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Defining and Mapping Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Prepared by Alison McCleery, Alistair McCleery, Linda Gunn and David Hill,
Napier University, Centre for Cultural and Creative Industries Research

www.ifacca.org



372 Elizabeth Street Surry Hills Sydney NSW 2010 PO Box788 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012 Australia

Email info@ifacca.org **Tel** +61 2 9215 9018 **Fax** +61 2 9215 9111 **www.ifacca.org** International Arts Federation Services Pty Ltd ABN 19 016 797 330
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Defining and mapping intangible cultural heritage

This report summarises the outcome of IFACCA's 36th D'Art question on approaches to mapping and defining intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The D'Art was initiated by Museums Galleries Scotland (formerly Scottish Museums Council) and the Scottish Arts Council as a preliminary study of the issues, both theoretical and practical, in making an inventory of ICH in Scotland in conformity with the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage.¹

On 18 February 2008 a D'Art question on the topic was distributed to selected members of the IFACCA network (CEOs and researchers from IFACCA member organisations). As well as looking for general research, information resources and examples of good practice from countries other than Scotland, the researchers sought to obtain opinions on a specific quandary: whether an inventory of the ICH of a given region should take into account ICH practices, such as story-telling, that are solely in languages indigenous to that region, or should the inventory also be concerned with ICH practices in languages spoken by migrant communities within that region, with languages that originate elsewhere, and with traditions that may already be safeguarded by mechanisms elsewhere? A copy of the full questionnaire is reproduced in appendix B.

There were eleven responses to the query (respondents are listed in appendix C). Responses are summarised in the next section.

Based on the responses and on their own research, the researchers produced a report, *Scoping and Mapping Intangible Cultural Heritage in Scotland Final Report*, which was published in August 2008. The report identifies practical steps to be taken in order to safeguard and promote the richness and diversity of Scotland's cultural practices and living traditions. The focus is on all ICH in Scotland, since existing traditions are constantly being renewed and added to by the heritage of new groups settling there. The report's contents include an analysis of definitions and international interpretations of ICH, case studies from Scotland, and recommendations on the way forward, including data collection, training needs and costs. The Executive Summary from the report is reproduced in appendix A. The full report can be downloaded from the Museums Galleries Scotland's website at www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/publications/publication/71/scoping-and-mapping-intangible-cultural-heritage-in-scotland-final-report.

As a result of the research, the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council awarded funds to set up an online inventory of Scotland's ICH (see media release *Scotland's culture to be captured online*, 4 December 2008, at www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/news-2/news-article/161/scotlands-culture-to-be-captured-online).

For more information and updates on this topic, visit IFACCA's topic page at www.ifacca.org/topic/heritage-defining-intangible-cultural-heritage. This page provides information and links to publications, news items and events relating to ICH, and is updated on an ongoing basis. The topic page will be updated as new initiatives and activities become available. I would like to thank Christopher Madden for his editorial assistance with this report and, as always, would welcome your comments and suggestions for additional resources on this topic (email us at info@ifacca.org).

Sarah Gardner, Executive Director, IFACCA

¹ The Convention, which is available in 26 languages, is online at <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00006>.

RESPONSES

The responses to this D'Art query revealed a number of interesting issues in defining intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and implementing the UNESCO Convention. One respondent, for example, provided a particularly succinct definition of ICH as 'any creation or expression of art which cannot be kept in a museum' (Cyprus).

Responses also show that countries are at very different stages of implementing the Convention. Some countries are in the process of establishing their ICH inventory (eg. Estonia). A number of countries have yet to ratify the Convention and have therefore made little progress toward implementation. However, it is apparent from responses that not ratifying the Convention does not necessarily mean inaction in safeguarding ICH. Even though Austria has not ratified the Convention, it has a 'National Agency' for ICH that actively monitors international developments, including those in Scotland. Canada has not ratified the UNESCO Convention because 'as a federal state some of the issues that the Convention addresses fall within the purview of the provinces', and to ratify it 'would require the approval of, and possible negotiation with, the ten provinces and three territories in Canada'. However, Canada supports the principles of the Convention, and several organisations and individuals within the country are 'keeping the prospect of signing this Convention very much alive in Canada'.

