

Summer 2023 Bulletin



Welcome to the latest edition of the ICOMOS-UK Bulletin, which is brought to you by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee of ICOMOS-UK

Introduction

Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for “The Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage”

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

Welcome to our summer 2023 Bulletin. This special issue celebrates both the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the UNESCO 2003 Convention and the work of the ICOMOS-UK- Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee’s (IHC) since it was founded a decade ago in 2012. The UK is yet to ratify this convention.

Our contributors to this Bulletin come from a variety of professional backgrounds and their articles reflect their personal views and opinions. The eight pieces in this issue span regional, national and international perspectives and most of them highlight the connections between tangible (built heritage, objects and landscape) and intangible elements (living traditions). **Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)** is a huge and diverse and complex topic. It covers numerous heritage Domains and genres. It would have been simply impossible to cover all aspects of ICH. Consequently, we have provided an eclectic mix of examples which raise some important points and questions with links and references for further reading.

After 10 years of leading on ICH , what’s next for ICOMOS-UK’s Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee’s (IHC) - In my article “Intangible Cultural Heritage: “Past achievements and future direction for ICOMOS-UK’s Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee”, as the founder and chair of the committee, I provide a brief summary of the IHC’s achievements, highlight their impact and outline the committee’s next steps.

Scotland leading on ICH- Although all the four devolved nations are engaged in promoting their communities' living traditions, Scotland, however, has progressed most and has been in the forefront of inventorying its ICH and the Scottish Government is supportive of ratification. Professor Mairéad Nic Craith, gives us a flavour of Scotland's rich ICH, maps the progress made so far and highlights "successes and failures" encountered and the "challenges and opportunities" that lie ahead.

Involving Tradition-Bearers and wider communities - Community Tradition-Bearers' involvement in defining and safeguarding ICH is a key cornerstone of the 2003 Convention. We have honoured this principle with articles from Ataa Alsalloum and Deniz Beck who provide regional perspectives to the identification, documentation and revitalisation of ICH by communities. Ataa's research examines the challenges of applying the 2003 Convention to racially diverse/multicultural settings and provides some solutions to overcome them. Deniz's case study on the other hand focuses on reconnecting Portsmouth's local communities to heritage craft skills to undertake repair and maintenance of huge and complex historic buildings.

From landscapes to objects - embracing ICH in WHSs and Museums - Jo Buchanan and Hedley Swain write about two critical heritage sectors: World Heritage and Museums. Jo examines the interconnections between ICH and the Cornwall and West Devon WHS - a mining landscape- and urges ICH to be integrated into OUVs and management plans to tell a complete story. Hedley focuses on how Covid has impacted on museums leading to the adoption of a more "fluid community focussed frame of reference" which presents improved opportunities to incorporate ICH into collection and categorisation processes.

Persepctives from the Arab Region and China - sustaining vernacular ICH and the co-existence of ICH and material values - Hossam Mahdi and Johnathan Djabarouti give us two different perspectives. Hossam briefly sets out the impact of war, natural disaster, modern developments and mass tourism on vernacular architecture, which is a form of ICH, and the

people who inhabit them across the Arab region. He suggests that today's architects "need to go deeper beyond the aesthetics" to learn the old ways and methods which support sustainability. Johnathan stresses that the 'Modern Conservation Movement' must embrace intangible values and critical heritage theory to remain relevant. Both elements place communities at the heart of conservation and promote inclusive approaches and decolonisation. He cites the Ancient City of Ping Yao in China as an example where Traditional-Bearer communities and their cultural expressions and Material heritage co-exist in harmony and inform each other.

My thanks to all contributors for their time and effort in providing such thought-provoking articles on the 2003 Convention and the management of intangible culture.

Past achievements and future direction for ICOMOS-UK's Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee

by Clara Arokiasamy

I write this piece in my role as the founder and chair of ICOMOS-UK's Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee (**ICHC**). I have tried to set out a very brief definition of UNESCO's 2003 Convention and an outline of the committee's decade long work in promoting ICH and its impact on the UK's cultural sector and the Government.

Definition of ICH

UNESCO's 2003 Convention for The Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is one of the six UNESCO standard setting instruments for culture. Adopted 20 years ago, it came into force in 2006. Since then, 181 out of the 193 Member States to UNESCO have ratified the Convention.

The safeguarding of ICH, ensuring intangible expressions of all communities, groups or individuals are respected, raising awareness about ICH, and the promotion of international cooperation and assistance are key objectives of the 2003 Convention. Article 2.1. defines intangible cultural heritage with six criteria which I have indicated by highlighted numbers at image 1.

As there are no strict boundaries between the Domains, they often overlap. And unlike the 1972 World Heritage Convention (WHC) where Outstanding Universal Value is largely experts' views, a key tenet of the 2003 Convention is a bottom-up approach which gives Bearers and communities, who embody their ICH, the responsibility to make decisions about values and safeguarding. And all ICH must be compatible with the national and international human rights Instruments.

“The ‘intangible cultural heritage’ means **(1)** 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. This intangible cultural heritage, **(2)** transmitted from generation to generation, **(3)** is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and **(4)** provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, **(5)** thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is **(6)** compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development”.

Image 1: Article 2.1. - UNESCO 2003 Convention

Article 2.2. of the Convention groups intangible expressions into five Domains or specialisms and are listed in image 2.

- “(a) oral traditions and expressions;
- (b) performing arts,
- (c) social practices, rituals and festive events,
- (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and universe
- (e) Traditional craftsmanship”

Image 2: Article 2.2.- UNESCO 2003 Convention

The key concepts that underpin the safeguarding of ICH are community participation, intergenerational transmission and that ICH expressions are living or dynamic heritage.

The UK's intangible culture

The UK remains one of a handful of nations still to ratify this international Convention. The lack of ratification, however, has not prevented ICOMOS-UK's ICH Committee from raising awareness about the Instrument among key stakeholders through some critical interventions. The stakeholders we have engaged with to date include bearer communities, civil society organisations, funding agencies, formal heritage sectors, UNESCO UK, academic institutions central (DCMS), devolved and local governments and the list is growing.

The UK's population is superdiverse resulting in complex layers of heritage and much of it is in the form of ICH and comprises culturally diverse customs and traditions, collective memories, shared histories, stories and folklores, crafts making and rites and ritual practices and so on. Intangible culture provides us with the means of living, way of life and shapes our identities. Unlike built heritage which occupy public spaces, these ICH expressions are held by the community and largely practiced and celebrated within the confines of Bearers' homes and local community spaces. And for the migrant and Diaspora communities of the UK, often, ICH is the only form of heritage they have access to.

So, how has ICOMOS-UK's ICH Committee impacted on UK's cultural heritage landscape?

The ICHC is one of ICOMOS-UK's eight scientific committees and was launched in 2012 following a roundtable meeting to gauge the state of intangible heritage in the UK. Attendees at the meeting included established civil society organisations engaged in safeguarding ICH such as the then Heritage Crafts Council and the Society for Story Telling and other heritage agencies and funders. Discussions at the meeting revealed a low level of awareness of the 2003 Convention and definition of ICH and the wide-ranging ICH genres that were protected by the Convention.

The key purpose of the committee was to raise awareness about intangible culture as part of UK's heritage and its value in the conservation of tangible objects and built heritage among ICOMOS-UK members and non-members. Since then, the committee has delivered

a significant amount work in the form of informal research, to inform its activities, roundtable meetings, seminal conferences, a pioneering museum project. It has also shared experiences and expertise with anyone interested in understanding ICH here in the UK and internationally.

Although the 2003 Convention has provided the framework for the committee's work, this has not detracted the ICHC from challenging some of the Instrument's limitations for application to the UK environment. For example, the ICHC supports the modern revival of old traditions that had been lost for decades or centuries, such as the Whittlesea Straw Bear ancient folk custom of Fenland, Cambridgeshire which was revived in the 1980s and has a following of 20 thousand or more people. Similar traditions will not be regarded as 'living heritage' as defined in the Convention. The committee is also open to supporting the identification of new ICH genres/Domains that have not been defined by the Convention. This is inevitable with such a mixed population as ours with a tendency for continuous fusion of cultures.



