

**Seminar on the Principles and Experiences of
Drawing Up Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventories in Europe**

14–15 May, 2007
Tallinn, Estonia

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Background paper

By 12 April 2007, the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage that entered into force on 20 April 2006 had been ratified by 76 States Parties.

Article 11 of this Convention inscribes on States Parties the obligations to take necessary measures “*to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage*”, which likewise entails the task to “*identify and define the various elements of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory*”. Article 12 (paragraph 1) stipulates the following:

To ensure identification with a view to safeguarding, each State Party shall draw up, in a manner geared to its own situation, one or more inventories of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory. These inventories shall be regularly updated.

Several States Parties have already undertaken the effort to compile such inventories, and these endeavours have proposed a variety of approaches, methods and results in drawing those stock-taking files. On the other hand, the Convention does not provide too many limiting guidelines in respect to making inventories by stressing that they should be created by States Parties “*in a manner geared to its own situation*” and that their number need not be confined to one, leaving an option of plurality.

However, the various meetings arranged in connection with the implementation of this Convention, and particularly the First Session of the Intergovernmental Committee in Algiers in November 2006 have pointed out that the requirement of drawing up inventories raises several questions, particularly by the Convention’s refraining from providing specific guidelines. Essentially an exercise of identification and categorisation of dynamic and vibrant forms of human expression and mental capacities, the making of inventories proves to be a task that instigates heated debates between cultural administrators, policy makers and scholarly experts in the field, but also on a larger scale between different social and political systems as well as representatives of different historical experience and administrative practices. The principles of management that favour clearly defined categories and tacit hierarchies confront here the scholarly perception of culture that resists fixation and favours the living practices negotiated by their carriers on daily basis between tradition and innovation.

This perception relates directly to the second part of paragraph (b) in Article 11 of the Convention that insists upon the process of identification and definition of the various elements of ICH being carried out “*with the participation of communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations*”. The participation of communities, relevant groups and individual practitioners in all stages of the implementation of this Convention appears to be crucial to the success of the whole process.

In view of the complicated nature of the process of inventory making, the somewhat contradictory practices carried out so far and the profound impact that this process eventually implies on local, national, and international level, and bearing in mind that the best practices of international cooperation involve meetings of deliberation by equal parties, we propose to convene the current regional seminar to analyse, exchange experience and debate on the issues of

inventory making. This meeting brings together experts representing different regions of Europe, largely combining the expertise and practices of Eastern and Western Europe. The rather limited regional scope is simultaneously covering relatively similar, yet also distinctly diverse historical experience that would hopefully provide a good basis for fruitful discussion.

The selection of participants of this meeting has been based on a rationale to attain two goals. First, its initial target is to bring together representatives of States Parties that form the electoral group Europe 2 in the Convention's General Assembly. The second aim is to expand the scope of deliberations by inviting particular experts also from other regions of Europe. The number of participants is, however, rather limited, in order to assure equal opportunities for the participants to share their experience in the field, and to provide ample room for meaningful discussions.

During this seminar, we would like to specify and analyse the advantages, disadvantages and contingencies of drawing up such inventories in various parts of Europe. This regional context, which is defined by complex, multicultural modern societies with different political systems and historical practices, comprises a versatile range of experience that includes contingencies of modernisation and urbanisation, manipulations of cultural heritage for political gain, but at the same time also presents manifold moments of preservation and maintenance, particularly due to constraints of time and circumstance. Bearing that in mind, the planned discussion gives some priority to theoretical concerns but it nevertheless keeps the practical side in focus while calling forth an exchange of information on different practices in inventory making in the countries involved.

We propose to elaborate on the meaning and application of inventories from local to national, to regional, and also to global perspectives while considering in your presentations the following questions:

- Who is the suitable and capable body for drawing ICH inventories?
- Should the process be arranged top-down or bottom-up?
- What is the relation between national and local inventories?
- How to secure community involvement?
- What is the role of individuals and the human factor in general?
- How to resolve the contradiction of particularities and universalities on local, national and international level?

