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Intangible
Cultural
Heritage

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A BEST SAFEGUARDING
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INTERGOVERNMENTAL
COMMITTEE FOR
THE SAFEGUARDING
OF THE INTANGIBLE
CULTURAL HERITAGE

EDUCATION
AND TRAINING
IN INDONESIAN BATIK
INTANGIBLE
CULTURAL HERITAGE
IN PEKALONGAN,
INDONESIA

BEST **SAFEGUARDING** **PRACTICES**

Intangible cultural heritage is a mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development. More than **150 countries** around the world **have agreed that safeguarding this heritage is our universal will and common concern** and have ratified the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

One of the Convention's tools for international cooperation is the **Register of Best Safeguarding Practices**, established in accordance with Article 18 of the Convention. The Register allows communities faced with the challenge of safeguarding their own intangible cultural heritage **to learn from the effective safeguarding initiatives of other communities.**

Each year, based on proposals submitted by States Parties that have ratified the Convention, the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage selects and promotes programmes, projects and activities that in its view best reflect the Convention's principles and objectives. Since 2009, ten Best Safeguarding Practices have been selected for the Register.

This is the story of one of them.

THIS GUIDE

This guide presents the experiences of the programme entitled **‘Education and training in Indonesian Batik intangible cultural heritage for elementary, junior, senior, vocational school and polytechnic students, in collaboration with the Batik Museum in Pekalongan’**. It was proposed by Indonesia and selected by the Committee as a Best Safeguarding Practice in 2009 (Decision 4COM.15B).

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1.

1. Elementary school students practise drawing motifs at a school workshop

2. Elementary school students dyeing cloth



2.

CONTENTS



1 How can we safeguard intangible cultural heritage?
p. 9



2 How was this programme born?
p. 13



3 Setting the programme in motion
p. 19



4 Batik goes to school!
p. 25



5 Serving students of all ages and levels
p. 33



6 What has the programme achieved?
p. 45



7 Confronting challenges
p. 51



8 What can be learned from this model?
p. 55

1.

HOW CAN WE SAFEGUARD INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE?

All over the world, we find a huge diversity of intangible cultural heritage, yet in many places it faces great challenges. A common problem in safeguarding this heritage is how to transmit it from its practitioners (many of whom may be elderly) to the younger generations upon whom its future depends. What steps can be taken to address this issue? The 2003 Convention asks each State to work towards the recognition of, respect for and enhancement of the intangible cultural heritage in society. This might be done through educational programmes aimed at the general public – in particular, young people – or through specific educational and training programmes within the communities and groups concerned.

Universal school education has brought tremendous benefits and future opportunities for children worldwide as they learn standardized subjects from mathematics to science. Nevertheless, the transmission of locally specific knowledge and culture is often neglected, without an awareness of what may have been lost. Nowadays children's time is mostly spent at school, away from family and community. For example, Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture and its networks are now implementing nine years of compulsory study throughout the country. Most Indonesian children no longer have the time to learn to practise intangible cultural heritage, outside of what is taught in the school curricula.

In this context, what approaches might be useful to preserve the skills and knowledge of a heritage that was customarily handed down from parent to child within the household or from master to apprentice in a community setting? What can be done when young people are no longer interested, even if the practitioners are willing to pass on their heritage to future generations?

One response to such challenges is to bring intangible cultural heritage training into formal school education as an alternative avenue of transmission, instead of relying on traditional transmission alone. We find cases from around the world where intangible cultural heritage training has been introduced into school curricula as a safeguarding measure. This is one example of an approach that combines formal and non-formal education to complement and strengthen the time-tested channels of transmission.



1. Children busy with their schoolwork

2. Grandma asks if her granddaughter would like to learn batik, but she's busy with her homework



2.

2.

HOW WAS THIS PROGRAMME BORN?

Indonesian batik is a type of traditional hand-crafted textile, passed down through the generations in Java and elsewhere in Indonesia. Batik involves a resist-dye technique: wax is applied on cloth to prevent certain areas from being dyed, thereby creating patterns. A special bamboo pen with a tiny copper funnel is used to apply the hot wax for making dots and lines. Copper printing blocks are another method used to apply the wax for creating continuous patterns and backgrounds. The motifs thus produced symbolize nature, culture, history and the social status of local communities.