Image 3: Straw Bear Festival at Whittlesey Museum

In 2014, the ICHC delivered its first seminal national conference, the first of its kind to focus exclusively on ICH in the UK. Supported by the Arts Council of England (ACE), Museum of London (MoL) and the Royal Anthropological Society (RAI), the event focused on theoretical contexts with practical examples aimed at raising awareness of the diverse range of ICH as practiced by UK's unique multi-racial communities with diverse religious traditions, in urban and rural settings. It provided an opportunity for all stakeholders who attended the event to share and explore definitions, key issues and challenges relating to the safeguarding and transmission of living cultural expressions to future generations. Feedback from the conference showed support for more similar events with opportunities for in depth exploration of definitions, Domains, safeguarding methods and the strengthening of the museums' knowledge of their local bearer communities and the use of ICH as an interpretive tool.

The conference findings also revealed a patchy and a disjointed ICH sector. Although many of the voluntary and grant aided annual and seasonal cultural arts, heritage and sports programming in the UK were made up of ICH projects, they were, however, not categorised as such. Oral histories and reminiscence projects, and craft making, spirit of place values featured more prominently among small grants projects funded by the national lottery and local authorities. Progress in promoting ICH varied between the four countries. Scotland was striding ahead with the development of a wiki inventorying system whilst Wales's National Committee for UNESCO had to stall documenting due to lack of funding. The Scottish and Welsh governments were supportive of ratification in contrast to the national government's uncertain stance. There was a lack of recognition of ICH as part UK's cultural heritage at national policy level. As Smith and Waterton (2009) had observed: DCMS and the then English Heritage were focussed on the management of material heritage. Research by Stefano (2009) revealed that museum staff in six museums in the north east of England were at unease with ICH terminology and did not regard ICH as being of equal value to the heritage value of objects they were looking after. Instead, it was used to facilitate outreach and audience development functions and interpretation of the museums' material assets.

The conference successfully catalysed cultural and civil society organisations who took part in the day's proceedings to review their policies and practices with a view to incorporating ICH and consider collaborations between the various stakeholders who until then had worked in silos. For example, the then Heritage Lottery Fund held a roundtable in 2014, literature review and stakeholder interviews in 2016 and finally delivered a dedicated ICH funding stream in

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April 2023. The event also placed ICH discourses quite firmly on conservation, museums and climate change agendas and shaped the committee's work.

'Exploring Intangible Cultural Heritage in Museum Contexts', a pioneering pilot project, undertaken in collaboration with ACE between 2016-2017 was our response to the museum sector's request for a methodology for interpreting their collections and audience engagement using ICH. Five regional museums in the SE region and the local bearer communities took part in a tripartite curation of an ICH project designed by the chair of ICHC. Bearers rather than museum curators took the lead following the bottom-up approach principle in the Convention. Independent artists facilitated interactions between the museums and Bearers and the ICHC. The methodology and outcomes of the project published in 2018 is used as a reference document by several higher education institutions running museum and heritage studies courses.

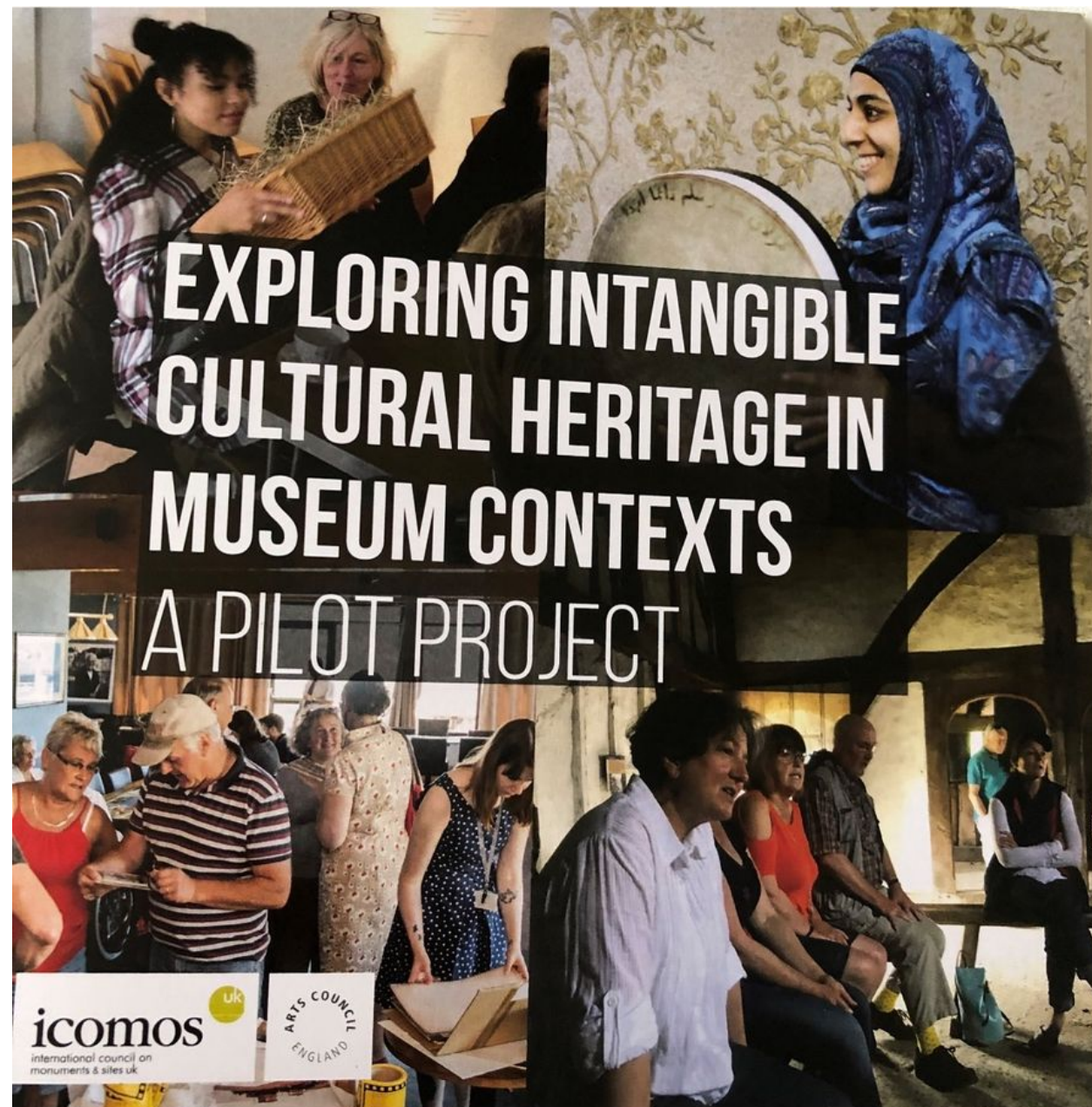


Image 4: ICOMOS-UK, Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee

The committee has also been very active in facilitating discourses on intergenerational transmission and the ratification of the 2003 Convention by the UK. Our 2019 Conference: ‘Passing on Our Cultural Traditions to Future Generations’ provided the opportunity for 70-80 participants to debate how and why UK’s living heritage should be preserved and the development of a culturally aware and inclusive framework for documentation/inventorying of ICH in the UK. Dr Tim Curtis, Secretary to the 2003 Convention of The Living Heritage Entity at UNESCO, gave a keynote address on ICH and the benefits of ratification in terms of the protection of ICH. Conclusions reached on the day showed an overwhelming support for the UK to become a signatory to the Convention in order to increase awareness among its population as well as protect ICH that were in danger of being lost for ever. ICH practices in Heritage Crafts ‘Red List of Endangered Crafts’ were cited as clear examples of endangered crafts making skills and knowledge that would benefit from ratification.

