Examples of community-based ICH transmission and practice needs being met by research and documentation projects

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Overview

The Intangible Heritage Convention requires States Parties to 'identify and define' the ICH present in their territories 'with the participation of communities, groups and relevant NGOs' (Article 11b). This is part of the process of inventorying the ICH in their territories 'to ensure identification with a view to safeguarding' (Article 12.1). The Convention strongly recommends community participation in all safeguarding activities (Article 15). The Intergovernmental Committee commented at the 2011 Bali meeting on the general lack of information about community participation in ICH inventorying in the periodic reports submitted to the Committee by States Parties. There are relatively few documented projects, even outside the ambit of inventorying under the Convention, in which community members set the agenda for formal research or documentation of their ICH, or indeed use these materials.

The best test of a research and documentation process that meets community ICH safeguarding needs would be the use of these materials for further ICH practice, transmission and safeguarding by community members. Community involvement in documentation would of course help to encourage later community use because of increased investment in and tailoring of the resource.

The most successful community-research partnerships have a community-driven motivation for involvement (heritage perceived to be at risk, or in need of revitalization); community representation at an early stage of project design; strong community involvement in implementation and dedicated community liaisons (see Brazilian examples below). New digital AV technologies have made documentation of cultural practice cheaper and more accessible to non-academics. Such projects may require external skills and funding. Where communities concerned partner with research agencies, they require flexibility and openness from their research partners to ensure that the research agenda addresses their needs. Formal documentation projects are becoming more open to the use of community-generated data and more open to providing public access to it.

Externally-driven or funded documentation projects are not always used by the communities concerned (or by others) for safeguarding purposes. This is more likely where these projects do not meet local needs or there is a history of mistrust between the state, researchers and communities. It is not always easy for any stakeholder to determine the boundaries of communities of practice, or their needs in terms of ICH safeguarding. Community needs

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are especially difficult to define or negotiate where there are strong divisions and hierarchies within the group, echoed or reinforced by ICH practices.

To meet community needs, projects may need to involve different kinds of documentation than required by an inventorying project or academic research. Where normal transmission modes are considered to be working well, no external support is needed. And where support is needed, documentation and research may not be the best way to aid practice and transmission. Communities may wish to document their own data without reference to formal processes. ICH safeguarding is also not always the main concern of communities associated with the element, especially in developing countries – specific ICH transmission and practice needs have to be addressed as part of a broader development project.

Some examples are given below to illustrate community use of documentation projects for safeguarding.

Indios on line (Brazil)

This online community documentation project in Brazil was initiated by an NGO called Thydêwá in 2000, and aimed at sharing experiences, strengthening cultural awareness within seven indigenous communities and improving community members' sense of citizenship and quality of life.

What is interesting about the website (which is in Spanish) is that it is mainly designed for community members to use it to learn and comment about their ICH practices, past and present, as well as to develop AV and computer skills. This is what makes it different from projects collecting or documenting material for research purposes – which may or may not be used by community members as well (such as Digital Himalaya http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/overview.php).
http://www.indiosonline.net/

Documentation by the Maasai (Kenya)

WIPO's Creative Heritage Project helps indigenous communities to document and preserve their own cultural traditions while simultaneously managing their intellectual property interests.

WIPO provided the Maasai community with digital equipment to record its own traditions and creative expressions. The program allows the community to create its own intellectual property in the form of photographs, sound recordings and community databases. WIPO's Director of Traditional Knowledge Division, Wend Wendland says "The project has empowered the Maasai to seize control over the recording of their own histories, their own stories. The program turns indigenous custodians of their knowledge systems into intellectual property owners. It makes them stakeholders so they can benefit from the system." The training program is offered by WIPO in partnership with the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress and the

Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University in the United States of America. The National Museums of Kenya also participated in the program.

This project is part of WIPO's Creative Heritage Project, which is developing an integrated set of practical resources and guidelines for cultural institutions such as museums and indigenous communities on managing intellectual property options when digitizing intangible cultural heritage.

