Unit 23

Methods & TeCHNIQUES of 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-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO (CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-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 ([www.unesco.org/open-access/terms-use-ccbyncsa-en](http://www.unesco.org/open-access/terms-use-ccbyncsa-en)).

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:

3 hours

Objectives:

Enhance the ability of participants to plan activities to collect and present intangible cultural heritage (ICH) elements, as well as demonstrate requirements related to generating information, such as receiving prior consent. Participants will also be able to distinguish between different interview techniques; deploy basic skills related to video recording, photography and audio recording; explain the importance of receiving evaluative feedback from community members and design a framework for achieving this.

Description:

The unit focuses on methods of information generation in community-based inventorying and looks at how appropriate application of such methods can enhance participatory processes. It describes the process of information generation and explains why it is necessary, when it should be conducted, which methods and techniques (e.g. interviewing, participatory video, photography, audio recording and participatory mapping techniques) should be used, and for whom and by whom data should be recorded. It further discusses the opportunities and limitations of these methods for community-based inventorying and their transferability. It also presents the ethical requirements related to information generation, including the need to obtain prior consent from community members.

Proposed sequence:

* Introduction to generating information on ICH elements
* Overview of different methods of information generation and the pros and cons of each method
* Guidance on choosing an information-generation method
* Exercise 1: Information generation decision framework
* Prior consent and release forms (Optional)

Supporting documents:

* PowerPoint presentation Unit 23
* Unit 23 Hand-out 1: Decision framework table
* Unit 23 Hand-out 2: Glossary for Unit 23
* Additional resources: *Folklife and Fieldwork: A Layman’s Introduction to Field Techniques*. First Edition Prepared 1979 by Peter Bartis. Revised 2002 Library of Congress, Washington DC

Notes and suggestions

This unit was adapted from CTA. 2010. *Training Kit on Participatory Spatial Information Management and Communication.* CTA, The Netherlands and IFAD, Italy (ISBN: 978-92-9081-446-7) and parts of *Folklife and Fieldwork: A Layman’s Introduction to Field Techniques* (1st Edition, 1979, P. Bartis, rev. 2002).

Unit 23

Methods & techniques of inventorying

Facilitator’s Narrative

###### Slide 1.

Methods & techniques of inventorying

The unit focuses on methods of information generation for inventorying and the ways in which appropriate application of these methods can enhance participatory processes. It describes the process of information generation and explains why it is necessary, when it should be conducted, which methods and techniques should be used, and for whom and by whom data should be recorded. It also reviews the ethical requirements of information generation.

###### Slide 2.

In this presentation …

Information generation is used here to refer to the process and tools for collecting, recording and presentingICH elements with the participation of the community. A variety of information-generation methods exist which employ visual and auditory components and convey the relevance and meaning of the material that is collected. These include text, video, audio or a combination of media.

It is important to remember that the main objective of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage[[1]](#footnote-1) is safeguarding. This means ensuring the viability of ICH through measures that enable its continued enactment, development and transmission, thereby providing groups and communities with a sense of identity and continuity. However, to allow measures such as information generation to help safeguard ICH, they must reflect its nature as living and constantly recreated. Otherwise, they risk immortalizing ICH in a static form, which does not constitute safeguarding.

This unit includes a review of approaches to information generation for ICH elements, including observation and note-taking, interviewing, participatory video, photography, audio recording and participatory mapping techniques. The opportunities and limitations of these methods for community-based inventorying and their transferability are discussed, as well as ethical requirements related to information generation, including obtaining prior consent and release forms from community members (refer also to Units 21 and 22).

###### Slide 3.

Generating information on ICH elements

Note to facilitator:

Generating information on ICH elements is also discussed in the introduction to Unit 19, but can be described briefly here. The previous unit emphasized identification and definition of ICH elements. This unit focuses on collecting and presenting information on ICH elements in a systematic way.

