Hence, participating in the Tour can be understood as a *rite of passage* to become part of this ever-lasting community.

In addition, despite the emphasis on local identity the author acknowledges the Elfstedentocht as the “largest ice-skating tradition of the Netherlands”, already hinting towards the Elfstedentocht as a national treasure, something unique to Friesland and the Netherlands. Similarly, it adds an extra nationalistic layer by mentioning it being unparalleled anywhere in Europe. This chapter entails a brief history on natural-ice-skating in the Netherlands, and more specifically in Friesland, while at the same time exploring its place within the Dutch heritage landscape. This exploration exhibits the complexity and layering of identity formations, and how contemporary attitudes towards ice-skating are historically rooted. After outlining a brief history of ice-skating in the Netherlands – since the early developments took place all across the country – I will focus on the historical developments in Friesland and its contribution to the ice-skating-culture at large.

⁶ The Frisians still maintain strong identity politics by distinguishing themselves from the rest of the Dutch. Frisian is an officially recognized language and many people in the province have a chauvinistic attitude. Although the degree of separatism varies from ‘merely’ more autonomy for Friesland, to full independence, activist groups such as the *Friese Beweging* (the Frisian movement) and the political party *Fryske Nasjonale Partij* (Frisian national party) push for the recognition and strengthening of the Frisian language and culture (Burger 2017). However, due to the scope of this thesis, I did not conduct extensive research on this particular subject. During my research it did surface many times by means of strong us-and-them dichotomies.

A brief history of ice-skating

Archaeological findings suggest that people have been searching for ways to move across the ice since the Prehistoric period. According to these findings people have been using skates made of shank in the Netherlands since ca. 800 BC. The oldest metal runners found in the Netherlands seem to date back to 1225. During the Middle Ages ice-skating started to take root in the Dutch culture due to an increase in wealth, a decrease in the metal prices, and an upsurge of more severe winters (Koolhaas 2010). From this moment onward ice-skating was the fastest and most egalitarian way of transportation, which it would remain until far in the 19th century. Egalitarian in the sense that “frost periods fostered a sense of equality, because all of a sudden a farm hand with a set of wooden skates that had costed him a few guilders, was able to travel as long and far as a knight on horseback”.⁷ Regardless of one’s class, gender or religion, everybody was able and allowed to skate. Indeed, ice-skating was also the only activity in the Netherlands that would never be impacted by the entrenched pillarization (*verzuiling*) of Dutch society. Even ice-romances between a man and a woman from different religious backgrounds would be approved due to the fact that they were “from the ice”.⁸ The frozen bodies of water created temporary pieces of lawless land with no instated legislation or clear rules.⁹ This egalitarian character of ice-skating is why according to Koolhaas (2010) ice-skating can arguably be considered as folk culture, since every citizen was able to enjoy and partake in this culture, and therefore fostered temporary equity. Interestingly, this sense of equality, cultivated by the ice, still resonates amongst my participants and was oftentimes mentioned. Besides this, during winter the ice became an important infrastructure for transporting goods and generating an income. Not only because it was fast and convenient, but also because other roads were often impassable (for trade) during winter. Back then, the ice was already referred to as “ice-roads” or “iceways”. Likewise, the ice was maintained by different organizations that kept an eye on the quality of the ice and created separate lanes for the recreational ice-skater and the horses with sleighs. Thus, “they really were highways *avant la lettre*”.¹⁰

Around 1500 skates started to appear more frequently in the visual arts, preceded by Jheronimus Bosch (ca. 1450 –1516). Briefly followed by Hendrick Avercamp (1585-1635), Pieter Brueghel (1525/30 –1569), and many others. These scenes demonstrate ice-skating as an established part of the Dutch folk culture (Koolhaas 2010). Ice brought sociality and festivities

⁷ Conversation Marnix Koolhaas 22-4-2021.

⁸ Conversation Marnix Koolhaas 22-4-2021; interview 28-4-2021.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Conversation Marnix Koolhaas 22-4-2021.

and a lot of what the Dutch call *gezelligheid*. Along the ice routes *koek en zopie* stands were established, and in Friesland special ice-inns were opened (Diemen 2010). For many, ice first and foremost meant connectedness. Until 1900 towns and villages were often rather isolated from the outside world (Lolkama 2006). Particularly in Friesland the area between dwellings was and remains vast. The province consists of vast agricultural land and contains many sole farms where people live an isolated existence away from the villages and fellow residents. Currently, a drive from one village to another is still at least 10-20 minutes. Back in the days, ice thus meant contact with the outside world and provided an opportunity to visit friends and family who lived far away. The ice allowed people to visit new and other places, which in normal circumstances would have been impossible. Hence, the ice brought people closer together. Therefore, the ice constitutes an important social-infrastructure that only existed during winter. This newfound mobility over ice, in combination with the social opportunities it provided, formed an important incentive for the tour skating tradition that has become a very important part of the Friesland ice-skating tradition. “And that is for example how the Elfstedentocht tradition came to be”.¹¹ The opening of special ice-inns where people could spend a night during a tour, suggest the popularity of this tradition in the province.

Ice-skating in Friesland

Around 1800 the first short track competitions originated in Friesland, followed by the establishment of the first formal ice clubs (Tan 1967; Stevens n.d.).¹² In 1840 Dokkum founded the first regulated ice club to which members paid a contribution, and a short 50 years later there was no village in Friesland that did not have its own ice club. The clubs took care of the rinks and tracks, and organized the short track competitions that were known by then as *hardrijderijen*. These *hardrijderijen* were, according to Tan (1967) and Koolhaas (2010), folk festivities par excellence and flourished from 1880 as never before. They attracted great audiences and were often combined with carnivalesque ice fairs. The Frisian precedent set an

¹¹ Conversation Marnix Koolhaas 22-4-2021.

¹² Ice clubs own or rent pieces of land that are landscaped or normally used as farmland. During winter the ice clubs flood the land with a shallow layer of water. This freezes over rather quickly and creates a strong and neat skating rink. This differs from the ice-road in the way that the latter are roads maintained on natural waters, and are not owned by anyone but remain a common good. Although people would start paying contribution to become part of the ice clubs, the contribution fees were and are often very low. The ice club tradition in Friesland remains intact to date. In addition, from the mid-19th-century onwards ice clubs took on a benevolent role, organizing competitions for the poor and providing them with skates. Participation was free, and in exchange people would receive bacon and beans. To date, the Dutch still use the saying participating ‘for bacon and beans. Meaning that you attend, but don’t really or officially participate. These competitions that attracted great audiences of course became quite ambiguous due to their condescending, cheap and disrespectful character. Although ice clubs now-a-days do not organize these kinds of events anymore, they often still feel like helping the less fortunate by providing them with skates or free memberships: interview 23-3-2021a; 22-4-2021.

example that was quickly adopted throughout the whole country. Since short track competitions in the beginning were specifically Frisian, it spurred the development of the Frisian skate (*Friese doorlopers*). This is a wooden skate with a longer sharp metal blade that allowed the competitor more stability, longer strides and an even faster pace (Stevens n.d.). The Frisian skate can be perceived as the forerunners of the speed skates as we know them today. Speed skates are referred to as *Noren* in the Netherlands and are still considered part of the Frisian ice-skating tradition.¹³ Before I went to Friesland myself, I was told by my father to bring *Noren* instead of figure-skating skates, and whenever I would tell this to my interlocutors they would often respond with “very good” or “and he was certainly right! In Friesland we skate on *Noren!*”¹⁴ Circling back to history, since the rest of the country was still skating on shorter or double-bladed skates that only allowed more quiet gliding, the Frisian skates became a great success and contribution to the national ice-skating sport.

As mentioned above, for many the ice formed the most important – if not only – way of transportation during winter. The technological developments that took place during the end of the 19th century, such as the invention of steamships and pumping stations, caused a constant flow in the water current. This negatively impacted the creation of the ice-roads, causing them great damage or their total absence. Although the ice-roads were no longer necessary for economical purposes, due to new and faster ways of transportation, the public feared the loss of their beloved ice-skating-culture (Tan 1967). Consequently, in 1886 the Frisian Ice Union was founded to preserve the iceways for recreational ice-skating. The Union, existing of several districts – and later iceway stations - successfully maintained the ice, kept steamships out of the waters and publicly announced the ice condition in newspapers. Hence, we can see that large scale institutionalization started in Friesland in order to preserve and support the ice-skating sport and culture, building from the smaller institutionalization that was present in the early 19th century in the form of the ice clubs. Moreover, the development of their ice-skating culture and its technological innovation such as the Frisian skate had an extensive reach.

The Elfstedentocht

The Tour itself also has a rich history. Historical research suggests that the tradition to skate the 200km long tour along the eleven Frisian cities has been a popular endeavour for a long time. In line with what is mentioned above, the Elfstedentocht started out as a way to visit

¹³ Fieldnotes 8-2-2021; 24-2-201; Interview 16-2-2021; 25-2-2021.

¹⁴ Interview 24-2-2021; 25-2-2021.

friends and family during winter, since many were otherwise unable to do so.¹⁵ Regardless of uncertainty about its exact origin, what we do know is that the tradition to visit all the eleven Frisian cities in one single day has at least existed since the early 18th century. The earliest source in which this effort is mentioned is a poem by B. Bornius Alvaarsme and stems from the year 1749. Hereafter, the tradition appears again in a source from 1763 and later in 1809. Irrespective of the absence of sources, it is unlikely that no one has tried to accomplish the Tour in the years between 1763 and 1809 since this period knows many severe winters (Diemen 2010). However, during the 19th century the Tour featured more frequently in different newspaper articles (Wiersma 1941), this time mentioning the participants names, and the timespan in which they completed the Tour. The articles oftentimes praised the participants for their perseverance and courage. While skating the Tour, people would stop in all of the cities to get a stamp or signature at the local inn and write down their time of arrival. This ritual is still part of the current Elfstedentocht tradition, although nowadays people get their stamps at certified stamp posts.

The winter of 1890/91 was a harsh winter with beautiful ice (Tan 1967). As becomes evident from Wiersma's foreword, this winter a few hundred men and woman skated the Elfstedentocht on their own initiative. Amongst them was W.J. H. Mulier (1865-1954), the later founder of the official Tour. Throughout his live, Mulier – who has now come to be seen as the Dutch sports pioneer – introduced many modern sports in the Netherlands such as soccer, hockey and athletics. His motivation was the decrease in public health he witnessed among the Dutch population, due to the rapid industrialization and urbanization. As part of his grand scale undertaking to support public health, he wanted to organize a 200km long track ice-skating competition. At first, he did not care where the event would be held and thus, in 1908, he wrote to all Dutch ice unions with the request to organize such a tour. The Frisian Ice Union was the only one who positively responded to the organization of the Tour since their local tradition of the Elfstedentocht was already existent. And thus, on January the 2nd 1909 – despite the thaw – the first official Elfstedentocht was held, with a mere 23 participants.

