

Report of the Preparatory Meeting for a
Manual on Oral Traditions and Expressions
with a view to the implementation of the
2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
UNESCO Paris, 27-28 January 2006

1. The Meeting

Organized by UNESCO's Intangible Heritage Section, this expert meeting was aimed at assisting UNESCO in the elaboration of the outline of the *Manual on Oral Traditions and Expressions* and at advising on potential authors. The manual is one out of a planned series of several thematic publications that address specific domains of the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and are meant to facilitate the implementation of the *2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. It will help the States-Parties in developing inventories and carrying out actual safeguarding measures and activities.

The five experts who participated in the meeting did so in their personal capacity and were selected on the basis of their competences and of regional considerations.

During the two days of the meeting, the experts discussed and revised a **draft structure of the Manual**, as presented by the Intangible Heritage Section of UNESCO. They also discussed and refined a **form for inventorying elements of ICH** and considered **some definitions of the Glossary Intangible Cultural Heritage**, prepared by an international expert meeting in June 2002

The experts also exchanged their personal experiences and examples of good practices of safeguarding oral traditions and expressions.

2. Revised and Annotated Manual Structure
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Manual - Chapter 1: Introduction

Revised Draft Structure

1.1. Background

Elements already presented in the General Manual will be resumed here in order to ensure the manual's usage independently from the other manuals (purpose of the Manual, background/ history of the Convention, definition of ICH, presentation of the domains, about 2 pages)

1.2. Guidelines

Specific information and practical guidelines on how to use the manual; abbreviations, explanations/ significations of informative icons; scope and limits of the Manual; explanation of "boxes" containing examples, definitions, hints, warnings, etc. (about 2 pages)

Comments and Suggestions

This section will among other things introduce the description/definition of ICH as given in art. 2.1 of the Convention, as well as the non-exhaustive list of domains in which the ICH manifests itself:

- (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;*
- (b) performing arts;*
- (c) social practices, rituals and festive events;*
- (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;*
- (e) traditional craftsmanship.*

The definition of "safeguarding" will also be discussed and the important role attached to the widest possible participation of the communities of tradition bearers in the identification, definition and management of their ICH.

Manual - Chapter 2: Defining oral traditions and expressions:

Revised Draft Structure

2.1. general definition

Oral traditions and expressions as part of the intangible cultural heritage (sub-categories, limitations of categorization; importance to take into account categorizations used by communities, about 2 pages)

2.2. genres, forms and content

This sub-chapter might deal with content and formal aspects of oral traditions and expressions and the various forms in which oral traditions and expressions appear (epics, legends, etc)

2.3. functions of oral traditions and expressions

This sub-chapter should include a discussion of Oral Histories

2.4 context and arena of performance

When, where, for whom; performances in traditional settings and staged ones, gestures, body language, costumes, etc.

Comments and Suggestions

The experts insisted that it should be made clear in the Manual that the distinctions between domains/categories of the ICH are arbitrary to a certain extent. ICH elements may belong to several domains at the same time, elements of other domains can be part of a story performance, etc. It was therefore suggested that oral traditions and expressions could be defined against or in comparison with other domains of ICH.

Data collectors and community members should feel free to adapt the Manual **categories and terms** to the specificities of their heritage and context. It is important to stress that local categories and traditional ways of conceptualizing ICH, not provided in the Manual but pertinent to the local situations, can be used in the process of definition and identification. In this perspective, the experts recommended that each definition be accompanied by various examples (also in the form of sound and video files on the Manual CD-ROM, and links to the Web) in order to illustrate the variety of local concepts and categories, as well as the diversity of terminology. In this connection, it may be useful to think in terms of a “checklist” reflecting different regional experiences that a local expert could consult and choose what is relevant (see also Comments under Chapter 7).

It should be made clear in the Manual that the definitions it offers are not “officially recognized” or the only possible “scientific” categories and terms, and that they can be replaced by other – local – categories and terms, provided that they are explained clearly and can be understood by outsiders to the community.

While defining “oral traditions and expressions”, it has been recommended to think in terms of “narrative practices”, taking into account the contexts and circumstances linked to the stories.

Speaking about **genres**, it is important to remember that some performances combine several genres (for instance, a performance may comprise a legend, a song, riddles, proverbs, etc.). The Manual should therefore advise on when to present elements as separate or linked together. Classifications by the communities themselves should be followed as much as possible.