Inventorying

Article 12 of the Convention requires States Parties to draw up one or more inventories of the ICH present on their territory. Inventorying, or inventory making, involves collecting and presenting information on ICH elements in a systematic way.

States Parties may organize ICH inventories in whatever manner seems most appropriate to them. ICH inventories should be comprehensive and regularly updated. Inventorying should be preceded by the identification and definition of elements of ICH in close cooperation with the communities and groups concerned and, if appropriate, with NGOs (Article 11(b)).

As mentioned above, the Convention requires inventorying to contribute to safeguarding, which suggests that the state of viability of the inventoried elements should be assessed and indicated. Inventories may also contribute to awareness-raising, one of the main objectives of the Convention. The drawing up of inventories will remain a work in progress as the constant recreation of ICH requires that inventories be continuously updated.

An inventory can be disseminated as a paper list, a multimedia database or another type of publication. At the request of the communities concerned, access to certain types of information may be restricted in conformity with Article 13(d)(ii) (refer to Articles 11(b), 12 and 13(d)(ii)).

###### Slide 4.

Why information generation is necessary

Information generation is important for a variety of reasons. It produces material that can be used to:

* inform and support a community’s inventory of ICH elements (this material might also become useful in the long-term archiving of local knowledge and might have uses beyond its original inventorying purpose); and
* maintain an account of inventory and ICH-related activities and events (through its entire lifespan), which can be useful in inventory evaluation and to provide feedback on a inventory to stakeholders (e.g. government, funders, NGOs).

Note to facilitator:

The facilitator may wish to remind participants (as seen in Unit 20 on identifying and defining ICH elements) that inventorying concerns the identification and definition of ICH; it is not the same as documentation or research. For insertion into an inventory, no extensive research or documentation on an element is required. If versions of the element were previously recorded, studied or otherwise written about, then the relevant information is welcome and should be referenced in the inventorying framework. Similarly references should be included on the existence of information on objects or instruments associated with living ICH expressions or practices.

###### Slide 5.

The role of community members

Refer also to Facilitator’s notes and Participant’s text Unit 7, and Participant’s text Unit 3.

In the context of community-based inventorying, careful consideration needs to be given to how information is generated, the methods used for information generation, and who identifies, records and presents this material. While members of the community should have a prominent role in the information-generation process, in some cases people outside the community will also be involved (usually in a facilitation or training role).

Materials and methods used for information generation should correspond to inventory goals, as well as the interests and comfort of community members. While certain individuals, such as community leaders or those acting as an authority on a specific element, may play a greater role in the information-generation process, input should be sought from the community at large regarding materials to be recorded and preferred approaches to information generation.

In all likelihood, it will be necessary to incorporate local ways of expressing knowledge when considering the role that community members will play in the inventory. This may affect the appropriateness of certain styles of information generation, depending upon the ability of certain techniques to represent local knowledge in a way that is meaningful to community members.

A variety of cultural factors may also shape the way in which ICH elements are collected. For example, group discussions may prevent less vocal members of the community from being involved, or the use of photography or video may inadvertently limit the involvement of participants who do not feel comfortable having their image captured. Information-generation methods should be sensitive to cultural appropriateness and personal feelings, while also recognizing and responding to specific community dynamics.

Inventorying facilitators need to understand that certain styles of information generation lead to greater inclusivity than others, and multiple approaches and methods may be required to obtain input from a broad spectrum of community members. One way to begin to think about this is to examine the make up of the information-generation team (e.g. it could be comprised of outsiders and community members; women and men; young, middle-aged and older people; rich and poor; and those from different groups within the community).

###### Slide 6.

Ethical requirements of information generation

Note to facilitator:

Participants should be reminded of the ethical issues related to inventorying, as they pertain to the collection and presentation of ICH elements. Depending on prior discussions of this subject in Units 19 to 22, the presenter can go into more or less detail here, so as to avoid excessive overlap.

