

PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO LIVING HERITAGE: NGO PERSPECTIVES

ICH NGO Forum Symposium, Asunción, Paraguay, 1 December 2024.

SYMPOSIUM REPORT

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The 2024 Symposium provided a space for NGOs to share experiences on the participation of communities, groups and individuals in decisions and actions for safeguarding intangible heritage. The event was well attended (in person and online) by approximately 100 participants. Overall, the symposium highlighted key issues concerning the implementation of participatory policies across theoretical, ethical, methodological and practical levels which will be further examined in 2025 through regional and thematic focus groups and an e-publication.

Welcome talks by Dr Robert Baron (ICH NGO Forum), Ms Fumiko Okinata (UNESCO Living Heritage Entity) and Dr Marilena Alivizatou (WG Research) highlighted the main themes of the symposium, including the stipulations of the 2003 UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage* and the practical and ethical issues and problems around community participation. A common theme was that NGOs are particularly well-placed to carry out community-based and participatory work, engage in processes of self-reflection, provide good practice recommendations and shape future international policy.

Session 1

The first session presented case studies of participatory work on the ground. Speakers were invited to reflect on how the context of their field sites has shaped their understanding of communities and the methodology used, with the aim of thinking about positive outcomes, but also complexities of this work. Professor Alejandra Díaz discussed the work of the NGO *Crear en Libertad* relating to the involvement of local communities in the cultural transmission of spiritual dances among the Indigenous communities of Paraguay. Ms Gloria Bejarano-Castro presented the work of the NGO *Casa Taller* on the development of educational activities for the transmission of Indigenous languages in

Panama among younger generations. Through a video intervention, Ms Luz Gutiérrez-García, from the NGO *Embodying Reconciliation*, presented an international collaborative research project in Colombia, India and Japan regarding uses of living heritage in post-disaster recovery. Dr Saymon Zakaria, representing the *Vabnagar Foundation* from Bangladesh, shared his fieldwork research on the revival of ancient Bengali Buddhist mystic songs of Charyapada through collaborative, community-based approaches. Mr Oleksandr Butsenko from the NGO *Democracy through Culture* discussed recent efforts to document the living heritage of Ukrainian communities displaced by the war. Finally, Ms Nadia Rdeini shared experiences of participatory arts and education programmes in Lebanon by the US/ Lebanese NGO *Lighthouse for Peace*.

Session 2

The second session focused on the role of NGOs in developing and implementing participatory approaches, considering practical issues of translating international policy into practice, but also the ethical implications of their work. Ms Ananya Bhattacharya talked about the work of the Indian NGO *Contact Base* relating to heritage governance and participation with Indigenous communities in Nagaland. Ms Jorijn Neyrinck from *Workshop Intangible Heritage* provided an overview of their work relating to community collaborations in order to illustrate how it is related to the UNESCO Intangible Heritage framework. Dr Rachel Gefferie provided an in-depth examination of local efforts supported by the NGO *NAKS* for the safeguarding of the Sedtsani dance in Suriname, including the colonial entanglements of this living heritage and the ethical issues related to its safeguarding. Finally, Mr Ian Thomas from the *British Council* presented how the organisation's international work and the ethical framework on which it is based.

Session 3

In the interactive panel discussion, speakers shared good practice recommendations emerging from their work and reflected on the challenges they encounter. A wide range of projects was presented which highlighted not only the different ways in which NGO professionals work with local communities, but also a shared commitment to the principles of consent, honesty, respect and trust, as well as awareness of challenges of funding, international and cross-cultural collaborations, sharing authority and ensuring fair representation.

Some of the papers presented at the Symposium can be found below:

SPEAKERS	TOPICS
Ms Sarah Green (Art for Refugees/ USA)	Historical Memory and its role in Punta Canoa, Colombia
Dr Valentina Zingari (AEJEST/ Italy)	The Tocatì methodology for inventorying Traditional games as ICH elements
Ms Charlotte Courtois (Konstelacio/ France)	Promoting the active transmission of cultural diversity and culinary traditions - Operation Ursino
Ms Sona Tomaç (Traditional Arts Association/ Turkey)	Hands of Heritage: Community-Driven Safeguarding and Transmitting of Handicrafts in Türkiye
Prof Susana Sardo (Int Council for Traditional Music & Dance/ Slovenia)	Shared Research Practices as a Self-Empowerment Process for Heritage Communities. The case of Kola San Jon and Women Multipart Singing in Portugal
Dr Konstantín Kontoyiannis (Conseil Int Danse/ International)	Inventaire des danses sacrées de l'humanité
Dr Hazar Souissi (Univ. Carthage/ Tunisia)	Ensemble pour le Patrimoine : Quelques Expériences Inclusives dans la Valorisation du Patrimoine Immatériel en Tunisie
Dr Eva Kuminková (Ethnological Society/ Czech Republic)	Keepers of Tradition: Community Safeguarding of Dance in a Museum?
Ms Giulia Avanza (Fond. Santagata/ Italy)	Co-Designing Heritage Safeguarding: A Case Study of Italy's Musical Art of the Hunting Horn Players