Unit 36

Documentation and inventorying

Published in 2016 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 7, place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France

© UNESCO 2016



This publication is available in Open Access under the Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO (CC-BY-SA 3.0 IGO) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/igo/>). By using the content of this publication, the users accept to be bound by the terms of use of the UNESCO Open Access Repository (<http://www.unesco.org/open-access/terms-use-ccbysa-en>).

The images of this publication do not fall under the CC-BY-SA licence and may not be used, reproduced, or commercialized without the prior permission of the copyright holders.

The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors; they are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

Lesson plan

Duration:

90 minutes

Objective(s):

At the end of this session participants should be able to understand the distinction between documentation, inventorying and research, understand the basics of documenting ICH in context and be able to create data-collecting formats.

Description:

Participants of capacity-building workshops often query the relationship between documentation and inventorying. This unit is meant to provide a short introduction to the issue of documentation for those without a background in the subject or in research related to forms of ICH. It may be particularly useful to community members and representatives inventorying their own ICH. The unit provides the basic concepts for participants to add to and build on.

Proposed sequence:

* Documentation, research and inventorying
* Forms of documentation
* Background information
* Context - the linch-pin of ICH documentation
* Documentation: primary and secondary
* Situating the element in the local context
* The wider context
* Future use
* Exercise: creating a documentation format

Supporting documents:

* Unit 36 PowerPoint presentation

Notes and suggestions

As the capacity-building workshops explore various aspects of the inventorying process, there may not be sufficient time or even the need to cover the basics of documentation. If participants do not have a background in documentation, however, it will be important to include this unit, as documentation skills are critical to inventorying and will affect the planning and execution of the field exercises.

Unit 36

Documentation and inventorying

Facilitator’s narrative

#### Introduction

This unit provides an overview of documentation of ICH as a necessary tool and as background for working on an inventory.

###### SLIDE 1.

Documentation and inventorying

###### SLIDE 2.

In this presentation …

###### SLIDE 3.

Documentation, research and inventorying

How does inventorying differ from documentation? Where does research come into it? When does documentation become research?

Inventorying is often seen as synonymous to listing. However, the inventorying of ICH goes beyond listing, though the extent of detail and format is left to each country or State Party to determine. Sample formats and publications of inventory projects thus present an edited, limited version of the description and significance of ICH elements. To arrive at this stage, it is necessary to carry out documentation and link relevant research for a successful and meaningful inventory that can serve as a basis for safeguarding.

###### SLIDE 4.

Documentation and research

Research and documentation are mutually enriching. While research is the creative act of systematic knowledge creation, documentation is the [recording](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recording) and [retrieval](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_retrieval) of [information](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information). Research can guide and contribute to defining the scope of a documentation exercise but is also the stage following documentation, and is based on analysis and interpretation provided by the process of documentation.

###### SLIDE 5.

Documentation and ICH

Documentation is referred to repeatedly in the text of the 2003 Convention and the Operational Directives as part of a range of safeguarding measures, and thus is recognized as essential to the implementation of the Convention in various contexts.

###### SLIDE 6.

Documentation and the inventory

Thorough and methodical documentation of specific intangible cultural heritage is required for the creation of an inventory. The format can be designed just for the use by the community or for the purposes of publishing, making it available on the internet, or distributing and accessing in other ways. For this reason, presentation of the inventory in one specific context is generally uniform in appearance and structure.

In the context of the Convention, the participation of communities in thorough documentation is vital for the inventory. Describing the context and use of the ICH, along with any associated elements and details of transmission and viability, is a prerequisite for the creation of successful safeguarding and requires the wisdom of the community concerned by the intangible cultural heritage.

###### SLIDE 7.

Forms of documentation

A list of documentation formats is presented here. However, it is important to include traditional forms of documentation that may exist within a tradition. These may take the form of images, manuscripts, songbooks, texts, aids to teaching and so on.

