

# ICH – Local Voices

## Intangible Cultural Heritage

Documenting Locally - Celebrating Globally: Empowered by the media



Synopsis for the  
Implementation of a  
Cultural Anthropology  
Project



## ICH – Local Voices

What is Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)?

About the Project: *ICH – Local Voices*

Documentation: discover the world of your own culture

Representation: appreciate the world of other cultures

The origin of the project

The Implementation

Project Team

Finance

Goals & Relevance



## What is Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)?

Intangible Cultural Heritage (henceforth referred to as ICH) is made up of our traditions, rituals, ideas and ideals, our creative forms of expression, our cultural identity, our heritage, which we adapt, develop, promote and protect for future generations. ICH embodies annual customs and festivals, traditional musical instruments, traditional dress or performed dances. It is also the craftsmanship and trades, the knowledge of medicinal herbs and of all the retold stories and myths, which are relevant for a culture and passed on and adapted from one person or generation to the next.

The idea of ICH is thus quite extensive and involves all the tradition-custodians and their cultural spaces, as it is they who uphold the traditions in their natural environment and who keep the cultural diversity alive.

Through the promotion of ICH using documentation, adaptation, representation and archiving, the content and ideas of ICH will be distributed, its cultural uniqueness will be made apparent and the appreciation of different cultures will be encouraged: an important aspect in safeguarding ICH because if traditional values, creativity and diversity are neglected or even completely forgotten, social and economic resources become less important as well.

To safeguard global ICH and to develop a counterpart to the UNESCO's World Heritage, the UNESCO itself created a convention<sup>1</sup> in 2003 to preserve unique and endangered ICH, which will be represented on a list of endangered ICH and a Representative List (since 2009)<sup>2</sup>. On a national level, every state party is committed to setting up an inventory of its local ICH, to recognise and highlight its living heritage. Promoting ICH is one of the main aims of the UNESCO convention (2003), with a strong focus on integrating the tradition-custodians in its actions.

Having put our focal point on the above mentioned aims it is all the more important to us to develop methods to create a project which leads to the appreciation of local traditions, to individual expressions and to a clearer perception of cultural diversity.



<sup>1</sup> *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, UNESCO, Paris, 17 October 2003, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00006>

<sup>2</sup> *The List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00011>

## About the Project: ICH – Local Voices

*How can the ICH of a specific culture and its diversity be documented and made available to other cultural environments?*

*How can the tradition-custodians actively be integrated into the process of transmitting their traditional forms of self-expression?*

The first part of the project was a theoretic/empirical one, where we conducted scientific work and field research to look into existing methods and projects in the field of multimedia documentation and representation of ICH.

While writing the concept we framed our basic principles and developed potential methods and implementation strategies to conduct an ICH-project on a national level.

Our initial idea is to link four focal points, which build the foundation of the project and set out key factors for our methodical objectives:

- *Multimedia documentation* – use different media tools (video, photography, audio, ...) to document ICH in various perspectives.
- *Local productions* – find alternatives to the commercially-driven media landscape by allowing self-representation, community participation while emphasising freedom of expression.
- *Digital representation*<sup>3</sup> – create a modular online database to give national cultural activities and traditions a visual expression and to raise the awareness of local ICH on a broad level.
- *Cultural promotion as a network* – create a common citizen agora (multimedia platform) for bringing dynamic ways of visualising ICH to a broad audience for reflection, debate, intercultural exchange and sustainability.

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<sup>3</sup>The term "Digital Representation" refers to the visual conceptualisation of the documentation through the use of extensive multimedia methods to be made available to the public.

## Documentation: Discover the World of your own Culture

We intend to use multimedia formats as the medium for seeing and understanding people and places in an alternative way and to consult on the promotion of ICH using audio-recording, audiovisuals, animations and archival material.