In 2021, the committee took the next logical step and invited four neighbouring European nations – The Netherlands, Sweden, Malta and Norway – who had similar issues to the UK with ratification, to share their trajectories in reaching ratification and the different models that they had chosen to adopt which met their Bearers and governments’ needs. Colleagues from central government and the devolved nations and DCMS took part in the discussion. It was the first event that DCMS had attended. Sweden’s model promoting the ‘Lifting of ICH’ which concentrated on raising awareness among its public rather than ‘Listing’ (inscription) of ICH on UNESCO’s ‘Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity’ found favour with many at the meeting, including the DCMS.

Three recommendations arising from the roundtable proceedings were sent to the then Secretary of State for Culture in January 2022. They were: that the government established a national inventory regardless of ratification; that it provided reasons for not ratifying the Convention; and that it ratified the 2003 Convention. In his response the Minister for Sport, Tourism, Heritage and Civil Society at the time thanked the ICHC for its leadership in drawing attention to the nation’s intangible culture and assured us that his officers were “exploring how the UK might ratify the Convention and the model of implementation that could be followed”. Regrettably, in a recent communication, we were advised by the DCMS that the review had to be stalled until DCMS concluded changes that the Department was going through.

So, where we do go from here?

Doubtless the ICH committee has provided leadership in bringing together the various ICH sectors, made significant inroads in raising the visibility of UK's ICH and engaged with the DCMS on the issue of ratification. These are major achievements for a small volunteer committee with little or no resource. As observed by the Secretary to the 2003 Convention of The Living Heritage Entity at UNESCO at the 2019 conference, the ICHC's work has contributed to laying the foundation for ratification.

Whilst ratification will certainly help with a national policy guidance on ICH, improve visibility and protect many of our ICH from being lost or endangered, we must make sure that it does not curtail the freedom that many communities have enjoyed thus far in celebrating their intangible cultures by layers of bureaucracy and red tapes. We must also make sure that it is not used to promote a narrow and biased interpretation of nationalism.

Going forward, the ICHC is currently considering establishing a national forum made up of the roundtable attendees to facilitate the implementation of the three recommendations sent to the Government. The committee is also keen to build on the work it has started in drawing attention to the inextricable links between ICH and tangible heritage comprising buildings, cultural landscape, world heritage sites, and its role in the mitigation of climate change impacts.

Over the last 20 years, the UK's cultural heritage landscape has changed significantly. Culture wars and the politicisation of heritage, decolonisation of tangible and intangible elements and management of ICH among new migrants, resistance to recognising that ICH values underpin tangible structures, management of climate change impacts, post pandemic recovery and the rapid rise in fusions of indigenous and migrant ICH dominate discourses and policies and practices among cultural organisations, civil society and academic institutions. They all pose new challenges. There are concerns that the Convention in its current form may be limited in addressing these old, emerging and critical issues which need to be factored into any ratification process and negotiation the UK government may wish to pursue in the future.

Author Biography



Clara is the President of ICOMOS-UK and is the Chair of ICOMOS-UK's Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee which she founded in 2012. She is a strategic planner by background. Her career as senior manager and non-executive member in the planning and delivery of arts and heritage services in the UK spans local government, community sector, and Non-Government Departments, over a period of 25 years. She has held numerous public office positions in the UK and internationally and includes being the vice president of the ICH Scientific Committee at ICOMOS International. She writes and speaks on inclusive heritage, and ICH.

Scotland and The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage

by Mairéad Nic Craith

A short blog cannot possibly do justice to the rich cultural landscape of intangible cultural heritage in Scotland. What follows here is a personal perspective on some of Scotland's successes and failures in the ICH domain as well as the challenges and opportunities ahead. My discussion is set in the context of the 20th Anniversary of the [Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage \(CICH\)](#). For those of you interested in delving further, I would highly recommend [Mapping Intangible Cultural Heritage Assets and Collections in Scotland \(2021\)](#) which was commissioned by a range of national organisations.

Dùthchas is the Scottish Gaelic word for heritage “from below”. According to [Alan Riach](#) it's “the word that describes understanding of land, people and culture”. Tradition or public folklore are terms that are also commonly used. Such terms are possibly more recognisable than the concept of ICH, which is well explained in [A Wee Guide to Intangible Cultural Heritage](#) from Traditional Arts Culture Scotland (TRACS). The TRACS Guide gives examples linked with the five domains outlined in the CICH. TRACS points to bothy ballads, waulking songs and the Travellers languages as examples of oral traditions in Scotland. Folk drama such as the Galoshins are categorised as performing arts while social practices, rituals and festive events include the Burry Man of South Queensferry, wedding ‘blackenings’ in fisher communities and the much-loved Hogmonay.

Scotland has strong expertise in recording and safeguarding its ICH. Over many decades, folklorists and ethnologists such as Margaret Bennet, Hamish Henderson and Colum McClean have recorded and documented Scotland's living traditions. Although not a signatory to the UNESCO CICH, Scotland has already adopted some of its practices.



Image 1: Burry Man of South Queensferry

One requirement of the ratification of the Convention is the establishment of a repository of ICH. One such inventory is [Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o' Riches project](#) which is hosted by the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh. This archive enables the knowledge and practices of tradition-bearers to be available on-line. There is also the [Scottish ICH Wiki](#) hosted by Museums, Galleries Scotland (MGS).

Scotland has strong expertise in all five domains of the CICH but two gaps in the collection

and safeguarding of these domains were identified in the 2021 Scottish Report. Knowledge and partnership concerning nature and the universe is a case in point. The Gaelic tradition is brimming with traditional ecological knowledge. There are also the nature writings of Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* and Patrick Geddes with his dictum that we should think global but act local. John Muir is popularly conceived of as the father of national parks in the US.

Debates concerning human landscape relationships regular feature in Bella Caledonia with contributions from the likes of Alastair McIntosh, Mairi McFadyen and Raghnaid Sandilands. While there have been some recent studies on ICH and the environment (see for example the links between musical heritage and the landscape by the Glenmoriston Improvement Group), much more needs to be done on ICH and the ecosystem in Scotland. Perhaps this domain would receive more attention in the context of a UK ratification of the Convention.

Traditional craftsmanship was also identified in the Mapping ICH in Scotland report as a neglected domain. Fair Isle straw back chair making, Highlands and Islands thatching, Northern Isles basket making (kishies and caisies) and sporran making all feature on Red List of Critically Endangered Crafts compiled by Heritage Crafts UK. Activities labelled as endangered include Kilt making, Orkney chair making, Sgian dubh and dirk making as well as Shetland lace knitting. Skills such as Bagpipe making (Highland pipes), dry stone walling, and Harris Tweed weaving are still considered viable.



Image 2: Harris Tweed

The current context is not entirely negative however. Historic Environment Scotland (HES)'s support for traditional building crafts is well recognised and is an area where they are solidly delivering against the UNESCO ICH Convention despite the UK not having ratified it. Much academic research with industrial partners has been facilitated through the Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities. At the Institute of Northern Studies, University of the Highlands and Islands for example, research is being conducted in the craft of dry-stone walling as well as cultural practice of thatching. There is also research being conducted on the tradition of building of the traditional Orkney Yole.



Image 3: Image of dry-stone walling (c) Niamh McKenzie

While the CICH represented a major milestone in the promotion of ICH, not all countries ratify it in the same way and some countries limit the process of recognition to long-established traditions within their jurisdiction. As a consequence, migrant heritage can be neglected. This situation differs greatly in Scotland where migrants (more commonly known as New Scots) and their heritage is given visibility. The Scottish Wiki, for example, features contributions about the Chinese New Year, Dragon Boat Racing, The Mela in Edinburgh and Glasgow and Mehndi skin decoration. Were the UK to ratify the Convention, Scotland could offer an example of good practice to the international community in this

regard.