Pekalongan, located on the north coast of central Java, is a port city with a population of some 272,000. It is known as ‘Batik City’ as batik has been the backbone of its economy for decades. This textile has traditionally been produced throughout the city by hand in family workshops and small-scale cottage industries. Batik has thus become part of the identity of the inhabitants, particularly since it has provided many of them with their main source of income.

In recent years, however, batik production in Pekalongan has come under threat, partly due to decreased demand. Indonesians have increasingly come to use more affordable, machine-printed, factory-made textiles with batik motifs or to adopt international clothing styles. Although batik continues to provide many of the city’s inhabitants with their livelihood, young people today are less aware of batik culture and are less attracted to a career as a batik-maker.

In 2006 a new museum devoted to the art and culture of batik opened in Pekalongan. Despite much fanfare and a presidential visit at the opening, the Batik Museum of Pekalongan attracted few visitors, testifying to a lack of public interest in this heritage, with its rich symbolism and traditionally important role in social life.



1.

1. A young family member gains skills and knowledge through observation and practice

2. Junior high school student drawing motifs on paper



2.

Looking at the empty museum, its director, Mr Zahir Widadi, pondered, ‘What can we do?’ He saw the problem as twofold: on the one hand, decreased public interest in the culture of batik; on the other, challenges faced in the transmission of the necessary skills and knowledge. These skills are passed down from generation to generation, by oral transmission and hands-on experience, often within the household. However, such traditional methods are increasingly problematic even in a city such as Pekalongan, where many batik practitioners still exist. Young people, especially children, spend most of their time at school. Even if practitioners are willing to maintain and hand down the traditions, they also want their children to succeed at school and are reluctant to take them away from their studies. After school, children are busy with homework and with distractions such as television or video games, leaving little time for learning the tradition of batik.

In this context, the director wondered, how could interest in the batik culture and the transmission of its skills and knowledge be revitalized? How could young people be encouraged to see a career in batik-making as just as worthwhile as one in medicine or computers? Even if students had become alienated from the tradition of batik, perhaps it could be brought to them at school. The museum could play a useful role through offering a venue and expertise.



1. The significance of batik motifs is taught at elementary school
2. Senior high school students collaborate in drawing batik motifs on cloth



3.

SETTING THE PROGRAMME IN MOTION



Elementary schoolchildren
admiring the batik they've
created

The museum director contacted the municipality and educational institutions to discuss the idea of bringing batik lessons to young students.

The scheme found immediate support from the mayor of Pekalongan, Dr H. Mohammad Basyir Ahmad, who also serves as chairperson of the Batik Museum Institute. He agreed to issue a decree for batik to be integrated as local content into the school curricula, in conformity with the existing national educational framework. Indonesia's Act 20 on National Education System (2003) provides that locally specific content be included among the compulsory subjects taught at school. Decisions on local content may be taken at the district or city level, so the mayor decided to include batik in the curricula of schools throughout Pekalongan.

Next, the museum contacted school directors to explain the necessity of batik education and asked them to introduce batik lessons for their students. Beginning with only one school in the 2005/06 academic year, it only took three years for the programme to reach all Pekalongan's 230 schools.

The main objectives of the batik education programme were as follows:

TO INCREASE awareness and appreciation of the cultural heritage of Indonesian batik – including its history, cultural values and traditional skills – among the younger generation at kindergarten, elementary, junior high, senior high, vocational high and polytechnic educational levels;

TO INCREASE awareness among school directors, teachers, parents and the batik community in Pekalongan regarding the importance of transmitting batik culture to the younger generations;

TO INVOLVE the management and staff of the Batik Museum in educational activities (both for students and for the general public) related to batik cultural values and training in batik traditional handicrafts.



1.

1. Polytechnic student working on an intricate design and using an advanced batik technique
2. The Museum Director visiting schools to invite them to take part in the programme

2.



23

4.

BATIK GOES
TO SCHOOL



Schoolchildren visiting the Batik Museum to attend a batik workshop

The first participants in the education and training programme were elementary school students, who participated in workshops held at the museum. The programme used the museum’s exhibition halls for lessons on the theory, history and cultural values of batik, while the museum workshop was used for practical sessions in the traditional skills of hand-drawn and hand-stamped batik. The programme quickly became integrated into all levels of the Pekalongan school system, from kindergarten to higher education.