After the first Tour there was a disagreement about whether or not the Tour should be a competition, and if the Frisian Ice Union should organize such an event, since their statutory function was the promotion of recreational ice-skating (Diemen 2010; Werk n.d.a). The Union wanted to dissolve the official Tour all at once, but M.E. Hepkema (1881-1947) saw potential

¹⁵ Conversation Koolhaas 22-4-2021.

in the Tour. Together with a few other enthusiastic Frisians he founded the Society of the Frisian Eleven Cities and became the first chair. From that moment, the aim of the society became promoting the ice sports in the province of Fryslân and in particular – if possible – the annual organization of the Elfstedentocht (*KVFES* n.d.). Hepkema decided that the Tour henceforward would exist of a competition, as well as a recreational component, in order to fuse the new competition element with the historical touring tradition (Diemen 2010). Since 1909 the Elfstedentocht has been held 15 times and is still organized annually (on paper).¹⁶

The appeal of the Tour has grown steadily over the years, which meant that participants were soon no longer solely Frisians. This we can read in Wiersma's description of the Tour of 1940 at the beginning of this chapter. The Tour of 1940 had 3000 participants, which is at least three times as many as the previous Tour, and 6 times as little as the latest Tour in 1997.¹⁷ Due to the introduction of the new media and the heroic stories about all the hardship the Tour skaters have to endure, the attraction of the Tour has intensified.¹⁸ And today, the fervour is heightened by the fact that every Tour could be the last.

From local to national

The Tour has thus grown from a local tradition into a mass event. In the process, it became incorporated into the national heritage narrative. As this contextual chapter has shown, historically, ice-skating indeed unfolded throughout the Netherlands as a true folk culture. Folk culture in the sense that everyone, regardless of their class, gender or religion, was able to participate in this cultural phenomenon. Moreover, this phenomenon was often combined with all kinds of festivities and sociability. This is all in line with Edith Turner's (2012) notion of *communitas* in the way that ice-skating becomes an acute point of community regardless of otherwise apparent and normalized differences. This, most certainly can form a historical foundation to establish ice-skating as national heritage.

The growing popularity of the Tour went hand in hand with the heritagization of folk culture that happened throughout the Netherlands from the 19th century onwards (de Jong 2006). In search of (cultural) legitimacy, nation states appropriated local customs and cultural expressions in order to establish a sense of continuity with the past (Hobsbawm 1983). In this

¹⁶ See appendix 1.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ Many stories that circulate the Tour are about enduring hardship: extreme sub-zero temperatures, frozen limbs and other body parts, injuries, perseverance, transcending oneself and a grand achievement. The 'Hell of '63' is most illustrative of this. This was the first Elfstedentocht ever that was broadcasted on television and was organized under harsh circumstances. It was held while it was freezing with 18 degrees, and from the 10.000 participants only 57 competition skaters and 72 tour skaters reached the finish.

process of nationalization, the Netherlands made an appeal to their ice-skating folk culture, that has come to be symbolized by the Tour. I assert that this process of appropriation at first happened on the provincial level by the Frisians themselves, after the Tour took its contemporary shape. This is because this variant of the Tour already deviated from the original tradition by implementing a competition element, one official start date and time, and official rules. It monumentalized the tradition by making it into one single event. When this became a success amongst the Frisians, combined with its traditional provenance, the Elfstedentocht became entangled with the Frisian identity, as we can read in Wiersma's excerpt. The momentum of provincial appropriation, that would soon thereafter happen on a national scale, will forever be captured in his foreword. The eventual public success of the Tour caused a local folk tradition to be promoted into a national cultural expression (Diemen 2010; de Jong 2006). Over time, this was amplified by processes of representation and musealization, such as the opening of the Ice-Skating Museum in Hindeloopen, incorporating ice-skating in the Dutch canon as "national sport" (Dohle 2006), and media representation, from films and documentaries, to talk shows and publications. In line with the increasing attention for intangible heritage, in 2000 the Dutch parliament enlisted the Tour as heritage that may never disappear (Diemen 2010). And in 2017 ice-skating on natural ice -with the Elfstedentocht as its summum -was officially added to the inventory of the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage (immaterieelerfgoed.nl n.d.). In this process, the Elfstedentocht has come to represent the Dutch ice-skating culture at large, as well as through the national process of essentializing culture; the Elfstedentocht has become an example of the Dutch identity on an international scale. (Anderson 1983; Herzfeld 1997; Diemen 2010; de Jong 2006). This demonstrates different layers of identification this heritage may evoke. Namely, in the north people can identify with this heritage on a local Frisian level, the Dutch can identify with this heritage as part of their folk culture, and internationally it can be used to distinguish the Dutch from other nationalities. For many of my Frisian interlocutors these layers were in constant negotiation during our talks. People often shifted between their different identities as a Frisian and a Dutch citizen. Even within one sentence.

However, by taking locality into consideration, I have demonstrated how Frisians distinguished themselves from the rest of the country by unfolding their own traditions. Moreover, Friesland gave new incentive to developments in the ice-skating-culture that found following in other provinces. Furthermore, the Frisians were the first to establish institutions to safeguard their skating tradition, demonstrating its importance for the local community. Additionally, due to the isolated existence of many inhabitants in Friesland, the tour skating

tradition became an important instrument to maintain social connections. This brought into existence the early Elfstedentocht tradition, that remained unparalleled even after organized tours became more popular in the rest of the country after the 1930s. From its beginning the adventurers who undertook the eleven cities journey were praised because of their exceptional achievement. Despite the informal tour becoming more popular near the end of the 19th century, the admiration for the performance would persist and is still prevalent today. Although the Elfstedentocht has become part of the Dutch intangible heritage, its Frisian roots and character is still emphasized to date. In the next chapter I will explore how these Frisian ice-skating traditions take shape in our contemporary society and how national appropriation of a local heritage phenomenon can cause dissonance between local and national perceptions.

Chapter 2 – The Present

“and so you see, we’re ice-people”

During the first week of my fieldwork, I was fortunate enough to experience a real winter. According to the KNMI (2021) it was the first time since 2013 that snow covered the entire country, and the first time in nine years that we were able to skate on natural ice across all of the Netherlands. The frost came in on February 6th and 7th and was parred with a huge amount of snow and wind: making my drive up north on Monday the 8th a real adventure in itself. As I drove carefully, all radio hosts were busy discussing the latest news, which at this point almost only comprised the Elfstedentocht debate.¹⁹ Politicians were quoted and the Covid-19 pandemic discussed. Even meteorologist Piet Paulusma, who is nationally cherished by most, was invited on some of the shows to comment on all the speculations. His forecast, however, was rather bleak due to all the snowfall which is a great disadvantage for the growth and quality of ice. When one of the radio hosts started to bring up some childhood memories and asked: “what is it with ice-skating?” I had to chuckle since this was one of the things I hoped to find out.

However interesting this national debate is, my research focusses on the experience of ice-skating and people’s relation to the ice in the province of Friesland. Based on many dialogues with my interlocutors there, it has become clear to me that the Frisians have a distinct ice-skating culture and perception of the Tour. This chapter explores what ice-skating on natural ice and the Elfstedentocht mean to the Frisians, and how they go about the ice: the interactions, the knowledge and the passion. I elaborate on what happens when a few days of sub-zero temperatures arrive and the social structure, or *communitas*, that unfolds when this happens. Furthermore, I will tackle why my interlocutors value this heritage and how they identify themselves with his heritage. This exploration provides insights in what the ice-skating culture in Friesland actually entails and how it takes shape in the present. Moreover, it shows what place the Elfstedentocht holds in this culture.

“Well first, let’s see if we can skate at all, then we’ll see what comes next”

Interestingly, it quickly appeared to me that the national hype regarding the Elfstedentocht is rather absent in Friesland. This is first of all due to the fact that Frisians characterize themselves as being more calm and sober than the *Hollanders*.²⁰ They maintain an “*eerst zien, dan geloven*” (first beholding, then believing) mentality, which I oftentimes

¹⁹ Fieldnotes February 8th 2021: I listened to 6 different radio stations and the Tour was discussed on all of them.

²⁰ Interview 31-3-2021; Interview 25-2-2021; Interview 24-2-2021.

encountered and experienced. When I entered a small bakery in Sloten for example, and mentioned the Elfsteden-fever sweeping the country to the lady behind the counter, she casually shrugged her shoulders and turned towards me stating: “But the Elfstedentocht won’t come. The whole country is swept up by the Tour while there isn’t even ice on the canals here yet. Certainly not this year. Perhaps some other”.²¹ Besides being more pragmatic and grounded in their expectation regarding the Tour, people also have a different attitude or approach towards it. Although they believe the Elfstedentocht to be iconic and their local pride, for the Frisians it is about more than the Tour itself. It is representative of a rich culture that conveys way more than a sole event. Therefore, the Elfstedentocht, as part of a bigger cultural phenomenon, also takes an alternate place in their ice-skating-heritage. While the rest of the Netherlands is immediately focussed on the Elfstedentocht as soon as a severe winter looms around the corner, in Friesland it is generally not the first thing people think about: it is the last. As mentioned in a conversation I had with a board member of the KVFES: “look, here in Friesland we do not talk about the Elfstedentocht when it starts to freeze. It is the last link in the full chain of events”²².

During my stay in Workum I became friendly with two members of the local ice club. Syb – one of the two men – has been part of the organization of the Tour for many years and now actively participates at the local ice club. Together with his friend Rindert he helped preparing the rink and canals for skating during winter. And kept an eye on the growth and quality of the ice in the city. He explained the dissonance he experiences between the local and national perceptions of what they were doing the following way:

Syb: *Well, you have to see it like this, we prepare the rinks and routes for ice-skating in Friesland. First of all, we do not prepare the lanes for the Eleven Cities Tour. And now and then it seems to appear as if it is all just about that one thing, but that is not true. We want to provide recreation. Recreation, ice-skating and schaatsplezier for the people of the Netherlands, the Frisians and those who like it. And whenever an Elfstedentocht follows that would be wonderful.*

Anne: *So, it is rather the cherry on top?*

Syb: *and that’s how it is! And I think at times that is turned around a bit.*

²¹ Fieldnotes 10-2-2021.

²² Interview 23-2-2021.

This demonstrates how local inhabitants come to terms with the significance others have foisted on their heritage (Herzfeld 1991). And how only an element of their culture is appropriated in the national narrative, with no understanding of the cultural context it is normally embedded in. While in Friesland the Elfstedentocht derives its cultural meaning, amongst many things, from its actual historical rootedness, whereas the rest of the Netherlands values the post 1909 Elfstedentocht invention. This is what Eric Hobsbawm (1983) describes as invented traditions that are allocated to establish a national perception of continuity with the past. This is entangled in complex processes of nationalist politics and myth making, as extensively described by Benedict Anderson (1983). Which, in turn, is in line with the previously clarified heritagization of folk culture for nationalistic purposes. National appropriation that is oftentimes related to heritage is thus inherently political (Smith 2015). This can cause dissonance between local and national perceptions of what a heritage practice such as the Elfstedentocht actually entails. Michael Herzfeld describes this experience as *disemia*, by which he refers to a tension between “official self-presentation and what goes on in the privacy of collective introspection.” (1997, 14). Although for outsiders the Elfstedentocht might appear as a monolithic sign of Dutch culture, and in this regard the Frisians also accept it as such, an up-close study reveals incoherency or frictions in perceptions of this heritage. This is evident in Syb’s statement. He expresses a misapprehension by the *Hollanders* of what the Tour is about, and the place it holds in his culture. Therefore, he seems to be well aware of the process of national appropriation. Moreover, his statement highlights how the Tour thus should be perceived as the ultimate gift, not the goal. This message is repeated to me multiple times by several informants. The goal is to enable people to enjoy the ice as much as possible.

This is in line with Rindert’s definition of what it means to be “ice-people”²³:

*“We are occupied with ice in general. That starts from keeping an eye on the ice growth; you know, first there is this bit of ice, then that. To the thrill of being able of skate further away and who knows what. Well, those are things that ice-people who love ice, really engage in. During winter. But you don’t just love the cold. Because you’re ice-people, you are thus someone who goes great lengths to try and possibly enable others to also enjoy the ice. That is why we are real ice-people. Ice brings so much motivation and joie de vivre.”*²⁴

²³ This term is used by my interlocutors in particular to define themselves.