With regard to **functions** of oral traditions and expressions, the experts stressed that as many relevant facets as possible (for instance, historical, political, aesthetic, social,) should be taken into account. The Manual must invite to reflect on both what a particular oral tradition means to individuals or communities in a particular context (eg. “stay away from drugs”), and also, in a more general sense, on what impact (if any) it has for cultural identity and social structure.

When discussing the **context and arena of performance**, the experts recommended to stress and value modern ways of performance and revival, as well as newer expressions based on traditions. A paragraph on new creations that have overtaken the functions of

old traditions could be envisaged: indeed, if the community feels that there is continuity, these creations could fall under the scope of the 2003 Convention. However, if both form and content are new, then we are speaking about a totally new expression and we may rather be in the realm of the 2005 Convention.

The experts proposed that this section also include a discussion of “gestures”, “body language” and “costumes”. The discussion of the performance can include ceremonies associated with stories, because sometimes storytelling cannot be dissociated from the ceremony. It has also been suggested to include here the role of texts or objects, as tools of the performer.

Alternative option: taking into account that points 2.1 to 2.3 are more theoretical, whereas 2.4 discusses questions related to the performance, it has been suggested at one point to move this section to Chapter 3

Manual - Chapter 3: Stakeholders: Communities, Practitioners, Tradition bearers, Authorities, NGOs

Revised Draft Structure

3.1. performers and audience

Who are the performers; are there professional performers (griots, storytellers, etc.); is the right to speak or perform restricted; role of the audience; role of text or objects as “tools” of the performer

3.2. secondary actors

Stake-holders at local/community, national and international level specific to the element of ICH (archives, researchers and institutions; universities, editors, festival organisers...)

Comments and suggestions

The experts suggested that this Chapter should start by stating that there is no clear distinction between “stakeholders” and “secondary actors”. The line between performers and audience can be very thin as a performance often is an interactive process.

The purpose of this chapter is to survey the variety of stakeholders, to convey the message that many different people are involved, and that oral traditions cannot be considered separately from performers, audience, custodians, etc. It should be emphasized throughout all Manuals that the 2003 Convention is about safeguarding processes and enabling conditions, rather than final products (ie., in the case of oral traditions, performance (and preparation) rather than text or recording).

There is a lot to be said about the personality, background, training, interests and career of the **performer**. The term “professional performer” has to be specified, because it may mean people who earn their living by telling stories or who know more stories and are

better at telling them than others. Perhaps, “professional performer” should sometimes be replaced by “expert performer”, implying recognition by the community? This term would also cover those who have great competence and skill, but for whom performing is not their main occupation. The Manual should invite to pay attention to the place of the storyteller in the community.

The discussion of the role of the **audience** must refer back to the discussion of the context of performance (Chapter 2, section 4).

Concerning Section 2 of this Chapter, the experts warned that the term “**secondary actors**” might lead to perceiving this group of stakeholders as second-order consumers or interpreters of the oral traditions and expressions. Perhaps, to define this group of actors, one should rather focus on the fact that they play a role also outside the performance act. Sometimes this second category is made up by members of the community who went out, got education, and are now able to provide services that didn’t use to be part of the traditional practice, but can make it attractive to the outsiders. In some cases, contests and festivals organized by the local or national authorities allow the performers to travel to the neighboring communities or main towns for the first time, and make some money, as well as spread their reputation. This may eventually influence the performance, but we should remember that it is natural for traditions to evolve due to external influences and new imperatives.

The experts concluded that as long as the community is in agreement, opening up the oral traditions and expressions to the outside world is in no conflict with their survival. A tradition must not be “locked in the past”, and it certainly is not the purpose of the 2003 Convention.

Manual - Chapter 4: Language

The experts decided that it was preferable to devote a separate chapter to the discussion of the language of oral traditions and expressions, rather than tackle this subject in different chapters, on a less consistent basis. The structure of this chapter remains to be determined (see also, Part 3: Proposed Contributions).

There was general agreement that the Manual should encourage **linguistic tolerance**, by explaining that there are no pure languages and no pure cultures. It should, for instance, encourage the inventory makers and data collectors not to discriminate against or omit borrowed elements, for not being “authentic”. Several examples were given of oral traditions that combine lexical elements from different languages, due to intense interactions between different linguistic groups.

