CHARTING A WAY FORWARD: EXISTING RESEARCH AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR ICH RESEARCH RELATED TO THE INTANGIBLE HERITAGE CONVENTION

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This paper explores the range and depth of existing research that relates to the UNESCO Intangible Heritage Convention before discussing themes that could be explored as priorities for future research.

By ratifying the Convention, States Parties undertake to try and encourage research about ICH that may contribute to its safeguarding and increased awareness about it (Articles 13(c), 14(a)(iii), Operational Directive (OD) 107(k)), including the development of research methodologies. States Parties undertake to facilitate access to the results of this research both by communities concerned (OD 85), and by researchers in other States (OD 87), as well as encouraging cooperation, collaboration and networking between communities, researchers and other stakeholders (OD 79 ff.). Research on UNESCO, its Conventions and issues like intangible heritage can of course be encouraged by universities or independent agencies as well as by States Parties. It can be done in various ways, for different purposes and with different results and impacts. Some of the research related to the Convention also covers issues such as heritage sites, museums or broader questions of memory and archiving.
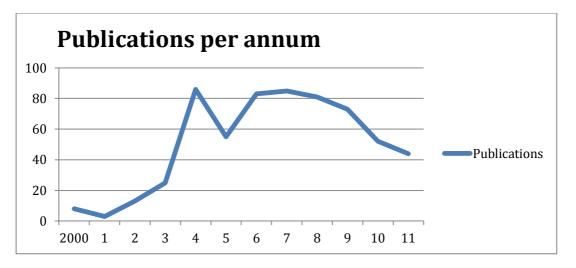
The paper provides an outline of research based on an overview of existing literature. The references have been collected using online research databases (Google scholar and journal databases) as well as through our academic networks. Some possible research areas deserving further attention have been identified from the gaps in the database as well as from ideas suggested by researchers.

TOWARDS A DATABASE OF EXISTING RESEARCH

For the purposes of this paper, a database was compiled from Google Scholar, Thomson Reuters Web of Knowledge and JSTOR using the search terms 'intangible' and 'heritage', 'intangible heritage convention' and '2003 convention' in English. Google scholar was by far the best source of references because books, grey literature - and humanities publications in general - are poorly indexed in the other databases. Searches were conducted in a few other languages (Spanish, Italian and French) using the appropriate terms for 'intangible cultural heritage' in those languages. Further references were received from various researchers in our networks.[i] (ICOMOS keeps a database about ICH-related publications but this we found was particularly focused on intangible values associated with sites.)

There are currently about 660 entries on the database.

The number of publications in the database is charted below by year (43 items have no date indicated yet). This decline since 2009 will be partly a result of biases in the database, including the fact that about 90 items published in China probably come from a literature review translated into English that focuses on the period 2005-2009.

Publications per annum

There are still significant gaps in the database and we hope to be able to extend it in the future. The database mainly consists of references that specifically mention ICH or the Convention in the abstract or title, so some sources that discuss the impact of the Convention in a less direct manner may have been overlooked at this stage. The work to date has also focused on academic publications; institutional reports, and analyses from cultural agencies and NGOs doing ICH-related work are underrepresented. Research about ICH management or safeguarding methods, and practical guides for it, may be more readily available from these underrepresented sources, in the grey or unpublished literature, or on project websites.

The database is biased towards English-language sources. Major English language journals represented in the database include the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* and the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *Museum International* and the *International Journal of Cultural Property* (on legal issues).

ANALYZING THE DATABASE

This database is work-in-progress. It does not represent all research on ICH and the Convention in all languages but it does illustrate some interesting trends.

TOPICS ALREADY UNDER INVESTIGATION BY RESEARCHERS

There is a clear emphasis in the database on certain topics rather than others. To some extent this may be due to biases in the search techniques, but those who work in the field will know that there are also certain kinds of research have been prioritised to date for various reasons.

The following topics were reasonably well represented in the database:

- The convention, its history and philosophy / politics
- ICH and the law: national and local legislation, IP, cultural rights, UNESCO/WIPO.
- Economic development / Tourism and ICH
- Museums and ICH (although much of this is about intangible values associated with objects rather than ICH practices)
- Management of ICH associated with sites (although much of this is about intangible values associated with sites rather than ICH practices)

Much of the research that has been done to date on the Convention itself has focused (not surprisingly) on the birth of the Convention and its early relationship to other instruments such as the World Heritage Convention or WIPO work on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore. There has been quite a bit of focus on the text and spirit of the Convention although less so on the Operational Directives. There is little current analysis on

how the Convention has been working since 2009 and on the evolution of its priorities, although some interesting case studies are starting to appear.