As discussed in Unit 22, free, prior and informed consent recognizes a community’s inherent and prior rights to their ICH and respects their legitimate authority to require that third parties enter into an equal and respectful relationship with them, based on the principle of informed consent. The process of free, prior and informed consent refers to the dialogue, sharing of information and general process through which community members choose to participate in a project. When properly implemented, the free, prior and informed consent process ensures that communities and individuals are voluntary participants with a comprehensive knowledge of relevant risks and benefits.

In its discussion of inventory initiatives started by outsiders, Unit 22 highlights the importance of ensuring that community members have a clear understanding of the following:

* the purpose of the inventory and its expected duration and procedures;
* their right to decline to participate and to withdraw from the inventory, as well as the anticipated consequences of doing so;
* factors that may influence their willingness to participate, such as potential risks or adverse effects;
* an understanding of the prospective benefits;
* how the information that they provide will be recorded, used, archived and possibly reused; and
* who to contact with questions.

Release forms

Interviewers should always ask the interviewee for permission to share the information and materials created during interviews and inventorying initiatives. Ideally, permission should be given in writing, using a prepared document called a ‘release (or consent) form’. This is particularly important if the materials are used in a public forum, such as online presentations, print publications, documentary films and so on.

The interviewees sign a written release form to indicate their awareness of the goals of the inventory and their willingness to allow their recorded material to be used in the stated inventory or for other purposes. Release forms may be specific (such as requesting permission to use a person's image in a video) or they may be sufficiently broad to allow the information generated to be used in ways impossible to anticipate at the time of the inventory. Generally, a release form is not needed in cases where people are participating in public events (e.g. a photograph of a large group of people dancing at a festival).

###### Slide 7.

Methods of information generation

A variety of techniques can be employed on their own or in conjunction with one another to collect ICH elements. An overview of these information-generation methods provides a useful starting point for determining which methods are most suitable for a particular inventory.

###### Slide 8.

Archive and literature reviews

It is useful to undertake a review of existing reports, studies, videos, photos, maps and other documents on the ICH element(s) in question before engaging in further information generation and presentation. Gathering information in this manner involves collecting and organizing items such as archival materials, reports and other published literature or records. It helps to avoid duplication of material and replication of interviews with community members, who might have already provided information. However, it is important that community members validate any such material before it is applied to the inventory.

Note to facilitator:

This aspect also corresponds to section 5 (reference concerning the ICH element [if any]) of the UNESCO framework for organizing information on ICH elements, presented in Unit 19.

###### Slide 9.

Archive and literature reviews: pros and cons

Pros:

* Document group characteristics.
* Elaborate upon the history and pattern of the ICH element.
* Establish an historic presence.
* Provide insight into ways that the community has been portrayed in the past.

Cons:

* Sources from outside the community may not reflect local perspectives.
* Quality of documents will vary, access may be restricted.
* Data may be inaccurate or constitute an incomplete representation.

###### Slide 10.

Observation and note-taking

Listening and watching can prove quite useful as a means of collecting local knowledge and specific ICH elements. Observation involves paying attention to people’s actions and words, including the ways in which they make use of private and public spaces, and the suggestions they make surrounding the inventory itself.

Observers need to be conscious of bias, or ‘seeing what they expect to see’. In other words, preconceived notions can lead to observations being distorted by limited understanding of events.

Observers also need to be impartial in drawing definitive conclusions about certain events. In particular, it is important that they avoid subjectivity and ‘seeing what they want to see’. This is notably the case during evaluation of ICH elements, which observers want to appear successful, leading to the misinterpretation (conscious or unconscious) of events to better suit one’s own requirements.

The keeping of well-organized, detailed field notes is important in this regard, even for inventories that do not rely on observation and note-taking as a primary method of information generation. They should be used to record direct observations, and to collect any ICH elements employed and ideas that arise surrounding these.