²⁴ Interview 23-2-2021.

Although Syb and Rindert were part of the organization of multiple Tours they never skated the Elfstedentocht themselves. When I asked them if this bothered them Rindert answered, smiling proudly, “well you should not forget that we are the ones who made it possible for many others to eventually skate the Tour”.²⁵ These statements make the communal nature of the ice-skating culture in Friesland apparent, on which I will elaborate in what follows. The Frisian ice-skating tradition consists of a layered build-up of smaller tours and events that all together –if they are lucky – culminate into the Elfstedentocht. Thus, the Tour can be understood as a means to an end, instead of an end in itself. The end is *ijspret* and social solidarity. And “the *ijspret* begins at the local ice rinks. But no earlier than the flags are raised”.²⁶

“The ice is ‘holy’”

During a walk through Sloten one of my interlocutors informed me that in Friesland the ice is “holy”. No one gets on the ice before the *ijsmeesters* have given the sign that the ice is ready. Hence, the flags mentioned above. An official *ijsmeester* can be appointed by the municipality, the KVFES or the local ice club, like Syb and Rindert. “Unofficial” *ijsmeesters* are often self-appointed and tolerated by the community. They own a piece of land or have been chasing the ice for generations. One of these individuals is Hans from Lemmer, a 53-year-old man who, just like his father, had always been chasing the first ice. When I met him, he was wearing a green fleece with an orange vest and a red-and-yellow ice-pick around his neck. He mentioned that people oftentimes critiqued him, saying that he forms an irresponsible example for the children: “but I’m always very responsible. Before I get on, I measure the thickness of the ice with my ice-pick” pointing at the thing around his neck “if the ice is not ready, I won’t get on”. “However,” he says confidently, “people are glad that I’m around. Because when I say the ice is *vertrouwd* the whole pack gets on the ice. I’m always surprised by people’s herd behaviour” he says laughing.²⁷ Hence, despite his unofficial status as an *ijsmeester* he is tolerated within the community as an authoritative figure. In turn, Hans does take on the required responsibility of an *ijsmeester* and behaves in the proper manner.

Although Hans characterized the waiting on the ice as “herd behaviour” I maintain that this is an integral part of the Frisian ice-skating tradition. It is a practice that I have witnessed

²⁵ Interview 23-2-2021.

²⁶ Fieldnotes 17-2-2021.

²⁷ Fieldnotes 11-2-2021.

extensively and is often combined with a chase of ice. The following vignette illustrates multiple aspect of this cultural phenomenon:

Vignette 1: Car drive 10-2-2021

In a rush we left the house because Lotte, one of the daughters, had a 1.5-hour break between online classes. We put our skates in the back of the car and left the house in search for some shallow ponds that might be skateable. Two days earlier, the family at whose house I was staying texted me that since it would be freezing this week, they would join me in Friesland for a few days: “How is the ice today? You could not have imagined a better start for your research than right in the middle of the emerging ice-fever!”. And so, they arrived yesterday. We drove past the Lusts, the small canal that runs through the city, and looked at the thin layer of ice that was coming about. Although there were still a few holes here and there my fellow car passengers commented enthusiastically on every bit. Repeating that the ice would be magnificent tomorrow. “Just give it a day. Mark my words. This weekend at the latest”. The woman in the passenger’s seat moved enthusiastically in her seat and smiled; “I’m so excited”. We drove to the ice club just outside of Balk. When we noticed that it was still closed so we decided to drive on in search of another ice-skating rink. A vivid and exhilarated conversation starts in the car “we MUST find a place to skate!” “we’re not going home before we find one”. Phones are taken out of pockets and several options for skating rinks are discussed. One place is found that will be opened at 14:00 today so it is unanimously decided that we will check it out later today around 16:00 when all members of the family are done with online-classes and work meetings.

We drive towards a small village called Wijckel that supposedly has an ice-skating venue. During the drive comments are made on all kinds of canals and ponds we pass and the ice that is covering the water. When we arrive at Wijckel we find the old gate that marks the entrance of the ice-skating rink. We enter it and drive over a long snow-covered driveway underneath the trees. We park near a wooden fence that is fenced off by a red-and-white banner, marking the rink as still closed. Paul gets out of the car to take a closer look at the ice. “I bet he doesn’t dear to try and step on the ice mom. I’ll go and try it for him”; Lotte gets out of the car and joins her father. I look out of the window and see a man and a woman who engage in a conversation with Paul. It is quite a romantic rink. A landscaped square surrounded by tall oak trees, with several lanterns in the middle to light the rink at night whenever it will be ready. I am still in the car, with Lilly sitting in the driver’s seat. She smiles at me and says “it is all about patience. We just have to wait. We should be careful in order not to spoil the ice. We just

have to wait.” The conversation I could not overhear ended and the man and woman walk away laughing. Lotte steps back into the car, snow covering her white sneakers. She says that the ice cracked when her dad carefully tried but that it is strong enough to hold her near the edge of the water. Paul just opened the car door when a young man in a red jacket walks by. “When do you think the rink will be open?” Paul asks, and the young man answers that it will probably be in a day or two: “certainly this weekend!”. Paul thanks the young man and gets back into the car. We drive off. “Let’s drive to Sloten. We need to take a look at the ice there” he says. 10 minutes later we arrive at Sloten, an idyllic Frisian city with historical houses alongside the canal. Sloten is one of the official Eleven Cities. It is small and beautiful. We park the car just outside the historical city centre, next to the Slotermeer, and get out. The lake is covered in ice shoves and therefore impassable on skates. Lilly, Paul and Lotte are looking at the ice in the small harbour and look disappointed. “Milkshake ice”, Lilly says making a displeased gesture in the direction of the ice. I look at the whitish porous ice, formed by the freezing of half-melted snow. Snow ice is hazardous since it is not as strong as it appears to be and unskateable due to its bumpy texture. A ship is docked and a lady gets out to mingle with us. She is very sceptical about the ice ever being ready this week and complains some more about some “foolish people who keep trying to get on the ice” after which she returns back on her houseboat. We cross the road and walk towards the city. A few young kids are ice-skating on a part where the water is shallow. The ice is black and the children are laughing. One boy is practicing pootje over in order to make a proper turn. Paul points out where the stamping post is always set up during the Elfstedentocht and explains how the Tour riders cross and circle the town before moving to the next destination. After walking through the city for a bit we return to the car. It is cold. We get in and drive back home. “At four we’ll go to Lemmer. We need to get on the ice today.”²⁸

During the days leading up to skateable ice, I noticed that the ice formed a point of connection that fostered social interaction alongside bodies of water. My analysis thus focusses on human interaction, as well as human-nature encounters on and around frozen water. Which is also evident in the vignette above. Herein, I follow Tim Ingold’s ecological approach that “situates practitioners in the context of an active engagement with the constituents of their surroundings.” (2000, 1). Ingold seeks to reconcile nature and culture by approaching human beings as a singular locus of creative growth, nurtured by constant interactions with humans and non-humans in their environment. Hence, insisting that nature and culture should not be perceived as two separate objects of study but as a hybrid form of nature-culture. In the instance

²⁸ Vignette 10-2-2021. Also see appendix 4.

of my study, a natural- and social phenomenon collide and interact. And in the absence of the natural, the cultural would not surface.

At this point during my fieldwork I was staying in Balk and spend a lot of time alongside the Sloterveer and the Luts. People would come from all over Friesland just to take a look at the ice and discuss the ice quality with anyone who happened to be near them. I interacted with people who came from Sneek, Lemmer, Bolsward and Sloten who all mentioned they drove around the province in order to judge the ice quality and find the first ice.²⁹ These social interactions and the chase of the ice is evident in the vignette above, as well as the enthusiasm that goes along with it. I indicate this practice of movement from one place to another in search for skateable ice as ‘chasing the ice’. Although a few of my informants characterize it rather as a “search”, I contend that a chase is more appropriate. This is due its nature. People are not really seeking something but pursuing it. Chasing the ice is part of the ice-fever and is fuelled by desire and excitement. They already know where the ice is, they just do not know when it is ready. And those who love skating do not want to miss out on their first opportunity to skate. And most importantly, enjoy the ice as long as possible. Many of my interlocutors also mentioned that since ice-skating has become “so unique, that it liberates you of all your daily obligations”.³⁰ Hence, taking up vacation days at work or rescheduling work as much as possible. But until then, as Lilly repeatedly mentions, they wait. The practice of chasing the ice creates a social information structure amongst the inhabitants of the cities and villages. The ice in the province is widely discussed. People report back and forth about where they have been and what they have seen and heard. Followed by speculations about when it will be ready. Meanwhile, everybody stays off the ice. Based on these observations, the information about the ice being “holy” did not come as a surprise.

Interestingly, in this practice of waiting we can witness a shift towards *active* waiting. According to Manpreet K. Janeja and Andreas Bandak (2018), following Gabriel Marcel (1967), we can make a distinction between *active* and *passive* waiting. Passive waiting is more or less patient and does not involve anxiety towards the outcome of waiting, and thus, entail a kind of waiting in which there is a degree of confidence in the anticipated outcome or a kind of indifference to it. Active waiting, on the other hand, starts when the certitude seems to be fading and an internal tension seems to rise. This might eventually flow into feelings of despair. However, while one actively waits the possibility of the anticipated outcome is still open. And

²⁹ Fieldnotes February 9th- 11th 2021.

³⁰ Interview 16-2-2021; Fieldnotes 10-2-2021; Fieldnotes 4-3-2021.

therefore, closely related to hope. Although in this instance people try to remain patient and maintain a certain degree of confidence, informed for example by the weather reports. A few of my informants mentioned that during the waiting process they become more aware of the fact that they are dealing with a natural phenomenon that is totally out of their control and can be unpredictable.³¹ Hence, they get nervous about the anticipated outcome. When I asked Lilly how she would describe her feelings while experiencing ice-fever she immediately mentioned the thrill and anxiety, “can or can’t we?”.³² The thing people have been longing for is within hand’s reach but not yet close enough to grasp.

“Nature, of course, plays an important role and has way more influence that people often realize”

Moreover, the fact that no one gets on the ice before it is ready to carry all, illustrates that the ice is regarded to by the community as something communal. It is something that should be enjoyed together or not at all. This, of course, is nuanced by the fact that there will always be a few exceptions to the rule: those who will try to get on the ice earlier than the rest. However, these people are judged negatively by the community, as the frustration of the woman in the houseboat demonstrates. These people will also be addressed by others for getting on the ice too early.³³ This behaviour is considered irresponsible and egotistical. As *ijsmeesters* and ice-people, Syb and Rindert also expressed their concerns in this regard. Since they are responsible for guaranteeing a certain degree of safety in relation to the ice, they often struggle with their inability to prevent reckless activity. Their main concern is not so much with adults who get on the ice irresponsibly since, in the end, it is their own responsibility. It is rather with these adults setting a dangerous example for the children: “because in general, older people are more experienced and they can see a bit ahead. But the youngsters, they haven’t experienced this [ice-winters] anymore. And we do not want a young person to drown”.³⁴ This latter statement testifies of an awareness of degeneration and the current scarcity of ice-winters. I will extensively elaborate on these worries in the following chapter. However, since my interlocutors are conscious of the decreasing ice-winters, they are becoming more aware of their position as guardians of knowledge.