At the international level, ICOMOS, ICCROM and ICOM have shown an interest in ICH and this has stimulated work on ICH in museums or intangible values in sites. This kind of interest, and associated conferences such as the ICOM conference on museums and ICH in 2004 in Seoul or the 16th General Assembly of ICOMOS on intangible values of monuments and sites held in 2008 in Québec, seem to have stimulated publications on sites or museums and ICH. Museums are always looking for new ways to engage their publics, and the discourse on ICH presents such an opportunity. Much of this work is mainly about representing the intangible values associated with objects in museums, but some of the museum and ICH research refers explicitly to safeguarding ICH practices associated with collections and would therefore fall within the ambit of the Convention. Several publications address the intangible values of sites. This reflects the growing importance of criterion (vi) in the World Heritage List (Brumann forthcoming) and the interest of local stakeholders in staging traditions for identity, touristic or commercial ends.

Other topics that were covered in the database to some extent but will probably see growth in the future include:

- Researching ICH: methods and case studies
- Digital technologies and ICH management/promotion
- Case studies of inscriptions on the Lists of the Convention including former Masterpieces
- Inventorying ICH
- Communities and ICH safeguarding under the Convention

Performing arts, festivals, craft and music were reasonably well represented, but not all domains were less well covered: this may partly be due to research bias and partly a product of sampling bias. There were a few papers on traditional games as heritage. There was little on food as yet but in the Critical Heritage Studies Association conference in Sweden on 5-8 June 2012 there will be a whole session on food as ICH, so more publications can be expected in this area.

REGIONAL DIFFERENTIATION

Research on ICH shows significant regional differentiation, according to the database and from our own experience in the field. National interests and regional experiences play a role in the funding and development of ICH research. For example, research from Asia and Africa often focuses on the development potential of ICH. Also, academics and heritage professionals in different regions have different kinds of relationships with each other, with communities, and with the state. This can affect what research is done on ICH and the Convention, who does it and how they do it. For example, research from Australia and Latin America often emphasizes community participation. Different theoretical traditions popular in different regions naturally inspire different reactions to the Convention and the notion of ICH.

Major countries represented in the English-language corpus are Australia, the UK and US, and South Africa. The western English-language literature seems to be reasonably well referenced in the Spanish, French and Portuguese corpus. It is not clear whether the same works are being used and referenced in Eastern Europe or Asia; from our preliminary investigations it seems that the western debate on ICH remains relatively separate from the Eastern European and Asian debates. Meanwhile, looking at citations of some of the key items in the database through Google Scholar one can gain a rough indication of who is citing whom. For example, Laurajane Smith's edited volume Intangible Heritage (2009) has had 23 citations. Of these, only three were not English-language works – and these were Italian and German. (Not all the works citing Smith's volume were specifically about ICH, so this trend may be characteristic of all heritage work.)

Citation patterns can be analysed in depth once the online databases allow for more analysis thereof in the humanities.

The database gives only a very rough indication of what is happening in Eastern European, Latin American and Asian ICH publishing at present. Regarding Asia, the large Japanese and Korean literature, and other regional literature, still needs to be added. However, the Chinese titles already translated into English confirm that China is producing a considerable amount of research about uses of ICH in tourism and economic development; ICH law and local case studies. Much of this is managerial and legal in focus, rather than analytical or community-focused. Rowlands has pointed out that is the case in Chinese heritage literature more generally (see the Rowlands session on China at the ACHS Conference in Gothenburg). Western and Asian heritage research and practice have different perspectives on issues like authenticity and community participation in heritage studies in general, and ICH in particular (Bodolec, forthcoming). There has been too little dialogue to date between these diverse perspectives, although some efforts are being made in this regard (see the Herzfeld and Peycam session at the ACHS Conference in Gothenburg). Cross-citation will be difficult without translation of the texts or the efforts of more multi-lingual scholars.

Research is being done on ICH in Africa, generated both from inside the continent and from outside it. It speaks to the western literature on the subject, although it does not distinguish as firmly between the management of tangible and intangible heritage. Although research funding in Africa itself is quite weak, ICH is being promoted by governments and presents an opportunity for researchers to propose models for implementation of good practices such as the integration of sustainable development in heritage management (Keitumetse 2011) or to discuss the challenges faced by government or heritage practitioners in implementing participatory approaches (e.g. Merolla 2011, Chirikure and Pwiti 2008, Katsamudanga 2003).

DISCIPLINARY DIFFERENTIATION AND THE CRITICAL – MANAGERIAL DIVIDE

The perspective from which major ICH research emanates can also influence the kinds of work that is done. The published literature on ICH – as in heritage studies more generally (see for example the session on Critical Excess at the Gothenburg conference) - can best be characterised as coming from two main perspectives: those of the cultural critic and the practitioner / manager. The divide between these two approaches is not primarily a disciplinary division, but it is expressed in disciplinary clusters. The disciplines best represented in the ICH database are law, anthropology, cultural and heritage studies, history, museum studies, heritage management, and tourism. The anthropology, heritage studies, cultural and history perspective tends to be primarily critical and the law, tourism, museum studies and heritage management perspective tends to be primarily managerial.