###### Slide 11.

Observation and note-taking: pros and cons

Pros:

* Observation and note-takingare low cost, include impromptu remarks.
* Record behaviours that may escape other tools of information generation.
* Document steps taken in creating the inventory.

Cons:

* Exclusion of some community members.
* Reflects the observer/note-taker’s perspective.
* May not include the context behind statements or occurrences.

###### Slide 12.

Interviews

An interview is a dialogue between two or more people for the purpose of exploring a specific theme or topic or providing insight into an ICH element. Interviews usually involve an interviewer (who asks questions) and an interviewee (who answers). Interviews are an intrinsic aspect of the other information-generation methods discussed in this section.

Understanding how to use popular interview styles can facilitate their application for inventory purposes.

###### Slide 13.

Focus groups: pros and cons

A focus group is an interview conducted with a group of people to discuss a subject of interest. The kind of information obtained through focus group interviews can resemble that obtained in a brainstorming session. For this reason, focus groups are particularly useful for determining inventorying goals and design. A focus group may not be the best choice, however, if detailed information about a specific ICH element is desired. Such data may be more easily obtained in a personal interview with one person who has a good understanding of the element.

Pros:

* Lead to collaborative problem-solving.
* Are time- and cost-effective.
* Place community members on an equal footing.
* Have a flexible format.

Cons:

* Focus groups cannot provide the same kind of in-depth information as one-on-one conversations.
* Some community members may feel uncomfortable speaking up.
* May lead to group think (i.e agreement on popular ideas).

###### Slide 14.

Structured interviews: pros and cons

Structured interviews are conducted between an interviewer and one or more interviewees. They involve a discussion framed by a predetermined series of questions. This approach is most useful for investigating a specific ICH element that different community members might understand in varying ways; it should not be used for more exploratory inquiries.

Pros:

* Allow comparability across a group of people.
* May not require transcription (less time-consuming).

Cons:

* May not reveal the true concerns of community members if they cannot deviate from questions.
* Do not allow for the inclusion of interesting or revealing stories.

###### Slide 15.

Semi-structured interviews: pros and cons

Semi-structured interviews draw upon certain components of the structured interview process: the interviewer comes prepared with a series of questions or topics for discussion. However, the interview can deviate from the interview schedule. It is generally beneficial to record semi-structured interviews when exploring the range of knowledge relating to a particular topic. Audio-recording is discussed in Unit 24.

Pros:

* Allow for a degree of comparability.
* Still allow for the inclusion of some incidental comments or stories.

Cons:

* May still be seen as ultimately representing the agenda of researchers/facilitators from outside the community.

###### Slide 16.

Unstructured interviews: pros and cons

An unstructured interview begins with the premise that the interviewer has not identified the most important subjects for discussion. Therefore, the interview is not guided by a schedule, but by the natural flow of conversation between the interviewer and respondent. The interviewer probes the respondent based upon things said and areas where greater detail or clarification is desired.

Pros:

* Recognize the unique body of knowledge possessed by each respondent.
* Are driven by community members.
* Allow for the full expression of each person’s ideas.

Cons:

* Easily to get off track.
* May result in time discussing seemingly irrelevant points.
* More time-consuming than other techniques.
* May require transcription.

###### Slide 17.

Photography

Photography can be an effective way of collecting information relating to the living and evolving nature of intangible cultural heritage by simultaneously capturing the process of enactment and the experiences and explanations of all concerned. Furthermore, photographs are not mere archival or research materials, they are active tools providing visibility to living heritage.

The use of photographs can serve to enhance the aesthetics and content of an inventory. Community members and other people involved in collecting and presenting information on ICH elements can photograph people, places, objects or events. Historic photos or pictures from the personal collections of community members can also be included. Depending on the way the inventory is organized, photographs may even serve as the primary form of conveying and presenting the ICH element/inventory, although it should be remembered that inventories must be comprehensive and regularly updated.

