
DECLARATION ON THE DYNAMIC ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN A MULTIPLICITY OF ACTORS FROM THE FIELDS OF MUSEUMS AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



PREAMBLE

Taking into consideration, among others:

- [the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage \(2003\), its related Operational Directives and Ethical Principles](#) and their focus on the living heritage, being constantly transmitted and recreated by communities, groups and individuals in response to their contexts, providing people with a sense of identity and continuity, forming an important mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development;
- [the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums](#) and the professional standards and principles it sets, as well as its emphasis on the use of museum collections to promote human well-being, social development, tolerance, and respect by advocating multisocial, multicultural and multilingual expression;
- [the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity and their Role in Society \(2015\)](#) and the importance of taking into account the diversity of museums and their collections, as well as of their approaches and practices, and the growing emphasis on the social role of museums that it underlines;
- [the FARO Framework Convention on the value of Cultural Heritage for Society \(2005\) and the Council of Europe's Resolution on safeguarding and enhancing intangible cultural heritage in Europe \(2019\)](#) and the promotion of a broader understanding of heritage and its relationship to communities and society at the heart of a new vision for sustainable development, as well as the recommendation to enhance intangible cultural heritage policies and measures to their full potential, and to provide guidance to the multiple actors that are emerging across Europe committed to safeguarding intangible heritage;
- [the UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) and their potential to address the two main challenges faced by the society: the impacts of climate change and increasing inequality across and within countries;
- [and the achievements of the *Intangible Cultural Heritage and Museums Project* \(2017-2020\).](#)

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With this Declaration we, the undersigned, express **insights** and **hopes** and share **inspiration** in relation to the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage of communities, groups and individuals, through and together with museums.

In the spirit of the collaboration that underpins this Declaration, it is composed as **an invitation**, as **a path to be explored**.

Its contents are subject to an **ongoing work in progress**, namely the **dialogue** between all parties involved in safeguarding today's, and therefore tomorrow's, (intangible) cultural heritage. A work in progress that is taking place at the very **local**, and at the same time at **national** and **European levels**, as well as **beyond these borders**. This dialogue involves many **passionate amateurs, volunteers and professionals from both the fields of intangible cultural heritage and museums**. They strive for a sustainable future in which the heritage they cherish can thrive and flourish.

2

Intangible cultural heritage and museum practices alike, **connect people, as well as past, present and future**. Both are in continuous change, as a result of the interaction with society at large. They have continuously transformed and continue to fulfil, among others, significant **social, economic, creative and emotional roles** in people's lives.

3

We are well aware of the fact that there are **numerous museums that have long since included the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage into their practices**. We are also conscious of the fact that there are many still **looking for ways in which to engage with the participatory and future-oriented approaches** that are central to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. This might mean **enriching existing museum skills** in order to adjust them to the needs of the communities, groups and individuals that embody intangible cultural heritage.

4

Tangible and intangible cultural heritage are intrinsically linked. The care for material culture might be the most obvious point of convergence that comes to mind when imagining intangible heritage and museums. But this only represents one of the many ways in which **shared concerns and aspirations of the actions in museums and in intangible cultural heritage can be jointly addressed**. A multitude of other opportunities, ranging from strengthening the relation with society by broaching new topics, to decolonising perspectives on heritage, innovating governance systems, exchanging expertise and fostering curatorial cooperation, and the collective usage of physical resources are possible.

5

All involved have differing but equal and complementary (levels of) capacity in relation to the care for intangible heritage. It is therefore all the more **worthwhile to pool these existing skillsets and know-how**, for the common purpose of safeguarding this heritage, and by doing so, **develop newly applicable expertise**.

6

Experimenting with and developing the interactions and engagements between museums and intangible cultural heritage presents **great potential to address pressing issues in today's world** in innovative ways, and **to contribute to the identification and implementation of sustainable solutions**. At the same time, it promotes (cultural) diversity and contributes to building bridges across and between sectors.

7

We believe that **museums are privileged spaces for contributing to the safeguarding of intangible heritage**. They are among the first-choice institutions for **supporting practitioners of intangible cultural heritage** with the preservation, care, sensitisation and promotion of their heritage. They have a **vital interest in contextualizing and bringing together all aspects and types of cultural heritage**. Their competences in relation to heritage care and mediation, and their experience in collaborating with different types of actors, ensure that they can **contribute to highlighting the value(s) and relevance of intangible heritage**.

8

We acknowledge the fact that there are **many other parties involved in the care for intangible heritage**, and that real transformation of common approaches and discourses can only occur if and when all involved are prepared to **improve, mutate, dynamize or adapt that which is long seen as a given**.

