

ICH+ 20: CELEBRATING THE ICH Convention – VALUES, VOCALITY, VISIBILITY AND VIABILITY

The adoption of the ICH Convention on 17th October 2003 following several years of denial, discussion, deliberation and negotiation, and period of contested and volatile debate that holds in its heart a battle over meaning and identity, was important in and of itself of course as a critical conclusion to this 'decolonizing' process, but it also gained huge significance in a number of ways for Barbados amongst others. In the same context of the 32nd session of UNESCO's General Conference, where member states acclaimed the importance of the Proclamation of 2004 as International Year to Commemorate the Struggle against Slavery and its Abolition, particularly urging the Director-General to "continue the Slave Route project at least until 2007, the 200th anniversary of the beginning of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade".

The General Conference also decided on a Draft charter on the preservation of the digital heritage which focussed on ensuring the increasing accessibility and sharing of understanding and interpretation of various aspects of intangible and tangible heritage. And at the same time it signaled the importance of the promotion and flagship project "The Slave Route" in highlighting the memory of the slave trade and slavery by means of an interdisciplinary programme based on cooperation between international scientific networks, and to encourage the celebration in 2004 of the United Nations International Year to Commemorate the Struggle against Slavery and its Abolition in line with the proposed Programme of Action of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. as well as urging Member States to develop programmes to be implemented aimed at supporting dialogue among cultures and civilizations.

We also sought to ensure that the value and importance of the Barbados Programme for Action in respect of Small Island Developing States was acknowledged, appreciated and recognized by both the General Conference and the Director General calling on him specifically to: "continue to undertake concrete measures for the further implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action in the context of UNESCO's programmes and projects, **giving special attention to the synergies of various kinds of interaction and cooperation – within and between societal sectors, within and between disciplines, within and between various stakeholder groups (government, civil society, youth, private sector, research and education communities), within and between regions, within and between institutions and organizations at various levels (local, national, subregional, regional, international)**", and recognizing the need to translate shared principles and agreements, inspiring a dialogue among civilizations and cultures, into concrete activities and action permeating all UNESCO programmes.

As a specialist on the visual arts, museums and the heritage, I have come more and more to comprehend that it is not so much the Convention's subject matter or contents of the different traditional practices and expressions which are of the greatest value for me. As intriguing as the various ICH elements revealed within our lists are, what matters most is that this diversity of expression must allow for a similar diversity of interpretation, and ensuring that carrier communities be enabled to give vocality and visibility to any heritage they consider to be theirs, not so much to claim as it is as such, as it to be empowered to share. Thus its evaluation and affirmation procedures are giving attention to critical **synergies of interaction and cooperation – within and between societal sectors, within and between disciplines, within and between various stakeholders... within and between regions**, and shaping the global consciousness and ethical considerations in this regard.

So for a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) community, geographically (dis)located and (de) limited within and between the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea ; as a former colonial country and enslaved community, which must continually address the memory of slavery and its haunting repetition, recognizing that it is a memory always in flux, mutating, changing, being changed within and beyond overt acts of memory work, we are constantly working to recover our obscured and at times deliberately erased identities, which at times only reside in our vulnerable intangible heritage. It is only through supporting and generating these aforementioned synergies that we can ensure the viability of our cultural identities, or indeed our social DNA. It is these synergies of purpose and process which are finally enabling the essential connection between our physical and intellectual realities. It is these intrinsic values which could only be meaningfully ascribed by communities towards their cultures and the sharing of those values with others.

Our recent reflection on a broader implementation of Article 18 of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Stockholm Sweden, where we sought to open up new means for the Sharing of Good Safeguarding Practices reminded me of how much I appreciated the continued evolution of the ICH Convention's language and landscape since the drafting and negotiating of the Convention. It is opportunities like these which provide opportunities to articulate informed guidance on accessible methodologies for assessing the dynamic interrelationship between tangible and intangible heritage, while at the same offering the opportunities to these communities to contribute to the diverse methods and tools and to facilitate their use for their evaluation and protection of the ICH for generations to come.

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