

# What Role Can Museums Play in Taking a Participatory Approach towards ICH Safeguarding?

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# Introducing “intangible cultural heritage”

Article 2(1) of the Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003):

“[intangible cultural heritage] means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage...”

- What are these “associated” objects/artefacts?
- How can non-material heritage be represented in a museum?

# Cultural significance of ICH

The 'cultural' value (significance) of such items is their connection with the intangible knowledge, skills and know-how with which they are used. Through this they acquire an ICH patrimonial value.

**Example:** a carpenter's tools may not in themselves be of great heritage 'value' but, when they are associated with the building of a wooden Japanese temple in traditional style using the knowledge to do this acquired over decades through a very demanding apprenticeship period.

# Universal versus local conceptions of heritage

2003 Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention:

International cultural heritage law-making has shifted from a paradigm that gives value predominantly to the material heritage—monuments, sites, artefacts and other objects—to one that celebrates a living heritage that is primarily located in the skills, knowledge and know-how of contemporary human beings.

What does this mean for the role of museums in contemporary life?



# ICH – universal or local heritage?

The 2003 Convention takes a very nuanced approach:

Safeguarding ICH is a ‘common concern’ of humanity (Preamble) since each element is a constituent part of cultural diversity, itself a ‘universal value’ (UNESCO, 2001).

At the same time, much greater space is given to the *local and specific character of this heritage*. This is in keeping with its strong human rights dimension and responds to the right of bearer and local communities to enjoy and have access to their cultural heritage (as enshrined in Article 15 of the ICESCR) as well as to the procedural human rights principle of participation.



# Idea of representativeness

The idea of the Representative List of ICH aims to avoid creating a hierarchy of ICH — it celebrates the *representative* nature of the ICH listed and its cultural significance.

This notion of representativeness also underpins the importance given to the *community-specific character* of the heritage: it is being celebrated internationally (through inscription) because it represents one aspect of the diversity of ICH worldwide being practised and performed daily by different communities.

# ICH defined with reference to the community

Article 2(1) states that:

“...This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, *is constantly recreated by communities and groups* in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and *provides them with a sense of identity and continuity*, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity...

# Community participation under the 2003 Convention

Article 15 calls on state authorities to:

“ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage” in their ICH safeguarding activities and also “involve them actively in its management”.

So, how does this play into the work of museums?

# Community involvement in what?

“Safeguarding” in Article 2(3) refers to “measures aimed at *ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage*” and the following specific actions:

- Identification (including inventorying)
- Documentation and research
- Preservation and protection
- Promotion and enhancement
- Transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education
- Revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage

# Challenges of community participation

Finding ways in which communities (groups and individuals) can become more actively involved in all stages of safeguarding presents a major challenge to governments and their national heritage bodies.

It requires them to develop new ways of collaborating more closely with communities and their representatives (who may, in some cases be cultural associations and, in others, non-governmental organizations).

# Museums are pivotal actors and stakeholders

Experience from the Periodic Reporting by States Parties to the 2003 Convention over the 2012-14 reporting cycles has shown that certain actors serve as important vectors for implementing ICH safeguarding policies and measures:

- Local authorities
- Community centres
- Non-governmental organizations active in the field of ICH
- Cultural associations
- The private sector.
- **Museums: pivotal actors in helping to integrate ICH into society and policies for sustainable communities.**

# How can ICH be presented in a museum?

How can a practice, performance, enactment be presented and interpreted in the museum context?

Interestingly, this endeavour has occurred in tandem with a growing interest in community museums, museums of minority and immigrant cultures and, in the UK, the US and West Africa, museums addressing the slave trade.

*Finding new ways to present and interpret ICH in museums is part of a wider movement towards a more community-based and less elitist conception of the museum.*

# What can museum's offer?

Museums need to be able to expand their range of activities and re-consider their role within the local society and how they engage with local communities and groups.