One of the challenges facing Scotland at the moment is the consolidation of ICH in partnership with relevant organisations. An outstanding example of successful collaboration was [Scotland's Year of Stories](#) (2022) which was a year-long celebration of Scotland's rich storytelling tradition, "from Robert Burns to The Beano". How now will Scotland build on that legacy of collaboration? There is already tremendous work being done by Creative Scotland, HES, MGS, National Library Scotland, TRACS, as well as universities and other bodies, but the ICH landscape is still fragmented in terms of guidance, encouragement, and resources. Considerable work is already being done to channel and co-ordinate those resources and there is the intention to establish an ICH advisory group for Scotland. Hopefully the UK Government will move on ratification of the CICH before too long to give enhanced visibility to ICH across the four nations as well as opportunities for international partnerships.

Further Reading

Nic Craith, M., Kockel, U, and Lloyd, K, (2018) "[The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage: Absentees, Objections and Assertions](#)" in N. Akagawa and L. Smith eds [Safeguarding Intangible Heritage](#), London: Routledge.

Author Biography



Mairéad Nic Craith is Professor of Public Folklore at the University of the Highlands and Islands. A collaborator with national and international heritage organisations (e.g., Heritage Crafts UK, Prince's Foundation, UNESCO World Heritage). Her range of publications on ICH includes a TEDx talk Mairéad is currently working on traditional ecological knowledge.

UNESCO's 2003 Convention: Exploring Its Relevance in The Management of Transcultural Heritage in the UK

by Ataa Alsalloum

The constitution of the UK's identity, partly derived from a diverse assortment of potentially disparate forms of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), is further complicated by both historical and current migratory movements to the British Isles. The departure of the UK from the European Union and the delay in the UK government's agreement to UNESCO's 2003 Convention also contribute to this complexity.

The reasons behind the UK government's reluctant to agree to the Convention are beyond the scope of this article. Instead, using data from my research, I attempt to briefly explore two important questions. Firstly, how can the quality of the 2003 Convention's content as it relates to the UK be evaluated? Secondly, how can the UK safeguard the diverse ICH that is unfolding within the country, regardless of ratification of the 2003 Convention by the UK?

Liverpool city, a dynamic hub and harbour, has been a home for varied nationalities each with their unique ICH over many decades. This blend of native and imported practices forms what my research identifies as 'Transcultural Heritage.' I studied examples of ICH from, both recent and longstanding, migrant communities who have resettled in Liverpool, providing insights into documenting, transmitting, and safeguarding this transcultural heritage. Additionally, I examined the 2003 Convention's terminology, raising questions about the UK's preservation strategies for its culturally diverse heritage.

The 2003 Convention is a set of rules established by UNESCO to outline principles for protecting ICH within bearer communities. Designed with human rights policies in mind,

the Convention underscores its importance in this domain. It also refers to earlier documents, such as the UNESCO Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore (1989), that influenced its creation, specifically referencing Article 3. The Convention emphasises the need to link tangible and intangible heritage in its Preamble. However, it remains to be seen how the 2003 Convention interacts with policies concerning tangible heritage other than those outlined in the 1972 Convention, and whether or how these policies might potentially interrelate. For example, the methods through which the 2003 Convention could be applied to safeguard urban heritage need further exploration.

The structure of the 2003 Convention mirrors standard UNESCO and ICOMOS instruments. It begins with an introduction, explains terms, and concludes with instructions—a structure criticised for being difficult to implement in practice. Critics claim this format fails to illustrate community involvement in heritage identification and protection. Waterton et al.'s (2006) critical discourse analysis of the Venice Charter (1964) highlighted its authoritative, unidirectional information flow with diminished dialogue. Landorf's review of the Venice Charter (1964) and World Heritage Convention (1972) stressed the need for trained local facilitators in culturally sensitive negotiations and mandatory proof of local stakeholder engagement (Landorf, 2008). This is crucial as the recognition of living heritage/ICH rests with its bearers.

The Preamble of the 2003 Convention emphasises the role of 'indigenous communities' in preserving ICH. However, the rest of Convention's text does not directly address the shared heritage of people who have migrated from their homeland, resettled, or obtained citizenship. This issue was later partially addressed in Chapter VI of the Operational Directives issued in 2022. Nonetheless, the complexity of defining migrants and resettled communities has not yet been clarified or practically included in any ICH list. In my study, I encountered a Chinese martial arts group in Liverpool. Founded by Chinese immigrants, the group upholds Chinese customs but is managed by 'indigenous' Liverpudlians of non-Chinese descent. This challenges our perception of 'indigenous' in the context of cultural heritage, demonstrating how cultures can integrate into broader society, despite differing backgrounds (Image 1).



Image 1: Tea rituals at Chinese martial art club in Liverpool

In my conversations with various resettled groups, I observed many travelled traditions. These practices have influenced urban structures and placemaking in contemporary Britain, forming a critical component of these communities' identities by blending their original and British cultures. Examples include dance groups, martial arts clubs, traditional music bands, shops with imported items, and gardening rituals (Image 2). Some community groups and local authorities are creating records that include both transplanted and original heritage practices in the UK. Thus, these efforts should be combined to create a comprehensive UK inventory.



Image 2: Maypole dance at Squash Liverpool representing a mixed group of migrants and local communities dancing together

My research has revealed that methods to protect these traditions can vary not only between migrant communities from different backgrounds, but also among indigenous British communities. For instance, Syrian and Indian communities use social media to stay connected and document their practices, while also importing traditional items unavailable in UK markets. Challenges include a lack of skilled craftsmen who can create items such as mosaics or specific tapestries, and the scarcity of necessary raw materials.

Furthermore, the safeguarding task is complicated by certain cultural elements being private, practiced within families or close-knit communities, while other elements are inclusive and shared publicly, Image 3. Consequently, while elements like lion dances, fortune cookies, and Syrian food are widely recognised in the UK, specific traditions practiced at homes, such as family rituals and home-making, remain lesser known.



Image 3: Eftar gathering by Syrian community in Liverpool

ICH in multicultural settings is recreated through interactions between different cultures. This has led to the development of what I have described in my study as transcultural heritage. This concept can help disparate cultures living in the same region to understand and respect each other, even if they don't share the same heritage. It fosters a transcultural environment, as opposed to an intercultural or cross-cultural one (Rodrigues dos Santos 2017). Transcultural suggests a blending or merging of cultures, while intercultural and cross-cultural imply interaction or comparison between distinct cultures.

My research uncovers a lack of awareness about the cultural behaviours of both recent and some established migrant communities in Liverpool. This is paralleled by an absence of formal cataloguing of Britain's indigenous ICH. I argue that in some parts of the UK, efforts have been initiated to protect certain publicly shared elements. However, the process of inventory-building has not yet been established. This effort should be reinforced by thoughtful policies, active participatory practices, and a sustained commitment to effectively safeguard transcultural heritage in the British Isles. The UK could significantly benefit from international experiences in creating such inventories, and from intra-national collaborations in this endeavour.

The deficiencies in the 2003 Convention can indeed be addressed, and UK national inventories can be compiled. The development of methodologies to recognise transcultural heritage in the UK, led by the UK, is crucial. This could serve not only as a conduit for its own communities but also to acknowledge and celebrate the diverse ICH identities within the UK.

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Author Biography

Dr Ataa Alsalloum is a lecturer in Architecture and Urban Heritage at the Liverpool School of Architecture. Ataa's research includes top-down and bottom-up heritage management approaches.

Ataa designed, planned, and is directing the [MA in Sustainable Heritage Management](#) at the LSA. She collaborated with the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) to fully recognise this MA program.

