Unit 6

Identification and inventorying

lesson plan

Duration:

3 hours

Objective(s):

Establish an understanding of what the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage[[1]](#footnote-1) means by: (a) ‘identification with a view to safeguarding’; and (b) inventorying. Explore the essential features of identification and inventorying of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), and how they may contribute to safeguarding. Examples of different approaches used around the world are also presented.

Description:

This unit is about the identification and inventorying of ICH – one of the obligations of States Parties under the Convention. The topics covered include: the obligations of States Parties regarding identification and inventorying of the ICH present in their territory, the purpose and effects of inventorying ICH, leeway and restrictions, the criteria for including an ICH element in an inventory, access to information about inventoried elements and planning an inventorying project.

Proposed sequence:

* What the Convention says about inventorying
* Purpose and possible effects of inventorying
* Leeway and restrictions
* From inventories to nominations
* Access to information about inventoried elements
* Planning inventorying projects
* Examples of inventorying processes

Supporting documents:

* Facilitator’s narrative Unit 6
* Unit 6 PowerPoint presentation
* Participant’s text Unit 6
* Participant’s text Unit 3: ‘Identification and definition’, ‘Inventorying’ and ‘Elements of ICH’
* Unit 6 Hand-out: Inventorying questionnaire
* Case studies 5–9
* Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage[[2]](#footnote-2)

Notes and suggestions

The exercise on slide 16 (30 mins) concentrates on designing inventorying processes. It provides an opportunity for participants to discuss issues relating to their own State’s inventorying projects, including the relationship (and differences) between inventorying tangible and intangible heritage. Facilitators should remember that this is not a workshop on inventorying; they may need to limit the time devoted to this if significant problems concerning ongoing inventorying processes are being experienced. (Separate capacity-building materials on inventorying may be needed). The case studies may be used to illustrate the variety of inventorying approaches adopted.

This unit provides a model questionnaire that could be used to compile and check information collected during interviews about elements for possible inclusion in an inventory. It can be used as a basis for discussion during the workshop or simply for reference purposes.

Unit 6

Identification and inventorying

Facilitator’s narrative

###### Slide 1.

Identification and inventorying

###### Slide 2.

In this presentation …

###### Slide 3.

Identifying ICH with the participation of communities

Participant’s text Unit 6.1 reviews Articles 11(b) and 12 of the Convention.

Note on ownership of ICH

The approach in Article 11(b) is consistent with the emphasis placed in the Convention on the central role of communities, groups and individuals who identify with, create, maintain and transmit their intangible heritage. The State, researchers, institutions or organizations do not own this ICH despite it being practised in a certain territory or publicized to the outside world by a certain institution or researcher; ICH belongs to its bearers/practitioners.

Article 1(b) mentions the ICH of the communities, groups and individuals concerned; the Convention does not use expressions such as ICH of a State or States, it speaks instead about ICH present in the territory of a State (Party). The stewardship of the communities over their ICH is further confirmed by the fact that they must identify their ICH (Article 2.1) and that their customary practices governing access to it are to be respected by third parties, including the State (Article 13(d)(ii)). In comparison with Article 3 of the World Heritage Convention, which assigns to the State the task of identifying and describing properties on its territory for nomination to the World Heritage List (tangible heritage of outstanding universal value).

Note on community participation in inventorying

The two Articles of the Convention that are relevant here (Articles 11 and 12) should be interpreted together, as confirmed by Article 20(b).

Article 11(b) of the Convention requires States Parties to identify and define the ICH present in their territory, with the participation of communities, groups and relevant NGOs. This is consistent with the indication in Article 2.1 (see slide) that ICH means the ‘practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills…that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage’. Since it is the communities and groups who create, enact and transmit ICH – and since they are the primary safeguarding agents– identifying and inventorying also requires their participation: it is *their* ICH.

Participation is not just about making sure that there are occasional stakeholder meetings at which communities are informed by the State, researchers or NGOs about the progress of their plans and activities regarding the elements concerned. The relevant communities, groups and individuals should play a key role in all activities concerning their ICH.

This may not be an easy process, of course, because people within communities or groups do not always agree among themselves, or with outsiders; it might also be difficult to identify appropriate representatives of the community concerned. People may disagree, for example, about the identification, viability status, function or values of elements of their intangible heritage. Identification or inventorying may therefore not be completed in one short visit to a community or region, but should be an ongoing process in which communities concerned are integrally involved. This is also important because although some ICH elements may be enacted at any time, others are enacted at specific times every year, for example at harvest time; some may be enacted once a decade or even less frequently.