###### Slide 18.

Photography: pros and cons

Pros:

* Adds aesthetic value to the words of community members.
* Is meaningful regardless of language or literacy.
* It depicts ICH elements in a way that could not be accomplished through the use of words alone.

Cons:

* Not all community-based inventorying facilitators/community members are familiar with photography techniques.
* Could convey the wrong impression.
* Some community members may feel uncomfortable in front of the camera.
* Its use may raise ethical issues of information access.

###### Slide 19.

Participatory video

Film is a powerful tool for conveying events, sentiments or the everyday affairs that characterize living ICH elements in a particular context. Through the use of film, community members are able to easily demonstrate actions, practices or beliefs related to the ICH element that would otherwise require long explanations. Furthermore, the use of film enables the dissemination of ICH elements across groups that may not share the same written or spoken language, and thus potentially contributes to awareness-raising (one of the main objectives of the Convention). While there are certain costs associated with the use of participatory video (e.g. costs of equipment and the amount of time taken to train those unfamiliar with equipment), film footage can provide a means of collecting and presenting the ways in which ICH elements are practised and experienced by community members.

###### Slide 20.

Participatory video: pros and cons

Pros:

* Conveys action, so is a preferred means of conveying events.
* Is meaningful regardless of language or literacy.
* Allows for the depiction of emotion.

Cons:

* Is relatively expensive compared with other techniques.
* Not all facilitators/community members will be familiar with the tools required to create a film.
* Some community members may feel uncomfortable in front of the camera.

###### Slide 21.

Audio recording

Audio recording is a technique that may be applied to a variety of information-generation approaches. For example:

* It can be used to collect ICH elements where sound is a defining aspect (i.e. music, dance, chants, etc.).
* It can be combined with photo and video material to create digital stories.
* It can be used to create podcasts to reach a broad audience across the internet.
* It can be used during interviews to record the thoughts/responses of community members concerning an ICH element and the inventory.
* It can be incorporated into participatory video projects and/or used to support awareness-raising.
* It can be used for archival purposes (and may be of great value for a community in later years).
* It can also have unanticipated uses in the future. The material might have been recorded with a singular purpose in mind, but may be repurposed to address a different issue at some later date.

###### Slide 22.

Audio recording: pros and cons

Pros:

* Can add a valuable dimension to photographs and other information-generation and presentation approaches to inventorying.
* Allows relocating segments and re-listening to aid in feedback sessions and discussions of ICH elements.

Cons:

* Digital recorders and related equipment (microphone, headphones, computer) can be expensive.
* Not all facilitators/community members will be familiar with the tools required to produce audio recordings.
* Can be time-consuming to transcribe recordings and/or apply them to other media.

###### Slide 23.

Participatory mapping

Participatory mapping first emerged as a tool within participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methodology, but is quite applicable to community-based inventorying when place-based practices are concerned, as it emphasizes transparency and the involvement of whole social networks and multiple voices in map-making. Maps can also be used to help communities find new ways to manage the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and culture.

Participatory mapping can be carried out in order to document a community’s cultural and territorial landscape and related ICH elements. Mapping the ‘cultural landscape’ (and not only the territorial landscape) refers to features that shape the social values, norms, practices and spirituality of a community and the related ICH element. These include, for example, sacred sites, dancing sites and circumcision sites and, more broadly, cultural understandings of landscapes. Participatory mapping can help to collect information on the ways in which communities interact with ICH elements, and can be useful in relaying spatial information to external agencies, as well as recording and archiving local knowledge relative to a particular ICH element.

More broadly, participatory mapping creates an opportunity for greater recognition of oral cultural and intangible heritage, and provides a medium whereby the close relationship between different cultural heritages and the territory and natural resource contexts in which they arise and survive, and are passed on to future generations, can be explained. Participatory mapping can strengthen the ability of communities to manage their ICH, while also encouraging respect and understanding from dominant groups.