She currently serves as a member of the University of Liverpool Senate. Ataa is an affiliated member of the IHBC, the Chair of the ICOMOS-UK Education, Training, and Events Committee, and an Expert Member of the International Scientific Committee of ICOMOS on Education and Training (CIF).

Portsmouth communities learning traditional building craft skills to conserve historic buildings- a case study

by Deniz Beck

As a Conservation Architect involved in heritage projects in the third/voluntary sector, the task of acquiring Scheduled Monument Consents allowed me to identify a significant need for heritage craft skills, an ICH Domain listed in UNESCO's 2003 Convention, for maintaining old buildings in Portsmouth. There is a serious demand for high-quality, free-of-charge advice for the third sector occupying heritage buildings, which often require urgent repairs. This long-standing and critical need served as a primary catalyst for the establishment of the Sustainable Conservation Trust (SCT) which I helped to set up. I am extremely pleased to share our first initiative, Widley Learning Studio project, that was delivered in the very location that sparked our inspiration.

In the face of a shortage of heritage skills needed to safeguard and upkeep historical assets, communities are being empowered to learn and apply heritage craft skills for the conservation of buildings in Portsmouth. Fort Widley, a local historic military structure, occupied by the Peter Ashley Activity Centre's (PAAC), a children's charity, is one such asset. It houses the SCT which acts as a focal point for providing training for communities in craft skills.

A recent pilot course organised and delivered by SCT for staff at local charities, volunteers, and conservation architecture students from the University of Portsmouth is a good example of skilling local communities with hands-on heritage asset maintenance. This dual-pronged approach was not only aimed at reducing the need for emergency repairs and costly specialist interventions but also to promote well-being and create wider heritage engagement opportunities for the community.

Preserving these local historic buildings often involves working with massive structures. Fort Widley alone is built with nearly a billion bricks. Conservation and /or restoration of such vast and complex buildings, which often require traditional knowledge and skills, is costly. Hence the pilot project to recruit and train local people in preventive repairs to avoid exorbitant rebuilding costs in the future. This project is also aimed at helping local people to reconnect with intangible processes associated with a range of tangible historic buildings.



Image 1: Our expert tutor showcasing an array of lime mortar varieties to an eager cohort of course attendees in the space that was repurposed specifically for learning. Photograph: ©SamBrooks

The free two-day course in brickwork masonry and repair starts with the basics - lime mortar maintenance. Lime mortar is an ancient, sustainable, and cost-effective traditional building method that has been largely forgotten in modern times. This is despite being found in some of the oldest and most iconic structures such as those in the Indus valley region (present day Pakistan) of around 6,500 BC and the pyramids in Egypt built around 2500 BC.

For too long, former military heritage assets in and around Portsmouth have been out of public reach due to neglect and becoming unsafe and unusable. Through this initiative,

underused sites like Fort Widley can be revived and safely reopened to the public in their entirety.



Image 2: Our expert tutor showcasing an array of lime mortar varieties to an eager cohort of course attendees in the space that was repurposed specifically for learning. Photograph: ©SamBrooks

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The challenges faced in sustaining heritage buildings is not unique to Portsmouth and are faced by many other heritage sites across the UK and beyond. However, the training offered

by the Trust and the willingness of volunteers to be involved in sustaining their local cultural and historical heritage by learning intangible skills and the promotion of the connection between tangible and intangible heritage, offer an exemplar solution for Portsmouth which could be replicated elsewhere.

The key objective of the Widley Learning Studio project is to build a local community task force skilled in heritage maintenance through learning and training to undertake repairs of their local buildings like Fort Widley. Such skill acquisition has also the potential to improve well-being for the entire community and offer job and career opportunities. The pilot project has been successful in achieving these objectives and provides a good foundation to build on. Plans are already underway to develop more free practical skills and continuing education. It must be noted that our learning aims are in line with UNESCO's objectives which encourage the teaching of ICH in schools and other education and training settings to promote transmission from one generation to another which is critical for the sustainability of intangible cultural expressions.



Image 3: Trailblazing women in conservation: female trainees meticulously restoring brickwork wall mortar with precision and passion. Photograph: ©SamBrooks

Add headingIn the broader context, engaging local communities in heritage building crafts aids: decarbonization of the environment by using natural materials, reduction of waste, empowerment of women in taking up professions and skills traditionally regarded as male domains and improve access to training in crafts skills to cultural minority groups.

Where heritage assets have been preserved and repurposed successfully, such as former vacant fortifications, they have contributed to the local economy and ensured the preservation of national assets for future generations.

So, the next time you see a brick building, take a closer look at the mortar. This binding layer not only holds the bricks together but also holds the potential to serve as an accessible learning platform. It offers an opportunity to express crafts making skills and unites the community to protect their tangible heritage assets through intangible heritage practices.



Image 4: Our tutor provides insightful details on the intricacies and constraints of working with venerable Ancient Schedule Monument site in our newly re-purposed space before starting practical work.

Photograph: ©SamBrooks



Image 5: Trainees learning how to protect the newly applied mortar. Photograph:
©DenizBeck

Author Biography



Deniz Beck, CA, ARB, RIBA is an accomplished Conservation Architect specialising on adaptive reuse of former military heritage structures for community enhancement.

Boasting nearly 20 years of experience and leading her own award-winning architectural design practice since 2012, she prioritizes the use of natural materials in her work. She shares her expertise as a RIBA Jury member for design competitions and as a part-time lecturer at the University of Portsmouth Architectural School.

Squaring the Circle: Intangible Cultural Heritage and UK Museums

by Hedley Swain

It remains the case that Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) as a formal concept is not central to UK museum practice and for various reasons ICH has not been embraced in the UK in the way it has in other countries. However, much of the philosophy that underlies ICH: the recognition that material culture can only ever tell a partial story about a people and their society is recognised and becoming more central to museum activity.

Before 2020 I think it is fair to say that ICH philosophy was slowly becoming a mainstream element of museum toolkits in terms of engaging with contemporary culture and was embedded in how we thought about past and present cultures. This was helped by ICOM UK and the pilot project run in South East England and supported by Arts Council. However, the last three years have been a major challenge for the whole sector – probably the most difficult for the UK museum sector since World War Two. Our visitors and revenues disappeared and are only coming back gradually and in unpredictable ways. All certainty for the future has gone. So, it is perhaps not surprising that as we dust ourselves off and think about our futures we need to come back to our relationship with ICH.

As we emerge from COVID and with a number of existential threats still hanging over us, UK museum thought is currently dominated by recovering business models, decolonialisation, diversity and inclusion and social justice. ICH has a valuable role to play in championing all of these causes and there are many examples of past and present projects where it is playing a key role. Front-line practitioners are trying to justify museum relevance with a far more fluid, community focused frame of reference – something that should make it ideal for an ICH approach. Most museum services and many heritage organisations are actively involved in building community engagement and now collecting evidence of changing social life.

It remains the case that Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) as a formal concept is not central to UK museum practice and for various reasons ICH has not been embraced in the UK in the way it has in other countries. However, much of the philosophy that underlies ICH: the recognition that material culture can only ever tell a partial story about a people and their society is recognised and becoming more central to museum activity.

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However, UK museums at their heart are still built around a dated enlightenment paradigm of the collection and classification of tangible things – something can only be given value by its institutional ownership, classification and control. The traditional approach has been to acquire things, catalogue them, classify them, measure them, protect them, Interpret them. Alongside this process has been an ongoing debate about what should have heritage or cultural value and what things should not. Traditionally this activity has been undertaken by a small group of self-validated experts and therefore by its nature it has been slow moving, fundamentally conservative in nature and self-reverential.

And it is in this area – collecting, categorising, preserving ICH that the UK sector has not really got going. Most museums are still creaking under the weight of their current collections and struggling to make them accessible. They have never really found a way of suitably capturing the intangible.