This chapter should also cover different **language registers** employed during performances. Specific dialects or archaic forms are often used to convey important messages and meanings, and are therefore essential to the performance.

Finally, the experts proposed that this Chapter also touch upon **translation**, as an important tool for the safeguarding the oral traditions and expressions in minority or endangered languages.

Manual - Chapter 5: Inventory making

Revised Draft Structure

This Chapter must be drafted taking into account the recommendations of the March 2005 UNESCO Expert Meeting on Inventorying the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

More particularly, this Chapter should:

- *stress the importance of community involvement in the process of inventorying (including the respect and use of local categorizations for oral traditions and expressions, and the right of communities to decide whether a certain element of their ICH should be included into an inventory or not and thereby respecting taboos and secret elements that may exist)*
- *list links to already existing protocols or manuals on documentation as good practices or draw from these manuals for examples*
- *explain which approaches can be considered as “ethical” (all measures to be taken in respect of the interests and concerns of the communities)*

Comments and Suggestions

The experts discussed and revised the “form for inventorying elements of ICH” elaborated during a previous expert meeting on intangible cultural heritage (see Part 4, Annex 3).

They stressed that the Manual should introduce the concept of **variation** and encourage to inventory different variants and versions of oral traditions. The experts also pointed out that it was very important for the Manual to insist on defining, as clearly as possible, the **unit of inventory** (is it the performance, or the story or part of the story?) in order to avoid empirical problems for inventory-makers. If for instance, the unit is the whole story, then, if at certain occasions, parts of a story are told, they should be linked to the whole story. It was remarked that this problem may be avoided by using the local categories. As already mentioned concerning chapter 2, it should be stressed again that the national data collectors and the community members should feel free to adapt the Manual **categories and terms** to the specificities of their heritage and context. Local categories and traditional ways of conceptualizing the ICH, pertinent to the local situations, can be used in the process of inventorying. In this sense, when choosing categories for the local and national inventories, one-sentence-definitions of what a story or myth is about can be more appropriate than scientific terms (ex. “story about where the community comes from”).

Manual - Chapter 6: Safeguarding

Revised Draft Structure

6.1 *Most frequent threats and challenges, including examples of threats that have impacted oral traditions and examples of challenges (for instance, mass media) that have been made use of to safeguard oral traditions*

6.2. *Safeguarding measures, in particular at the national level, could be divided into 3 subcategories, providing examples for each in boxes (both good and bad experiences):*

6.2.1. *Transmission: modes of transmission (formal and non-formal, traditional and new, including many examples), who are the people who transmit, the context of transmission, use of formal and non-formal education, use of traditional and new media*

6.2.2. *Documentation: research, archiving (including promotion of networking and cooperation, local capacity-building) for the sake of: enhancing threatened transmission, memory for the communities concerned, research by grassroots and academic experts, participants, strategies, archiving practices, use of traditional and new technologies and methodologies, involvement of older custodians and younger people, use of media*

6.2.3. *Promotion: awareness-raising about the importance of ICH in general and the need to promote the use of ICH in the communities (at community, national, regional and international level; amongst tradition bearers, scientific community and decision makers), role and use of media, festivals, etc.*

6.3. *Capacity-building / local empowerment: transfer of skills based on the needs expressed by communities or local and national authorities, including many varied examples*

Comments and Suggestions

It was stated that this chapter is designed to cover a variety of approaches and measures, but mainly from the administration vintage point (**top-down**), whereas Chapter 7 will present existing approaches from a bottom-up perspective. However, there should be no strict separation, and it should be made clear that synergies can be created by combining and mixing the “top-down” and “bottom-up” approaches. It should also be explained that there will often be overlap (for instance, authorities can be part of community).

The experts stressed that Chapters 6 and 7 are closely interconnected and must be cross-referenced.

Manual - Chapter 7: Safeguarding oral traditions and expressions – by and for communities

Revised Draft Structure

Communities as bearers of oral traditions and expressions are crucial actors in the process of the implementation of the Convention. An important part of the measures for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage will be implemented / managed by, or in cooperation with communities. A specific part of the manual will therefore be addressed to communities and their organizations in order to provide them with practical advice (communities often want to be active; for involvement of academics on a large scale UNESCO will not have the required funds).