Being an ice-person often is parred with a great range of knowledge about ice, the weather and a full lexicon on what types of ice exist. A lot of factors influence the growth and

³¹ Interview 25-2-2021.

³² Fieldnotes 10-2-2021.

³³ Fieldnotes February 10th – 11th 2021.

³⁴ Ibidem.

quality of the ice such as the wind, water current, snowfall, location and amount of frost. I would describe most of my interlocutors as amateur meteorologists since they possess a lot of knowledge about the weather and its impact on the ice. Many mentioned that when the meteorological winter begins, they start keeping an eye on the weather and frost forecasts.³⁵ And oftentimes create written or digital journals to keep track of the weather changes. Besides knowledge about weather impact and ice growth, there is also other information one should know about in order to make skating on natural-ice a “safe” endeavour. Such as, what and when ice is *vertrouwd*, what to do when you fall through the ice, and how to recognize *wakken* as well as how to deal with those.

Furthermore, the Frisians know a great deal about ice preparation and, as mentioned in Rindert’s statement about ice-people, they go great lengths to make sure the ice quality is as good as possible. This form of anticipation is taken on with a lot of passion and excitement and, again, asks for expertise on this matter. And creativity. Just like the wait, these activities are often a communal effort, and range from spectacular endeavours – drawing in an audience – to family initiatives. The morning I arrived in Stavoren on the 9th of February to meet my other host, she told me that just the evening before a few men tried to break the ice by sailing through it with a boat. This effort was meant to break the snow-ice that was covering most of the canal, in order for the frost to turn the water into beautiful black ice overnight. Others told me about so-called ice-transplantations by which they take out big chunks of ice from a smaller ditch and place it back to mend a hole in a bigger canal. And Hylke, one of my other informants, told me that he and his daughter filled the cracks in the ice with warm water during the night so they would be mended in the morning. These are just a few of the many preparation examples that my interlocutors introduced me to.

All this knowledge is part of the Frisian ice-skating heritage and demonstrates the relationship between human activities and their surroundings. This human-environmental interaction goes both ways. On the one hand, people adapt and use their surroundings to fulfil their own needs. For which the preparations are exemplary. On the other hand, people are greatly dependent on the weather conditions in order to practice and express their culture.

“Free. You just feel free. That feels good.”

Ice-skating triggers a whole array of feelings. Most of my informants explained to me that they are in awe with skating itself. The movement, the sound and their exceptional position within

³⁵ Interview 25-2-2021; Interview 4-3-2021; Interview 20-4-2021.

the landscape. They feel more relaxed and freer, and are well aware of the exceptional nature of what they are doing. Many mentioned that they are more aware of their surroundings, and see the landscape in a very special and different light. As well as being conscious of the fact that they are located on frozen water. This extends Ingold's (2011) argument that human beings are most fundamentally and continually "in touch" with their surrounding through their feet. This is a view that literally grounds humans in their environment. Through feet, a constant connection with the ground, one perceives and experiences the materiality on which social life is enacted. People often do not perceive things from one single vantage point, but rather perceive objects by walking around them. Thus, our perception depends on how we move and our knowledge of the environment is altered by techniques of footwork and the devices, such as skates, that we attach to the feet in order to enhance their effectiveness (Ingold 2011).

Moreover, many informants expressed feelings of appreciation, being grateful and lucky. One of my participants went even further by expressing that nothing would be more beautiful than – eventually – dying on the ice.³⁶ I contend that what people experience is a sense of the sublime in nature, nurturing a stronger (temporary) connectedness between individuals and their natural surroundings. According to Lisbeth C. Bethelmy and José A. Corraliza (2019) the sublime is a composite of feelings of "awe and inspiring energy, which describe different affective experiences" (9). Awe is defined as a mix of fear and respect toward nature, in which an individual might feel insignificant or stunned by the sight and experience of something much larger than oneself. The experience of nature as being vast and powerful confronts people with the fragility of life. Meanwhile, inspiring energy is defined as "the feeling that awakens a sense of vitality, happiness, freedom, and unity between the self and the natural world" (Bethelmy and Corraliza 2019, 9) and by extension the individual's surroundings. This connectedness to nature, awe and inspiring energy is effectively captured by one of my informants in the following conversation:

Sjoukje "I think on natural ice you're a bit more in the here-and-now. A bit closer to yourself. What it is eventually all about in life. Because life is so short and when you're on the ice it just becomes clear that this is just the most beautiful thing there is. Apart from everything we have to do and what our society has done to one another. I think we make it really difficult for ourselves at times. And then, on natural ice everything is nice and simple again. That is what I believe makes humans happy and fit. It is way healthier for us. [...] I just think it is wonderful

³⁶ Fieldnotes 5-2-2021.

to be on the ice, because eventually that is actually what and where we came from. In the first place, let's say. It is simply what your body desires. And I think for many it also feels that way."

Anne "Back to nature"

Sjoukje "Yes, exactly. Yes. Exactly that."

As we can see for Sjoukje, being on ice puts everything in perspective and provokes a sense of freedom. Beside the gained freedom of movement by skates, I maintain that when my interlocutors mentioned feelings of freedom, these oftentimes transcend the practicality of movement, and rather rely on the experience of the sublime in nature. Moreover, the sublime also resonates in the use of terms such as "unique", "special" "magical" and "exceptional", to express affective experiences in relation to ice and the Elfstedentocht. Furthermore, multiple studies have shown that the experience of awe brings about an increase in prosocial behaviour and values – such as volunteering and generosity – and make individuals feel less rushed (Piff et al. 2015; Rudd, Vohs, and Aaker 2012). This can serve as an explanation for why natural ice can cause a reduction in self-importance and why people are willing to put themselves aside for the organization of the Tour, and the wait on the ice.

Besides this fundamental experience of the sublime, a lot of people also related natural-ice-skating to being adventurous and sensational. It is often linked to the thrill of exploring the unknown and the constant risk of falling through the ice.

Communitas

Thus, in order to fully grasp the Frisian ice-skating culture it is important to understand that in Friesland ice means communitas. And the Elfstedentocht is representative of this. Communitas, following Victor and Edith Turner (2012), is found and experienced in shared interests, and the act of working together in order to achieve communal aims. As well as in the act of coming together, a sense of togetherness and the enhancement of social cohesion. It is a shared moment of joy with others, outside the conventional structures of life. Within the liminality of winter or shared ice related experiences, the Frisians experience feelings of social solidarity and a shared passion, which are emphasized in almost all conversations I have had during the three months of my fieldwork. During this period I often asked my informants what the Elfstedentocht means to them and why they think it is important that this heritage is passed on to next generations. One of the most telling responses I received was:

“I think it is very important because of the character of what is passed on. It is way more than a sports event and it is typical for, well I have to say this correctly, it is in Friesland by chance, but it is possible here because everyone knows what it is. It fits within our culture. It belongs here. [...] And I even believe that if there will never be a Tour again, that the whole story of what it was and how it went is certainly still worth to pass on. [...] That we can organize something so special and that you are capable of doing something like this as a human. You can really transcend yourself, and that is necessary for many because it is a fricking long way. The symbolical value, I believe, is the non-commercial character. It is solidarity and a sense of community. It is putting yourself aside for something else. Volunteering and all those kinds of things. And then the grand personal achievement linked to this.”³⁷

This statement exhibits the character of the Tour according to many of my interlocutors. The organization of the Tour as well as the waiting for the ice to be ready represent a communal effort that fosters social cohesion. This ranges from the social information structure described above, to the audience that “carries” the skaters during the Tour; supplying them with the necessary help. As well as from the local ice-people, to the KVFES and its hundreds of volunteers. The statement above strongly emphasised that the Elfstedentocht fits within the Frisian culture and therefore also conveys a message about how people perceive themselves and their local identity. This resonates with the foreword of Wiersma, written almost 80 years ago, showing how the Elfstedentocht for a long time now, is engrained in the Frisian identity. Moreover, this is in line with Durkheim’s conviction that tradition and rituals – that we can take the Elfstedentocht and the wait to be – are best understood as an act internal to a group that celebrates itself through it (Baumann 1992). According to Baumann these symbolic performances “unite the members of a category of people in a shared pursuit that speaks of, and to, their basic values or that creates or confirms a world of meanings shared by all of them alike” (1992, 98). As I suggested in the previous chapter, the process of identification is very complex and layered. Besides identifying with this heritage on a local- or national level, people who participated in the Tour also strongly identify with the other participants of the Tour: “I keep saying ‘we’ but you know, I was there. We did it”. This is due to the fact that a part of their identity is constructed by their experience and memories share. This too, suggests the experience of *communitas*. Most participants I spoke to maintain that it was either the best day of their life or a life altering experience that still resonates in the person they are to today.

³⁷ Interview 23-2-2021.

Based on my own experience in and around Utrecht, the Netherlands, and the conversations I had with people from home, the tradition of waiting on ice, the chase and the extensive ice preparation are unique to Friesland.³⁸

³⁸ People in the middle of the country tend to be more individualistic and jump on the ice as soon as they think it is ready to carry them, with no care about the possible consequence of spoiling the ice for others. The first few days of frost people falling through the ice featured frequently on the news about the lakes and canals in Loosdrecht, province of Utrecht (Fieldnotes February 8th – 10th). At home, I also oftentimes witnessed children spoiling the ice by throwing bricks or other heavy object on the ice. During my stay in Friesland, I have not witnessed this once.

Chapter 3 – The Future

‘I’m a child of Thialf’

The three of us are sitting around a big wooden table. My company exists of two old study friends, reminiscing about their college days in Leeuwarden and the Elfsteden festivities of 1997. “So how did I experience this? Well, at least as the city of Leeuwarden that was turned upside-down by an insane and unique event”. When I look outside through the big glass folding doors, I see the remnants of the thawing ice that has brought us so much joy just two days ago. Now, floating, and covered with a thin layer of water. It is foggy and grey out, and I notice that it is starting to get dark. “I don’t know any better than that as a child, I always skated during winter. Winter just normally was time for ice-skating. We learned how to skate in a similar way as to how to swim” Auke says. Auke is the shorter one of the two. He is a bit plump, and has greyish curls and friendly eyes. He wears a khaki ranger blouse and big hiking boots. His friend Arjan – a man of almost two meters tall – continues the conversation “you know what it is, while my children can now only skate once every 6 years, in my memory – and I really think I remember this correctly – it was an annually returning thing. For us it was just way more common, it was normal. If I now see my son scribble on his Noren I realize ‘well, when I was his age, I already made way more strides’, and yeah for the younger generation this is less of a given thing”. He raises his voice and scratches the back of his head as if apologizing for what he is about to say, “and when I mentioned koek and zopie, they asked me what it was. I had to explain it and the whole ambience around it, which to me is a welcoming and jovial feeling, but to them it is something unfamiliar”. The men fall into a passionate conversation about skating, the feeling, ambience and sociality. The dialogue goes on and I feel like a mere observer carried away by their tales. When they nostalgically start telling me about the feeling of fraternity during the Tour and winter-romances at the local skating rink Arjan states: “yes the normalcy of yesteryears has turned into something unique I believe”. Both men seem to be well aware of the increasing scarcity of ice-winters and eventually stumble upon climate change. “You know, there are so many different views of climatologists on the developments of climate change. Some say that it will manifest itself in more extremes in the Netherlands. Well, I think that might actually be something positive, because this could indicate that we will still get some severe winters. The Elfstedentocht is something we should cherish. I really want to cherish it. It is the only tour like this in the world”. “And,” Auke adds, “what about the ice-skating winters in general! I mean they are not as common as they used to be. And yet in my mind I still depend on the idea that every winter there will be a winter. You know, whatsoever, there will be a

moment again that we can ice-skate for a day, for sure. Or two days, on natural ice. But when I was younger almost every winter was an ice-winter. It belonged to the normal course of affairs, and that is no longer the case. But it changes really slowly". "Yeah, it sneaks in," Arjan responds. "And I think that is mainly harsh for the younger generation".³⁹