Documentation of ICH should be preserved and deposited in community centres, archives, museums or libraries for consultation, if and as appropriate. The data extracted can be made available through databases or the internet via blogs, articles, websites and social media. However, in the context of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, the potential negative and positive effects of documentation and archiving on safeguarding specific intangible cultural heritage have to be considered in advance.

###### SLIDE 8.

Documenting an element

The documentation process should take into consideration that each element is an integral part of the life of a people and should be viewed in that context. A dance may form part of a larger ritual tradition, a craft such as basketry may form part of a larger bamboo-weaving tradition, and so on. Function and context, community or location, or other factors may connect such elements. It is therefore important to situate an element in its larger cultural context.

All forms of ICH are dynamic. They are constantly evolving, being recreated and transmitted. The documentation process must therefore also evolve. There is a somewhat dangerous misconception that documentation of a genre, once done, is complete and need not be revisited. This is not the case; documentation is an ongoing process.

Documentation is meant to describe and record. The records should not, however, be used to freeze a tradition or accord it finality as a means of deciding on ‘authenticity’. No matter how exhaustive, no documentation can be complete or replace actual practice. Thus, documentation should not be used as a basis for prescribing or teaching, though it may be treated as an aid to understanding.

Though documentation may be perceived by some as an objective description, it is necessary to realize that documentation is never objective. The perspective of the person documenting the element is bound to affect the data and the outcome. It is best to be aware of this and state their point of view to the extent possible. In documentation related to community-based inventorying, the perspective of the community and the practitioner have to be represented.

###### SLIDE 9.

Background information

The origin story and history of the element, if known, constitute useful background for documentation. Tradition bearers or community elders are the most typical resource for such information. As there are likely to be several versions and theories, however, it is advisable to begin the documentation process by bringing people together to contribute to the discussion. Other basics would be the various types of the expression and how they are practiced, the areas where they are practised and so forth. The significance of the practice is not always clear or known to everybody. There may be myths, stories and legends associated with ICH elements, as well as written or oral texts. Beliefs may include deities or spirits, which have implications for practicing the ICH.

As an example, in Goa it is believed that the ritual theatre known as Zagor must be performed or the crops will fail and wishes will remain unfulfilled. In Rajasthan, the ritual storytelling of the Pabuji epic is said to cure cattle disease.

###### SLIDE 10.

Context - the linch-pin of ICH documentation

Context is the lynch pin of ICH documentation. Likewise, de-contextualization is one of its biggest threats. When a practice moves out of its context and is performed in isolation, it loses its significance, social function, vitality and relevance to the community.

This slide lists the core documentation questions. These are used to establish the context of a particular element. The name by which an element is **called** may not be a single term; however, it most likely exists in the local language. At times a descriptive or translated term replaces the original term (e.g. Sword Dancing). **Whom** refers not only to the practitioner being recorded, but also any specific persons, groups, castes, clans and so on identified as practitioners. **Why** refers to the context and significance. The audience, consumer, recipient or beneficiary of every element is very important. **When** an element is performed or practised refers to the time, season, occasion or reason for the practice. **Where** may refer to a significant place or location, or may not.

This list comprises the basic set of questions for documentation.

###### SLIDE 11.

Documentation: primary and secondary

Primary documentation refers to observation of the practice in its actual context. The basics of documentation require both physical presence and observation. Certain events, however, may not require a specific context and performances can be arranged for the purpose of documentation. Primary documentation can be supplemented by secondary documentation, such as interviews with practitioners and other community members, and reference to literature and previous documentation. However, data collected through interviews, accounts of practitioners or via the internet cannot be considered as documentation, but may complement existing data if it is in accordance with the views of the community.

###### SLIDE 12.

Process, not product

This general statement means that, for the purpose of documentation, the process underlying the cultural element is as important as performance of the element itself. In the case of crafts, which are tangible objects, the ability, technique, skill and so forth are considered part of the ICH, and thus part of the inventorying process.