There was a wide range of responses to the request for views on whether a definition of ICH should take into account examples of ICH practised by migrant communities in languages originating outside of the country of reception, or for traditions that may already be safeguarded by mechanisms elsewhere. The general consensus was that ICH in non-indigenous languages should *not* be excluded from any inventory, as this would 'contradict the spirit of the Convention and ... miss an important opportunity for intercultural dialogue' (Switzerland). Estonia interprets UNESCO's definition of cultural heritage 'present' in a state's 'territory' in a slightly more prescriptive fashion as covering only 'the ICH of migrant communities living in a given region at least for two generations'.

The arguments are reproduced in detail in the selection of responses below. For more discussion on this issue, see Section 2.2.1 of *Scoping and Mapping Intangible Cultural Heritage in Scotland Final Report*, August 2008, referred to earlier.

Selection of responses

Selected comments from the responses are reproduced below to demonstrate the range of interest in ICH inventories and the stages that various countries have reached to date.

Canada

Canada has not ratified this Convention, not because it does not support the safeguarding and preservation of ICH, but because as a federal state some of the issues that the Convention addresses fall within the purview of the provinces. To ratify the Convention, therefore, would require the approval of, and possible negotiation with, the 10 provinces and three territories in Canada. There are nonetheless active organisations such as Folklore Canada International (<http://www.folklore-canada.org/>) and individuals...who are keeping the prospect of signing this Convention very much alive in Canada.

I am not aware of any research reports have been undertaken by the Government of Canada or its agencies that address the Convention.

The Director-General of UNESCO has encouraged Member States to view the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) and the Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) as integral parts of a holistic approach to cultural preservation. As both the Intangible Heritage Convention and the Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of

Cultural Expressions both recognise language as part of intangible heritage and essential to cultural diversity, 'non-indigenous' languages should not be excluded from the inventory. It should also be recognized that ICH can, and often does, result from a blending of cultures over time and it can therefore difficult to define a 'pure' indigenous culture.

The Convention views Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) as 'living heritage'.

ICH is defined as 'the practices, representations, expressions, as well as the knowledge and skills, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage', and...

- is transmitted from generation to generation;
- is constantly recreated by communities and groups, in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history;
- provides communities and groups with a sense of identity and continuity;
- promotes respect for cultural diversity and human creativity;
- is compatible with international human rights instruments;
- complies with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, and of sustainable development.

These elements, and this definition, are the result of extensive consultation with Member States and ICH experts around the world.

Croatia

As far as legislation is concerned, at the time of drawing up the new Law on the Protection and Preservation on Cultural property, as early as 1999 Croatia explicitly included, along with mobile and immobile cultural property, forms and phenomena of human spiritual creativity in the past.

One of the Articles of the Law defines in detail what is considered intangible heritage: 'Intangible cultural property may be a variety of forms and phenomena of spiritual creativity that are transferred from one generation to another or through other methods, and which in particular relates to:

- languages, dialects, idioms and toponyms, as well as all types of oral literature
- folklore creativity in the areas of music, dance, traditions, games, ceremonies, customs as well as other traditional folk values
- traditional skills and crafts.'

According to the Law on the Protection and Preservation on Cultural Property, cultural properties are registered in the Register of the Cultural property of the Republic of Croatia. The Register is the public book under the authority of the Ministry of Culture.

As far as intangible cultural property is concerned, Croatia has registered 9 phenomena or forms of the ICH on the List of cultural property under the preventive protection, and 54 phenomena or forms of the ICH on the List of registered cultural property. There are more than 200 phenomena of the intangible heritage in the procedure of inscribing on the List of registered cultural property that includes languages etc. 7 of 54 registered phenomena of the ICH, are the languages, dialects and toponyms. Languages of Croatian minorities outside of the territory of Croatia are not listed on the National Register of the Cultural property.

For more, see *Croatia - Information related to ICH* at:

www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?cp=HR&topic=nat_measure

Cyprus

We are confronting the same issues as you...We are still at the preparatory stages.

In my opinion ICH practices [should] cover also languages spoken by migrant communities, since with the passage of the time they become part of the ICH of the host place and develop differently from ICH practices still existing in their country of origin. I believe also that once a population is accepted and [live] legally in one place, then its culture might constitute part the host's heritage.