###### Slide 4.

With a view to safeguarding

Participant’s text Unit 6.1 reviews Articles 11(b) and 12 of the Convention.

###### Slide 5.

Why are inventories needed?

Participant’s text Unit 6.2 outlines the aims of inventorying.

###### Slide 6.

Leeway and restrictions

Participant’s text Unit 6.3 discusses the leeway and restrictions on inventorying given to States Parties under the Convention.

Participant’s text Unit 6.4 discusses the criteria for inclusion of ICH elements in an inventory.

###### Slide 7.

Scope and size of inventories

See also Participant’s text Unit 6.3.

###### Slide 8.

Organizing the information

See Participant’s text Unit 6.3:

###### Slide 9.

Using existing inventories

See Participant’s text of Unit 6.3:

###### Slide 10.

Criteria for inclusion

See Participant’s text of Unit 6.4

###### Slide 11.

Case study: identifying and safeguarding Estonian handicrafts

The specific interests of community members, institutions or specialists who wish to engage in a safeguarding or conservation activity around a handicraft may determine how the heritage associated with that handicraft is defined and the safeguarding or conservation strategies chosen. The following are some examples:

* If traditional woven and knitted products are identified as the heritage to be protected, for example, a collection and an inventory of tangible heritage (e.g. knitted socks) might be created. This might require conservation interventions to protect the items from physical destruction (e.g. moths).
* If the skills in producing the woven products are identified as the heritage to be safeguarded, the creative process and its transmission might be documented and/or an inventory of the knitting and weaving skills might be created, perhaps also referencing the people skilled in this field and the equipment or yarns used in the production processes. This might lead to safeguarding measures that encourage local people to create traditional woven and knitted products using techniques passed down through the generations.
* The traditional patterns used in knitting or weaving might be identified as the main intangible heritage to be safeguarded, and therefore the focus might be on documenting and reproducing (or further developing) these patterns in new products.

The Estonian artist and anthropologist Anu Raud, for example, has encouraged her students to research and document traditional weaving and knitting patterns in museum and other collections around the country and to use them in the creation of soft toys and other new products. This contributed to safeguarding the practice of the pattern-making skills even as the wearing of knitted socks and other traditional products becomes less widespread.

All these kinds of inventorying and safeguarding strategies are interlinked and may be necessary in their own right. It is beneficial to take a holistic approach to safeguarding in the domain of handicrafts: while identifying and inventorying the intangible heritage aspects (knowledge, skills or designs), practitioners do not wish to (and others should not) ignore the resulting products (and their development). When targeting the products for conservation, it is critical that the skills and knowledge involved, together with the craftspeople and their role in society, are not ignored.

The case study on safeguarding of traditional knitting and weaving in Estonia is presented in Case study 23.

###### Slide 12.

Access to information about the element

Participant’s text Unit 6.5 discusses the importance of respecting customary restrictions on access to ICH.

The ODs do not cover inventory-making in any detail, but encourage States Parties to develop codes of ethics ‘to ensure appropriate ways of raising awareness’ about ICH (see OD 103). These codes of ethics could cover issues such as consent for access to information.

OD 103 States Parties are encouraged to develop and adopt codes of ethics based on the provisions of the Convention and these Operational Directives, in order to ensure appropriate ways of raising awareness about the intangible cultural heritage present in their respective territories.

In several States (including Brazil, Canada and Australia), the authorities began to regulate data collection and access to information about ICH in cooperation with community representatives and researchers decades ago. Such regulations allow communities to maintain customary restrictions on access to their ICH, and also in some cases to protect their rights over their ICH.

Codes of ethics are discussed further in Participant’s text Unit 10.11.

###### Slide 13.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

Case study 5, gives an example of how restrictions on access to ICH databases have been managed in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

###### Slide 14.

From inventories to nominations

Participant’s text Unit 6.6 discusses the link between inventorying and the preparation of nominations for the Lists of the Convention.

Note on the impact of inventorying on nominations

The Convention encourages each State Party to work towards inventorying the ICH ‘present in its territory’. A broad approach is thus encouraged. The kind of inventorying project undertaken in a State Party will influence the choice of elements to be nominated, and sometimes vice versa. Inventorying processes that cover only a small region of the State, or a small number of the communities living there, may lead to nominations that are not representative of the diversity existing in that State, or to a bias in safeguarding activities. This may have a negative effect on the relationships and mutual understanding between communities within the State.