The history, anthropology and critical heritage studies literature in the English-language ICH literature (and the western literature more generally) provides critical commentaries on ICH and the Convention following the 'invention of tradition' paradigm (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983), or focuses on the difficulties inherent in the construction of notions of 'community', 'identity' and 'authenticity'. This approach is not specifically concerned with improving the actual implementation of the Convention, except in a broader sense by challenging some of its assumptions and questioning the outcomes of its work. By contrast, research work emanating from disciplines such as law, tourism or heritage management is far more focused on practical issues, trying to explore how best to implement the ideas in the Convention or State-led ICH initiatives.

In the first case the job of the researcher is that of analysing the making and the implementation of ICH policies as a research object, in the second the job of the researcher is to use their

expertise to take part in such process. Very rarely do the two research perspectives seem to refer to each other; they use different terminologies, hold separate conferences and publish in different journals. Their assumptions and perspectives affect their findings. In spite of the fact that the critical perspective might be well known to some of those interested in applied research, and vice versa, it is difficult to encourage a dialogue between the two camps and to have a common understanding of the goals of the work at hand.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

How would one identify research priorities for the future? There are various ways of doing it: one could look for example at areas emphasised by the Convention and its Operational Directives; one could look at the issues raised and problems faced currently by governments and heritage professionals in implementing the Convention; and at the issues raised and problems faced by communities in safeguarding their ICH.

In safeguarding the ICH, the Convention and the ODs emphasize the importance of community participation, consent and stewardship over their ICH. Various stakeholders such as States, NGOs and researchers are encouraged to assist the communities concerned in safeguarding their ICH rather than telling them what to do. Research institutes, centres of expertise, museums, archives, libraries, documentation centres and similar entities are encouraged to develop participatory approaches to ICH research in line with the Convention (OD 109).

In practice, not much has yet changed in the relationship between states, researchers and communities. There are different views about the extent to which community participation is required, what it looks like and how it should be done. The participatory approach is seen by some researchers and activists as part of a broader democratic trend towards considering ethical issues and community participation, but this approach is criticized by others for using a romanticized idea of "community". The implementation of a participatory approach is emerging as the main challenge for transforming heritage practice in national heritage institutions and other agencies, which are often still drawing on scientific and technical approaches to tangible heritage management. It is hard to change top-down approaches to governance and heritage management.

Taking existing research and the above issues into account, in the future some priority research areas could be:

- Impact of the Convention after 2009, including effects of listing on the USL, RL and Register after 2009; the impact of the Convention on national and local institutions, and cultural agencies; and the impact of the emergence of new national heritage categories for ICH
- Community empowerment / stewardship / participation in ICH safeguarding and negotiation of new roles for researchers, NGOs and state agencies in community-driven projects
- ICH and sustainable development (including tourism)[ii]
- Ethics and ICH safeguarding (research ethics, etc.)
- ICH safeguarding, the Convention and human rights[iii]
- Case studies of ICH inventorying and its effects, including negative effects
- Case studies of ICH safeguarding methods, including negative effects
- Case studies of ICH research methods, including unsatisfactory methods
- ICH, migration and immigration, including the role of ICH in (non-)integration of immigrants, and the mobility of ICH practices themselves.[iv]

These research issues are interrelated, of course. It is important for example to analyze and develop participatory approaches in ICH management in relation to work on community-based development, community-based research, ethics and rights issues.

CONCLUSION

The Convention and its ODs recognize the need for States Parties to encourage research that supports implementation of the Convention. Researchers can play an important role in the implementation of the Convention (in the preparation of nomination files, in inventory making, in developing safeguarding plans with communities and cultural agencies). They can also offer important critical perspectives on the Convention and the management and safeguarding of the ICH.

Researchers, practitioners, communities, the Committee or States Parties will never speak with one voice on what the priority areas for future research should be, or on the results of this research, but their different interventions are all helping to build a new field of research around ICH. Some of this work will analyze and/or contribute to the implementation of the Convention or better ICH management and safeguarding, other work will offer constructive criticism (or simply criticism) of the ideas and methods of doing so.

This overview of existing research on ICH suggests that certain topics have received more attention than others in the past, and many gaps remain for the future. One area that may be prioritized by a wide range of different stakeholders is research on community involvement in the management and safeguarding of their ICH. Research can identify some good practices (and challenges) in this regard, refining our understanding of contextual differences, problems and possibilities for the future. It will also be important to explore in greater depth the impact of safeguarding measures and inscription on the Lists of the Convention on ICH elements and the communities concerned.

We believe that to facilitate a conversation about these issues, it is important to understand what research is being produced in different contexts, for what reasons, and how it is being disseminated and engaged with. To give a full picture the database needs to be extended to fully represent all languages and regions. One of the characteristics of the ICH field, and probably the heritage field in general, is the existence of several regional research traditions (that seem from cursory analysis to be largely self-referential) and a major division (at least within the English-language literature) between a critical perspective and a practitioner perspective. Thus although the ICH field is multidisciplinary and internationally well represented in different regions it is not actively interdisciplinary nor do we benefit yet from sufficient cross-regional dialogue about the various experiences of ICH safeguarding and the implementation of the Convention in these different regions. An expanded analysis of the literature can encourage a deeper dialogue between different regional research contexts, methods and priorities.