In my opinion, any creation or expression of art which cannot be kept in a museum as an object is intangible culture heritage. I consider that dances, music, oral languages, ceremonies, habitudes, myths, traditions, *savoir-faire* and techniques of handcrafts are to be examined as part of the ICH.

England

The UK looked at the convention and concluded that a) it would be very difficult to monitor and enforce, and b) it duplicated efforts that the UK was already undertaking. (English Heritage)

Estonia

Since Estonia approved the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereinafter referred to as the Convention) in 2006, several meetings between researchers, representatives of communities and other counterparties have taken place in order to exchange experience and find the best ways for safeguarding the ICH. The initiator of these discussions has been the Ministry of Culture. In 2007 a pilot project was launched: cultural activists on the Hiiumaa island tried to find effective ways of implementing the Convention and making inventories. The preliminary outcome of this process provides a part of the basis for the Estonian inventory of ICH, which at the moment is in the process of establishing.

An international seminar on the Principles and Experiences of Drawing Up ICH Inventories in Europe was held in Tallinn, 14 to 15 May 2007, with experts from different regions of Europe participating (www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?meeting_id=00076#meet_00076). You will find the Estonian comments on the participation of communities or their representatives, practitioners, experts, centres of expertise and research institutes in the implementation of the Convention online at www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/2EXTCOM/Estonia_comments-Decision_2COM_8.pdf

Should an inventory of a given region take into account the ICH practices of migrant communities? According to the spirit and the letter of the Convention, the answer is yes. Article 2, paragraph 1, of the Convention defines the ICH as follows: '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'. Article 11 of the Convention says that each State Party shall 'take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory'. This means that ICH inventories should also include the ICH of migrant communities provided that their ICH corresponds to the definition given in Article 2 in the Convention. A practical question that has often been asked at Estonian national level concerns the number of generations that have transmitted their ICH. The Convention does not give direct indications here, but in order for the transmission to take place at least two generations need to be involved. Therefore, the migrant communities should also live in a given country at least for two generations, practice and recreate their ICH that often will develop some special characteristics of its own when compared to the ICH of their culture of origin. In short, migrant communities are expected to draw up their ICH inventories and State Parties to the Convention should take necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the ICH, including the ICH of migrant communities, present in their territory.

Switzerland

Thank you for your message concerning the development of an inventory on intangible heritage. As Switzerland is about to ratify the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage, we will soon have to deal with similar questions.

The Convention does not give any clear-cut answer to the question about the inclusion of ICH practices that are in languages spoken by migrant communities but which originate elsewhere, and of traditions that may already be safeguarded by mechanisms elsewhere: on the one hand, a State Party is to 'take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory' - which includes of course ICH practices of migrant communities; on the other hand, the fact that migrant communities are closely linked to and interacting with their culture of origin raises practical difficulties for establishing measures of safeguarding.

To only take into account indigenous practices would in our view contradict the spirit of the Convention and overlook the global dimension of cultural creativity. In addition it would mean to miss an important opportunity for intercultural dialogue. Therefore, the option of promoting migrant cultures in cooperation with the country of origin should be examined. This could be done in the context of bilateral development cooperation.

See also Kasfir, Sidney Littlefield, and Yai, Olabiyi Babalola Joseph, 2000, 'Current debate: authenticity and diaspora', in *Museum international*, No. 221-222; pp. 190-197
(<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001358/135852s.pdf#135875>)

Other information that might be helpful in developing a practical definition of ICH:

- Material prepared for the parliamentary debate in Switzerland:
in German: www.admin.ch/ch/d/ff/2007/7251.pdf
in French: www.admin.ch/ch/f/ff/2007/6837.pdf
- Material prepared by the German National Commission for UNESCO:
www.unesco.de/fileadmin/medien/Dokumente/unesco-heute/unesco-heute-1-07.pdf
www.unesco.de/ike-memorandum.html?&L=0
- Upcoming conference of the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences on 'ICH: a new concept and its signification for the scientific discourse' (Zurich, 30 May 2008); details (in German and French) at: www.sagw.ch/fr/sagw/veranstaltungen/agenda-sagw-2008/ov-08-kulturerbe.html and www.sagw.ch/de/sagw/veranstaltungen/follow-up-2008/fu_ov08.html