###### Slide 15.

Planning an inventorying project: basic tasks

See Participant’s text Unit 6.7.

As mentioned above, inventories should contribute to safeguarding (Article 12.1) and involve communities (Articles 11(b) and 15), providing access to the information without violating customary restrictions (Article 13(d)(ii)). An inventory is always a work-in-progress because new elements need to be added and existing entries updated or deleted to reflect changes. This broader context should be taken into account when designing an inventorying process.

###### Slide 16.

Planning an inventorying project: many questions

This slide is left blank to indicate questions identified by the participants. Refer to Participant’s text Unit 6.7.

Exercise (30 mins): issues in designing inventorying processes

Participants may discuss how the inventorying process is (or could be) conducted in their own country(ies). Depending on the profile of the participants, if the inventorying process in a country is already underway, it may be useful to use this unit to discuss any challenges faced by the current inventorying process.

Participants may think of examples where tangible and intangible heritage elements are closely linked. They should consider whether focusing on either tangible or intangible heritage in identification or definition of the heritage has affected safeguarding or conservation strategies, and if so, whether this has had a positive or negative effect.

Participants may refer to the questions listed in Participant’s text Unit 6.7.

Most of these questions cannot be answered, or at least not easily answered, using the Convention and the ODs. The issues will need to be addressed by those preparing the inventories concerned. However, some guidance is provided below, indicating how the framework provided by the Convention and its ODs can be used to guide decision-making in some instances.

*Defining ICH*: see Participant’s text Unit 6.4.

*Determining the scope of the inventory*: see Participant’s text Unit 6.3.

*Organizing the inventory (classification systems)*: see Participant’s text Unit 6.3.

*Determining the level of detail provided about each element*: see Participant’s text Unit 6.3.

*Enabling community participation*: see Participant’s text Unit 6.1.

###### Slide 17.

Advice on inventorying from UNESCO?

See Participant’s text Unit 6.8.

A version of the model questionnaire for inventory-making is provided in the Unit 6 Hand-out.

See the special brochure on identifying and inventorying ICH in the UNESCO Kit on Intangible Cultural Heritage:   
http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00451#6

###### Slide 18.

Examples of inventories

See Case studies 6, 7 and 8.

A few examples of ways in which inventories have been drawn up in different States may be provided to show how the process can work. None of the case studies should be presented as the perfect inventorying method. They are simply examples, some of which might be used to inform other processes identification and inventorying under the Convention. The facilitator may choose some of the case studies for discussion.

Other examples of inventorying processes (in addition to those presented in Case studies)

In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, a community-driven inventorying process has documented both tangible and intangible heritage of value to local people. The data were gathered in 335 municipalities using questionnaires administered by existing networks of cultural workers, students and teachers, assisted by teams of volunteers. Short descriptions of more than 80,000 cultural expressions have been published in over 200 volumes. The inventory is used as a cultural and educational tool in formulating development policies.

In Bulgaria, an inventorying project was conducted in 2001 and 2002, based on a questionnaire sent to communities through administrative channels and through the network of local culture and community centres, and then analysed by experts. The main criteria for including an element in the inventory were authenticity, representativeness, artistic value, vitality and being rooted in tradition.[[3]](#footnote-3) A first version of the inventory was placed online for public comment before publication. It was divided into national and regional lists. Intangible heritage domains used in the inventory included traditional rites and feasts, singing and music playing, dancing and children’s games, narration, crafts and medicine.

China’s inventorying project identified 870,000 items of intangible cultural heritage in the State between 2005 and 2009. China has a system of national, provincial, county and municipal lists of ICH in which the lower levels of the pyramid feed the higher ones. Intangible heritage is categorized on the national lists as follows: folk literature, folk music, folk dance, traditional drama, oral traditions, acrobatics and contests of skill, folk arts, handicraft skills, traditional medicine and folk customs. There is a strong focus on a ‘scientific’ approach to protecting ICH, so particular emphasis has been placed on the role of institutions and expert committees at both national and local levels.

Another approach, taken by France, has been to create an inventory by bringing together existing lists of intangible heritage that were drawn up for different purposes and in different periods (in other words, an inventory of inventories).

