



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Intangible
Cultural
Heritage

LIVING HERITAGE AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Snapshot of the
UNESCO online survey



Experiences from over 70 countries have shown the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on living heritage around the world, as well as the role it can play in maintaining social connectivity and solidarity during physical distancing and lockdown.

As part of UNESCO's response to this on-going crisis, UNESCO mobilized its networks to document and exchange experiences from communities around the world on how living heritage has been impacted, and the roles it can play to support community resilience and recovery.

This document presents the general outcomes and trends of this work.

As of August 2020, the online platform includes more than 200 experiences from over 70 countries showing the diverse ways in which communities have responded to the impact of the pandemic on their living heritage.

Online survey

UNESCO launched the online survey in April 2020, targeting a broad range of stakeholders and with an emphasis on communities who are at the heart of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The survey invited respondents to 'Share your living heritage experience' in their own words, leading to a collection of rich testimonies in English, French and Spanish. These testimonies are available to the public in their original language through an [online platform](#).

The survey is still open – please send us your contribution [here!](#)



KEY FINDINGS

The COVID-19 crisis reveals the fragility of living heritage in emergencies, but also its resilience: while the pandemic may physically separate us, living heritage can connect us, offering hope, solidarity and inspiration to help face the crisis together.

MAIN TRENDS



94%

CONFIRMED THAT LIVING HERITAGE IS AFFECTED BY THE PANDEMIC

59%

REFERRED TO INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO PASS ON LIVING HERITAGE

27%

HIGHLIGHTED THE DIRECT CONTRIBUTION OF LIVING HERITAGE TO SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY

IMPACT ON LIVING HERITAGE

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITIES

"Many bearers, especially of elements inscribed on the lists of the Convention, have told us the pain and anguish that it has caused them, not being able to experience in the usual way, the practices and characteristics of the local Intangible Cultural Heritage."

Centro de la Diversidad Cultural (Cultural Diversity Center), Venezuela



"A living tradition is one that is practiced and constantly recreated in communities. At the time of the pandemic, when it is forbidden to socialize and move around, it is not possible to practice most forms of living tradition. However, individuals and groups, using modern technology, manage to create a semblance of communion and transfer individual practices to young people, so that the thread of tradition transfer is not interrupted."

National Section of CIOFF® of Bosnia and Herzegovina



"The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on Japanese traditional stage performances, including the professionals who make the stage tools necessary for these performances. Indeed, these traditional and important performances, such as Noh, Kyogen, Kabuki and Bunraku were increasingly canceled or postponed since late February 2020, with most of them stopped by the beginning of May 2020."

Tamiko Tamura, NGO for Project of maintenance of quality of stage tools for the Japanese performing arts, Japan



Disruptions to the enactment and transmission of living heritage

- Physical distancing and lockdown measures led to the cancellation or postponement of many festive events and rituals.
- Access to the spaces, places, objects and materials necessary for the practice and enactment of living heritage was restricted.
- Loss of income and livelihoods for bearers and practitioners (many of whom largely operate in the informal sector) threaten its transmission.

Living heritage adapts to an evolving environment

- Communities explore new ways to express, transmit and safeguard their living heritage despite restrictions around physical distancing, using in particular digital technologies and social media, and finding alternative performing venues.
- The pandemic fosters reflections on the roles and importance of living heritage in times of crisis through public debates, online consultations and research.
- More time spent at home sometimes triggers the revitalization of living heritage elements, particularly among younger generations.



© I, Ruud Zwart / CC BY-SA 2.5 NL Some intangible practices have been affected or stopped altogether this is the case, for example, of cyclical community practices for the maintenance of earthen architectural heritage, such as those in Djenne and Timbuktu (Mali).

LIVING HERITAGE, A SOURCE OF RESILIENCE

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITIES

"Many of the citizen started to re-visit their traditional culture, and to plant edible plants that were once an important food source of local rural community. Exploration of home cook skills and food culture flourish in the city, some started to make their own rice wine, fermented paste, and plant vegetables at home etc., which are traditional knowledge and skills to produce and preserve food."

Policy for Sustainability Lab, Centre for Civil Society and Governance, The University of Hong Kong



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"A new form of sociality has manifested itself with the songs and music from the balconies and windows of the houses, especially in the urban areas, bringing out the significant role of music and particular songs as an expression of our common cultural heritage or in any case shared, from which to draw energy to face the difficult moment of crisis."

Associazione Culturale "Circolo della Zampogna", Italy



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"In Cambodia, intangible cultural heritage is deployed for the transmission of important public health messages. The 75-year-old Master Kong Nay, one of the rare great masters of the Chapei Dang Veng, sings about hand-washing and social distancing and other COVID-19 safety tips."

