

The role of NGOs in implementation of the
Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH
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Safeguarding ICH: key safeguarding measures

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Overview

In this presentation I shall start from a practical point of view and discuss the question how we may safeguard a particular element of living culture.

In a safeguarding plan all the key safeguarding measures should be made explicit and in relation to each other: is transmission of knowledge the most important issue, or is it documentation, or financial support, etc.?

I shall discuss 3 examples of performing arts in Indonesia
Each case needs its specific safeguarding plan.

1. Starting points

In safeguarding we should always respect the dynamic character of living culture and it should be seen in relation to what it means to a **community**.

Concepts like 'authenticity' and 'revival' (of an element no longer in the living memory of community members) are irrelevant for safeguarding plans.

The creation of living culture is influenced by existing value systems. However, safeguarding should focus on the **technology** of the art production and not on the ideas and values involved.

Choices

One of the problems of the 2003 convention is that the number of elements of living culture is very large (too large?) within one state and even within each community of a particular state.

The available budget, time and human power is always limited and **choices** will have to be made.

For such choices a kind of **inventory**, including scientific **documentation**, audiovisual archives, etc. is needed.

Inventory

I assume that in most countries there are kinds of inventories, especially made, or just consisting of scientific articles and books, newspaper articles, radio and television reports, etc.

Improvement of the inventory could be one of the safeguarding measures to be taken.

However, for me this seems an necessary, but relatively minor part of the urgent safeguarding efforts and it could be done via existing **research institutions**.

Disappearing and emerging ICH

The role of **communities** is central in the 2003 convention and their social practices should be taken seriously.

Not all elements of living culture need safeguarding. An element may just disappear because the need for it is no longer felt in the community and new elements come into being. However, this should be in balance.

Mostly only a selection of elements in different communities need special safeguarding measures. For this selection, the existing documentation can be used.

2. Three examples from Indonesia

I would like to show 3 examples from my own research in Indonesian performing arts and discuss whether these should be put on a list for safeguarding and, if so, what the major safeguarding measures should be.

- a. Storytelling in Minangkabau, Sumatra.
- b. Trance dancing and boys carried around the village the day before their circumcision, Bandung, West Java.
- c. Sundanese Cianjuran music, West Java.

2a. Storytelling in the Minangkabau

The first video example is a recording I made in 1996 of epic storytelling (*sijobang*) in West Sumatra.

The male singer recites the story about the cultural hero Anggun Nan Tungga and accompanies himself by tapping a matchbox. One story takes a few nights, so only a part of the story is told from about 9 o'clock in the evening to 5 o'clock in the morning.

This recorded performance/ demonstration for me took place from about 1-3 o'clock in the early morning and at the end most people in the room were sleeping.

Sijobang fragment recited by Datuk Kodo, 1996 (53”)



Safeguarding *sijobang*?

This epic storytelling will probably not survive many more years in this form. Television is on a limited scale present in every small village and there is just no great interest in *sijobang* from the public any more.

The number of performers has decreased over the last decades.

However, the community recognizes that these epic stories, also told in, for instance, *randai* theatre, are an important aspect of Minangkabau culture around the town of Payakumbuh. *Sijobang* is part of a wider cultural setting, and safeguarding should be **holistic**.

Copyright

After this *sijobang* performance, I discussed the purpose of my recordings and copyright issues.

The performer, Datuk Kodo, complained about 'the TV people from Java' who seldom came to record in Sumatra and sometimes asked money from the performers for recording, instead of paying them.

Some time ago people from Malaysia came to film his *randai* theatre group. They wanted to pay US\$ 880, but some members of the group opposed: the recordings would be sold for much more money in Malaysia.

Transmission of knowledge

Datuk Kodo allowed for the recordings, because he saw it as a kind of promotion: hopefully the Malaysians would become interested and come to the Minangkabau to learn more about *randai* and *sijobang*.

It was clear that Datuk Kodo wants pupils who are genuinely interested in the Minangkabau performing arts, in particular *randai* and *sijobang*.

This is a general attitude of performers. They are not only interested in financial reward, but rather in the recognition that their ‘**technology of enchantment**’ (Gell) deserves respect. They are foremost concerned about the **transmission** of their knowledge.

Performances in new setting

Epic storytellers have a difficult time in many parts of the world.

In Indonesia safeguarding efforts are, for instance, that the conservatories record the storytellers and have their students perform (part) of these stories in different social contexts.

In this way the performative aspects of the epic stories may become intergrated into other genres, as it has always been in living culture.

2b. Trance dancing in West Java

The horse mask and entranced dancers on leather hobbyhorses are many centuries old and continue to be seen in West Java. The trance takes place during the processions of boys who are to be circumcised in the Islamic way the following day.

After the dancers have fallen into a trance, which frequently unleashes dangerous behaviour in them, the leader puts them to sleep for about 15-20 minutes.

In the following excerpts you will see the horse dancers, clowns, main horse mask and the boys carried through the streets on seats in the form of lions.

