CASE STUDY 1

Stakeholders in the management and safeguarding of a festival in Japan

Yamahoko, the float ceremony of the Kyoto Gion festival, which takes place in July every year in Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan, was inscribed on the Representative List in 2009.

The Yamahoko procession consists of thirty-two wooden floats, with gorgeous hangings and decorations, whose elaborate designs date back to the mid-seventeenth century. They are decorated with references to Japanese legends and plays. The floats proceed through the streets of Kyoto, pulled by local people; some have accompanying musicians or dancers. The procession is managed and conducted by the residents of self-governing central districts of Kyoto, who own the floats and store them in special houses. Today, each of the thirty-two districts has its own Cultural Preservation Association, coordinated by an umbrella community organization called the Foundation for Gion Festival Preservation Associations, established in 1923.

The procession is not currently facing severe threats to its viability, but in order to safeguard it and ensure its future practice and transmission, a variety of interlocking roles are performed by numerous community members, State agencies, NGOs and other institutions, and by local industries.

#### Role of the communities concerned

Residents of the older, central part of Kyoto have traditionally organized the procession: they participate in it, make financial contributions and also train younger members of the community to take part. Residents are organized into blocks of houses that each have their own Yamahoko association and organize their own float.

Local residents’ associations, coordinated by the Foundation for Gion Festival Preservation Associations, undertake research, training and coordination of the procession and help with the maintenance and storage of the floats and their decorations.

The residents are essential actors in the procession as musicians or dancers, pulling the floats or riding on them; the streets are crowded with an appreciative audience. The practitioners train young people in musical and dance skills, the assembly and turning of the floats and maintenance tasks. The migration of older families and wealthier people out of the central districts of Kyoto and the influx of new residents and businesses, however, has led to a greater reliance in conducting the procession on volunteers who do not live in the central part of the city. The residents are currently running out of storage capacity for the floats and have asked for State assistance in building new storage facilities.

#### Role of the State

The State at national, provincial (‘prefectural’) and municipal levels in Kyoto provides support for community maintenance and safeguarding efforts. A Kyoto prefectural (provincial) ordinance (the Prefectural Ordinance for the Promotion of the Revitalization of Kyoto Based on Cultural Power) provides a broader rationale for municipal and provincial investment in the event. The Kyoto municipal government regulates the procession’s route through the city, ensuring for instance that overhead cables do not prevent the passage of the floats. The Kyoto municipal government also negotiates with community associations to regulate and agree the procession’s route. The holding of the procession is a major event in the city and requires the closure of roads and the management of what have become very large crowds.

National, provincial and municipal governments assist with the maintenance of floats, research and training. For example, various levels of government give money to the Associations for maintenance of the floats. Local schoolchildren are given musical training to participate in the procession.

National legislation on ICH, the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties (1950), provides for State funding for ICH inventorying and safeguarding. The Yamahoko procession was included on a national ICH inventory as an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property (1979), providing central State funds for research and repairs to the floats, among other things. It is also on a provincial inventory of ICH. The Yamahoko procession was successfully nominated to and inscribed on the Representative List in 2009; all stakeholders worked together in preparing the nomination file.

#### Other stakeholders also play a role

Local industries such as weaving, embroidery and metalworking contribute to the maintenance and repair of the floats and benefit from the display of their products on the floats. State funding contributes to their work on the repair of embroidery and metalwork used in the floats.

Institutions like the State-funded National Research Institute and Japanese universities, and the Foundation for Gion Festival Preservation Associations, undertake research on the history and function of the procession, as well as on how to address the threats it might face in the future, in close cooperation with the communities and groups concerned.

For further information:

* Fukami, S. ‘The Gion Festival Yamahoko Events and Activities of the Gion Matsuri Yamahoko Rengo-Kai’. ACCU Training Course for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, 16 December 2008:

http://www.accu.or.jp/ich/en/training/curriculum/second/curriculum\_7.html

* Murakami, T. ‘Safeguarding System of ICH by Municipality of Kyoto’. ACCU Training Course for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, 25 January 2008: http://www.accu.or.jp/ich/en/training/curriculum/curriculum\_7.html#/point4/
* Yamauchi, H. ‘The Influence of Culture for Community Revitalization in Kyoto’. ACCU Training Course for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, 26 January 2008: http://www.accu.or.jp/ich/en/training/curriculum/curriculum\_9.html