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)

I know that the Intangible Heritage section at UNESCO deliberately left the scope of intangible heritage 'vague' arguing that it is for each country or 'culture' to define its scope. The original discussions asked that they should include the specific themes of oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices/rituals/festivals, knowledge, craftsmanship but said this was a 'non-exclusive list'. Several countries have indeed suggested to me that they are unclear how to define the scope of their inventories on intangible heritage, in particular Mexico (see CONACULTA web site www.conaculta.gob.mx with inventories of Mexican infrastructure). Latin American countries have a particular interest in intangible heritage and its measurement.

We have just completed a revision of the 1986 UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (the initial study was undertaken by BOP, Andy Pratt, and Calvin Taylor), and have placed intangible heritage/traditional knowledge as a transverse theme running across all the usual dimensions of culture (Arts, Books, Audiovisual...). The framework will shortly be available on our website www.uis.unesco.org. It is currently under formal consultation with Ministries of Culture, National Statistics Offices, and international professional groups like IFACCA. I can also send a copy if useful. The emphasis is to suggest that every creative or cultural industry is supported by informal cultural traditions which need to be measured as they are the foundation on which the sector/activity is based.

UIS definitely thinks that story telling is important and we have argued that this should be recognised as a particular occupation in the International Labour Organisation's International Standard Classification of Occupations. I know something of the issues surrounding migrant communities in Scotland...My personal view here would be that the inventory should contain anything of cultural significance WITHIN/TO Scotland from whatever source. Obviously much of this would be very policy sensitive and it's difficult again to draw a boundary. I have had a similar discussion with Victoria Dickenson, the head of the McCord Museum here in Montreal, who sees her museum as having a role in any migrant community in the city as long as the result has had an impact on Montreal/Quebec/Canada – ie. not Lebanese textiles made in Montreal, but if for example Lebanese textiles in Montreal that portrayed life in Canada, or developed a distinct Lebano/Quebecois style then she would be interested. This suggests to me that Norse and Irish influences in Scotland are certainly important, as well as more recent migrant communities which may have influenced contemporary Scottish culture – for example in music or drama??

The definition of intangible heritage and its measurement at least at the international level is very important to UIS.

APPENDIX A EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reproduced from *Scoping and Mapping Intangible Cultural Heritage in Scotland Final Report*, July 2008,

<http://www.museumsgalleryscotland.org.uk/publications/publication/71/scoping-and-mapping-intangible-cultural-heritage-in-scotland-final-report>

The intangible cultural heritage (ICH) of Scotland requires to be accorded a status which is equal to that of the material culture of Scotland. If this is not currently the case, this in part reflects difficulties inherent in identifying the existence of, far less capturing the essence of, something which is not a material artefact. The creation of an accurate inventory of ICH in Scotland will constitute an important step towards safeguarding its future.

The nature of ICH in Scotland, while unique thematically and specific geographically, nevertheless exhibits a range broadly consistent with the generic UNESCO typology, and may be categorised under the headings of oral traditions and expressions; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; and traditional craftsmanship. Within this categorisation, an inclusive approach to what constitutes ICH in Scotland (as distinct from Scottish ICH) is advocated which embraces the customs and practices of well-established immigrant communities. It is suggested that the touchstone for inclusion is the point where self-conscious reference to the site of origin has been replaced by self-confident expression consistent with the ICH becoming embedded in its wider destination context.

The obverse of this situation also occurs and must be resolved in the context of recording and safeguarding ICH in Scotland. This relates to the point at which ICH in and for the community is transformed into something outward facing and intended primarily for the 'tourist gaze'. A case in point is festivals which may demonstrate aspects of both. With decisions made on criteria for eligibility for inclusion in the inventory, the next choice relates to finding the most efficient and effective means of identifying ICH on the ground. A distinction requires to be made between routes to and sources of ICH and the preferred method is to employ a snowballing technique with Local Authority staff coordinating and directing the efforts of teams of knowledgeable practitioners.