It's not clear whether community members are using the AV materials for ICH transmission and practice since the main aim of the project is IP related. However, if community members don't see their cultural resources as threatened in any way and normal transmission modes are functioning well, there would be no need to use the AV materials to promote transmission. In addition, many rural households may not have electricity or the equipment to access the AV materials. One of the reasons for community participation seems to be income generation, which is understandable: 'Their music may be an important source of income and the Maasai themselves, John says, must be the ones who benefit from profits made from their culture.' (transcript from the video on the website).
http://www.wipo.int/portal/en/wipo_untv_maasai.html

!Khwa ttu – transmission, tourism (South Africa)

In some communities, the chain of cultural transmission between young and old has been broken; apprenticeship-style training is reintroduced in a semi-formal way. The Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA) voiced the concern of San communities throughout the region to learn more about their history, to practice their traditions and to promote their culture and languages. They wanted to use tourism as an engine for community development–culturally and economically. Consequently, in 1998, WIMSA was assisted by the South African San Institute (SASI – a San support organisation working on documenting indigenous languages) in setting up a tourism and training project, focusing on general education, income generation, culture, and heritage. In 1999, the !Khwa ttu site was purchased and a project set up with a mandate to:

- 'Restore and display San heritage, culture, folklore, visual arts, cosmology and languages
- Educate the general public about the world of the San
- Provide training to the San in literacy, entrepreneurship, tourism, health issues, community development, craft production/marketing and gender awareness.'

This project is not designed specifically for community use in ICH revitalization. It plans to do some documentation (although this is not available online) and seems to have trained a few community members as tourist guides in animal tracking, plant use and other traditional San skills. This model could be extended in other circumstances to include broader community practice and transmission of the ICH being documented, but this would probably need to be focused on skills that have current utility for community members such as plant harvesting in

the wild and medicinal use.

http://www.khwattu.org/

Two Scottish oral history documentation projects (UK)

These projects are funded because they are about language, but may also be a vehicle of storytelling revitalization etc. in the community. A culture and heritage project run by the Columba Centre on the island *Seanchas Ìle* in the Inner Hebrides at Ionad Chaluim Chille Ìle, which started in 2005, produced a book and website (not currently online) comprised of transcripts from Gaelic speaking islanders who talk about their experiences of growing up on the island, the tales they were brought up with, and proverbs. It was a three-year project to collect, record and preserve the heritage connected with Islay's land, language and culture. 'The aim is to encourage the continuation of Gaelic among all ages of Islay's population and raise the profile of Gaelic both on Islay and throughout Scotland. Gaelic culture and inheritance of the island is perceived as of importance not only to the people of the island, but also in the framework of Scottish history as a whole.' [2] The project was part of a broader promotion of the Gaelic language in Scotland, so it is not clear whether it was sufficiently rooted in the needs of the community to be used by them after external funding ceased.

http://www.ile.ac.uk/

http://tairis-cr.blogspot.com/2009/01/archive-seanchas-ile-donald-meek.html

http://blog.islayinfo.com/article.php/seanchas-ile-website

'Tobar an Dualchais (Kist o Riches in Scots) is a similar project to digitise, catalogue and disseminate Gaelic and Scots sound recordings online. The objective is to preserve a vast heritage of stories, poetry, music and factual information as a unique record of Scotland's cultural and linguistic heritage. Online access to the recordings will also ensure that they are widely available for educational and personal use.' [3]

http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/dualchas/

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2   Màiri Robertson Àite Dachaidh: Re-connecting People with Place – Island Landscapes and Intangible Heritage, International Journal of Heritage Studies Vol. 15, Nos. 2–3, March–May 2009, pp. 153–162; DOI: 10.1080/13527250902890639

3   Màiri Robertson Àite Dachaidh: Re-connecting People with Place – Island Landscapes and Intangible Heritage.