###### SLIDE 13.

Documenting the process

These photographs are taken from a series documenting the process of basket weaving by the Lhop Community of Village Taba, Bhutan.

###### SLIDE 14.

Documenting connections

ICH elements do not exist in isolation. One element may incorporate more than one practice and some activities may connect separate elements. This slide lists a few examples from music. Participants should be encouraged to add to these examples.

###### SLIDE 15.

Training and transmission

An important part of documenting an element is the method of training and transmission. This also has major implications for safeguarding. Safeguarding measures are often needed most when traditional forms of transmission are under threat. A few traditional as well as contemporary methods of transmission are listed here as examples. Traditional and contemporary methods may co-exist and ought be documented and described.

###### SLIDE 16.

Recording names, roles, functions

It is important to note correctly the names of all those involved, as well as the terms used for various participants and their roles in addition to their names. The terminology of parts of objects, tools instruments and so on, should also be recorded along with their functions.

It is important to stress the need for detail and accuracy when documenting people’s perspectives, processes and objects, and the requirement to record all parts of elements in the local language.

###### SLIDE 17.

Documenting viability

The viability or the health of an element is crucial for safeguarding. This can be best recorded during the process of documentation. The few questions listed here should be expanded upon to address the level of activity, whether the practice or performance has changed, whether there is local support for it, the state of transmission, and finally the livelihood concerns of the practitioners.

As society and cultures change, the market for traditional goods may disappear along with the context for certain services. It is important to collect data on such changes. Addressing the livelihood concerns of ICH practitioners forms an important part of safeguarding.

###### SLIDE 18.

Situating the element in the local context

As has been underlined above, the perspective of the community should lead the documentation exercise. Various points should be borne in mind when situating an element in the local context.

There is no one best or most authentic version of any ICH element but just ICH as communities define and recreate it. Thus, all variations and versions, and opinions should be recorded. Even if you are a community member, verify your information by recording all shades of opinion. An element is recognized by the ownership of its practitioners, and the label of authenticity is not relevant in this context. It is also advisable to avoid classifying and categorizing ICH elements under headings like ‘Folk art’ or ‘Street Performance’. Not only are these not reflective of the terms used by the community, but can often be seen as pejorative.

###### SLIDE 19.

The wider context: intangible and the tangible

Intangible cultural heritage elements connect with tangible elements in many contexts. For example, crafts produce objects which are tangible objects, although ICH refers to the knowledge and creativity required to create them. In addition, many objects that form part of the practice and performance of ICH elements are critical to its structure and enactment. Musical instruments and items like masks, costumes, scrolls and ritual objects are another major category. The enactment of ICH elements is sometimes linked to specific spaces and sites, which define it, such as a central square, temple courtyard, riverbank and so on. Some ICH elements are also linked to built heritage such as places of worship and monuments.

###### SLIDE 20.

Documents for documentation

The creation of formats for documentation is a useful part of preparation, although not all may be adhered to in the course of the practicum. Forms for capturing technical data and for procuring free, informed and prior consent are essential. Documents to ensure community access are likewise important. These should note the recordings made and ensure copies or access, as may be decided upon with the community representatives. Release forms for public or online access of the inventory should also be produced.

###### SLIDE 21.

Documentation: for future use

Finally, there are some practical tips to ensure that the documentation created is useful for further use. Recordings must be annotated carefully and permissions noted, along with other instructions to enable fair practice for access.

It is also very useful to have an overall report of the documentation, and summaries of the various issues and elements documented to supplement the detailed documentation.

Unit 36

Exercise:

Creating a documentation format

**Group exercise**: Ask each group to create a format for documentation for a different kind of element (e.g. performance, ritual, craft).

These should then be presented and discussed, and an attempt made to combine them to create a schematic for the fieldwork practicum. This can combine spaces for structured, as well as unstructured, data using categories such as ‘Notes’. Each group should ideally include at least one community member or practitioner, who can act as a resource and lead the process. Working with practitioners in this way also provides training for cultural workers on working with communities in a supportive role.