TRAINING OF TRAINERS

At a preliminary four-day workshop at the Batik Museum, the staff were trained to give instruction in batik cultural values and traditional handicrafts. Later, as the programme expanded, schoolteachers were also trained so that batik education and training could be carried out at educational institutions that had the necessary facilities, while the final evaluations and testing would be done at the Batik Museum. In the training workshops, participants learned how to teach their students to make batik through the traditional method of oral instruction. They also learned how to teach the history and cultural significance of batik, as well as the symbolism of its motifs.

TEACHING MATERIALS

The museum prepared written materials for teaching batik and also designed exams at each level to check whether students had acquired the relevant skills and knowledge. The cultural practices of batik-making have now been integrated into many aspects of the school curriculum: for example, language lessons use written articles related to batik, while biology and chemistry lessons discuss the natural dyes used in making batik. Computer lessons include making batik designs using fractals, and the history of batik culture can be discussed in history lessons.



1.

1. Vocational high school student working side by side with a batik practitioner
2. Teacher showing her student how to apply colour to the motifs
3. Junior high school student applying a printing block to cloth



2.



3.

BATIK PRACTITIONERS AS INSTRUCTORS AS WELL AS SPONSORS

As the programme expanded beyond the walls of the museum, expert batik practitioners were called in to teach at those schools that were able to set up a workshop for the classes. Sponsors were also sought among batik producers, to minimize the cost of training the students. The sponsors contributed their time as well as cloth, wax, dyes and tools, so that all schools and students could participate.



Junior high school student dyeing cloth

5.

SERVING STUDENTS OF ALL AGES AND LEVELS



Kindergarten children enjoying drawing on cloth with a brush

The programme has expanded rapidly: initially, the museum was the only venue used for batik education; subsequently, the number of participating schools in Pekalongan increased until all the city’s educational institutions were included. One of the programme’s most interesting and dynamic aspects is that the teaching content has been adapted to the specific needs and levels of the students – whether in manipulating tools, making designs, the dyeing and treatment of cloth, or studying batik as intangible cultural heritage.

Learning batik can be formal or non-formal. Students can gain experience while they learn. They can also study and understand the culture of their country. After one hour of lessons, they can take home the batik they’ve made.
 (Mr Zahir Widadi, director of the Batik Museum)

KINDERGARTENS

Kindergarten children use brushes, rather than the special batik pens, to apply the wax, drawing whatever they wish for fun. No complicated techniques are taught at this stage. The children experience the pleasure of using their own hands and creating their own world on a piece of cloth.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Lower graders at elementary school are taught to use brushes to make (mostly basic) batik patterns. Higher graders begin to manipulate the special pens and copper wax printing blocks. The children make a 50 x 50 cm batik from beginning to finished product with their own hands, including writing their name on it with wax resist, which is then dyed. They can take home the finished batik to show their parents and friends. This gives the children a sense of achievement, reinforces their appreciation of batik and also increases the awareness of their parents and friends.



1.

1. Kindergarten child drawing on cloth with a felt-tip pen

2. Senior high school students discussing the colouring of motifs with their teacher



2.

I like learning batik. It's great fun and also a challenge. I can learn a lot from studying batik.
(Sekar, 9 years old)

We try to make the batik lessons very practical, so that they encourage a love for the activity, and for wearing batik. We collaborate with the parents and invite them to school committee meetings, along with officials and experts.
(Mr Mabruri, elementary school director)

JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

High school students not only take practical lessons in batik, but also learn the cultural values associated with it, including the significance and symbolism of different motifs and the characteristic patterns of different districts. Some junior high school students create their own designs – either individually or in groups – to produce a variety of articles and accessories. They also apply the designs in innovative ways, for example, making batik sandals or putting batik patterns on motorcycle helmets. Senior high schools have been innovative in introducing batik into subjects outside the fields of art or culture, such as languages, biology or chemistry. Senior high school students are instructed in the symbolism of patterns and motifs. They can thus appreciate the Batik Museum's displays, which come from all over Indonesia.