9

Having experienced **surprising and extraordinary examples of collaboration between museums and practitioners of intangible heritage**, that have joined forces with an eye on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, we share with you what has struck us most:

- Practitioners of intangible cultural heritage (communities, groups and individuals) and museums alike show great courage by trying to cross thresholds, and by expressing their willingness to cooperate, as this might be overwhelming at times.

- Investing time, care and adequate funding, if not evident, is rewarding. Different levels and types of engagement and collaborations will serve different purposes, that are all of importance when pursuing the viability of the intangible heritage concerned.
- An open attitude and the readiness to question yourself, and a spirit of mutual respect and reciprocity, is a key starting point. The sooner all parties get together, the more successful the collaboration will prove. Expressing readiness to engage in transformative processes is of great value.
- Advisory and mediation work is not unidirectional: practitioners of intangible cultural heritage and museums alike can benefit from the expertise of the other.
- As living and evolutive places, museums offer a space to explore and better understand yesterday's and today's reality. They seek new and effective ways to respond to changing needs. Their responsibility towards society, democratisation and inclusiveness, ensures that what practitioners of intangible cultural heritage are passionate about, is of interest. At the same time, the latter can find a space to reflect on their practice in (the process of collaborating with) museums, and have a platform to engage with those who are curious to find out more.

10

We strongly feel the need to stress that **intangible cultural heritage is connecting people**, from the very local level to the European and beyond. It **connects the past, present and future**, and it is strongly affiliated with the sense of **belonging, well-being** and **cultural identities** of people. Intangible heritage can be a valuable resource in relation to developing **social cohesion, economy, and sustainability**. Museums can act as fora, offering to the public a better understanding of these mechanisms.

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Therefore, **we urge all policy levels to support actions that bring together museums and the communities, groups and individuals engaged in practices of intangible cultural heritage**. We stress the importance of **providing opportunities, space and financial incentives** for them to collaborate, so that they can **strengthen each other**, in a mutual quest to face present and future societal issues and challenges. Room for education, training, transnational cooperation and exchange are crucial to strengthen the capacities of all involved.

On our path towards a **growing number of connections and collaborations – diverse in form, shape, complexity and intensity – between practitioners of intangible heritage (communities, groups and individuals) and museums**, we invite all individuals and organizations involved in safeguarding this heritage, to walk along. We won't map out the road, but we have pointed out some interesting directions that deserve to be further explored. And we are ready to continue on this journey with you.

On behalf of those engaged in
the *Intangible Cultural Heritage and Museums Project*:

THE IMP PROJECT PARTNER ORGANISATIONS AND ITS STEERING GROUP MEMBERS

- Workshop Intangible Heritage Flanders | Werkplaats immaterieel erfgoed (Belgium) | **Evdokia Tsakiridis, Jorijn Neyrinck and Eveline Seghers**
- Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage | Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland (the Netherlands) | **Sophie Elpers**
- MCM-CFPCI | Maison des Cultures du Monde-Centre Français du Patrimoine Culturel Immatériel (France) | **Séverine Cachat**
- SIMBDEA | Società Italiana per la Museografia e I beni Demoetnoantropologici (Italy) | **Valentina Lapicciarella Zingari**
- VMS | Swiss Museums Association | Verband der Museen der Schweiz (Switzerland) - **Cornelia Meyer**

& THE MEMBERS OF THE IMP THINK TANK

- NEMO - Network of European Museum Organisations - **David Vuillaume and Julia Pagel**
- ICOM - International Council of Museums - **Afşin Altaylı**
- ICH NGO Forum - **Reme Sakr and Meg Nömgård**

- **Hendrik Henrichs** (University of Utrecht)
- **Marc Jacobs** (University of Antwerp, and UNESCO Chair on Critical Heritage Studies and the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel)
- **Jorijn Neyrinck** (Workshop Intangible Heritage Flanders)
- **Rosario Perricone** (Museo internazionale delle marionette Antonio Pasqualino)
- **Florence Pizzorni** (General Curator of Heritage at the French Ministry of Culture, assigned as scientific director to the foundation for the memory of slavery)
- **Isabelle Raboud-Schüle** (Musée gruérien Bulle and Swiss Museums Association)
- **Albert van der Zeijden** (Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage)

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- the authors of and contributors to the IMP-publication: *Museums and intangible cultural heritage: towards a third space in the heritage sector. A companion to discover transformative heritage practices for the 21st century.*

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