This vignette illustrates the awareness that is expressed amongst all of my interlocutors concerning natural-ice-skating becoming more rare. It provides insights into generational differences, a feeling of losing, wishful thinking and the desire for a certain type of heritage. Also, a sense of wistfulness perhaps, for their children who will not experience their heritage in a similar way as they did. Complemented with nostalgic memories, in the present, betwixt continuity and discontinuity. Since nostalgia always conveys temporal aspirations this chapter expands on the former about the present, by bringing in futural orientation. According to Bryant and Knight the past and present are “always inevitably shaped by the ends for which we strive” (2019, 20). Thus, the future, and the limit of knowledge thereof, orients our present. Therefore, it shapes our perception of the everyday and how we find our temporal orientations (Bryant and Knight 2019). Futural orientations are amongst more anticipation, expectation, hope, potentiality and speculation. Although all forms of futural orientations are evident in my research, anticipating certain futures deserves some special attention. Anticipation can spur collective action. According to Bryant and Knight the affective dimension of time is often experienced collectively, referring to this as *affective time* or *vernacular timespace* (2019, 32). It creates the collective perception of living within a period that has a particular temporality and is often described in epochal terms. This can for example be Times of Peace or Times of War, but in the instance of my research project the affective dimension of time is *Time of Ecological Change* or *Time of Climate Change*. A looming threat, such as ecological disaster, can cast a particular shadow that catches people collectively in a particular vernacular timespace. Although the distant threat of climate change may appear surreal, it can still be an incentive for the feeling of “running out of time” or the need for required response. Hence, collective action in the present is shaped as anticipation. I argue that the perception of these affective dimensions of time and the anticipation it spurs, forms the underlying matrix to understand the individual and collective action that is taken concerning the Elfstedentocht and natural-ice-skating. As well as the affective experiences and attitudes of people in relation to this same heritage as will be discussed in this chapter. I conduct anthropology of the future by looking at how the future manifests itself in the present. I do this by studying the futural orientations in which hopes and

³⁹ Vignette 16-2-2021.

worries manifest themselves, to learn more about the hopes and worries of my interlocutors in regards to their heritage in the future. Moreover, since nostalgia goes hand in hand with hope and aspirations for the future – since awareness of the past gives insights into future possibilities – this chapter engages with the ever-changing nature of culture, resilience and human creativity, by means of looking at how people seek to preserve their heritage: how is it passed on, monumentalized and materialized.

As I have briefly touched upon in my introduction, I use the distinction between *ecological change* and *climate change* as a discursive tool to indicate the two distinct worldviews that were dominant throughout my fieldwork. By doing so I aim to maintain an emic perspective by means of adopting the vernacular language of my interlocutors. I contend that these worldviews convey the experience of two different forms of a vernacular timespace namely Time of Ecological Change and Time of Climate Change. These two affective dimensions of time are expressed and felt amongst different generations: the ones who consciously did experienced the Elfstedentocht (≥ 34), and those who did not (< 34). Amongst these two generations I encountered a different understanding and explanation for the increasing scarcity of natural-ice-skating, as well as perhaps a related differing attitude towards the Elfstedentocht. Of course, here it is important to acknowledge that these are not fixed categories. Some who belong to the older generation will not (completely) recognize themselves in this category and vice versa. Hence, in these categories there is always room for nuance. To grasp people's worldviews in all their complexity is an immense task I do not seek to endeavour in this research project. I decided on these analytical categories since these two worldviews were most prevalent during fieldwork. They are not based on one singular story, but a composite of the many conversations I had.

“Winter always comes in pairs”

The generation who did experience the Tour in the past – who hence forward will be referred to as the older generation – often understood environmental change as a “normal” effect of ecological change. According to them, the environment always follows a conjunctural movement during which colder periods are followed by slightly warmer periods. Hence, the absence of ice-winters is due to the fact that we are now entering a warmer ecological period. Acceleration of this process due to human behaviour seemed to many nihilistic or only an insignificant part in the ecological equation.⁴⁰ Accordingly, they often felt like changes and

⁴⁰ Interview 20-4-2021; Interview 23-3-2021a.

weather excesses have – and always will be – part of our environment and are only natural. Therefore, with this in mind, many explicitly distinguish their own convictions about ecological change from the current tendency and discourse on climate change. This is demonstrated in the following statement made by Syb:

“It is nature of course. We see that – I always say – we also had an ice age here back in the days. Thus, of course we are worried about that [ecological change]. And everything that happens around us shall most certainly have a certain impact. But my gut tells me that people weigh too heavily on this [climate change] nowadays, and my mind says it has always been this way. People perhaps put a bit too much weight on it. Let me tell you, in 1960 I was a young boy and it rained so heavily during summer. We had heaps of hay on the land, and this was in July, and the ducks would swim around them. Nowadays people sometimes tend to say ‘well, it is raining more horribly’, but it was the same way back then. And back then, people also did not say ‘nature is all over the place’, we just said ‘we have a bad summer’. And I think – I hope – that people perhaps sometimes want to talk a bit too much into a certain direction. But of course, we all haven’t been that conscious about treating nature wisely. [...] we all have to be a bit more aware of how to treat nature.”⁴¹

This statement reveals how individuals distance themselves from the contemporary climate change discourse and how they use their personal experience as a referential framework to explain or normalize the rigidity of nature. According to my interlocutor Onne, who was quite firm in his convictions on ecological change, nature is in and of itself dynamic and unpredictable, meaning that one can never know exactly what the future holds and that therefore the possibility of the Elfstedentocht remains intact.⁴² I discovered that most of my informants from the older generation found a certain comfort in the futural unknown. The unknown in the sense of what the future holds, and thus, how the climatological developments will eventually unfold. They often appealed to the fact that there are various divergent claims and statements made by climatologist, as is evident in the vignette above. Or consciously distanced themselves from the climate debate by embracing their personal lack of knowledge – quite literally embracing the unknown. In these instances, the ecological change timespace is used to generate hope:

⁴¹ Interview 23-3-2021a.

⁴² Interview 20-4-2021.

*“Because of course I don't really understand how that works, with the climate and everything. And one says this, and the other says 'no, nature takes its natural course and this was the time when it was a little warmer and there will be a colder time again soon', well things like that. Yes, I don't know everything about everything and I don't really want to. I'm more of a romantic, I just hope it comes.”*⁴³

In addition, interlocutors such as Onne and Arjan maintained that ecological change does not have to imply that the average temperature will rise, and thus it does not have to rule out ice-winters, nor the Elfstedentocht.⁴⁴ Embracing the timespace of ecological change provides directionality for hope. Mainly, a tolerable and optimistic form of hope and waiting, that Janeja and Bandak (2018) would describe as the *poetics of waiting*. Those who experience this timespace maintain a degree of certitude in regards of their anticipated future. Ecological change, for example, opens up the opportunity for cold winters to return and the normalization of ecological change. Perhaps making the irreversibility of climate change less threatening. Many of my interlocutors from this generation also experienced last winter as an incentive of renewed hope for the Tour. According to them, based on their lived experiences, winter always comes in pairs. Meaning that the Tour could happen any year now.

One of my most prevalent findings during my fieldwork is that although the older generation often worried about the ice-winters becoming scarcer, they remained optimistically hopeful about the Tour. They perceived the long wait for the Tour – now more than 24 years – as an inherent part of the Tour's uniqueness. The questionnaire I distributed amongst the followers of the musical “De Tocht” also showed similar results. Out of the 53 people who filled out the questionnaire, all indicated that they experienced the Tour in the past, and 65.4% specified that they contend that the long wait is indeed an inherent part of the Tour's unique character.⁴⁵ Furthermore, my informants often mentioned to me that in retrospect they always had to wait on the Tour for a longer period of time and appealed to the fact that there also was a wait of 22 years between the Tour of 1963 and 1985. However, what they did not take into consideration here, is that during the 1970s a lot of relatively warm cooling water was discharged into the Frisian canals by power and industrial plants. Consequently, it should have frozen at least 4 degrees more than normal in order to obtain the required ice thickness (De

⁴³ Interview 21-4-2021.

⁴⁴ Interview 20-4-2021.

⁴⁵ Questionnaire results 23-7-2021.

Volkskrant 1981). Hence, I assert that what this generation is holding on to is a distorted or an outdated idea of the Tour's rarity.

Nonetheless, I argue that the generation who lived to experience the Tour are not really feeling like they are losing the Elfstedentocht. Hitherto, the Tour remains an important and existing part of their (daily) lives. Their experienced timespace opens up opportunities for hope as a temporal orientation that "draws the not-yet into the present and motivates activity in the here-an-now" (Bryant and Knight 2019, 157). This can be witnessed in how people anticipate the arrival of the Tour. This can be on a time-consuming and frequent basis, such as all year-round physical training to stay in shape as many do, and the annual organization by the KVFES. Or more seasonally bound anticipation, such as more frequently checking weather and frost forecasts or resuming indoor ice-skating practice as soon as the meteorological winter starts. But also, on a basis that is becoming more incidental, namely the ice-winters, during which people start moving around working schedules, go to Friesland (as did Lilly and Paul) and preparing the ice, as is demonstrated in the previous chapter. Of course, these forms of anticipation and hope are entangled in other forms of futural orientations such as expectations and speculations. This only demonstrates the complex process in which we constantly move between and engage with differing timespaces as we go about our daily lives.

"And this is where nostalgia becomes important"

However, while these participants do not seem to be losing the Elfstedentocht, what they are worried about – and nostalgic towards – is the ice-skating culture itself. Although thinking about environmental change in terms of ecological change might provide some relief for envisioning their heritage in the future, the contemporary lived reality is that ice-winters remain more and more absent. Some participants nuanced this fact by proclaiming that also back in the days there was not always a winter. Yet, the sentiments of "in the past there was always winter" echoed more frequently in our conversations. The two concerns that were raised most frequently by this generation were those about a loss of knowledge and a decreasing interest in ice-skating.⁴⁶ The latter, immediately having a negative impact on ice-skating as a top sport at the ice clubs. Both of these concerns are underwritten by Durkheim's (1972) theorization of ritual interaction, in which he emphasizes that ritual social events are in need of repetition in order to maintain and organize communal structures. There is a need for affective experience in order to pass on intangible heritage. My interlocutors were well aware that natural ice is a necessity

⁴⁶ Interview 15-3-2021; 16-2-2021; 14-2-2021; 17-3-2021; 23-3-2021a; 22-4-2021.

to keep their heritage alive and entuse the younger generation to keep on ice-skating. Whenever there is no ice, it becomes harder to pass on knowledge or acquaint children with the sport, let alone the culture.