And 21st century UK is a complicated cultural landscape, there are complicated things going on here. Our society is multi-cultural but in complex ways that are difficult to tie down. We live in a “pick and mix” society where almost every individual embraces a multitude of different cultural goblets to make meaning of their lives. Are we living in a post-cultural world? Not in the sense that culture no longer exists but that it no longer conforms to traditional models.

The very importance of ICH is that it is held in living people, but more and more in the modern world the thing that characterise people is that they are giving up on traditional cultures – which is why I guess we are trying to preserve them? But as ever we are choosing to try and preserve the bits we find politically expedient. I would suggest an attempt to formally categorise ICH in all its manifestations in 21st century UK would lead to madness. It is too diverse, too complicated, too fast moving and I would guess too factional and contentious.

So where does this leave us? No one in our statutory and funding bodies: Arts Council, Historic England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund or elsewhere would argue that ICH was not valuable, important and worthy of support. We have had opportunities to fund projects and programmes that protect and celebrate cultural heritage through the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the National Lottery Community Fund. We also have a mechanism to advocate for, develop and fund current arts and cultural activity in many forms through Arts Council England. The recognition that heritage and culture are as manifest in how people act and how they think as in the physical manifestations of that acting and thinking is patently obvious and should be recognised and celebrated and recorded. But the language and philosophy of ICH are not mainstream and as a valid sub discipline it is not understood or being discussed widely enough.

Let's raise awareness that culture starts with people getting together as communities and making sense of the world around them. Let's recognise that this is a constant and ongoing negotiation. Let's use the funding mechanisms we have to allow curators, artists,

communities and practitioners to celebrate and negotiate this cultural change. It would be wonderful if the United Kingdom would ratify the UN Convention because we should be showing solidarity across nations, but lets recognise trying to list ICH in the UK at the moment would not be the best use of limited resources.



Image 1: Performance Gallery, Brighton Museum and Art Gallery – museum objects are what is left behind when cultural practice moves on.



Image 2: Queer The Pier, Brighton Museum and Art Gallery – the objects associated with the intangible experience of growing up Gay in Brighton.

Author Biography



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Cornwall and West Devon World Heritage Site's Connections, Interconnections and Disconnections with Intangible Cultural Heritage

By Jo Buchanan

This article aims to explore the interconnectivity between ICH and the Cornwall and West Devon mining landscape (CWDWHS). It highlights the need to promote these connections in order to strengthen the role of ICH in the management of the site, as well as integrating it into policy, practice and research associated with CWDWHS.

Over the last few decades Cornwall's heritage management has shifted from informing and defining local identity based on its past political, economic and cultural forces to a global valorisation as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO (2006) and as a National Minority by the Council of Europe (2014). These moves officially recognised Cornwall as 'different' from the rest of the UK, with Cornwall's cultural heritage described as a 'unique identity and distinct region in its own right' (Cornwall Council, 2014:5). This recognition led to a popular performative heritage event in 2016 - the Man Engine Pilgrimage (MEP), which celebrated the ten-year anniversary of Cornwall's mining landscape as a WHS. Central to this heritage performance was a twelve metre tall mechanical puppet, replicating parts of the mining process, which made a pilgrimage across the Cornish landscape, visiting old mining sites as an act of community remembrance, spatial identity and celebration.

These events drew attention to ways that 'heritage' was used and celebrated through formal and informal processes and practices. Commissioned by the CWDWHS, as part of their cultural programme, it illustrated that although the term ICH is not used, there is an on-going commitment to practising intangible cultural traditions. In fact, there are multiple references of ICH in the recent [CWDWHS's Management Plan](#). Their importance is outlined as 'Attribute Features' of mining settlements and social structures. These interconnections are also outlined in the [North Wales's slate WHS](#) where chapels and band-rooms retain



Image 1: The Man Engine. Photo: © Ainsley Cocks

multiple examples of a traditional way of life and minority language. UNESCO therefore recognises the latter aspects as important to World Heritage.

Connections to sustainable development

From the social practices that bring communities together to deeply rooted traditional knowledge on nature, land and biodiversity, ICH contributes to our developing identities and futures and sustainability. Two examples within the mining landscape illustrate these ICH values well. The first is the well-known ‘Trevithick Day’, an annual community festival in Camborne, which celebrates the local people’s connection with mining and Richard

Trevithick the 19th century local British inventor and mining engineer. The event includes a community procession through the town performed in traditional mining dress and includes Cornish scoot dancing (a Cornish traditional way of dancing wearing a hard soled boot).

This social practice enacts wellbeing for the community bringing them together to remember their mining past, provides a commitment to self-reliance, sense of belonging and participating in their cultural tradition.



Image 2: Trevithick Day. Photo © Colin Higgs



Image 3: Trevithick Day. Photo © Colin Higgs

The second example contributes to preventing climate change impacts. The Cornish hedgerow found throughout the WHS is used to prevent flooding due to its ability to retain water, whilst providing an ideal environment for biodiversity. Projects like ‘Kerdroya’ have constructed [a labyrinth of Cornish stone hedging on Bodmin Moor](#) that has increased local awareness and provided training on how to create them - thereby transmitting this traditional knowledge to the younger generation. In addition, the future of mining and Cornwall in helping to achieve sustainable technology in a critical metals is being explored at the [University of Exeter](#).

Disconnections

Whilst the shift to embrace the intangible, ‘more than representational’ and ‘felt experience’ nationally is to be applauded, the term ICH has relatively low awareness in the UK. The situation is quite the opposite in Cornwall, ICH is discussed in the [Cornwall Heritage Strategy](#) and the [Creative Manifesto](#) highlights the role of artists in heritage-making.

As outlined in the above paragraphs, ICH is important to individuals and communities building identities and a sense of belonging. As with all heritages, we need to be critical and try not to over-romanticise this form of heritage. Recognising and celebrating cultural differences in all settings is a welcome shift from homogenic and essentialising debates, however the connection between heritage and diversity needs to be carefully managed. It is also essential that we enact an ethics of respect and inclusivity. Within this context the term Cornishness is increasingly adopted to reflect anyone who was born, lives or loves Cornwall. This extends to the diaspora and migrant communities.

Finally, the shift within 'heritage' to recognise intangible dimensions is important, however it may highlight disconnections. The performance of Cornishness through the Man Engine (2016) helped raise the visibility of the WHS to a wider audience, indirectly funded ICH and created space that rebalanced a global narrative of Cornish mining to include pride and loss. In the future, extending this process to the Cornish diaspora, and inclusion of the emotional impacts on indigenous people who were colonised during Cornwall's mining expansion, may create some discomfort. For example Jeevan and Gaurave (2021) explores the emotional impacts of industrial colonisation on the traditional owners of Australia (the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people). This colonisation resulted not only in natural calamities, environmental catastrophes but also in the massive destruction of cultural heritage that were protected for centuries. Consequently, these negative impacts have emitted intergenerational trauma that still affect the indigenous peoples psychosocial wellbeing, and created cultural disconnections.

In conclusion, ICH is important to the CWDWHS and there is a need to strengthen its role within WHS and provide sustained support, alongside that already given to built heritage, which increases its visibility and viability. There can be challenges when taking into account the interconnected tangible and intangible dimensions, attempting to quantify the immeasurable intangible value, or negotiating the complexities around some ICH. Within these challenges however there are many opportunities including democratisation of heritage. The Man Engine Pilgrimage helped to rebalance a mining narrative to include loss. More work is however needed to include the impacts on indigenous peoples, who were

who were colonised during global mining expansion to provide an intertwined story and enhance our understanding of the construction and complexities of 'heritage'. This may however challenge the basic concept of Outstanding Universal Value and the 'great' stories that underlie WHS interpretation strategies.

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Author Biography



Jo Buchanan is an Independent Specialist in Heritage with a wealth of experience in the cultural heritage sector. She was awarded a doctorate in heritage studies from the University of Northumbria in 2020 (shortlisted for the ENCATC research award in cultural policy). Her research interests are in minority heritages, ICH and the role of creative practitioners in heritage-making. She is a member of ICOMOS-UK and an editorial board member for the Journal of Festival Culture, Inquiry and Analysis.