Finally, a fit-for-purpose inventory must combine flexibility from the user's perspective with ease of data entry from the compiler's perspective. It must also be database based so that a single change of detail effects change across the whole record. After due consideration, the preferred option is identified as a restricted-access Wiki with content being uploaded by authorised individuals only. This offers flexibility in terms of data categorisation, using a traffic light system for indicating fragility, combined with user friendliness both for those creating the inventory and for those wishing to access information. Both in respect of the snowballing method for data gathering and for the technical aspects of data entry, basic group training sessions would require to be offered to participating professional coordinators – possibly Local Authority-based. This training would be specifically designed to be capable of being cascaded to community-based volunteer staff, drawn from ICH practitioners on the ground, who could be responsible for gathering the data and sorting it in readiness for data entry. The maintenance of any inventory will be as critical to the matter of adhering to best practice in the recording of ICH as its initial creation. It is recommended that ad hoc updating is paralleled with a more methodical stocktaking of ICH in Scotland every few years.

The establishment of an inventory of ICH in line with UNESCO best practice is not, however, a sufficient condition to ensure adequate safeguarding, although it does ensure that those examples of ICH most in need of support can be identified. However, a specific effort must also be undertaken actively to safeguard ICH for the future, and it is recommended that such endeavours are best carried out either as community-level projects or embedded as part and parcel of the delivery of the curriculum in schools. If young people are progressively involved with the customs and practices of their own cultures, through both the curriculum and community-based projects, this is undoubtedly the most effective way of promoting a safeguarded ICH in Scotland for the future.

APPENDIX B THE D'ART QUESTION

Question posed through IFACCA (International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies) via Christopher Madden to its members on the interpretation of the ICH Definition and the way in which it is currently being applied and operationalised across the globe:

Dear colleagues

IFACCA's members from Scotland are seeking your help in identifying resources for the development of an inventory on intangible cultural heritage. This email is being sent (in Bcc) to CEOs and selected researchers of IFACCA member organisations. We would be very grateful if you could answer the questions below, or forward this email to someone who would be able to help.

Context

The Scottish Arts Council and the Museums Galleries Scotland have commissioned Professor Alistair McCleery to undertake a preliminary study of the issues, both theoretical and practical, in making an inventory of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Scotland in conformity with the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Convention, which is available in 26 languages, is online at <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00006>.

The researcher's remit is to:

- scope ICH activities in Scotland using a reporting framework that relates to the domain definitions set out in Article 2.2 of the 2003 UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage;
- map the support mechanisms that are in place to safeguard ICH (Article 2.3) including both formal and informal mechanisms; and
- review, evaluate and make recommendations on best practice in enhancing the participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals in the management of ICH and on the roles of key stakeholders, including public, private and third sector bodies.

The full research brief can be found online at http://www.scottishmuseums.org.uk/pdfs/ICH_brief.pdf
The Convention, which entered into force on 20 April 2006, has been ratified by a wide range of countries. Members of the IFACCA network may therefore already have undertaken work on definitions and inventories relating to the Convention. We seek your help in uncovering existing work by answering the questions below.

Questions

1. Have you undertaken or commissioned any research or reports that address UNESCO's Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage? (a Yes or No will suffice)
2. If yes, please provide copies, links, or full references for the reports.
3. We are interested in your opinion on the following specific issue: should an inventory of a given region take into account those ICH practices, such as story-telling, that are solely in languages indigenous to that region, or should the inventory also be concerned with ICH practices in languages spoken by migrant communities within that region, languages that originate elsewhere, and traditions that may already be safeguarded by mechanisms elsewhere?
4. Could you provide any other information that you know of that might be helpful to our project team in developing a practical definition of ICH?

APPENDIX C LIST OF RESPONDENTS

- Catherine Bunting, Arts Council England
- Sue Cole, English Heritage
- Simon Ellis, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Canada
- Kristi Grünberg, Estonian Folk Culture Development and Training Centre, Estonia
- Dr Ioannis Ionas, CRC Signor Researcher, Cyprus
- Letila Mitchell, Fiji Arts Council
- Aleksandra Uzelac, Institute for International Relations, Croatia
- David Vitali, Office fédéral de la culture, Switzerland
- David A. Walden, Canadian Commission for UNESCO, Canada
- Dina Yanni, National Agency for the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Austrian Commission for UNESCO, Austria

We thank all respondents for their contribution.