In Fiji, a cultural mapping programme was initiated in 2004 by the Department of Fijian Language and Culture under the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and implemented through the Institute of iTaukei Language and Culture. The programme aims to map the traditional knowledge and expressions of culture of all communities across all of Fiji’s fourteen provinces, with a strong emphasis on the culture and traditions of the indigenous people. Among other things, the programme aims at: (a) the identification and recognition of custodians of indigenous knowledge; (b) research and documentation of Fijian culture; (c) the creation of a database; and (d) the inventorying of intangible cultural heritage in need of safeguarding.[[4]](#footnote-4) Mapping processes based on physical locations require wide community involvement and consultation to be appropriate for identifying the ICH present in a State or part of it.

Not all States where intangible heritage inventories are currently being compiled are States Parties to the Convention. Cultural mapping and inventorying projects are undertaken in all parts of the world for different reasons. In Canada, for example, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has included the inventorying, safeguarding and documentation of ICH as a key initiative in its Provincial Strategic Culture Plan.

###### Slide 19.

Case study: Newfoundland and Labrador (Canada) inventory

See Case study 6.

###### Slide 20.

Case study: community-based inventory in Uganda

See Case study 7.

###### Slide 21.

Case study: many inventories and a registry in Brazil

See Case study 8.

###### Slide 22.

Case study: a community-driven inventory in Estonia

The facilitator may use this case study (or aspects of it) to discuss some of the opportunities and challenges in starting a national inventorying process, particularly the relationship between national and local structures, and between local institutions managing an inventorying process and the communities concerned. It may also be used to discuss some of the important issues that should be considered when planning a project, such as the acquisition of consent for existing datasets to be incorporated into the inventory and the extent of historical information required.

This case study is included as an example in the Facilitator’s notes only; if the facilitator decides not to use it, slide 22 should be omitted.

Hiiumaa Island inventory[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Background**

Following Estonia’s ratification of the Convention in 2006, the Estonian Folk Culture Development and Training Centre became the State agency designated to oversee the implementation of the Convention at the national level. This organization, based in the capital city of Tallinn, participates in the development of cultural policies, contributes to the survival and evolution of Estonian folk culture and the appreciation of intangible heritage, and organizes professional training courses for adults.

A Chamber of Intangible Heritage was established at the Centre in 2008 to coordinate ICH-related activities in Estonia: one of its main roles is to decide on the format and content of its Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage (the planned national inventory) and then maintain it. The Chamber of Intangible Heritage is governed by a Board consisting of national and regional representatives from government, academia and heritage institutions.

Even before the Chamber was established, the Estonian Commission for UNESCO, the Ministry of Culture and the Estonian Folk Culture Development and Training Centre held several meetings to discuss the Convention and its implementation.

One of the issues discussed at the preliminary meetings was the requirement for States Parties to draw up inventories of the ICH present in their territory. Although it was decided to use the definition of ICH in the Convention, the pilot inventory discussed here also includes elements that are no longer practised.

The rationale for inventory-making in Estonia was defined as follows:

* affirming community identity and self-respect by acknowledging their heritage at both regional and national levels;
* enhancing cultural networks within and between communities and practitioners; and
* encouraging local communities, both economically and socially, by safeguarding of their ICH.

It was agreed that no single inventory model would be elaborated for Estonia at the national level – regional differentiation would be encouraged and lessons would be learned from a pilot project on Hiiumaa Island, which was to be community-driven.

**Pilot project on Hiiumaa Island**

Hiiumaa Island is part of the western Estonian archipelago with an area of 1,000 km2 and a population of approximately 10,000 in 183 villages. The working group decided on Hiiumaa Island as the location for the pilot project for several reasons: (a) the museums on the island were already working on a number of heritage projects, both tangible and intangible; (b) cultural activists on the island had already demonstrated their interest in and ability to undertake the inventorying project; and (c), crucially, the island was small with a strong sense of community.

The Hiiumaa inventorying team were given considerable leeway in deciding on matters of process and content. However, the Chamber of Intangible Heritage decided the format of the final inventory.

**Compiling the inventory**

A team of three local cultural workers coordinated the project, which began in 2007 and drew partly on prior ethnographic work. It included a cultural practitioner, a cultural representative of the municipal government and the Head of Collections of Hiiumaa Museum, an ethnographer. Community members, community organizations and NGOs supported the inventorying work. In one subproject, community members not only collected information on embroidery skills, but children also learned some of the skills; several pieces of embroidery were presented to the local museum; and an exhibition of local embroidery was organized. Community members were trained in data collection for this project.