Cambodian Living Arts, Cambodia



© Cambodian Living Arts

LIVING HERITAGE, A SOURCE OF RESILIENCE

SURVEY RESULTS OVERVIEW



- Oral traditions, music and dance are used as a way to strengthen social cohesion and express messages of support for health workers on the frontline.
- Practicing and enjoying one's living heritage provide a source of spiritual and emotional comfort, contributing to mental wellbeing and allaying feelings of anxiety and uncertainty caused by the pandemic.
- Different forms of living heritage, such as poetry, song and storytelling, are used to communicate information about COVID-19, promote behavior change and advocate for public health recommendations.
- Local systems of food production, agriculture and health care encounter a renewed interest, strengthening networks of mutual aid and support and promoting more sustainable ways of living together.
- Traditional crafts and art forms provide an alternative source of livelihoods for communities facing precarious social and economic conditions.

© Austrian Commission for UNESCO. Transhumance in the Alps
The practitioners are still confident that the ICH will not be disrupted by the virus (it was also continued all through World War II and the political unrests in the 1960s).

UNESCO'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

While billions of people around the world turn to culture as a source of resilience and social connectivity, COVID-19 has hit the culture sector hard. People need culture, but culture is now in crisis. In response, UNESCO has developed an action plan focusing on four key pillars:

1. Communication, advocacy and awareness raising

To enhance visibility, promote community involvement, ensure continued access to culture, improve understanding of the role of living heritage in emergencies and integrate culture into national responses to COVID-19.

- **#ShareOurHeritage#ShareCulture awareness campaign**
- **Social media messages to counter illicit trafficking of cultural property**

3. Support for artists, culture professionals and communities

To mobilize the international community to support artists and the creative sector, including at the local level through cities, promote knowledge exchange and identify support measures for creative professionals.

- **ResiliArt: Supporting artists and culture professionals beyond the crisis**
- **UNESCO Creative Cities Network**
- **Online survey on Living Heritage and COVID-19**

2. Impact assessment of the cultural sector and support for public policies

To mobilize Member States, intergovernmental organizations, development banks and cultural institutions, map public policy measures and integrate culture into national post-crisis measures.

- **Online meetings on COVID-19's impact on the culture sector**
- **Culture 2030 Platform analysis of national data**
- **Culture and COVID-19: Impact & Response Tracker**
- **UNESCO-ICOM survey with museums and museum professionals**

4. Capacity building and resources to safeguard cultural heritage

To support professionals and practitioners in safeguarding cultural heritage, provide expertise, resources and strengthen capacities.

- **Open access to living heritage resources, including:**
 1. **More than 60 thematic training units.**
 2. **Toolbox on ICH and sustainable development**
 3. **Interactive bibliography with more than 1,000 research references in 10 languages.**



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Living heritage in emergencies

This work contributes to the ongoing reflections by the governing bodies of the 2003 Convention on intangible cultural heritage in emergencies, which led to the development of the operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies, endorsed at the 14th session of the Intergovernmental Committee in 2019. For more information [visit the website](#).

SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND FIGURES



When designing the online survey, UNESCO opted for a few open questions to allow for the widest possible participation despite difficult circumstances, in particular from bearers and stakeholders. The questions were framed around the themes gradually developed since 2016 on living heritage and emergencies (impacts on living heritage and living heritage as a source of resilience).

The survey was shared among the 2003 Convention networks (Accredited NGOs, global network of facilitators, category 2 centres, UNESCO Field Offices and UNESCO Chairs related to living heritage).

Out of the nearly 300 responses received or collected by the Secretariat, more than 200 provided enough information to be shared online. To facilitate the access and the analysis of such a large amount of qualitative information, the Secretariat developed vocabularies on the type of impact and resilience mentioned in the responses and indexed the experiences accordingly.

IMPACT	
Type of impact of the pandemic on living heritage	% of experiences concerned
New ways of enacting or transmitting	59%
Cancellation/postponement of ICH-related event	45%
Restricted access to associated places	26%
Loss of livelihoods	23%
Reflexive initiatives on ICH and the pandemic	13%
Revitalization of intangible heritage	11%
Restricted access to associated objects/materials	6%
Safeguarding activity cancelled/postponed	5%

SOURCE OF RESILIENCE	
Type of resilience brought by living heritage	% of experiences concerned
Social connectivity	27%
Spiritual support and mental well-being	15%
Communication and awareness-raising	6%
Local agriculture and production	5%
Alternative livelihoods	5%
Non-formal education	4%
Traditional health care	4%