- Local museums can be central to safeguarding specific ICH elements, often in cooperation with cultural communities
- They can provide communities with educational, social, spatial capacities necessary to participate effectively in ICH safeguarding
- Museums, sometimes in coordination with local cultural NGOs, may offer training courses on ICH management and inventorying
- Establishing documentation centres in local museums and cultural centres, some custom built for specific elements, makes access possible for many local communities

# Challenges in harnessing the role of museums

A general tendency to place a heavy emphasis on documentation and recording, rather than on seeking to enhance the function of ICH within society and the community

Museums have to re-consider how (and whether) to hold the tangible elements associated with an ICH element in a museum (masks, musical instruments, costumes, looms, cooking utensils etc.)

Avoid placing restrictions on their use by the ICH holders (e.g. the case of the utensils necessary for the Jongmyo element in South Korea and the performance and transmission of the ritual and its Jerye music)

## **UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their diversity and their role in society (2015)**

*Collection* is defined as “an assemblage of natural and cultural properties, tangible and intangible, past and present”

*Heritage* is defined as “a set of tangible and intangible values, and expressions that people select and identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their identities, beliefs, knowledge and traditions, and living environments, deserving of protection and enhancement by contemporary generations and transmission to future generations”.

# UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their diversity and their role in society (2015)

## PRIMARY ACTIVITIES OF MUSEUMS

- Preservation
- Research
- Communication (“Museum actions should also be strengthened by the actions of the public and communities in their favour”)
- Education

# UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their diversity and their role in society (2015)

## Education

“2. Museums as spaces for *cultural transmission*, intercultural dialogue, learning, discussion and training, also *play an important role in education (formal, informal, and lifelong learning), social cohesion and sustainable development.*”

# UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their diversity and their role in society (2015)

## DIVERSITY OF MUSEUMS

“23. The *diversity of museums and the heritage of which they are custodians* constitutes their greatest value. Member States are requested to protect and promote this diversity, while encouraging museums to draw on high-quality criteria defined and promoted by national and international museum communities.”

# Some examples ...

The following three museums are chosen since they each exemplify a particular way in which museums can contribute to ICH safeguarding and community participation in this:

- Mohács museum alongside a 'Busó Yard' and a craft house (Hungary)
- Open Air Museum (Hungary)
- Gilan Rural Heritage Museum (Iran)

# Mohács museum for the Busó element (Hungary)

A new independent museum devoted to the Busó heritage element was initiated in Mohács in the autumn of 2012. Here, the Busó festivities can be viewed and experienced throughout the year through the exhibitions, interactive programmes and other events organized by the museum (e.g. Busó mask carving). The museum also liaises with Mohács Sokác (a 100-year-old cultural circle) that teaches the language of the Croatian minority who are custodians of the Busó custom, their dances and other traditions in the frame of a 'play house'. The Busó community orchestra of the regularly holds dance houses and performances.



# Hungarian Open Air Museum: A Museum as the Implementing Body

On 1 April 2009 the Directorate for the Intangible Cultural Heritage was established as an organisational unit of the Hungarian Open Air Museum. Its main responsibilities are:

1. Administering the National Inventories and having contact with ICH bearer communities interested in having their element inscribed on the National Inventories.
2. Preparing nomination of selected heritage items for inscription in the UNESCO Lists.
3. Promoting ICH, raising public awareness of it, facilitating the flow of information and providing opportunities for show-casing heritage elements.
4. Initiating professional cooperation with partner institutions, maintaining and operating the network of experts and co-ordinators, briefing and updating experts, establishing and maintaining the database of experts.
5. Preparing related materials and documentation, developing project plans, guides on ICH, curricula for training experts.
6. Devising systems to motivate and acknowledge bearer communities.
7. Liaising with the Ministry for Culture, providing proposals, recommendations, projects and documentation and preparing UNESCO questionnaires and reports etc.

In early 2010 the Directorate for ICH at the Hungarian Open Air Museum created the network of county ICH co-ordinators relying mostly on staff working at county level museums. Their job is to assist the implementation of the Convention at the county level and to mediate information. They receive continued training (4-5 times annually) on the national and international issues concerning the safeguarding of ICH, including inscription on the National Inventories.

# Gilan Rural Heritage Museum