In general, these discussions are aimed to bring us closer to an understanding of how the ICH inventories function in the European context, while hopefully also helping us to perceive the meanings and implications of the categories of *safeguarding* and *urgent safeguarding* in modern Europe. In your preparation for this meeting, we would urgently recommend you to return to the reports of two Expert Meetings arranged by or in co-operation with the UNESCO Secretariat that particularly addressed the same range of problems:

1. Expert Meeting on Inventorying Intangible Cultural Heritage, held in Paris, 17–18 March 2005
http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/file_download.php/89cf68e84379e9e753d10577e6520d4drepexp03-2005_en.pdf

2. Expert Meeting on Community Involvement in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Towards the Implementation of the 2003 Convention, held in Tokyo, Japan, 13–15 March 2006 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001459/145919E.pdf>

Organisational aspects

The main organizers of the seminar are Estonian National Commission for UNESCO in co-operation with Estonian Ministry of Culture and Folk Culture Development and Training Centre, assisted by a generous support of the ICH Sector of UNESCO.

The main working day of the meeting with presentations and discussions is 14 May. There will be only a morning session on 15 May with a general focus on regional cooperation.

The working languages of the seminar are English and Russian. Simultaneous interpretation is provided.

The seminar is financially supported by UNESCO, Gambling Tax Council of Estonia, Cultural Endowment of Estonia, Ministry of Culture of Estonia, Estonian Folk Culture Development and Training Centre and Estonian National Commission for UNESCO.

Meeting Agenda

13 May, Sunday

Arrivals. Guests will be met at the airport.

Accommodation at Meriton Grand Hotel Tallinn, Toompuiestee 27

<http://www.grandhotel.ee/>

18.45 Meeting at hotel lobby. Guided walk in Tallinn Old Town

20.15 Dinner at hotel L'Ermitage, Toompuiestee 19

<http://www.lermitagehotel.ee/?pageid=64>

14 May, Monday

09.00 **Opening** of the seminar at Meriton Grand Hotel Tallinn
meeting room: Jakobson Hall
Welcome by Laine Jänes, Estonian Minister of Culture

09.10-10.00 **Presentations. Chaired by Kristin Kuutma, Estonia**
Rieks Smeets, UNESCO
Kristin Kuutma, Estonia
Marc Jacobs, Belgium

10.00-10.45 **Questions and discussion**

10.45-11.15 Coffee break

11.15-12.00 **Presentations. Chaired by Kristin Kuutma, Estonia**
Vida Šatkauskienė, Lithuania
Irina Balotescu, Romania
Alla Stashkevich, Belorussia

12.15-13.00 **Questions and discussion**

13.00-14.00 Buffet lunch at Meriton Grand Hotel Tallinn

14.00-14.45 **Presentations. Chaired by Cherif Khaznadar, France**
Christian Hottin, France
Valdimar Hafstein, Iceland
Magne Velure, Norway

14.45-15.30 **Questions and discussion**

15.30-16.00 Coffee break

16.00-17.00 **Presentations. Chaired by Cherif Khaznadar, France**

Maria Walcher, Austria
Dace Bula, Latvia
Agnes Kovacs Biro, Hungary
Juraj Hamar, Slovakia

17.00-17.30 **Questions and discussion**

19.00 Departure from the hotel to Kaval-Antsu talu (*Tricky-Ants Farm*), Toompuiestee 23
<http://www.trickyants.com/index.php?lang=est>

Presentation of Seto culture, dinner

15 May, Tuesday

10.00-10.10 Brief summary of the 14 May discussions

10.10-12.00 Discussions on regional cooperation (electoral groups Europe 1 and 2) moderated by Kristin Kuutma, Estonia
How should the national inventories function in Europe? What does urgent safeguarding mean in the European context?

12.00 Buffet lunch at Meriton Grand Hotel Tallinn

Departure of participants

Participants

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