Threats to the Built Vernacular Heritage in the Arab Region

By Hossam Mahdy

In 2016 a copy of Palmyra's Arch of Triumph was installed for three days in Trafalgar Square "in defiance of the barbarians who destroyed the original" as claimed by Boris Johnson, the then mayor of London. But why Palmyra's Arch and not an Iraqi vernacular Shanashil House? I guess everyone knows why! It would have been a huge embarrassment and an ugly reminder of Britain's role in the destruction of so many Shanashil Houses as a result of the American-led bombardment and invasion of Iraq in 2003, erasing millennia-old tangible and intangible heritage. Ironically, that was the same year of the adoption of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage!

Shanashil Houses are Iraqi vernacular buildings that are found in Baghdad, Basrah, Mosul and other Iraqi cities. They are characterized by their shanashil (projecting wooden windows), which have great functional and aesthetic values for living in a hot climate. They also reflect the importance of privacy in Arab culture. What would be the point of reconstructing these houses if the way of living in them is lost? The damage caused by wars to the built vernacular heritage is complicated. Not only the fabric of the heritage is damaged but more importantly life is disrupted, confidence in traditional way of life is shaken and traditional knowledge of constructing and maintaining the built heritage are lost. A second or third generation Iraqi migrant would not know how to use or maintain a Shanashil House after being born in exile and having lived there for decades.

Even if traditional knowledge is preserved, war conditions disrupt normal life and usual

traditional practices. When a vernacular house is damaged by bombardments, the survivors from its residents are made homeless in the blink of an eye. Thus, repairs would have to be made in great haste with little or no attention to traditional methods and materials in order to bring the residents back to their homes as soon as possible. Such a hasty process often undermines the authenticity and integrity of the building's heritage value.

Past and present Western colonial crimes in the Arab Region aside, a reconstruction either theoretical or physical may make sense for an archaeological heritage such as the Arch of Palmyra but would be meaningless in the case vernacular heritage. Vernacular architecture is one form of expression and the tip of the iceberg of a community's intangible heritage. Hence open air museums that exhibit vernacular buildings furnish them with everyday objects and engage actors dressed in traditional costumes to perform different aspects of the relevant intangible heritage.

Unfortunately, war threats are not limited to Shanashil Houses but include the vernacular heritage in many Arab countries, such as the reed structures in Southern Iraq, the earthen domed villages in Northern Syria, the stone and earthen villages in Palestine, the oasis and old town of Ghadamis in Libya, the vernacular houses in San'a', Shibam and other Yemeni cities and many other amazing built vernacular heritage resources throughout the Arab Region. Many of which are listed World Heritage Sites.

Natural disasters add salt to injury. The damage caused by the earthquake that hit Northern Syria and Southern Turkey a few months back is an example. In addition, climate change subjects vernacular buildings to unprecedented severe conditions, such as torrential rain over historically arid zones and rising sea levels among other threats.

The built vernacular heritage is also threatened by insensitive huge development projects, such as urban regenerations that often lead to gentrification and infrastructure projects such motorways and dams. For example, the mega project of the High Dam in Aswan, Egypt led throughout the 1960s to the formation of a huge artificial lake that drowned hundreds of

Nubian vernacular villages as well as many significant archaeological sites. The international community rose to aid Egypt in saving the most important threatened Ancient Egyptian heritage by what became the biggest heritage safeguarding operation in human history and the seed for the establishment of the World Heritage Convention. However, nothing was done pertaining to the submerged Nubian vernacular heritage and all associated intangible heritage apart from the shifting of whole communities from their centuries-old gracefully built earthen villages to hastily and cheaply built new reinforced concrete settlements on higher terrain.



Almage 1: Vernacular houses of San'a' World Heritage Site, Yemen ©Hossam Mahdy

Due to its modest nature, vernacular buildings are often put in an unfair comparison with heritage of greater monumental or archaeological values, as was the case of the Nubian heritage in Egypt. In addition, the vernacular heritage is seen in an unfair comparison with the convenience of living in modern buildings, which sometimes lead to loss of self-confidence by local communities and their tendency to abandon their traditions and way of

life by replacing their vernacular buildings with modern structures. Such changes often lead to regret within a generation or two. By then it is often too late as the traditions and much of the knowledge to build and live in a vernacular building are lost. The old town of Shali in Siwa Oasis in Egypt is an example, where the new generations moved out to modern houses on the outskirts of Shali abandoning their vernacular earthen houses to melt away gracefully as the traditional annual maintenance regime was halted.



Image 2: Historic Shali, the Oasis of Siwa, Egypt ©Hossam Mahdy

Another threat is mass tourism and the commercialisation of the images of vernacular buildings and settlements in the Arab Region. This could be seen in the Ksour and Berber villages in Morocco, where the appearance of the buildings and traditional costumes and objects are carefully engineered and in some cases a kitsch version of the vernacular is produced, mainly to impress tourists and to benefit from mass tourism economy. Another factor is to offer convenient locations for shooting commercial movies while much of the

traditional values and intangible aspects of the heritage are being compromised.



Image 3: Kasr Ait Bin Hadou, Morocco ©Hossam Mahdy

There is a need to have holistic understanding of the vernacular heritage in order to develop appropriate ways to conserve and manage it. Heritage professionals, conservators and architects often address the tangible attributes of the vernacular in the Arab Region and fail to comprehend its intangible attributes. One reason for this is their training in the material culture. Another reason is a colonial legacy as Early Europeans who studied vernacular heritage were impressed with its aesthetic and material qualities but did not pay attention to its intangible attributes due to their ignorance of local languages, traditions, value systems and worldviews.

Architects often get inspiration from the aesthetic qualities of the vernacular architecture in the Arab region. This could be seen for example in Le Corbusier's design of Ronchamp chapel that was influenced by the Berber vernacular architecture in Algeria. Today, architects need to go deeper beyond the aesthetics and learn lessons from the vernacular for their new designs with regards to more profound aspects such as environmentally friendly construction methods and materials, climate action, sustainable development and conforming to local socio-cultural values.

Conservators and agencies that fund conservation projects in the Arab Region need to pay more attention to the built vernacular heritage. While it is all well and good to conserve Palmyra's Arch of Triumph, the archaeological remains of Babylon and other monumental sites, the built vernacular heritage is a priority because it is closely related to human lives, even if it is less prestigious and even if it does not produce dazzling photos for field reports. The thousands of remaining Shanashil Houses in Iraq merit attention and careful conservation efforts that address their tangible and the intangible aspects so that local communities could regain pride in their identity and begin the process of healing. 2023 is ironically the twentieth anniversary of both the contentious invasion of Iraq, one of the oldest civilizations on earth and the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. It is never too late to act responsibly and to adopt a holistic approach to the understanding, conservation and management of the built vernacular heritage in the Arab Region.

Author Biography

Hossam Mahdy PhD is the president of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Vernacular Architecture (CIAV). He is an independent consultant and researcher with more than thirty years' experience as a conservation architect, researcher, consultant, and lecturer on the conservation of architectural and urban heritage in the Middle East. Hossam's work focuses on the conservation of built vernacular heritage, World Heritage and Arab-Islamic views on cultural heritage conservation.

From Materials to Meanings: an Evolution of Architectural Conservation Practice

By Johnathan Djabarouti

As we commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, it is essential to acknowledge the profound influence of intangible cultural heritage and critical heritage theory on architectural conservation. These evolving fields have expanded our understanding of heritage, which continues to (re)define the role of the built heritage professional in contemporary conservation practice.

