

Documentation as a Tool for Safeguarding a Community's Intangible Cultural Heritage on the Verge of Disappearing

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Background

IRCI is a new institution, established with the agreement of the Japanese government as a UNESCO category II centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage. Its mission is to promote and implement the objectives of the 2003 Convention by facilitating research activities. Medium and long-term programmes approved by Board members focus on five topics, including 'Various methodologies and utilisation of documentation of intangible cultural heritage'. The topic of this article, 'Documentation as a tool for community's safeguarding activities', is the subject of a research project (focusing on our mission) that has recently been initiated by IRCI with a group of international experts.

There have been many instances to date of outside researchers creating records to document intangible cultural heritage (ICH). We launched this project for two reasons. First, many practitioners and community leaders who participated in my community-based project during my tenure of Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU) reported, 'No records remain inside the community' (i.e. 'there have been no records from the beginning') or 'as successors are aging, we wish to make a record [of our intangible cultural heritage] before it becomes too late. However, we have no know-how on the recording'. Participants also reported that existing films previously produced by outside researchers and broadcasting media were inaccessible for the following reasons:

- The contents may not be shared.
- The content archives themselves have not built.
- The contents were filmed for a different purpose and do not fit with the desired use.

The second reason for launching this project was our aim to contribute to risk management by providing a very practical methodology to the communities whose ICH is on the Urgent Safeguarding List. We were aware that UNESCO placed a high priority on safeguarding intangible heritage that was on the verge of disappearing at the time the convention was held. The most important list originating from the 2003 Convention was the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, as prescribed in Article 17. As of May 2012, there were 27 elements on the list, 80% of which were associated with emerging markets and developing countries.

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Therefore, practical international assistance is a high priority and the specific factors for the elements being at risk need to be carefully analysed through field research activities so that discussions may take place to provide a framework for international cooperation with stakeholders and communities. Table 1 shows a partial analysis that identifies the causes of risk for the 27 elements on the Urgent Safeguarding List (gleaned from nomination forms). External factors are those that come from outside the inheriting community, while internal factors come from within. Also noted is the number of elements corresponding to each type of risk. The risks of greatest interest for the present study are designated in the table by the letters 'h' and 'i'.

Table 1. List of Elements According to External/Internal Risks Found In the UNESCO Urgent Safeguarding List

I. External Factors			II. Internal Factors		
a	Personal/physical disappearance due to war, strife, or natural disasters	3	g	Risk due to internal changes among youth (lessened interest, changes in religious beliefs, etc.)	6
b	Heavy impact due to worldwide globalisation/industrialisation	5	h	Risk due to considerable changes to heirs' environment and circumstances (shrinking and aging population, disappearance of a language, etc.)	8
c	Negative impact due to tourism development	1	i	Risk due to absent or insufficiently constructed system for inheriting (research systems, methods of transmitting knowledge, etc.)	8
d	Impact of geographical changes, etc. due to national government policy	3	j	Risk due to decreased motivation of heirs (decrease in places and opportunities to demonstrate heritage, etc.)	2
e	Risk corresponding to disappearance of tangible cultural heritage	1	k	Risk due to changing values	1
f	Population movements due to structural changes in the economy	7	l	Community depopulation due to poverty	1

Finding two approaches for community's ICH documentation

Based on the above findings, I have concluded that there is a need for methodology for documenting the records applicable to the successors, as well as for the creation of manuals, which may be prototypes that can be modified. Accordingly, I have launched two related projects to propose shareable approaches through the creation of model guidelines for (a) recording films aimed at the purpose stated at the close of the preceding paragraph that should be undertaken; and, (b) identifying who will manage the filmed contents thus completed and where, and how the contents should be used.

As a first action, we organised a research group in March 2012 to discuss this theme and to

create ‘Guidelines on Documentation for Community Safeguarding of Their ICH’, of which a partial extract is shown below. The guidelines target researchers, state officials, and documentation experts. Contents consist of four chapters, including:

- Goals/interests/resources behind documentation,
- Ethics, rights, and relationships,
- Methodologies/media for documentation, and
- Managing data and monitoring access

Table 2. Guidelines on documentation for community safeguarding of their ICH

Guidelines on documentation for community safeguarding of their ICH
<p>Researchers/state officials</p> <p>Researchers and documentation experts (e.g. AV and legal experts, ethnographers)</p> <p>Goals/interests/resources behind documentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of the communities, groups, and individuals concerned is important. • Documentation should meet the needs of communities for safeguarding. • Documentation should be facilitated by communities, state officials, researchers, or documentation experts. Documentation projects should be financially sustainable and contribute to sustainable ICH practices. • Capacity building for communities, researchers, or documentation experts needs to be part of every project; traditional means of documentation should be used. <p>Ethics, rights, and relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitivity to voice (different researcher or documentation expert/practitioner perspective) is required. • Capacity building is needed to encourage community direction and participation in the documentation process. • Documentation institutions/researchers must not become the authorities through the documentation process. • • • <p>Methodologies/media for documentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiations regarding what should be documented should take place with the practising community (performance, transmission, preparation); determination on how to contextualise documentation for various uses should also be made. Negotiations are needed to specify the language of documentation to maximise use for safeguarding. • Timing and place of documentation should be negotiated. • Communities must be empowered to document their own practices to enable safeguarding. • Capacity building among researchers or documentation experts, and in communities, should be utilised so that community interpretations and perspectives are foregrounded in the documentation. • • • <p>Managing data and monitoring access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access needs of different audiences for a variety of documentation media must be considered, and collections should be organised accordingly. • Customary restrictions on access to ICH documentation should be taken into account. • Community members should have ongoing access to documentation as needed. For example, appropriate documentation language is necessary to maximise access by communities and other users, as negotiated. The need for decentralised documentation centres serving communities should be explored.

