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“Living heritage: Exploring the Intangible” an outdoor photo exhibition at UNESCO Paris

On 13 April, Director-General of UNESCO, Koïchiro Matsuura, assisted by Ambassador Seiichi Kondo, Permanent Delegate of Japan to UNESCO, opened the “Living Heritage: Exploring the Intangible” photo exhibition, displayed along the fence surrounding UNESCO’s headquarters in Paris.

The exhibition highlights the diversity and vitality of our living heritage worldwide. It features more than a hundred large colour photographs of people throughout the world enacting cultural expressions and social practices: from performances of music, dance, and theatre to rituals, oral traditions and handicrafts. Text panels emphasize the need to safeguard our intangible cultural heritage and describe UNESCO’s activities in this area. The exhibition forms part of UNESCO’s strategy to give worldwide visibility to living cultural heritage and – most importantly – to the 2003 Convention.

From 2001 to 2005, UNESCO proclaimed a total of 90 Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity; UNESCO’s action in the field of ICH culminated in the adoption, promotion and entry into force of the 2003 Intangible Heritage Convention. The present exhibition, which can also be viewed on the web (www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/expo/), features photographs of these 90 Masterpieces, including popular carnivals in Bolivia and Belgium, classical forms of Japanese and Indian theatre, or polyphonic singing from the Central African Republic, Georgia and Albania.

All 90 Masterpieces are to be integrated into the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, established under the 2003 Convention. The exhibition is retrospective in offering an idea of

intangible heritage as recognized under the Masterpieces programme, which ended with the entry into force of the Convention in 2006; it looks ahead towards further implementation of the 2003 Convention, leading the way for a new era in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage world-wide.

The provenance of the photos is as diverse as their content, some taken by professional photographers, others by researchers and people working in the cultural heritage field, and by practitioners and community members. The Paris exhibition will continue until 30 November 2007 and is also being displayed elsewhere. Already shown in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, it will soon be on display in China (see the information box on the next page).

© David Stehl



Photo panels in front of UNESCO’s main entrance.

Editorial

The Intangible Heritage Convention’s focus on safeguarding has stimulated time-honoured disciplines and institutions to reconceive their activities. Many museums, for instance, have initiated good practices to present intangible heritage as the living heritage it is, giving life to objects previously valued as art objects alone and increasing the involvement of the communities that produce and use these objects.

The notion of “living” is indeed crucial for the Convention, which defines safeguarding as “measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the ICH”. Among the concrete safeguarding measures enumerated in the Convention, “documentation” figures prominently. And

so the question is, how to document so as to contribute actively to safeguarding? Or, in other words, how to use what is documented for safeguarding purposes? This issue of the *Messenger* discusses a meeting organized to deal with these questions, and introduces some experiences from various countries. Documentation can also contribute, of course, to other goals of the Convention, such as giving better visibility to ICH and raising awareness about it. In that context, this *Messenger* also highlights the open-air photo exhibition now displayed on the fences of UNESCO’s Fontenoy building, and the Information Centre recently created to support implementation of the Convention.

Rieks Smeets, Intangible Heritage Section

Panel displaying the Carnival of Barranquilla, Colombia, with the UNESCO main building in the back.



© Jean-Luc Thiery

Expert meeting on Documenting and Archiving the Intangible Cultural Heritage

On 12–13 January 2006, 24 international experts met in Paris to discuss crucial issues related to documenting and archiving intangible cultural heritage, in the spirit of the 2003 Convention. The experts gave special attention to legal and ethical issues, to documentation by community members and capacity-building to that effect, and to the need to restore older documentation to communities.

Participants reported on new perspectives and promising outcomes, based on a variety of projects worldwide, that suggest ways of using ICH documentation in efforts to ensure or restore the viability of documented practices and expressions. The experts agreed that communities must be involved at all stages of recording and documenting their ICH and be the primary beneficiaries. They also insisted on the dissemination of information on ICH in the mass media and the integration of such information in school curricula, as means to raise awareness of the existence and importance of this heritage. They discussed experiences in and possibilities for grassroots-based documentation, and the training required to enable the direct involvement of communities and groups so as to eventually enable them to decide how their customary laws and practices should be respected. The Convention itself calls for the close involvement of communities and groups in implementing safeguarding measures.

During the meeting, the experts encouraged the creation of partnerships and networks that might generate positive dynamics among communities, specialized institutions, international bodies, and local and national authorities. Such co-operative structures could open channels of access to their heritage that at present are often inaccessible to communities, and should lead to different ways to share and restore externally located ICH documentation. This approach has already yielded examples of communities receiving back part of their intangible heritage and using it for safeguarding efforts. The full report of the experts' meeting can be found on our website.

