

MUSEUMS AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: SOME RISKS

Only a profound mutual understanding and respect will make the collaboration between the museum and the practices of intangible heritage really work – for the benefit of heritage preservation/safeguarding, as well as with a view to environmental and social sustainability. Something that appears to be an opportunity to museums, might turn out to be harmful to the practitioners concerned. Equally, the communities, groups and individuals involved might place high expectations on museum staff who take care to strike a balance between

preserving objects and communicating with a diverse audience. In such cases, threats to either the viability of an element of intangible cultural heritage, or neglect of objects under museum custody might emerge.

The UNESCO 2003 Convention ***Ethical Principles for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage***, can serve as a guiding tool for mitigating the former. This tool highlights some risks to bear in mind when working with intangible cultural heritage in the museum context:

'Communities, groups and, where applicable, individuals should play a significant role in determining what constitutes threats to their intangible cultural heritage including the decontextualization, commodification and misrepresentation of it and in deciding how to prevent and mitigate such threats.'

Ethical Principle 10

LOSS OF MEANING AND DECONTEXTUALISATION

Intangible cultural heritage can be safeguarded only if meaningful to the communities, groups and individuals concerned.

AUTHENTICITY

While sites and objects are approached through classification of uniqueness and timelessness, intangible heritage is constantly changing in its manifold manifestations. There is no better or worse intangible heritage, every practice is precious to its bearers.

COMMERCIALISATION

Although specific elements of intangible heritage, for example crafts, are depending on commercial activities, unethical economic exploitation can seriously harm their viability.

INTANGIBLE DIMENSION OF TANGIBLE HERITAGE

The intangible dimension of tangible heritage may e.g. refer to values, memories, or testimonies associated with heritage sites or museum objects. It is indeed important to value historic sites, cherish memories or remember Memorial days but these are not to be identified as intangible cultural heritage.



This tool was realized in the context of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Museums Project (IMP).

Main funding and support



Flanders
State of the Art

Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union



The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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Werkplaats immaterieel erfgoed | Workshop Intangible Heritage Flanders (BE), Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland | Dutch Centre for Intangible Heritage (NL), Maison des Cultures du Monde - Centre français du patrimoine culturel immatériel (FR), Società Italiana per la museografia e i beni demotnoantropologici (IT) and Verband der Museen der Schweiz | Swiss Museums Association (CH) & Swiss Confederation - Federal Office of Culture