###### Slide 24.

Participatory mapping: pros and cons

Pros:

* Can be collaborative and constructive.
* Allows communities to take a leading role in generating local and indigenous information and visualizing spatial perceptions and practices.
* Enables stakeholders to relate to mapping products.
* Is useful for recording and archiving local knowledge (collecting and preserving cultural histories, and knowledge of elderly community members).
* Makes community knowledge of an ICH element visible.

Cons:

* Can lack accuracy if exact measurements or a consistent scale are not used; as a result, may lack authority with stakeholders.
* Some ethical issues may arise relative to revealing sacred or confidential components of a community’s knowledge or cultural landscape.
* Is a relatively complex process to prepare and carry out requiring a range of competencies.

###### Slide 25.

Choosing an information-generation method

Based on the preceding criteria, there are a number of questions that community-based inventorying facilitators should ask themselves prior to determining ways to collect and present ICH elements. It is important to remember that one need not choose a single technique, but that multiple methods of information generation can be used to enhance the inventory. The following list serves as a guide to the kinds of questions that might be asked at the outset of a project:

* How will the inventory be organized and presented (e.g. paper, model, digital, etc.)?
* How much time is available?
* How much of this time can be dedicated to the actual information-generation process? And to training?
* What is the budget? Are there any opportunities for additional funding?

All programmes ultimately operate under time and funding constraints. Depending upon what needs to be accomplished within these limitations, certain information-generation methods and techniques may be more suitable than others. An assortment of techniques can, and likely should, be employed in a complementary manner to permit the project to move forward within its time and funding constraints.

* What are the costs of the different information-generation methods under consideration?
* What role do community members have in the information-generation process?

An additional element for consideration is the amount of assistance to be drawn from the community. While this might allow for more knowledge to be recorded in a shorter time period, the process of training community members must also be considered. However, the training component may be conceived of as a goal in itself, carrying the added benefit of allowing greater community engagement and input, and enabling local actors to refine certain skills that can then be shared throughout the community.

* What methods of information generation are most acceptable within the community?
* What information-generation methods best meet the inventory goals outlined by the community?

Unit 23

Exercise 1: Information-generation decision framework

#### Objective:

Determine which methods of information generation are best suited to collecting and presenting particular ICH element(s) in a systematic way and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the information-generation methods that may be employed.

#### Time:

1 hour

#### Materials:

* UNESCO framework for inventorying or existing State framework for inventorying developed in Unit 19 or 20
* Unit 23 Handout 1: Decision framework table
* Unit 23 Handout 2: Glossary for Unit 23

#### Procedure:

* Divide the participants into groups.
* Invite the participants to reread the inventorying framework developed in Unit 19 or 20. Have participants work through the accompanying decision framework to determine which method of information generation is most appropriate for the ICH elements identified. The framework is meant to provide a starting point for consideration of other questions that might help determine their information-generation requirements.
* After the participants have worked through the decision framework, invite them to imagine how they might proceed with collecting information on the ICH element(s). Direct them to discuss as a group ways in which problems, such as a limited budget or unequal access to certain technologies throughout the community, might be overcome.
* Have participants reconvene with the larger group. Have each group take turns presenting its conclusions.
* Discuss the chosen methods of information generation with the larger group, allowing participants to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the different suggested approaches for each ICH element.
* Ask the group to choose together two or three of the techniques to be further developed in Units 24 to 28, and in light of the upcoming field practicum (e.g. photography, audio recording and interviewing).

#### Tips and options:

As the participants work through the framework, they may find that certain answers do not fit clearly into one category, but somewhere in the middle. This is fine. The framework is designed only to be used as a guide to any method of information generation.

*Source*: CTA, 2010, *Training Kit on Participatory Spatial Information Management and Communication*. CTA, The Netherlands and IFAD, Italy (ISBN: 978-92-9081-446-7).

1. . Frequently referred to as the ‘Intangible Heritage Convention’, the ‘2003 Convention’ and, for the purpose of this unit, simply the ‘Convention’. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)