During my fieldwork I interviewed Sjoukje, a 53-year-old Frisian woman who has been a professional long track speed skater her whole life. She participated in the Tour of '97 and currently trains multiple top ice-skating teams. When we were talking, she mentioned that she already noticed that amongst the younger generation ice-skaters the memory of what the Elfstedentocht was all about is fading. Only skaters who experienced the Tour in the past or who were raised by their parents with the stories about it, would understand what it was all about. And this already says a lot since “for a long track speed skater the Elfstedentocht is a sort of Dutch Olympics”.⁴⁷ When I asked her how this heritage could be kept alive, she first of all answered that due to the absence of ice it is important to establish valid educational programmes to educate school children about the Elfstedentocht. Or, as is the case in the Sven Kramer programme, school children should be taken to one of the indoor skating arenas to get acquainted with the sport. Syb and Rindert also initiated an annual fieldtrip that, in the absence of natural ice, takes the school children of Workum to Thialf – the ice-skating arena in Heerenveen. This is their way of establishing new connections between their ice-skating heritage and the younger generation, because according to them “every Frisian, every Dutch person must be able to skate”.⁴⁸ This latter statement is interesting because it stresses once again the different modes of identification with this heritage. However, what Sjoukje mainly emphasized is that there is a need for natural ice, since it brings people to the local ice clubs and the rinks, introduces people to the ice-skating culture and entuses them for the Tour. Hence, “natural ice keeps it more alive”.⁴⁹ This is exemplified by my own experience. After five days of *ijspret* I thought to myself that I would like to take some ice-skating lessons whenever the rinks would be allowed to open again.⁵⁰ But also by Hylke, who I mentioned in the previous chapter, who was able to teach his daughter how to mend the cracks in the ice and pass on his knowledge thanks to the last ice-winter. In addition, one of my younger interlocutors enrolled himself and his bother for the Elfstedentocht after they tried to skate the route past winter. And if the Tour would possibly ever come, he simply must attend.⁵¹ Furthermore, during one of the walks, my informant complained to me about the enormous amount of people who

⁴⁷ Interview 21-4-2021.

⁴⁸ Interview 23-3-2021a.

⁴⁹ Interview 21-4-2021.

⁵⁰ Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the indoor skating rinks and arenas were closed until further notice.

⁵¹ Interview 1-3-2021.

landed in the Emergency Rooms last winter. To him this was a sign of inexperience and a lack of knowledge about the ice. He asserted that it was a really unfortunate thing, that could have been prevented “if only we would have had more ice-winters”.⁵²

When it comes to nostalgia, people from the older generation often spoke in a longing way about their childhood memories, ice-romances, the festivities and social cohesion. The feelings they experienced while on the ice and how glad they were that their children and grandchildren could have caught a glimpse of this during the last winter. Besides their awareness of the importance of the younger generation for the survival of their heritage, they often sought community amongst people who had similar experiences. When I spoke to Tjeerd, a web owner who maintains a website about the Elfstedentocht, I asked him if he perceived the testimonies he collected on the website as a form of digital archiving for future generations. He responded surprised and said he had never looked at his website that way: “yeah you know, if I stop for whatever reason, perhaps it should indeed be preserved”.⁵³ He said that he mainly started to collect and post testimonies on his site because he found comfort in reading other people’s statements, and he experienced that others did too. He therefore enables dialogue between people who have been through similar experiences to reminisce about the good old days. In another conversation, one of my interlocutors mentioned that the “national” day of the Eleven City Tour – instated since the 15th of February 2019 by a few fanatics – is rather a big reunion for those who have participated in the Tour. Instead of a national moment of festivities or commemoration – which of course would imply that the Elfstedentocht has ceased to be – or a moment to engage a new audience with this heritage. The same, according to many, goes for the general meeting of the KVFES. Others seek community by joining initiatives such as “friends of the ice-skating museum” to engage with other people who are fond of ice-skating and the Elfstedentocht.⁵⁴

However, according to Wim, one of my informants from Dokkum, these nostalgic gatherings and interactions are “where nostalgia becomes important for future generations”.⁵⁵ Nostalgia according to him is an important part of the Frisian ice-skating culture and the Elfstedentocht. And a productive way to keep it alive. Websites like Tjeerd’s do eventually turn into testimonial archives and the shared memories into the stories that are told at home to children and grandchildren. The memory of the Elfstedentocht currently heavily relies on oral

⁵² Fieldnotes 5-3-2021.

⁵³ Interview 25-2-2021.

⁵⁴ Fieldnotes 20-4-2021.

⁵⁵ Fieldnotes 24-2-2021.

histories that are passed on from one generation to the next. According to Anke van Diemen “it is not the tangible remains from the past that keep the Elfstedentocht alive but rather the intangible remains” (2010, 12). This is also illustrated by Sjoukje’s statement in which she mentioned the parents who share the stories. However, all participants I spoke to kept diaries and scrapbooks with old newspaper articles, the stamp card and photos, which they all brought to our interviews. Often without asking. They said that every once in a while, they would take them out and share their stories with their families and that during winter they would always “annoy” everybody with their tales.⁵⁶ Furthermore, in all homes I visited I noticed that people displayed memorabilia of the Tour.⁵⁷ This varied from displaying the medals (photo) to photos and collages on walls, that have become a constant reminder of their achievements.⁵⁸ I contend that this exhibits vernacular ways of collecting in which intangible heritage is materialized for safekeeping. Small objects are collected and bestowed with meaning, as well as becoming vehicles for the intangible stories. Nevertheless, what they all emphasized was that they really hoped that the Tour would come for the next generation, because they felt that they are really deserving of this. And experience, thus, is the best guarantee for the survival of this heritage.

“Schaarste doet beminnen”

“Schaarste doet beminnen” is a statement made by one of my interlocutors, meaning that in the absence of something or when something becomes scarce, it evokes endearment and we start cherishing it. This statement stuck with me for the rest of my research project and I maintain that it catches the essence of the younger generation’s attitude towards the Elfstedentocht and the ice-skating culture. Time of Climate Change follows the contemporary discourse in which climate change comprises “a long-term change in the average weather patterns that have come to define Earth’s local, regional and global climates. These changes have a broad range of observed effects that are synonymous with the term” (NASA n.d.). The observed changes are primarily driven by human-induced emissions which in turn causes the Earth’s average surface temperature to rise. The perception of the climate change timespace almost inevitably endangers the heritage that the younger generation has never know in its full glory. And not only the heritage site but the whole world along with it. However, throughout their lives they have been confronted with stories and images of this heritage by their families and the media. Inducing a longing for a past one has not experienced personally but rather vicariously. This occurrence is what Berliner (2015) describes as *exo-nostalgia* and can trigger

⁵⁶ Interview 5-3-2021; Interview 15-3-2021.

⁵⁷ Fieldnotes 23-2-2021; 24-2-2021; 15-3-2021; 23-3-2021a; 20-4-2021.

⁵⁸ See appendix 3.

a great range of heartfelt affect. I argue that the younger generation regards to this heritage as something that is fading. Hence, they feel like they are losing their heritage due to climate change. They are losing in a more vigorous way than the older generation who are finding comfort in the ecological timespace as demonstrated above. Losing the Elfstedentocht to them not only means losing the whole ice-skating culture it represents but also a sense of a time before climate change. A time with frequent real winters. Although none of my younger interlocutors specifically used the term climate anxiety, this affective realization was often expressed to me in our conversations by bringing up their fears and worries. Someone even said that “if the whole climate issue will be fixed and the Elfstedentocht would never be held again, than that isn’t as bad as the other way around”.⁵⁹ This generation perceives this heritage as an indicator of climate change. The absence of ice makes this change visible. Therefore, confronting them with the timespace they are living in that is connected to feelings of “running out of time”.⁶⁰ Talking about the Elfstedentocht within the climate change timespace makes it a more political endeavour that is combined with an affective desire to preserve this heritage.

“So perhaps you should indeed just hope.”

This is most clearly demonstrated by the conversations I had with Janne. She is a 29-year-old long track speed skater who recently created a podcast about the Elfstedentocht. Besides this she is doing research on the Tour out of personal interest, that according to her has grown because of all the stories she has heard over the years from her older fellow skaters who “were lucky enough” to attend the Tour.⁶¹ She is registered for the Tour since this is curtesy for competition skaters, and has been dreaming of attending ever since. She describes the Tour as “the ultimate contest that you really want to experience someday”.⁶² She was 5 when the last Tour was held, so she has no memory of the event, but the many stories that she mentioned in our conversations have fostered a longing within her that she sometimes can’t understand herself:

*“It is amazing to hear all of those stories. So, the only thing that you keep on hoping is that as a skater you can really experience that one day. The craze and the competition. Yes, that was just unique. And somewhere, it is also just fairly double or harsh: to put so much time and effort into training for something that might never happen”.*⁶³

⁵⁹ Interview 23-3-2021b.

⁶⁰ Interview 28-4-2021.

⁶¹ Interview 7-5-2021.

⁶² Ibidem.

⁶³ Ibidem.

There are a few interesting things about this statement. First of all, we can see that Janne's longing for something is based on other people's stories. She has no personal memory of this event and still she is nostalgic towards it as if she has experienced this herself. This is also evident in her reference to the craze and the competition as "yes that was just unique". At this point of the conversation, it almost felt like she was reminiscing about something she experienced first-hand. This demonstrates the functionality of exo-nostalgia and how this is lived vicariously and intense. She often smiled when she spoke about the Tour and talked very passionately. The second interesting thing is that she still feels like her training is leading up to her participation in the Tour, but that she is also well aware that this might never happen again. This is again tied to a few interesting observations. During our conversation she often linked the absence of ice-winters and the long wait for the Tour to climate change and was mindful of the process of degeneration. Besides the fact that she mentioned multiple times how badly she hopes and dreams that one day she can participate in the Tour, she also mentioned a few times that she is rather sure that she will never experience the Tour in person. She mentioned that she was feeling low due to the recent election results since she felt like this was our last chance to make the necessary changes, and the results were not as promising as she had hoped. She mentioned that at times she lost faith in our possibilities to change the tide when it comes to climate change. Meanwhile, she is feeling kind of helpless in the process. Besides the fact that she is part of an "ice-skating scene" as she called it, in which the Elfstedentocht has a particular status, I noticed that she used this heritage to talk about greater issues that were at stake. This is similar to the experiences I had with other interlocutors such as with Madelene (33), one of the initiators of the spectacle musical "De Tocht". She informed me that one of the underlying storylines in the musical is to address climate change, and that taking this seriously is one of the main messages that people should take home after their visit. Furthermore, Madelene explicitly stated that she maintained that the Elfstedentocht can serve as an important vehicle to address these kinds of pressing issues.⁶⁴ What we can see here is that compared to the older generation who use their heritage and ecological changes to talk about their heritage and its possible endangerment, the younger generation uses their endangered heritage to talk about climate change and express their concerns for the future. The latter, already feeling like their heritage is indeed already endangered.