7.1. Begin the section with encouragement for the communities to get involved and then continue by explaining how to get involved. This section should include examples of activities and projects initiated by community members, as well as of the possibilities and opportunities that may be offered by governments and how to use them or how to obtain information on them.

7.2. Organizations

This section should stress the importance for the communities of organizing themselves, give examples of good ways, and of the benefit of such organization

7.2.1. existing traditional organizations

7.2.2. ad hoc organizations

7.2.2.1. experts from the community

7.2.2.2. experts from outside the community

7.2.3. networks of organizations

7.3. Safeguarding measures

This section should include a discussion of how to determine the threats and turn them into challenges (for instance, television and ICTs), how to adapt existing materials to particular situations and how to achieve results with modest means

7.4. Material prerequisites

(for instance, designating existing buildings or spaces to become Cultural Centers)

7.5. Network-building

Where to look and who to contact (vertically and horizontally)

7.6. Skills and training

Capacity-building, but looking at people training themselves, or taking the initiative

Comments and Suggestions

The experts decided that it would be particularly useful to have a **Checklist** of the characteristics of oral traditions that one may look for. It does not have to be exhaustive or applicable to all cases, but rather serve as a memory trigger. When thinking about genres, this will help to include those that would not have been thought of as appropriate otherwise. This Checklist could be placed either under Chapter 2 or Chapter 7.

This Chapter should also alert communities to the legal implications of the inventorying and documentation activities and stress that the needs of local communities must always be taken into account by the experts and authority representatives who participate in those activities.

Manual - Chapter 8: Oral traditions and expressions and development

Revised Draft Structure

Intangible cultural heritage as an element in ensuring smooth social transformation and as an income source (tourism, cultural industries, etc.)

Comments and Suggestions

It was proposed that this chapter highlight the implications for development at the local and national levels of the implementation of the 2003 Convention (for instance, the economic value of the knowledge about nature, skills related to handicrafts, etc.), as well as advise what governments could do in specific cases (for instance, with regard to cultural tourism, which can have both beneficial and negative impacts). It is important to demonstrate here that the benefits gained at the expense of communities are not sustainable, while at the same time providing examples of good practices (for instance, benefits from publications by outside researchers being fed back into communities).

Manual - Chapter 9: Legal Considerations

Draft Structure

Details on legal considerations that may be specific to the field this manual refers to: guiding principles, human rights, copyright, intellectual property, reference to international conventions

For lack of time, this chapter was not discussed during the meeting.

3. Proposed Contributions

- **Isidore Okpewho** generously offered to submit to UNESCO a draft of Chapter 2 in April 2006
- **Lea Zuyderhoudt** and **Margaret Florey** volunteered to submit to UNESCO a checklist for Chapter 2 (or Chapter 7) in mid-August 2006
- **John Foley** generously offered to hand in a draft of Chapter 3 by April
- **Margaret Florey** generously offered to prepare a draft of Chapter 4 by mid-August

All experts are kindly requested to send to UNESCO brief summaries of the examples and cases of **good practices** that they mentioned during the meeting (see part 4 below).

The Intangible Heritage Section will identify the authors of the remaining chapters and try to put together a first draft of the Manual by mid-September 2006.

4. List of proposals for good practices to be presented in boxes (chapters 6 and 7)

- storytelling-schools in Basque country (John M. Foley)
- language learning plays at Melbourne Arts Festival (Margaret Florey)
- capacity-building activities in Taiwan (Margaret Florey – example from Austronesian languages conference)
- Maori example for language chapter (Margaret Florey – Sandy Morrison for advice)
- Indian NGO for safeguarding oral traditions as community-based initiative (online presentation www.asgporissa.org)

Note: This list may be incomplete, for which the Section would like to apologize in advance.