Case studies from Hungary, the Philippines, Viet Nam, and Papua New Guinea are presented in this edition of the *Messenger*.

UNESCO photo exhibition on show in the United Arab Emirates and China

The photo exhibition “Living Heritage: Exploring the Intangible” currently displayed at UNESCO in Paris is travelling. Recently included as a side event during the first Regional Meeting for the Arab States on Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (31 March – 3 April 2007), held during the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair, the exhibition will be on show at the Intangible Cultural Heritage Theme Park in Chengdu, China as part of the Chengdu International Intangible Cultural Heritage Festival (23 May – 10 June 2007). The park's inauguration coincides with the first extraordinary session of the Intergovernmental Committee, which will be held in Chengdu from 23 to 27 May 2007.

Documenting Intangible Cultural Heritage: Four Examples

HUNGARY: Documentation of Musical Heritage

After more than 100 years of research and documentation, an enormous volume of musical recordings and related photographic, audiovisual and written documentation on traditional music has been accumulated in East European State archives. UNESCO's 2003 Convention provided an impetus for exploring new functions for these archives, beyond their traditional roles in the areas of research and education. Increasingly, materials from these archives are being used to reinforce or revitalize music and dance traditions in the communities concerned.

The Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, together with European partner academies, is developing a project called “Open Musical Archives on the Internet” to provide the general public with free and easy access to these invaluable music and dance databases. The “Bartók System”, already part of the Institute's website, alone contains 14,000 traditional songs and associated information collected by Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, and their collaborators and successors between 1896 and 1940. The database of “Musical Sound Publications” on the same website contains another 6,000 traditional songs and melodies published on vinyl records, magnetophone or other media between 1950 and 2000. A mapping tool is integrated into the database search engine to help communities find musical expressions from their own region. Visitors to the site can listen to or download all of these musical expressions.

The online databases are receiving many visits from communities that are gradually including earlier musical documentation in educational curricula and cultural programmes. In return, community members provide new documentation of contemporary expressions.



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(Top) A Subanen man (Philippines) performing a ritual before entering a site, asking permission from the Unseen for documentation.

(Right) Ma Quang Chong and Ma Quang Eng learning to manipulate the rod puppets of Tham Roc village.



La Cong Y. © Vietnam Museum of Ethnology

PHILIPPINES: Community-Based Documentation Contributes to the Viability of ICH

Between 2003 and 2004, the Subanen community in Western Mindanao in the Philippines undertook innovative documentation of their indigenous knowledge about the plants found in their ancestral domain. The plants are valuable to them for their medicinal, agricultural, economic, and religious uses.

Plant diversity in the region is declining due to population pressure and climatic changes. Elders recognized that as plant diversity dwindles, knowledge about plants also declines. They also realized that as the younger generations are drawn into mainstream society, orally transmitted indigenous knowledge is no longer passed on to the next generation, and could eventually disappear forever.

The Subanen leaders sought assistance from specialized organizations to provide them with the skills to document themselves this indigenous knowledge, with external experts acting as facilitators. The non-literate but knowledgeable community elders provided the information, and younger literate community members assumed the role of documenters.

The resulting documentation was packaged into a multimedia format and other popular educational materials, in English with Subanen translations. To protect community intellectual property rights, these materials were formally registered with the government copyright office. The community's education programme now uses them to teach schoolchildren about their culture; they are also used as curriculum material for adults who want to learn to read and write in their ancestral language.

This "self-documentation" has turned out to be a successful way to preserve orally transmitted ethnobotanical knowledge and to make it available for present and future generations, contributing to the viability of this part of the Subanen's ICH.



© Veli J. Saminguit

VIETNAM: Documenting and Revitalizing Tham Roc Puppetry

Alongside its emblematic water puppetry, Viet Nam has a number of lesser-known local puppetry traditions. One such tradition is the rod puppetry of the Tay people of Tham Roc village in Thai Nguyen Province, north of Hanoi. Dating back at least five generations, the puppeteers had not performed for several decades when the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology commissioned a set of puppets for its collection in 1997. Encouraged by this interest, Tham Roc villagers wondered whether it might not be possible to see them perform once again.

Museum researcher La Cong Y, himself a Tay, suggested the audiovisual department make an ethnographic film of the tradition. The museum mobilized the financial support of the Ford Foundation's Hanoi office, and museum staff members were soon being trained in video documentation and editing. The team went to work in Tham Roc in 1999.

An immediate obstacle was that villagers no longer performed the puppet shows, having rejected them as a vestige of superstition in the wave of revolutionary fervour of the 1950s. Luckily they had carefully packed the puppets in wooden crates and stored them in the rafters of a village elder's home. The stewards of the tradition explained to the filmmakers, however, that the villagers were reluctant to bring them out because the puppet's spiritual patrons could easily be offended. Special ceremonies had to be performed before they could open the crates and work the puppets again.