Through direct practice, students may be inspired to love batik more. Our ancestors have told us to be vigilant so that batik is not abandoned. Batik is a blessing. That is the meaning of batik.
(Mr Mujib, junior high school teacher)



1. Teacher showing a kindergarten child how to use a bamboo pen

2. 3. Elementary school students show great skill in using their bamboo pen



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1. Junior high school teachers with students during a practical batik session
2. Students working together to draw a motif on the design desk

VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS

Students at vocational high schools receive more specialized training. These students are even more serious about batik, since many of them eventually take up batik-related work. Vocational high schools by their very nature prepare students for a particular occupation, but even students who are not majoring in batik participate in batik studies as an elective subject. As part of their course, students from vocational high schools regularly gain practical experience by working as guides and trainers at the Batik Museum. Their batik studies tend to be more focused than those of students in mainstream education.

THE POLYTECHNIC

The Polytechnic of Pekalongan has established a three-year diploma course in batik, thus producing specialists with higher degrees in this field. As is the case with senior high schools, batik studies at the polytechnic level are often integrated into other subjects such as chemistry or environmental sciences. The symbolism of various patterns and motifs is studied in detail, with the students designing their own versions.



Vocational high school students helping each other to spread out cloth

6.

WHAT HAS THE PROGRAMME ACHIEVED?

The batik education and training programme has made an important contribution to the valorization of batik-making, not only in Pekalongan but also elsewhere in Indonesia. Young people have gained a new appreciation of the skills and knowledge required for the craft and a renewed respect for its practitioners, together with an increased interest in the possibility of making a career in batik.

Under this programme, a number of students have discovered what batik actually is. Some were already familiar with the process, as their families produce batik at home. For others, batik may have had no special significance. Through practical lessons, they have come to understand the intricate skills and hard work involved in producing a piece of batik cloth and making beautiful designs appear through the resist-dye technique. Their practical experience, coupled with the knowledge of batik's cultural significance taught in class, mean that batik is no longer simply an abstract concept for them.

This is a good programme for those who perhaps know something about batik but don't know how it's made. Students can experience and create items for themselves, according to their desires.

The instructors also enjoy giving the training in batik.

(Ms Rininta Karuniawati, staff member at the Batik Museum)

Furthermore, in the family, students talk about what they have learned at school. As a result, many families gain a renewed awareness of the importance of batik for them and their children. The participating schools have also created opportunities for their students' families to be involved in the programme, thereby rediscovering batik as their own intangible cultural heritage.

What does the programme mean to the community of practitioners? Some have been enlisted as instructors, whether at the museum or in local schools. Others serve as sponsors, providing tools and supplies so that the schools can serve all students. While by no means wishing to abandon older methods of non-formal instruction and apprenticeship, practitioners also recognize the value and effectiveness of integrating batik instruction into the formal education system.



1. A student takes home the batik cloth he made at school

2. Junior high school student drawing a motif on paper



Previously, we received batik cultural heritage orally. Now this must change with the use of technology. Having batik in school curricula very much supports the tradition, as the spirit and condition of the students are different from before. Now, if we don't make a clear theme or module within the education system, they will not accept it. (Mr Sukma, batik-maker)

Before there were institutions of formal education, we had been transmitting batik heritage to friends who wanted to learn, including schoolchildren. Now this is formalized in educational institutions which are more specific and formal for safeguarding batik as intangible cultural heritage. (Ms Ella, batik-maker)

Apart from increasing students' appreciation of batik heritage, the programme has yielded other benefits. For example, the experience of learning batik has given many students the pleasure of creating something with their own hands. As their creativity is stimulated, some begin to make their own batik designs, based upon what they have learned. Students also cultivate such qualities as patience, self-confidence and collaboration skills, while creating batik by themselves or in teams with their classmates.

The Pekalongan programme has brought batik to the hearts and hands of young students who might otherwise not have been aware of the significance of their heritage in a rapidly changing society. The city's inhabitants are witnessing a renaissance of their batik culture.



1.

1. Senior high school students working together to colour in the motifs

2. Junior high school students putting the final touches to the cloth

3. Elementary school student tracing a flower motif on cloth



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7.

CONFRONTING CHALLENGES

The programme has grown rapidly and yielded positive and observable results. However, this has not been without a number of challenges, as outlined below.

Some schools were initially reluctant to integrate batik education into their curricula. Teachers and school directors felt that their curricula were already overloaded with a number of other subjects to prepare students for higher education. In such cases, the decision-makers – the museum and the schools – discussed and defined the significance of batik education and devised a joint strategy on how it could best be integrated into the curriculum. Sometimes this meant reassuring school staff that the necessary support would be available from the museum programme and they would not be left to their own devices. At other times, this meant creatively deciding where to insert batik into subjects such as biology, chemistry or computer sciences.