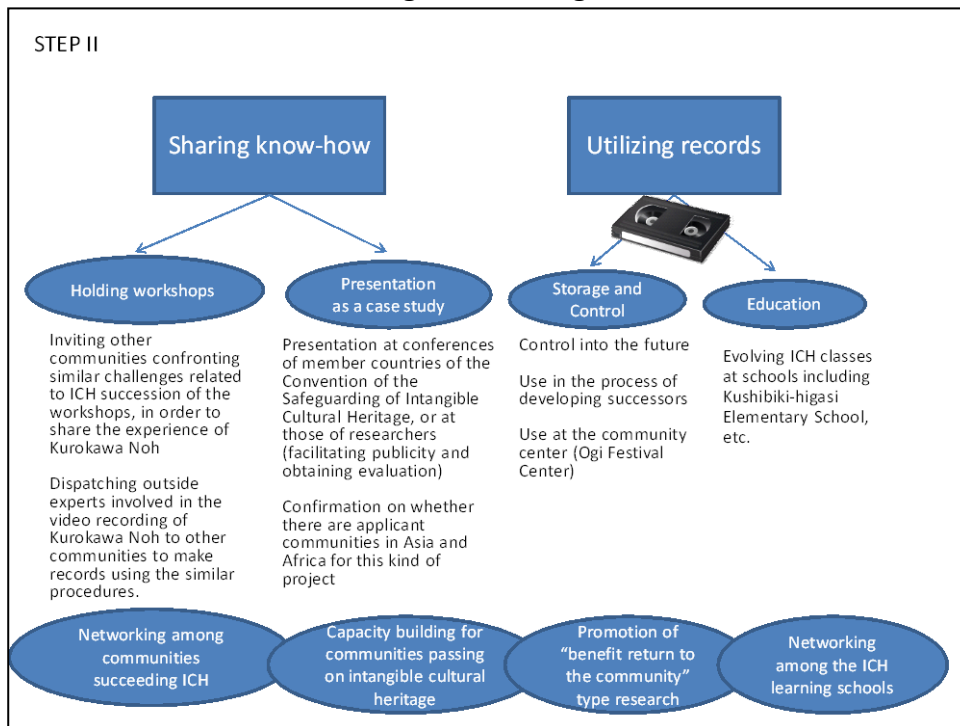
Regarding a different perspective, one of UNESCO’s earlier recommendations was that documentation be community-led, since many recommendations seem to be directed at

researchers who explain how to involve communities and fully respect their rights. Therefore, I planned to organise another research project trying to cover this perspective (Approach II). This approach would offer a practical alternative for producing manuals through field studies, while focusing on making a film recording.

We imagined situations that would require an immediate response for assisting a community in keeping records of ICH to accurately pass down to the next generation. I subsequently drafted a two-step project. Step 1 aims at identification of the record to be made. Then, film contents are to be recorded and edited based on elaborate validations and discussions between successors and researchers. We also envisioned the implementation of an experiment designed to use the created contents, and our ultimate aim is to create manuals that contain the film contents and documentation of the procedure/process itself. In order to create a sample manual, the cooperation of a Japanese community placed under similar circumstances was enlisted. The community that agreed to cooperate with us is the one succeeding Kurokawa Noh in the Yamagata prefecture, while the target ICH is 'the Ogi Festival', their biggest event/ritual. Kurokawa Noh is a traditional performing art (theatre) that retains a high profile among other expressions of Japanese ICH. Accordingly, many visitors, Japanese TV crews, overseas media, photographers, and researchers come to the hamlet where the theatricals are performed to gather news and produce programs. Nonetheless, while discussing with some people in the community found that such productions are produced based on different purposes-to attract audiences or focus on only a specific part of the festival. Therefore, this community wishes to pass down a record (film) which shows the complete sequence associated with the Ogi Festival, including the provenance and significance of each ritual, to younger generations.

Following the filmmaking, Step 2 aims at sharing know-how by inviting other communities and utilising the film contents. First, utilisation of the completed documentation record should be considered, discussed, and carried out in the Kurokawa hamlet. Secondly, the recording method used for the hamlet should be presented as a case study, while sharing the recording methodology with other similar communities across the globe through workshops. Through the two projects explained above, I hope to use the findings to form 'the guidelines + manual'. Furthermore, I would like to finalise the compilation as a legitimate record and tool to protect the ICH of the community.

Table 3. Sharing and utilising outcomes



Sustained implementation of the processes above will naturally bring about the accumulation of records, techniques, and transmission know-how related to folk performing arts. Consolidating such information for each community and performing art and then making that information available to a broad audience will facilitate a deeper awareness and appreciation of the arts on the part of other communities; in addition, it will create networks among communities. The creation of institutions, organisations, and facilities to serve as centres of these functions is needed to facilitate these developments.