Annexes

Annex 1. List of Participants

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- **Sabine Kube**, Intangible Heritage Section, s.kube@unesco.org

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background

Elements already presented in the General Manual will be resumed here in order to ensure the manual's usage independently from the other manuals (purpose of the Manual, background/ history of the Convention, definition of ICH, presentation of the domains, about 2 pages)

1.2. Guidelines

Specific information and practical guidelines on how to use the manual; abbreviations, explanations/ significations of informative icons; scope and limits of the Manual; explanation of "boxes" containing examples, definitions, hints, warnings, etc. (about 2 pages)

Chapter 2: Defining oral traditions and expressions:

2.2. general definition

Oral traditions and expressions as part of the intangible cultural heritage (sub-categories, limitations of categorization; importance to take into account categorizations used by communities, about 2 pages)

2.2. genres, forms and content

This sub-chapter might deal with content and formal aspects of oral traditions and expressions and the various forms in which oral traditions and expressions appear (epics, legends, etc)

2.3. functions of oral traditions and expressions

This sub-chapter should include a discussion of Oral Histories

2.4 context and arena of performance

When, where, for whom; performances in traditional settings and staged ones, gestures, body language, costumes, etc.

Alternative option: taking into account that points 2.1 to 2.3 are more theoretical, whereas 2.4 discusses questions related to the performance, it has been suggested at one point to move this section to Chapter 3

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Who are the performers; are there professional performers (griots, storytellers, etc.); is the right to speak or perform restricted; role of the audience; role of text or objects as “tools” of the performer

3.4. secondary actors

Stake-holders at local/community, national and international level specific to the element of ICH (archives, researchers and institutions; universities, editors, festival organisers...)

Chapter 4: Language

The structure of this chapter is to be determined.

Chapter 5: Inventory making

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More particularly, this Chapter should:

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(for instance, designating existing buildings or spaces to become Cultural Centers)

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Where to look and who to contact (vertically and horizontally)

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Capacity-building, but looking at people training themselves, or taking the initiative

Chapter 8: Oral traditions and expressions and development

Intangible cultural heritage as an element in ensuring smooth social transformation and as an income source (tourism, cultural industries, etc.)

Chapter 9: Legal Considerations

Details on legal considerations that may be specific to the field this manual refers to: guiding principles, human rights, copyright, intellectual property, reference to international conventions

Annex 3: Revised Form for inventorying elements of the intangible cultural heritage

1. Identification

- 1.1. Short but maximally informative title;
- 1.2. Name of the element as used by community concerned;
- 1.3. Domains concerned [explain what “domain” means and/or give examples]
- 1.4. Characteristics of the expression/tradition;
- 1.5. Performed in what situation / occasion;
- 1.6. Associated tangible elements (if any);
- 1.7. Associated intangible elements (if any);
- 1.8. Language or languages / registers / speech levels involved;
- 1.9. Modes of transmission / acquisition.

2. Location

- 2.1. Physical location(s) of origin of the element (if known)
- 2.2. Physical location(s) of enactment or of practice (according to national administrative divisions. For example: region / province / district / village);

3. Persons and institutions

- 3.1. Community (ies) concerned (and sub-group(s), if any);
- 3.2. Performer(s) (name(s)/age/gender/social status and/or professional category) and other participants;
- 3.3. Holder(s)/custodian(s) (name(s)/age/gender/social status and/or professional category);
- 3.4. Relevant local organizations (NGOs and others, if any).

4. State of the element: viability

- 4.1. Threats to the performance (if any);
- 4.2. Threats to the transmission (if any);
- 4.3. Availability of associated tangible elements.
- 4.4. Availability of associated tangible elements: implications for transmission

5. Inventory-making

- 5.1. Explicit agreement of the community or group to listing (the agreement is given according to the form defined by the community);
- 5.2. The inventory entry compiled by...;
- 5.3. Resource persons(s) - name and status;
- 5.4. Date and place of inventory entry;
- 5.5. Reference to literature/discography/audiovisual materials/archives.

Annex 4: Suggestions concerning the *Glossary Intangible Cultural Heritage*

1. It has been suggested to replace the expression “social practices” in all definitions by “cultural and social practices”.

2. In the definition of “culture”, it has been suggested to replace “lifestyles” by “language”. The definition would then read as follows:

The set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or a social group, encompassing, in addition to art and literature, language, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

3. The experts proposed to modify the definition of “oral expression” in the following way:

Aspects of intangible cultural heritage expressed by the human voice (instead of “through the spoken word or in song”).

4. It has been suggested to change the definition of “oral tradition” (Passing on by word of mouth and memorizing information from the past.) in the following way:

Transmitting cultural knowledge by word of mouth.