Intangible cultural heritage represents the living traditions, knowledges, customs, and practices that are passed down from generation to generation, shaping the collective memory and identity of communities. Within the realm of architectural conservation, intangible heritage has emerged as a novel, if not slightly problematic component in the efforts to safeguard the spirit and essence of heritage places. It reminds us that buildings are not merely bricks and mortar but repositories of stories, traditions, and values that must be preserved alongside their physical fabric. Yet with the Modern Conservation Movement premised on objective matters relating to the preservation of physical assets, original materials, and decay prevention, a broader range of concerns and motivations must be embraced to ensure that conservation practices remain relevant and adaptable to evolving conceptualisations of heritage. In combination with critical heritage theory, a focus on intangible qualities of built heritage assets offers a fresh perspective. It challenges us to question the social, political, and cultural dimensions of heritage. It prompts us to examine the power dynamics that shape the understanding and physical representation of the past.

In the realm of architectural conservation, critical heritage theory calls for a more inclusive approach that acknowledges diverse narratives and voices, encouraging those involved with built heritage to engage with communities, fostering dialogue and collaboration to ensure that all relevant identities are valued and included within conservation processes.

The conservation and revitalization program of the Ancient City of Ping Yao in China serves as a prime example of how the interplay between tangible and intangible heritage influences and informs each other. Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a comprehensive conservation programme undertaken at the site acknowledges the profound link between the intangible cultural practices within Ping Yao, across traditional crafts, festivals, and the physical fabric of the city itself. By placing emphasis on safeguarding and promoting its intangible elements, Ping Yao ensures the preservation of its rich cultural traditions, which in turn informs and guides the technical conservation efforts applied to its buildings and structures.



Image 1: Ping Yao. View from Market Tower. Severin.stalder (CC BY-SA 3.0). [Image Credit.](#)

This holistic approach establishes a framework where tangible and intangible heritage coexist and mutually reinforce one another. It creates a synergistic relationship where the tangible elements of the city's architectural heritage are enhanced and given deeper meaning through their connection to intangible cultural practices. This framework not only ensures the conservation of physical fabric, but that this fabric can more meaningfully contribute to the life of the city. By fostering a symbiotic relationship between tangible and intangible elements, the conservation program of Ping Yao focuses on generating a sustainable model for the city's future, rooted in tradition, re-created for present-day societies. This framework ensures that the historic city remains meaningful and relevant, carrying forward its rich legacy for future generations to experience. It celebrates the unique cultural identity of Ping Yao and serves as a testament to the enduring value of both tangible and intangible heritage in shaping and preserving the city's cultural landscape.



Image 2: Folk performance in Ping Yao. Gino Zhang. (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0). [Image Source](#).

The growing interest in intangible cultural heritage and critical heritage theory has also begun to transform the role and remit of built heritage professionals, who must now serve

as facilitators of community engagement, advocates for inclusivity, and narrators of intangible heritage as well as custodians of physical heritage. Physical conservation work must now involve the creation of platforms for dialogue, fostering collaboration, and the appreciation of the intangible aspects of heritage. Recognising that the essence of architecture is in stories, traditions, and practices, professionals are in a privileged curatorial position which can bridge the gap between the tangible and intangible, accepting that heritage first and foremost is a dynamic and living entity shaped by people and their environment. This can more simplistically be described as a shift in focus from materials to meanings.

Integrating an ‘intangible outlook’ in professional practice fosters a more inclusive and sustainable approach towards architectural conservation. By preserving the intangible practices that make sense of our heritage buildings and sites, we can ensure that future generations inherit a rich cultural heritage.

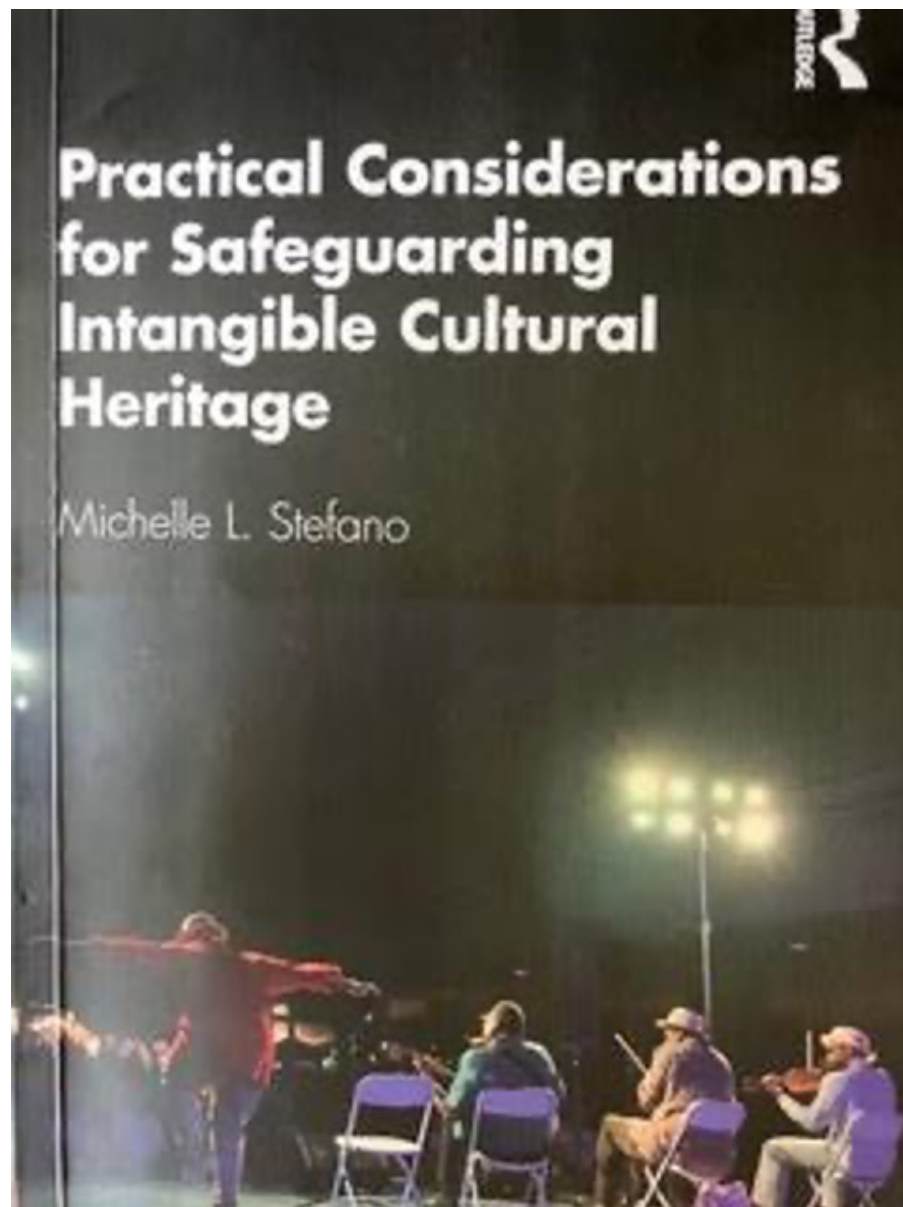
Author Biography

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Good Reads

A recommendation by the
Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee

Practical Considerations for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage

by Michelle Stefano

This includes how Public Folklore and Eco-museology can contribute to international discourses and safeguarding of ICH. Her book provides balanced insight. Whilst Stefano supports the principles of the 2003 ICH Convention, her analysis of the process involved reveals an 'inherently challenging infrastructure'. Her critique goes on to outline examples of recent practices that enhance an ethical and equitable safeguarding of ICH within the UNESCO-ICH framework, including a growth in NGOs and 'Good' safeguarding practices, for example the Botana Eco-museum in Croatia. Stefano's transdisciplinary approach (as an academic and folklore specialist practising in the USA) is an insightful resource for researchers, professionals and communities involved in safeguarding ICH. Her book can also help inform all heritage management and practice that aims to foster community participation, embrace a holistic, Rights-based approach and effective decolonisation.

Jo Buchanan