With the cameras recording, the puppets were finally brought to light – and to life. The ethnographic video needed a narrative climax, and what could be better than the first performance of the Tay Puppets of Tham Roc in decades? The villagers enthusiastically set to work, with grandfathers teaching grandsons – and, for the first time, granddaughters – how to manipulate the puppets and recount the ancient texts. The performance recorded for the museum was not to be the last. Buoyed by the video's success, Tham Roc puppeteers have since performed several times in their home province and at the Ethnology Museum in Hanoi. As the museum's former director Nguyen Van Huy noted, "The traditional skills involved in making and manipulating puppets were re-established ... and the bond between members of the community was strengthened" – all through a documentation project.

A Subanen member of the documentation team receiving information from an older member of the community.

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CALENDAR

- 23-27 MAY** First extraordinary session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Chengdu, China.
- 23 MAY – 10 JUNE** Photo exhibition: “Living Heritage: Exploring the Intangible” in the Intangible Cultural Heritage Theme Park during the “International Intangible Cultural Heritage Festival”. Chengdu, China.
- 11-14 JUNE** Round Table on Endangered Languages and Oral Traditions. Havana, Cuba.
- 3-7 SEPTEMBER** Second ordinary session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Japan.

For further information, contact: ich@unesco.org



Photo panels along the Avenue Ségur.

© Jean-Luc Thierry

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: The Value of Old Recordings Today

In the late 1990s, the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna collaborated with the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies to make the collection of Papua New Guinean sound recordings in its Phonogrammarchiv widely accessible. In 2000, the Academy published a set incorporating five CDs of music, storytelling and other linguistic material together with a CD presenting the original documentation with a printed 223-page English translation, updated with relevant information about the collectors and the collections' significance*.

The Austrian anthropologist, Rudolf Pöch, recorded the bulk of the material in three different regions of New Guinea from 1904 to 1906. There are also recordings from 1907 of a Papua New Guinean teenager in Europe, made by Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt, and others made in Papua New Guinea in 1908–09 by Fr. Josef Winthuis, the first missionary to make field recordings in the country. The CD set was distributed to institutions and cultural centres in Papua New Guinea, with public awareness promoted through local newspapers and radio stations.

So far, few people knew that such historic recordings existed, and the interest in and usage of these materials had been limited. But since recently, linguists and musicologists have benefited from comparing the recordings with present practices. Of particular importance is the first recording of Tok Pisin, or New Guinean Pidgin, now the most widely spoken language in the country. Some of the recordings document ceremonial songs no longer performed – prohibited by missionaries or replaced by ceremonies from neighbouring groups. Such traditions are today only remembered in a very fragmentary form. Supported by photographs taken during this early fieldwork, the recordings also serve to reconfirm contemporary performance practices, providing documentary evidence that some traditions are being properly maintained. Since the names of the singers are documented, many community members today can hear the voices of their ancestors. Finally, local performance groups are using the recordings to stimulate village elders to recall performance practices of their youth, which can then be passed on to younger generations. Without these recorded examples as a starting point, such revitalizations efforts are almost impossible.

Old recordings, preserved on the other side of the globe, have great significance to Papua New Guinea today. They speak of traditions that might otherwise have been lost, and they reconfirm ancestral traditions. Those recorded may have died long ago, but their voices continue to inspire their descendants in many ways.

* *Tondokumente aus dem Phonogrammarchiv der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Gesamtausgabe der historischen Bestände 1899–1950. Series 3: Papua New Guinea (1904–1909)*. Dietrich Schüller (ed.), commentary by Don Niles (<http://www.oaaw.ac.at/verlag>).

Visit the ICH Information Centre!

The end of 2006 saw the opening of an intangible cultural heritage information centre on the ninth floor of UNESCO's Bonvin building. The information centre offers a rapidly increasing range of printed publications (from leaflets to doctoral dissertations), photos, and audiovisual and multimedia material that can be consulted on the spot. It is working to bring together and digitize material relating to past actions of UNESCO in the field of ICH, including documents on the three Proclamations of Masterpieces, as well as on the preparation and implementation of the 2003 Convention. The Information Centre further intends to collect publications and other data of any type on the safeguarding of ICH around the world. It is, in a sense, the archive of the Secretariat of the Convention.

We are happy to receive and make available any material on ICH and on safeguarding measures for ICH that ministries, NGOs, communities or researchers might wish to send on to us.

As space in the reading room is limited, visitors are requested to contact the Centre to arrange an appointment to visit. The Centre is open to the public from Monday to Friday between 2:30pm and 6pm; in the mornings by appointment only.

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