

**Name: Riet de Leeuw**

Former senior policy advisor in the Ministry for Education, Culture and Science, The Hague, Netherlands

Retired, but nevertheless very involved in developing intangible heritage policies, projects and supporting the Dutch Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage.

**Text:**

The Intangible Cultural heritage (ICH) Convention has been the leading policy document for the Netherlands to develop policies on safeguarding ICH; set up the Dutch Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage; launch the bottom-up procedure for inventory making; and develop a research agenda on ICH. The Convention has been successful in raising awareness of the nature of living heritage, the importance of safeguarding living heritage and the value for society on the international and national level. It has increased the visibility of ICH in the world. The way the convention puts communities at the heart of safeguarding practices and responds to the needs of communities, is becoming a more widely applied practice in our heritage regimes.

The Netherlands has -also on the international level- contributed to UNESCO's global capacity building program. In our view the most impactful way to start the implementation process was to train policy advisors, NGO's, museums, researchers and communities, to understand the convention. Capacity building programs were also a way to involve the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the implementation of the Convention. The islands have co-ratified the convention and are mapping and documenting their living heritage with a view to safeguarding and making community based inventories.

ICH has been recognized as an important leverage to address contemporary challenges facing communities and societies in the world. For instance, in connection with climate change disasters and degradation of biodiversity, good practices and research results in the field of the contribution of ICH to ecological sustainability are becoming more and more visible. The Netherlands has developed a research agenda on these topics, as have other state parties.

Still, a lot remains to be done in the coming 20 years:

Intangible heritage is threatening to disappear; refugee communities and migrant communities are dispersed over the world; governments fail to reckon with the significance of ICH and the safeguarding of it and natural and conflict disasters, the lack of an economically enabling environment and rapid urbanization are constantly disrupting social structures.

However, there also are inspiring, promising examples of platforms of young people, initiating and working together to safeguard ICH. They work with migrant communities in neighbourhoods in superdiverse cities. They employ innovative programs to work with the knowledge and skills of citizens to tackle major transition in urban areas. Digital environments are important as new avenues for communication targeting the public and youth. They allow communities to share their experiences, on international and national levels. These examples of active

practicing and safeguarding ICH demonstrates the power of living heritage for enhancing inclusion, solidarity, supporting social and economic participation.

Challenges for the future:

An important challenge for the convention is ensuring greater equity, geographical balance and representation of ICH and communities, groups, NGO's, experts across the world, in safeguarding, visibility and advisory functions.

Placing communities at the heart of the convention should not just be hollow words. Bringing the involvement and experiences of communities and groups to the fore will result in making their experiences in safeguarding more accessible and visible during UNESCO statutory meetings.

ICH is an important vehicle for cultural diversity. Respect for cultural diversity and the celebration of differences should be in the foreground of policy making in the field of ICH. The ICH needs of underrepresented groups, the diaspora and refugees, need to be recognized and respected. ICH in urban contexts, with young people, informal groups and digital spaces need special attention, this can contribute to new views on safeguarding.

ICH has to be embedded more firmly in policies and strategies within and beyond the culture sector. Transversal cooperation is key to ICH programs: stakeholders from different sectors should engage in joint action to enhance the future of ICH and communities.

On the local level, governments of municipalities and provinces, museums and other institutions have to become more engaged in ICH safeguarding, through cooperation (networks), co-design of policies and programs, exchange of good practices, sharing of experiences, in support of the practices of communities.

ICH can make a contribution to education in schools. Learning and teaching with and about ICH fosters the production and transmission of knowledge on ICH, sustainable development etc. Experiences and good practices need to be exchanged between educational stakeholders in different countries.

Monitoring instruments on local, national and international levels are important to generate new data on ICH elements and practicing communities. The contribution of ICH to ecological sustainability, climate adaptation and biodiversity are key points to observe.

Last but not least: The cooperation within the Kingdom of the Netherlands on safeguarding ICH, developing inventories, documenting and researching, has resulted in a proposal for a Kingdom wide nomination procedure for the lists of the UNESCO Convention. Aruba, Curaçao, St. Maarten, Bonaire, St. Eustatius, Saba and the Netherlands worked together to develop this 10 step nomination procedure with as key points of departure: respect and equality. My wish for the future is that we can continue in the same spirit!