The Hiiumaa community was defined geographically by the boundaries of the island, where there has been relatively little immigration in recent years. There is some regional cultural differentiation on the island, which was picked up in the inventorying process. The inventorying team was mainly interested in the practices that have characterized the island for many generations, rather than practices held in common with the rest of Estonia. They did not collect data on dance forms because these had already been inventoried elsewhere.

During the inventorying process, questions arose as to who the audience was for the final product. Was it only the people of Hiiumaa or was it also the general Estonian population? It was decided that it would be the latter: this meant that information well known to Hiiumaa people sometimes had to be explained to a wider audience.

The inventorying team took into account the island’s historical division into four districts. In each district, with the help of local people, the team started to identify cultural practices and practitioners through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The team distributed questionnaires and travelled to all the municipalities to meet local government representatives and community members in the search for tradition bearers. They worked with community members to fill in the questionnaires and develop preliminary lists of ICH. Then the inventorying team sought specific information about ICH practices.

While the team initially planned to include and describe only a few ICH elements, it was later decided that a comprehensive approach to the documentation of cultural practice was more suited to show how ICH elements had changed over time and were currently being practised. The inventorying team experimented with different ways of defining elements, both broad (e.g. woodworking skills) and narrow (e.g. making specific kinds of rocking chairs).

Once the data-collection process had progressed far enough, data were selected and refined for entry into the inventory. The team are now continuing with the inventorying work and are seeking to expand the inventory. The Chamber of Intangible Heritage was responsible for the technical side of the inventory process, designing the online inventory, hosting the website and enabling public access.

The online inventory can be consulted. (<http://www.rahvakultuur.ee/vkpnimistu/> [in Estonian]). It provides the option to search by category or by keyword. The categories include: Settlement; Way of life; Resource management; Fisheries; Food and nutrition; Handicraft; Language and folklore; Customs and religion; and Social practices. Inventory entries contain a description with historical background; information about practitioners; the viability of the element and potential risks, if any; as well as photos, audio, video and other documentary evidence. Formal consents for inclusion in the inventory, provided by the tradition bearers concerned, are included for all elements. The inventory includes local dialect terms for elements. It also includes both living practices and those that reportedly have ceased to be practised, as certain elements that appear defunct often experience a resurgence later.

The Hiiumaa Island ICH inventory inspired broader safeguarding and awareness-raising initiatives. Meetings and school presentations were used to generate awareness about the project. As awareness grew, community groups and NGOs on the island applied for further support and funding for ICH projects (the pilot inventorying project was not very well funded). Projects were designed in which tradition bearers could teach the younger islanders handicraft skills, for example, and other projects collected information for the inventory.

**Challenges faced**

The inventorying process faced several challenges. The first of these was insufficient funding.

The second challenge was the occasional confusion between the local inventorying team and the national level about what kind of information should be collected and how it should be organized. The format of the online inventory had not yet been established when data collection began, so it was not clear what kind of audiovisual materials should be collected (e.g. length of video clips) and how much other data would be required (e.g. how much historical data was needed) for the final inventory.

The third challenge was that consent had not been acquired for information collected prior to the inventorying project to be made publicly available as part of the online inventory. Thus, various individuals and their families had to be contacted to ask whether consent could be given for the data to be used in the public online inventory.

For more about the national inventorying project:

<http://old.nordvux.net/object/29358/eatingryebreadisintangibleculturalheritagetoo.htm> Regional seminar on ‘Principles and Experiences of Drawing up Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventories in Europe’, Tallinn, Estonia, 14–15 May 2007.

Kuutma, K. 2007. ‘Making Inventories: a Constraint or an Asset?’ Regional seminar on ‘Principles and Experiences of Drawing up Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventories in Europe’, Tallinn, Estonia, 14–15 May 2007.

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)
2. . UNESCO. *Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (referred to in this unit as Basic Texts). Paris, UNESCO. Available at <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00503>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . Not all these criteria (e.g. authenticity) are compatible with the spirit of the Convention itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. . L. Lowthorp, 2010, ‘National Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Legislation and Initiatives’, UNESCO-New Delhi Field Office, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. . Thanks are due to Helgi Põllo and Kristin Kuutma for their assistance in compiling this case study. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)