INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND DIGITAL MEDIA

Portugal - Slovakia Readings

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Title

Intangible Cultural Heritage and Digital Media: Portugal - Slovakia Readings

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Edition Date

June 2022

Editor

University of Évora | UNESCO Chair in Intangible Heritage and Traditional Know – How: Linking Heritage

ISBN

978-972-778-269-7 (e-book)

Design and layout

Sónia Bombico

Cover image

Blueprint by Peter Trnka. Photo available at www.instagram.com/modrotlac.sk/?hl=sk

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Introduction

May you live in interesting times

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"May you live in interesting times" is frequently declared to be the antient Chinese curse meaning that it is better to live in "boring times" of peace, tranquillity, permanent values, and slow technological progress. Unfortunately, we right now live in the "interesting times" where almost everything, especially information-communication technology, is changing too fast to be caught up by any ordinary man/woman without difficulties. Moreover, with some degree of exaggeration, it can be said that we live in interesting times of the digital imperative: anything is either digital, or it does not exist (i.e., it is out of interest). Thus, while the term "Intangible cultural heritage" traditionally hided three "abilities" – intangibility, i.e., non-material nature, culturability, i.e., direct links (tights) to particular culture and heritability, i.e., ability to be passed among generations, nowadays, due to the "digital imperative" we should add another "ability", namely digitality. Digitality is not only characteristic of new technology, but is also characteristics of culture, society and even an individual. An important part of digitality is a new digital medium. It brought about "a digital revolution" into all forms of the communication processes, including processes of capturing, safeguarding, accessing and space/time transfer of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Thus, the ICH is also hit by the spirit of the "interesting times" – it is in a state of permanent change: starting from its position in a society, through the ways of its capturing/documentation/presentation to its acceptance, understanding, development and transfer in time and space.

In general, the new medium "revolutionarily" in connection to the ICH is manifested mainly through its following abilities:

1. elimination of the time/space "tyranny" resulting in the change of the paradigm: from Mohamed goes to the (ICH) mountain to Mohamed has the (ICH) mountain at a one click reach anytime, from anywhere.

2. An offer of the real – virtual space continuum for new ways of the ICH presentation/representation: ICH can be nested in a real space, virtual space, augmented reality, augmented virtuality, or mixed reality.

3. Phenomenon of interactivity – from passive "consumption" to the active participation in the ICH storytelling.

4. (Algorithmic) processing allowing for a creative approach to the ICH: besides the ICH original, numerous derivative "versions"/art works can be created.

5. Online sharing among communities of interest and a public.

6. The use of the ICH as a contextual information (e.g., an environment of computer games).

7. Hybrid encounters with the ICH – simultaneously both in a real and virtual place.

The new medium also brought some general side effects, too:

1. Paradigm change: from the lack of information to the information overload. As a result, the ICH should be not only searchable/accessible on internet, but it has to fight for an attention of internet users.

2. A rise of the culture of infotainment. The "infotainment style" is especially important when the ICH is used for the support of tourism in given locality.

3. Paradigm of "anytime, anywhere, any device". The ICH thus should be accessible both in the allocated spaces (museums, galleries, archives, ...) and through the network/new media.

As a result of these side effects, the new medium let us to live in the hybrid space of reality/virtuality where the ICH acquires new position/role. This is the reason why it is important to understand the characteristics of digital medium and the possibilities that

new media offer to the ICH capturing, safeguarding, presentation/representation and the ICH knowledge transfer. The special attention should be paid to the influence of the phenomena of mobility, hybridity, networking, pervasive computing, interactivity, personalisation, etc. (all of them offered by digital medium and new media technologies, respectively), on the position of the ICH in a contemporary society.

Documentation and processing of intangible cultural heritage is currently a very acute issue, and its importance will continue to increase. The possibility of obtaining an authentic living memory from people born in the 1930s and 1940s is currently coming to an end. On an international level the UNESCO is putting stress on safeguarding of cultural diversity, including of both tangible and intangible heritage. The safeguarding of local practices, knowledge, skills, artistic expressions, craftsmanship, dance and performance arts become a crucial step to the strengthening of cultural diversity. The position of the ICH is crucial in this effort because it is that "*what makes our world rich and vital*" (UNESCO, 2003). Ongoing process of globalisation and the pressure from the so called "dominant culture" are together identified as the main threads to the sustainability of the ICH on the level of local communities. Another reason why the agenda of the ICH is important is that it is stimulates understanding and cooperation on an international level in the safeguarding living conditions on the planet Earth (UNESCO, 2001).

The intangible cultural heritage is preserved either directly, on the level of individuals (living treasures, creator, performer, producer, promoter) and human communities, or indirectly, in the form of analogous records (traditional audio-visual media) or in the form of digital records backed by a new digital medium.

An essential component of Slovakia's intangible cultural heritage are verbal and literary expressions disseminated by oral, dramatic, musical and dance expressions, nicknames, proverbs, rhymes, legends, fairy tales; nativity scenes and wiremen; folk songs and dances. Besides, linguistic expressions (local and regional variants of the Slovak language, languages of ethnic minorities, national groups and dialects, including contemporary slang); geographical, cadastral and local names (e.g. Oblazov mills); original production technology and technological processes (e.g. production of instruments, blueprints); cultural traditions (family, calendar, work customs, local customs and historical events are also included in the intangible cultural heritage of Slovakia, too (UNESCO.sk). Its digitization and presentation through new media are important parts of the Slovakian ICH policy.

In this eBook we consider new digital medium to be an agent behind all the above changes and a basket of new media is a vehicle for their implementation. Our attention is aimed at the analyses of the possibilities offered by the digital medium for a presentation and an interactive use of the ICH.

Indeed, one of the greatest challenges facing the ICH is that of transmission to younger generations, in a process capable of generating identity and a sense of belonging. The preservation of cultural practices and expressions, as well as knowledge and know-how, goes hand in hand with the dynamics of transmitting this heritage to future generations. According to 2003 UNESCO Convention, 'safeguarding' means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage." Therefore, the ICH pays attention to cultural expressions ("know-how" in arts and crafts, celebrations, oral expressions…) still practiced today, which persist in communities through a generational line that assures them, expressions that are dynamic and alive, contextualized in terms of community experience and in constant relationship with the other expressions of heritage.

However, the recognition of the value of these intangible manifestations through their study, safeguarding, promotion and dissemination must involve specialists in the field of heritage and culture in a process that simultaneously streamlines the recognition by the community (and its representatives, local or national) of these manifestations, and not necessarily with inscription on UNESCO lists. In fact, community participation, together with the establishment of inventories, is among the main actions associated with ICH safeguarding.

So, our time is really an interesting and challenging time. Winning over the collective, drawing its attention to the question that he becomes the heir of what has been produced as a testimony (at the material and immaterial level) having the obligation, as such, to keep them to transmit them. To win the collective we must win its interest, and when we talk about the *heritagization* of the intangible, that it is often done naturally, less formal than involving state institutions. In the convention for the safeguarding of the ICH, the States Parties engage in a dynamic of viable partnership with the communities but knowing that interventions must be structured especially on the government side.

And now, hope for the future. The adoption of the strategic document "Transforming the world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 suggests that culture could play a decisive role in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. This program confirms the affirmation in the 2003 Convention, according to which the ICH is the guarantor of sustainable development, which does not only concern the economic sector: there is social cohesion and responsible management of the environment that can facilitate its durability. Indeed, development must be inclusive by giving the opportunity to all layers of the population to contribute to the advancement of society, and where education plays an essential role.

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