The core of the documentation-process will be the tradition-custodians and the local recordings of written texts, photo-, film-, and audio material of selected ICH. The productions will have a strong focus on the authenticity of the ICH-documentation and will represent the views of the tradition-custodians on past and present traditional practices – local content told and produced by local people through the support of our team. Our goal is not to produce commercially-driven material on ICH but to provide an opportunity to picture ICH through individual perspectives. Further it should be noted that it is understood that ICH is a continually evolving and adapting phenomenon and therefore changes must be reviewed on a constant basis.

To locally record the ICH, a team with professional media skills will be established, which will be guided by selected tradition-custodians to recount their stories and points of view through the use of multimedia equipment. An “information and direct booklet” will be given to the tradition-custodians in advance to familiarise them with the goal of the project and its creative processes. The opportunity to produce or contribute to their own productions will be available to them in a flexible and interactive way. It is important that tradition-custodians of all age-groups can be integrated in the process and act as producers, storytellers, protagonists or middlemen between their community and the project coordinators.



Through a strong participation of the local community – an important aspect of this concept to generally safeguard and promote ICH – respect for freedom of expression and ownership will be central. Tradition-custodians will have the possibility to represent themselves through media formats suited to their needs and preferences in order to present their ideas and ideals to a broader audience.

## Representation: Appreciating the World of Other Cultures

To make the multimedia productions accessible to the public and other cultural groups, our aim is to provide a multimedia platform<sup>4</sup> which will be modular and “living” just as the ICH itself. The material, periodically updated, will be accessible online and can be changed or replaced according to the requirements of the custodians of the respective ICH. As important as the present is of course the past, or the roots of an ICH, which should equally be represented in this “living” depository of cultural treasures. This will show the archival recording of the selected ICH, animations of existing objects, artefacts and/or scans of old relics relating to the ICH. Through the combination of traditional and new media forms the representation of ICH should be as holistic as possible. Of course, we are aware that essential aspects of an ICH, like the flavour or the texture of materials, cannot be expressed using media. Nevertheless our intention is to provide a unique insight into national ICH through the use of this multimedia and self-representative approach.

The multimedia platform will not only be a tool to represent the material but also to create a public space that enables an exchange between the tradition-custodians, local communities, regular users and cultural institutions on a national and international level. Furthermore, it can be of interest to the UNESCO Commission to record their national inventory lists, so that the ideas of the ICH-convention and the selected national ICH can become more accessible to the public through a unique and local approach.

In order not to be too reliant on the World Wide Web and to make the content accessible to individuals and communities who do not have access to the internet on a regular basis, we will produce an interactive DVD which contains the entire content of the platform and can be renewed annually.

Furthermore, to enhance the sustainability of the project we mean to introduce the ICH productions not only in the ways described so far, but also through alternative approaches such as exhibitions, multimedia packages, publications, UNESCO activities and sustainable tourism projects.



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<sup>4</sup> Based on an Online-Database (Website)

## The origin of the project

We have been active in the field of media works and cultural promotion for several years, particularly in the field of ICH.

Through the writing of a dissertation, conducting national and international field research and media projects, we have addressed the definition of ICH, effective ways of safeguarding it and especially finding different strategies to promote it. Our ambition now is to combine our scientific and practical approaches with empirical data to create new ideas and to develop an innovative project in the field of multimedia documentation and the representation of ICH. To implement a project like this we were motivated by people whose work and mission is to safeguard and promote ICH – led by the traditional custodians themselves. The need for an ICH-project was clear, especially after talking with the UNESCO's person in charge, cultural heritage experts at universities and various institutions as well as with some local communities. Through our experiences, motivation and external support we are convinced that it will be possible to realise a project which facilitates access to local ICH on an national and international level.

Some of our founding ideas were born from our field research where we obtained empirical data abroad and which we are continuously building upon. It does however appear to us that even if each culture has its own constitution and premise, there are commonalities which have or should have relevance in many places and can be transferred. In particular, we refer to the integration of the tradition-custodians themselves with an understanding and tolerance of unconventional and individual expressions of ideas, multifaceted representations, the use of multimedia formats and the opportunity for intercultural communication.



## The Implementation

### Project Team

Sebastian Knoebl, DI (FH), focuses on Digital Media, Multimedia Knowledge Transfer, Film, Internal/External Communication and ICT.

