

PRESS RELEASE

The ICOMOS-UK Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee (ICHC) is launching a Report on the findings from its pilot project: ‘Exploring Intangible Cultural Heritage in Museum Contexts’, supported by Arts Council England (ACE).

on 18 October 2018 on Thursday, 11.00am - 1.00 p.m.

with an introduction by

Hedley Swain, Area Director, Art South East Arts Council England

Venue: The Gallery, 75 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EL

The Report demonstrates the benefits of involving ICH practicing communities and artists as intermediaries between the diverse groups of bearers and cultural organisations, in order to forge an equitable tripartite curation that might make collections and museum spaces alive and relevant to contemporary society. It also shows why, as a consequence, museums could benefit from reviewing and recasting their physical and practical boundaries. Bearer communities are guardians of our rich and diverse cultural traditions, collective memories, history, stories and rites and ritual practices.

Four museums, Hastings Museum & Art Gallery, Weald and Downland Living Museum, Museum of Cambridge, and Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery, rose to the challenge and volunteered to be part of the pilot project. A methodology comprising two layers of processes were used to gauge museums’ level of awareness and knowledge of ICH, test the use of ICH as an interpretative tool, explore the role of artists as intermediaries to facilitate interactions between the practicing communities and museums, and establish what types of synergies and dynamics the three-way relationship could yield in curating collections in the museums and those held by the bearer communities.

The pilot project’s key outcomes exceeded expectations and were far reaching. In particular, an approach to interpretation was developed that involved the merging of different types of curatorial skills emanating from museums and from the art forms and living heritage practiced in community settings. This empowered bearers to lead on the interpretation of collections whether held in the museum or in the community. Additionally, during the pilot project the museum confines were expanded to include the community cultural spaces in the

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surrounding landscape which generated new ways of engaging with an untapped source of audience – ICH communities. Above all the pilot project has suggested a robust methodology for the integration of ICH into future museum practices.

The framework for the project was based on definitions of ICH as set out in the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003*. The interest in translating the 2003 Convention into practice is gaining momentum among the international museum community beyond the 178 countries which have ratified the Convention. The UK has not ratified the Convention but that has not prevented museums here from exploring the integration of ICH into collection management and stewardship in order to keep abreast of good practice and to participate in discussions concerning ICH. Also, more practical examples are needed to match the work being undertaken in developing theoretical contexts. Exploring Intangible Cultural Heritage in Museums Contexts is an exemplar in this regard and with potential of transferability to other arts and heritage sectors.

The ICHC is the only organisation in the UK that gives voice to all categories of ICH practices as laid out in the 2003 Convention.

Clara Arokiasamy, Chair of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee, ICOMOS-UK, said:

“I am extremely pleased with the innovative results produced by this pilot project that offers the museum sector a methodology to integrate ICH into museums. Both ICHC and ACE wish to share this methodology with museums and other arts, heritage and community sectors at the forthcoming launch. This result would not have been possible without the tremendous commitment and good will shown by the four participating museums, the bearer communities and the artists. I would also like to congratulate ACE for its proactive funding of this developmental initiative”.

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