Circling back to Janne's statement, her training for the Tour demonstrates that we can engage in differing futural orientations at the same time. Futural orientations can overlap and

⁶⁴ Interview 28-4-2021.

co-exist. Therefore, anticipating something in the long term does not mean you cannot anticipate something else in the short term. Thus, anticipating the potential loss of your heritage due to climate change does not exclude you from your annual training for the Tour that might happen next year. Although in Janne's case it is a bit more complex because she is an ice-skater by profession, this is also demonstrated by the young man and his brother who registered to become a member of the KVFES last winter. They did this despite their participation in the climate change timespace: they shared with me that they estimate the chances of the Tour ever happening rather bleak. Hope, according to Bryant and Knight (2019) is one of the most complex temporal orientations there is. This became clear to me when I tried to determine what kind of hope which generation was experiencing. Both often expressed to me that they remained hopeful, but after a while I noticed that the younger generation cherishes a less secure or certain form of hope. A longing form of hope that is more fragile than the hope of the older generation. It is a form of hope that is stacked against all odds. And yet, they maintain this hope and hold on to their heritage, and also to them, last winter oftentimes fostered renewed hope. Not in relation to the climate change debate since that is relatively inevitable. But it created hope that they might not permanently lose their heritage as long as it can manifest itself in the arrival of extremes.⁶⁵

“I'm actually afraid that at some point it will really become a museum thing”

As I have stated above, when things become scarce people start to cherish it, and in the case of intangible heritage impacted by climatological changes people seek to do this in materializing, monumentalizing and collecting what is still there. Janne started her podcast to collect and preserve the stories of former Tour participants. Since oral histories are the most important way in which the Elfstedentocht is passed on – besides the Tour itself of course – she aspires to build an archive of these stories in order to preserve them for future generations. Interestingly, this clearly contrasts Tjeerd's motivation to start his website that was mainly to exchange experiences among fellow Elfsteden skaters. Janne's motivation indicates a different and more conservation-driven attitude towards this heritage. Her initiative is an intentional attempt to materialize and safeguard the Elfstedentocht for the future. Janne and Madelene, as well as multiple other participants from the younger generation, expressed their worries about the oral tradition of this intangible heritage. They expressed that if the Tour indeed remains absent there will be a natural decrease in people who can pass on the stories. We can see

⁶⁵ Interview 31-3-2021.

initiatives such as the podcast as a response to these kinds of worries. Madelene also made clear that the musical seeks to make the intangible tangible:

*“I live in Lemmer and the Wouda pumping station is here. That is also [UNESCO] heritage. I think that is also of great value, but the difference is, you can go visit and then you can feel and you can touch. That you can smell, and there you can be. And that is the difference with the Elfstedentocht. It is something intangible, but something just as important as the Wouda pumping station. And that is why I want to make it into something tangible. [...] And I contend that we have to make this kind of cultural heritage into something tangible in order to pass it on to next generations at all, if they will never experience it again”.*⁶⁶

The last sentence conveys her worries for the Elfstedentocht heritage and strengthens her personal motivation. Furthermore, Madelene claimed that, in line with the importance of ritual described above, an important part of keeping heritage alive is about passing on affect. Affective experiences are necessary to pass on or create an understanding of what heritage is about. It creates communal support to keep heritage alive. She maintained that with time the affinity and feelings involved will fade, except for when it is experienced again or transferred properly. According to her, film and musical can serve as potent ways to transfer affective experiences without really experiencing it. And interestingly, she paralleled the community-based effort to create the musical to the Elfstedentocht itself which she also described as a community project.⁶⁷ In a certain way, this shows how the Tour is already transforming or how the spirit of the Tour is kept alive in different forms.

In addition to this materializing turn, this heritage is transforming in other ways too. One example is the value that younger people ascribe to skating an unofficial “wild” Elfstedentocht. I interviewed a few of the young men who skated one of these tours last winter. Meaning that they skated the route even though the ice quality was not good. All of them told me that the ice was really bad, contained many *wakken* and they had to walk, *klunen* or drive many parts of the route. All of the men tried to skate as much as possible and summoned a full supporting system of friends and family who would meet and support them at different parts of the route. One of the men also told me that he made it possible to follow his whole journey on social media. He got a lot of great responses which to him felt like a similar supporting system as the large audience of the Tour would normally be. When I asked one of the other men, who

⁶⁶ Interview 28-4-2021.

⁶⁷ Interview 28-4-2021: they work together with a community of almost 3000 people that volunteer and give input for the musical.

is 31, why he wanted to skate the Tour so badly he answered that he felt like “it is something that I think can be done less and less frequently now, and that creates pressure that if it is only a little bit possible, to really do it”.⁶⁸ This demonstrates the pull of the Tour and an awareness of the diminishing chances to skate the Tour due to climate change. This attitude contrast sharply with a conversation I had during one of my walks. My 68-year-old interlocutor started to tell me an anecdote about the time he was sitting in a train with his two skating friends on their way to Groningen to skate another tour. During the train ride the Elfstedentocht of 1985 was announced. It was the first Elfstedentocht in 22 years and although his friends went crazy and immediately got on a train straight back to Friesland, he declined this opportunity because he felt like he was not yet experienced enough, “and the Elfstedentocht will come another time”.⁶⁹ Fortunately for him he could skate the Tour one year later in 1986 and again in 1997. When I inquired if he would have made the same decision in our current situation of climate change he firmly answered “yes, I would make the same decision because the Tour will come again”.⁷⁰

Reflection

All in all, that ice-winters have appeared less frequently in the last decennia is a fact and this is experienced by all of my interlocutors across both generational groups. A simple statement such as the title of this chapter already addresses this. The title was a statement made by my youngest interlocutor. Daan is an 18-year-old man who is born and raised in Friesland, and is a passionate short-track skater. When I asked him how he experienced skating on natural ice last winter he said firmly “getting used to it. ‘I’m a child of Thialf,’ we always say here at home. The switchover from Thialf to natural ice is always different for a bit. But after a few times you’re used to it and then it is great fun”.⁷¹ This suggest that the absence of ice-winters has caused Daan to learn how to skate at artificial ice rinks for most of his life instead of on natural ice. This implies a discontinuity with the past and a break between generations. Interestingly, the fact that this divide is acknowledged by the whole household can fit both categories, both Time of Ecological Change and Time of Climate Change. However, the extent to which a discontinuity with the past is experienced depends on the timespace one is experiencing. Founded on their exo-nostalgia, the younger generation is more drastically experiencing a discontinuity with the past. For most of them the long wait for the Elfstedentocht

⁶⁸ Interview 1-3-2021.

⁶⁹ Fieldnotes 5-3-2021.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ Interview 31-3-2021.

has become an indicator of climate change. While the older generation can still fall back on their former experiences as a referential framework in order to nuance weather extremes and find comfort in the tidal movement of ecological change. They maintain a degree of certitude in their anticipated futures, meaning that the Elfstedentocht will come again. Due to this experience, I argue that the younger generation, rather than the older one, is feeling like they are losing their heritage. Heritage that they have not yet even experienced to the fullest.

What is interesting is that the younger generation, due to their lack of experiencing this intangible heritage, rather feel like they are losing the monumentalized national heritage of the Elfstedentocht. Contrastingly, the older generation is relatively more worried about losing the knowledge and rituals that makes the Frisian ice-skating culture at large. This manifest itself correspondingly in how people seek to keep their heritage alive. While the older generation is more focussed on passing on this heritage by acquainting the youngsters with ice-skating by means of educational programmes, fieldtrips and storytelling, the younger generation directs its attention to gathering and collecting the stories in order to make the intangible tangible. Hence, preserving this heritage for future generations that possibly will never experience it themselves. This form of collecting is mainly motivated by the potential and almost inevitable loss of their heritage. This for example contrasts with the musealization of the ice-skating culture in the Hindeloopen Ice-skating Museum as part of the monumentalization of folk culture in the 1970s. Nevertheless, what the younger generation does show, is the creative side of ecological nostalgia by allowing the heritage of the Elfstedentocht to transform. What is evident in the value they ascribe to the “wild” Tours. However, what the two generations do have in common is that they use nostalgia to talk about desired presents and futures, weather it is for the survival of their heritage, or the survival of live on Earth.

Conclusion

“So you started by saying that you most likely will never experience the ‘Tour of all tours’, but the other day you said that every day, is a day closer to the Tour. So where are you in this situation?”

“Yeah.. It’s madness isn’t it?”

This thesis started from the paradox of why and how people are so invested in the Elfstedentocht and its preparations, while the event has been absent for over 24 years. The changing climate endangers this heritage, but nonetheless it is still very much alive within wider cultural imaginary. By using the lens of ecological nostalgia I have explored the interplay between intangible heritage and climate change, and how people cope with potential loss and heritage transformation. By following the temporal orientations that nostalgia entails – the past, present and future – I have studied how people place themselves in history and orient themselves towards the future. I, too, live in the climate change timespace, meaning that encountering and familiarizing myself with the ecological timespace was an unexpected and educational endeavour. My research project depicts the lived realities of the ice-people of Friesland, and as my study suggests, these lived realities and the degree of losing that is experienced, depends on what timespace one inhabits.

By outlining the historical context in which the ice-skating and Elfstedentocht tradition emerged, I have illustrated the historical rootedness of the phenomenon as well as its place in the contemporary Dutch heritage landscape. This first chapter has shown the complexity and layeredness of processes of identification and how heritage practices become appropriated in national heritage narratives. In what followed I have demonstrated how this process of national appropriation can cause dissonance and how people experience a sense of *disemia* (Herzfeld 1997). What this mainly highlighted is the alternate place the Elfstedentocht holds within the Frisian ice-skating culture. I established that what people experience during ice-winters in Friesland, and during the Elfstedentocht, is a strong sense of *communitas* as coined by Victor and Edith Turner (2012). A sense of collective joy, solidarity and togetherness that is lamented in the absence of winter. This I contend, echoes in the expressed eco-nostalgias I encountered.

In addition, this longing is strengthened by what the ice-skating culture has come to represent. An important implication of my research, is that I discovered that for many of my interlocutors ice-skating has become the embodiment of a more social, freer and healthier world in which people are more connected to nature and perhaps even a bit more eased. I maintain

that this eco-nostalgia is an idealized social imagination of what ice-skating has been in the past. This is a clear example of the paradox of nostalgia. There is more to this imagination than heritage, as it contains a social commentary on our contemporary society. The Frisian ice-skating culture has become a heritage site that allows people to reflect on, or imagine a better society. It entails what people are longing for most in the present and desire in the future, but what perhaps might never happen. Thus, losing this heritage also means losing these aspirations and imaginings. Interestingly, these sentiments are mainly expressed by those belonging to the older generation. In chapter three, I mentioned that for the younger generation, talking about the Elfstedentocht within the climate change timespace makes it a more political endeavour. However, by taking this social commentary into consideration, this is applicable to both generations. Furthermore, this thesis shows how eco-nostalgias recognize potentiality and spur creative collecting and conservation initiatives. Hence, I demonstrated how heritage constantly transforms, and therefore, the resilience of culture impacted by a changing climate.

Lastly, reflecting on my research question stated in the introduction, my study of ecological nostalgia in the Dutch intangible heritage context has provided insights in the futural orientations (Bryant and Knight 2019) that form people's ideas, actions and social relationships in the present through engagements in and with time. In addition, it showed why people ought to wait on something that might never happen again and how ecological nostalgia can facilitate a way to think about what might be lost and how to deal with this.

Final remark

During my fieldwork a theme that occurred several times during conversations is the Whiteness of the ice-skating sport in the Netherlands. Multiple interlocutors mentioned that they believed it is a shame that the Dutch ice-skating sport does not represent the multi-cultural society of the Netherlands. According to them, children with a migration background cannot recognize themselves in this heritage since role models remain rather scarce. My informants feared that the absence of these role models, combined with no incentive to get acquainted with this culture – due to the lack of winters or stimulation from family members – would cause a lack of interest and identification amongst this particular younger population. Although I can see where my informants are coming from, these statements are problematic in the sense that they bear an encoded assumption that all immigrants have to appreciate this heritage, and therefore push notions of assimilation. It shows that when it comes to heritage, it is always contested, and it always poses questions such as “whose heritage?” (Hall 2004). While simultaneously, due to climate change there might be no ice-skating heritage left. Moreover, this highlights the

ongoing process of reimagining what it means to be Dutch, not only vis-à-vis changing demographics, but also vis-à-vis climate change. These sentiments, that are nationalistic in nature, unfold interesting opportunities for prospective research in light of the constant transformation and renegotiation of heritage. Raising questions such as what it is that should actually constitute heritage in the Netherlands.