Stephanie Knoebl, Ph.D. student (University of Salzburg), focuses on International and Intercultural Communication, Visual Anthropology, History of Art and Photography.

We, as the body responsible for the project with diverse focal points, will continue this interdisciplinary approach through the development of a dynamic network of experts working in the field of media and cultural studies, anthropology, folklore, sustainable tourism and intercultural communication. A small adaptable team, with theoretical knowledge and empirical value, will lead us to carry out certain project phases.

The presented concept represents strategies developed by us, albeit the experiences gathered from selected projects and the measures taken by the national UNESCO-Commission through the ratification of the Convention (2003) are considered as well.

Therefore it is our aim to collaborate with the UNESCO as well as national and international cultural institutions so that new ideas can be created, common goals can be identified and experiences exchanged. Especially now, after the ratification of the Convention by the Austrian federal government on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2009, the topic of safeguarding and promoting the national ICH is current and much discussed. We, as the initiators of the project, wish to contribute by presenting our scientific research and by rising to the challenge of converting relevant and innovative methods into action. We are convinced that through joint action it will be possible to find adequate and creative approaches, which will link science and practice as an important initial point.

For the process of selecting local ICH of Austria, which is understood as rare or even unique, we will cooperate with the National Commission for UNESCO together with regional cultural institutions and individuals working in the field of safeguarding and promoting ICH. After the selection of the ICH and creating an agreement with the tradition-custodians, we will support an active exchange during and after the productions. They will in this way become acquainted with the project and the team will become familiarised with the ICH, enabling us to collectively work on the promotion.





## Finance

The project will be implemented over the period of two years (Start: November 2009) with the support of national funding, international programmes, foundations, sponsorship, all under the support of the National Commission for UNESCO. As a starting point it will be necessary to acquire initial funding to establish a foundation. This would include the conception and communication of the project; the establishment of a team and identification of partners; the procurement of required technical equipment; the development of the digital platform; the selection of local ICH; the design of the "Information and direct booklet"; and the realisation of a pilot-project.

The second and more time-consuming phase will be the production - the multimedia based documentation of the selected ICH and its representation on the digital online platform.

It is envisaged at a later stage to use the multimedia platform to create production releases and to generate funding so that the project will meet international and sustainable interests.



## Goals & Relevance

ICH is a fragile field deeply rooted in the past, connecting the tradition-custodians of today with their history and the constant pressures of change in the outside world and the future. It is clear therefore, that the methods used to document and inventory ICH have a much shorter history of standards and practical experience than the material objects that they must capture. At present there are certainly theories and empirical data that address the question of ICH, but nonetheless new questions and considerations will inevitably arise, and existing ones will only be resolved, after having moved from theory to practice. For instance: "How great is the interest of the tradition custodians to document their ICH?"; "How successful are our methods when it comes to the realisation on a local level and what reactions will emerge?"; "How accurately can you document and represent ICH using the presented methods?"; "Is there a need to promote ICH in the region and beyond, and if so, how strong should it be?"; "Which risks can arise when promoting local ICH?"; "Who will show interest in national ICH?"; "Will this kind of multimedia representation raise awareness of the diversity and relevance of ICH?"; "Will it strengthen the value and importance of cultural identity and foster respect for unique forms of expression?"

As a result of these questions, and many more, we see our theoretical and empirical approach as required preliminary work, and the implementation of the project as the means to answer some of these questions and to stimulate new ones, in order to keep our ideas and the perspectives of others "living".

The goal is to provide a multifaceted approach to unique traditional expressions and to strengthen the values of ones own ICH. It is also to create access for discovering other cultures. We are convinced that a representation of a variety of local expressions, creativity and initiatives, using a broad range of conventional and modern methods, will raise awareness and increase tolerance for cultural diversity and identities while showing the uniqueness and importance of local ICH.

Contact: Stephanie Knoebl  
0041 78 6963844  
stephi.knoebl@gmx.at

Sebastian Knoebl  
0043 660 7324337  
sknoebl@gmail.com

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