The programme took on the ambitious mission of including batik at all levels of education, from kindergarten to the Polytechnic. Consequently, the content of batik education, in both theory and practice, needed to be tailored to fit the needs and capabilities of students of different ages and levels and at their respective places of learning.

The programme also faced the challenge that not all institutions and families can afford to buy the materials needed for the batik education of their students or children. In order to make this education affordable for everyone, batik producers have been enlisted to sponsor classes and provide tools and materials.



1.

1. Elementary school students adding a layer of colour to their batik cloth

2. A batik lesson adapted to a computer class



2.

8.

WHAT CAN BE
LEARNED FROM
THIS MODEL?

The batik education and training programme in Pekalongan offers many useful lessons as a model for localities and communities who wish to safeguard their own intangible cultural heritage. What are its key attributes and what can we learn from its experiences?

MAINSTREAMING HERITAGE INTO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Article 14 of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage calls for educational and training programmes to enhance the intangible cultural heritage within society. Some expressions of intangible cultural heritage such as batik can easily be adapted to a formal education system.

The communities involved need to ensure that formal education is a complement to non-formal, household-based or master-apprentice methods and that it strengthens rather than weakens such traditional channels of transmission. Here, the enthusiastic participation of batik practitioners – as instructors and even as sponsors – demonstrates that they recognize the programme as reinforcing their own methods and encouraging transmission and awareness raising among a larger number of young people than they themselves might reach.

School curricula in Pekalongan – as around the world – are already full. Even if the education system welcomes local content, programmes need to identify ‘entry points’ at which intangible cultural heritage concepts, knowledge and skills can be inserted into relevant subjects: from languages, history and civics to biology, physics, chemistry and maths.



1.

1. Teacher cooling the wax so that her pupil can use the bamboo pen safely
2. Teacher showing students how to draw the motifs safely
3. A family visiting the Batik Museum with their child, who has learned batik-making at school



2.



3.

INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS AMONG CORE INSTITUTIONS AND PEOPLE

The success of the programme relies upon strong and effective collaboration among numerous people and institutions. Core institutions such as the Batik Museum, the municipality and schools have worked to achieve a consensus in defining shared goals and methods and achieving clear results.

In this case, some key decision-makers within institutions – a museum director, a mayor, a school director, a teacher – recognized the importance of the initiative and personally contributed to its success. Their knowledge, skills and resources are all different, but equally vital to the design and implementation of an effective programme.

WIDEST POSSIBLE PARTICIPATION OF THE COMMUNITY

The programme is strongly supported by the local batik community and by the families of student participants. Sponsors from batik workshops provide learning materials so that all students, including those from less affluent families, may receive training. Batik practitioners participate actively as instructors at the museum and in individual schools. Students' families are made aware of the importance of batik when their children discuss their learning experiences and through their participation in related meetings and events organized by schools.

HANDS-ON LEARNING COMBINED WITH CONCEPTS AND CONTEXTS

Students learn the craft skills and techniques directly from teachers and practitioners, using their own hands and real materials. They have the opportunity to hold and use different tools and fabrics, to wear batik articles and to smell the molten wax and dyestuffs. Through this hands-on experience, they learn that the basics of batik are simple, but that their mastery requires great knowledge, skill and talent.

This practical experience reinforces their learning of the cultural values of batik (history, symbolism and significance of the craft) and their respect for its practitioners, while increasing their appreciation of its important role in Indonesian life. They can also learn the fundamentals of science (biology and chemistry, for instance) through examples that are close to home and to their daily lives.

CUSTOM-MADE AND FLEXIBLE

The contents are customized according to the students' capabilities and levels of learning so that the lessons are meaningful and enjoyable for them. From kindergarten through higher education, students encounter batik as a common thread, but at each level it is presented with greater complexity and a more demanding content.

The educational content and methods are adapted not only to age and grade, but also to specific kinds of schools. Students in a general high school are not learning the same thing as students in a vocational high school, even if their ages may be comparable. Some teachers or school directors are willing to allocate time for intensive study, while others may participate less fully.



Credits:

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Graphic design & layout:
Emmanuel Labard & Estelle Martin

UNESCO
Intangible Cultural Heritage Section
7, place de Fontenoy,
75352 Paris 07 SP, France

For further information:
www.unesco.org/culture/ich

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