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Appendix 1 – Map and Overview Eleven Cities Tours



Image 1

Source: The Washington Post. Link: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/sports/wp/2019/03/07/feature/in-the-netherlands-ice-skating-is-in-the-dna-a-warming-climate-could-change-that/>. Accessed on July 24, 2021.

	Year	Date	Competition Skaters	Tour Skaters	Participants (total)	Winner(s)
1st	1909	January 2 nd	-	-	23	Minne Hoekstra
2nd	1912	February 7 th	38	22	60	Coen de Koning
3rd	1917	January 27 th	42	108	150	Coen de Koning
4th	1929	January 12 th	98	206	304	Karst Leenburg
5th	1933	December 16 th	173	339	512	Abe de Vries Sipke Castelein
6th	1940	January 30 th	688	2.716	3.404	Piet Keizer Auke Adema Cor Jongert Dirk van der Duim Sjouke Westra
7th	1941	February 6 th	600	1.900	2.500	Auke Adema
8th	1942	January 22 nd	970	3.862	4.832	Sietze de Groot
9th	1947	February 8 th	277	1.791	2.018	Jan van der Hoorn
10th	1954	February 3 rd	138	2.597	2.735	Jeen van den Berg
11th	1956	February 14 th	259	6.070	6.329	No winner
12th	1963	February 18 th	568	9.294	9.862	Reinier Paping
13th	1985	February 21 st	227	16.000	16.227	Evert van Benthem
14th	1986	February 26 th	317	16.999	17.316	Evert van Benthem
15th	1997	January 4 th	301	16.387	16.688	Henk Angenent

Source: Werk n.d.b.; KVFES n.d.

If the Tour were to happen today, all 32.800 members of the KVFES would have the right to start, from whom approximately 25.000 would in effect skate the Tour. In addition, the KVFES has a long waiting list of people who are waiting to become an official member.

Appendix 2 – Questionnaire

De Elfstedentocht

Goedendag!

Ontzettend fijn dat u even de tijd neemt om deze vragen te beantwoorden. Het invullen van de vragenlijst zal niet veel langer dan 5 minuten in beslag nemen.

Voor mijn Masterscriptie Culturele Antropologie aan de Universiteit Utrecht doe ik onderzoek naar de Nederlandse schaatscultuur en de Elfstedentocht in tijden van een veranderend klimaat.

'Wat drijft onze schaatskoorts?' 'Wat betekent dit erfgoed voor ons?' 'Hoe gaan wij daar vandaag de dag nou mee om?' En 'hoe zal de schaatscultuur er in de toekomst uit gaan zien?' zijn maar een handgreep uit de vragen die centraal staan in mijn scriptie.

Uw antwoorden zullen geheel anoniem worden verwerkt en niet meer te herleiden zijn tot u als persoon.

Bij voorbaat dank voor het invullen! Uw antwoorden dragen enorm bij aan mijn onderzoek en zullen mijn inzichten verrijken.

***Vereist**

1. Vindt u het belangrijk dat er een musical komt over de Elfstedentocht? *

Markeer slechts één ovaal.

- Ja
 Nee

2. Waarom? *

3. Ik heb de Elfstedentocht:

Markeer slechts één ovaal.

- Wel meegemaakt, als toeschouwer.
 Wel meegemaakt, als toer- of wedstrijdschaats(st)er.
 Nog nooit meegemaakt of ik was nog te jong om mij iets te herinneren
 Wel meegemaakt, maar ik ben er toen niet actief mee bezig geweest.

4. Voor mij is de Elfstedentocht in de eerste plaats een:

Markeer slechts één ovaal.

- Sportprestatie
 Culturele uiting

5. Waarom?

The Eleven Cities Tour

Hello!

I am very glad that you are taking the time to answer these questions. Completing this questionnaire will take no longer than 5 minutes.

For my master thesis Cultural Anthropology at the University of Utrecht I am researching the Dutch ice-skating culture and the Elfstedentocht during times of climate change.

'What drives our ice-fever?' 'What does this heritage mean to us?' 'How do we go about this heritage now-a-days?' and 'what will the ice-skating culture look like in the future?' are just a hand full of questions that are central to my thesis.

Your answers will be confidential and anonymized. And will not be able to be traced back to you.

Thank you in advance for completing the questionnaire! Your answers will be huge contribution to my research and will enrich my insights.

1. Do you think the production of a musical about the Tour is important?

- a. Yes
b. No

2. Why?

3. I have:

- a. Experienced the Tour, as audience.
b. Experienced the Tour, as tour or competition skater.
c. Never experienced the Tour or was too young to remember experiencing it.
d. Experienced the Tour, but did not really pay attention to it back then.

4. The Elfstedentocht is in the first place:

- a. A sports prestation.
b. A cultural expression.

5. Why?

6. Het feit dat we al zo lang moeten wachten op de volgende tocht:

Markeer slechts één ovaal.

- Hoort er gewoon bij. We moeten altijd wachten en dat maakt het unieke karakter de tocht.
- Baart mij wel eens zorgen.
- Is voor mij een parameter voor klimaatverandering.
- Anders.

7. In het geval van anders, namelijk:

8. Ik zou mezelf beschrijven als een natuurmens

Markeer slechts één ovaal.

- Ja
- Nee

9. Bonus vraag: wat betekent de Elfstedentocht voor u?

6. The fact that we are waiting for the next Tour for so long:

- a. Is just a part of it. We always have to wait and that makes its unique character.
- b. Worries me sometimes.
- c. Is an indicator of climate change to me.
- d. Other.

7. In case of 'other', please explain:

8. I would describe myself as a nature person:

- a. Yes
- b. No

9. Bonus question: what does the Elfstedentocht mean to you?

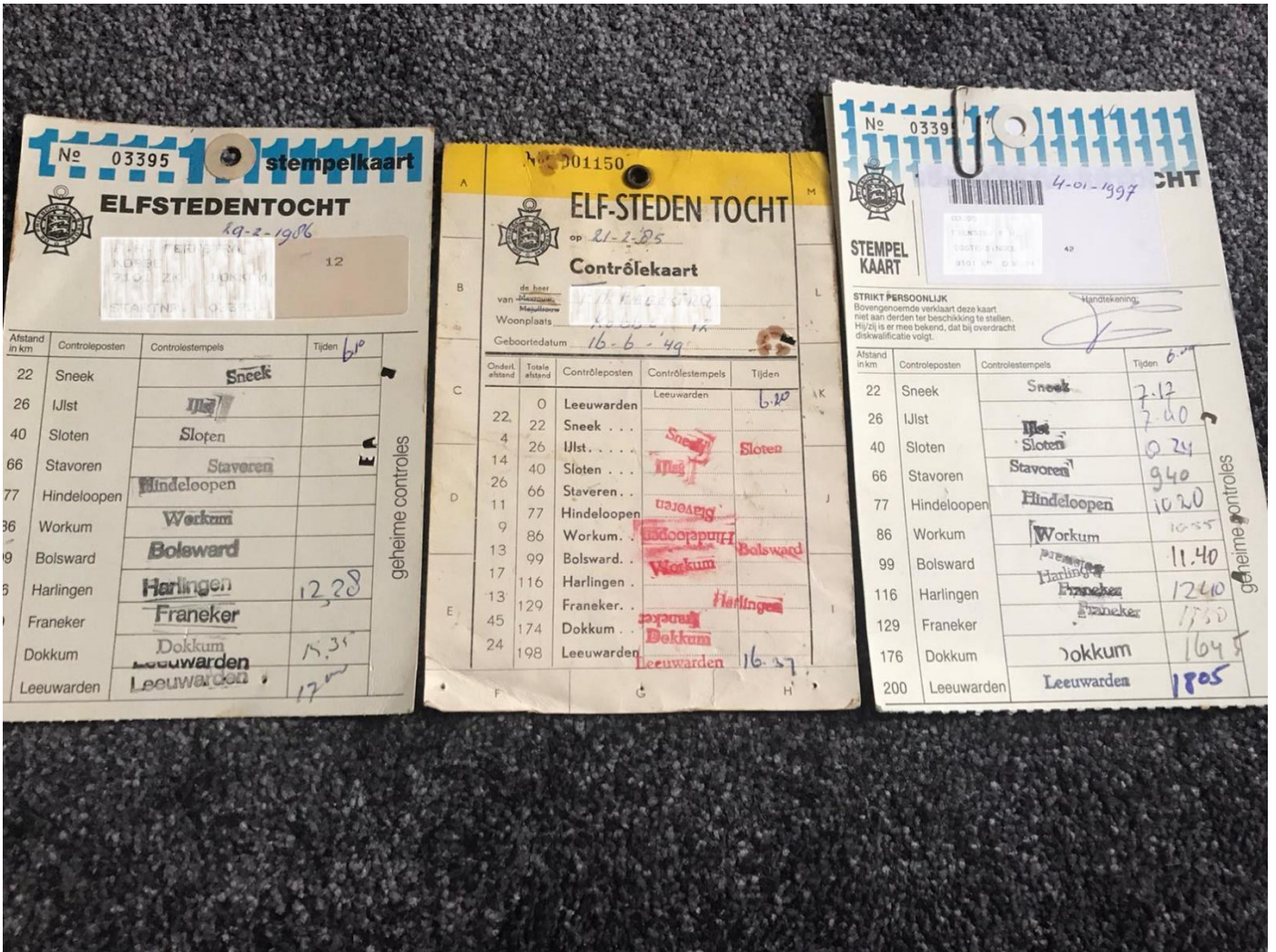
Appendix 3 – Photos of Memorabilia



> The caption from left-right top-bottom says: "13th Eleven Cities Tour, 13,000 Winners and one of them was I" "Eleven Cities Tour 1985" "Thursday 21 Feb. 1985" "'85 I was there!"(24.2.2021)



> The Elfsteden crosses or medals (24.2.2021)

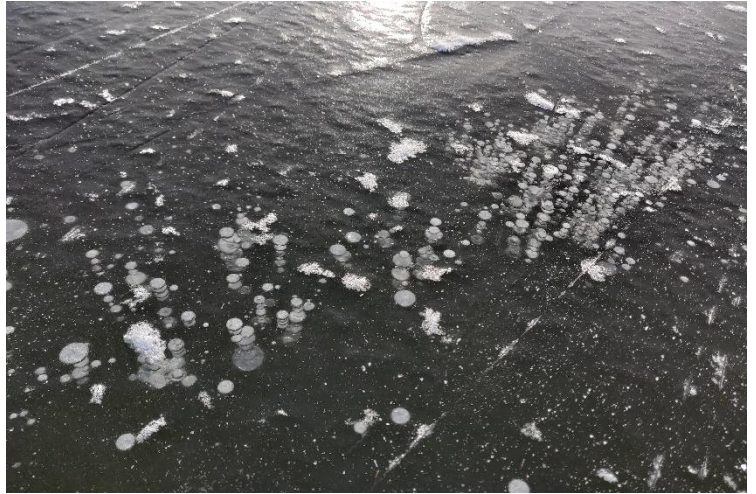


> Stamp cards (25.2.2021)

Appendix 4 – Visual Recordings Ice



> *First time on Noren (10.2.2021)*



> *Black Ice. The air bubbles indicating the thickness of the ice (14.2.2021)*



> *Texture of snow-ice or “milkshake ice” (11.2.2021)*



> Ice shoves on Sloterveer (10.2.2021)



> Thin layer of ice on the Luts, Balk (9.2.2021)



> The frozen canals of Hindeloopen (9.2.2021)