Trance dancing and boys on lions. West Java, 1990 (1:03)



Interested audience

The groups organize themselves. For these trance dancers and other groups performing in these processions there is still enough interest from the public. Also, circumcision of boys will be executed for many more years to come in the largest Islamic country in the world.

However, for families the costs for hiring such groups often becomes a burden and some safeguarding measures seem necessary.

Organising competitions, inviting the groups more often to governmental happenings, and possibly some financial support (instruments, props, etc.), could be safeguarding measures to be discussed with Sundanese communities.

2c. Cianjuran music

Cianjuran music (or Tembang Sunda Cianjuran) is music of the upper-middle classes in West Java. It is 'sung poetry' with the accompaniment of zithers and a bamboo flute.

This genre originated from other genres of vocal music in Cianjur in the first half of the 19th century.

It is still performed at receptions, weddings, etc. In the following example I show a fragment taken from a gathering of Cianjuran *connaisseurs* with star vocalists performing in the TV studio Bandung, 1990.

Male 'intruder' in song for female vocalists

The excerpt is from a metric song. Metric songs are always sung by women. In this particular song, Budak Ceurik, the instrumental interlude may be used by a man to sing. This is a breach of 'how it should be done', a musical symbolic act for the disturbance of the social order.

The text sung by the male vocalist-intruder is always about the bamboo flute that is 'out of tune,' and the singer who is 'confused,' that is, a metaphor for being in love with someone else, maybe the female singer [not his own wife]:

Text of male vocalist

Kuma suling (2x)

Suling téh ngan silung baé

How about the flute?

The flute is just out of
tune

Kuma kuring (2x)

Kuring téh ngan bingung baé

What about me?

I am just confused

A flute and any other instrument that is out of tune is a metaphor for disturbed social relations and meaningful to Sundanese audiences, also in other genres.

Cianjuran music from West Java, 1990 (1:34)



Future of Cianjuran music

The TV studio was filled with upper-middle class people. For instance, the man sitting on the left side of the female vocalist was the Vice-Chancellor of a Bandung university. He sang a set of songs with her.

For the elite of West Java Cianjuran music is very important, it is in a way their 'visiting card'. There are many who fear that the quality of the performances might decrease and the genre disappear.

However, Cianjuran music is taught in the Bandung conservatory and the poetry has been well documented. The many amateur and professional groups are fairly well organized and there are interested audiences.

Safeguarding Cianjuran?

The Cianjuran groups are **visible**: they perform for radio and television, in hotels and at governmental receptions. The instrumental groups (*kacapi-suling*) also perform without the vocalists at receptions and in hotel lobbies.

Further, the professional groups regularly perform on international stages (a Cianjuran group performed in Abu Dhabi, 2009). They serve **promotion, presentation and recognition** of Sundanese/ Indonesian living culture.

I think that safeguarding Cianjuran could be limited to **maintaining the transmission of knowledge**. The music has changed and will change again, like all living culture.

3. Communities and culture

Safeguarding is about establishing proper conditions for continuity of production and re-creation in communities. This is not always simple. However, culture can only have continuity if people enjoy the **conditions** to produce and re-create it.

‘Culture’ is a site of contestation and not of homogeneous agreement between all peoples in a community.

This makes it difficult to decide which ICH elements should be supported with the limited time, money and human power when safeguarding.

Methodology for selection

In October 2009 the first items were added to the RL and the USL according to the new Operational Directives of the convention.

The Subsidiary Body did a very good job by spelling out the methodology that was used for the selection of items for these lists. If you did not yet read their reports, please do so, because it is a good introduction to what the major issues of safeguarding are.

After Abu Dhabi we should also start to seriously **evaluate** whether items on the RL, e.g. polyphonic singing in Georgia or the Iraqi *maqam*, have been effectively safeguarded according to the criteria of the convention.

'A-cultural' methodology

For safeguarding we need to use an 'a-cultural' methodology, that is, an entirely indifferent position with respect to the aesthetical value of an art object.

It should be irrelevant whether the decision makers like or dislike Cianjuran, *sijobang* or trance dancing. What matters is how the different communities value their cultural heritage.

That is already a very complicated problem, because who are the people representing a community? Mostly there are many contradicting voices.

Symbolic meaning and technology

Decision makers should not only look at the symbolical functions of ICH, because then they forget the technological component in the production of ICH.

What matters is which role these technical processes controlled by artists play in society. The production of living culture (re-)creates social relations.

Safeguarding should be concerned with the **process of transmitting technical knowledge** about living culture and not with questions of 'beauty' and other value judgments.

Conclusion

The 2003 convention is a great step forward to developing new cultural policies, for instance:

- the terminology is better than in former conventions and declarations, and taking into account the **oral traditions**;
- there is a significant role for **communities** (artists, their public and other culture bearers) in safeguarding.

The complexity of living culture with the emphasis on processes rather than objects, forces us to pay much attention to the **methodology** of safeguarding.

Safeguarding plans should be directed to the **transmission of knowledge** and be **evaluated** after some time.*