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Intangible Cultural Heritage – From the Development of a Concept to the Protection of Cultural Diversity / Series of Lectures of the Institute Heritage Studies (IHS) - Guest lecture at the Beijing Institute of Technology (BIT) March 2019

"The Importance of the intangible cultural heritage as a mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development" has been stated in short in the preamble of the Convention Concerning the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in October 2003. Additionally, in this convention the General Conference addressed the importance of cultural heritage for human development. In the preamble of this convention its function for creating and developing the identity of peoples has been defined just as its potential for social and economic development. Furthermore, it was agreed upon that safeguarding cultural heritage should encourage and empower local communities to initiate their own socio-economic development.

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Therefore, with respect to intangible heritage, first of all the process of globalization has to be addressed. Today's globalization is the result of the 'third industrial revolution'. Global communication and information systems have not only changed the industrial development with its streams of capital and goods, but they have also directly and indirectly affected the cultures of the world and their cultural identities. Within UNESCO, the understanding of culture changed during the 1980s from the focus of culture as material heritage to a more and more socially defined understanding of culture and the recognition of its intangible expressions.

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The first milestone in this process was the World Conference on Cultural Policies in Mexico in August 1982. The material understanding of the assets to be protected was extended and supplemented by an understanding of their immaterial value. Thus, the notion of culture expanded itself. Consequently, the 1982 Mexico Declaration emphasized the potential of culture to shape identities. The material and natural assets were now regarded as cultural goods as well as the *"unique spiritual, intercultural and emotional heritage of mankind".* (Fabrizio, in The UNESCO Courier 9/1997). Thus, not only the notions of culture and nature were modified according to the understanding of the time, but also the notion of culture itself. Ever since in the Mexico Declaration culture was understood as both material and immaterial culture. The Intangible Cultural Heritage of ethnic groups and their expressions were up to now regarded with more respect.

Without the contribution of the cultures of the world, globalization would never have been possible and without the Mexico Declaration, an understanding of Cultural Heritage as the intangible expression of the human being, would never have been possible.

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Consequently, we also have to discuss immaterial or "intangible" cultural heritage. Intangible heritage is part of the cultural memory of people and thus a basic constituent of every culture. In order to properly understand cultural expressions, we have to equally deal with humanity's intangible cultural heritage. In this regard, another milestone has to be mentioned.

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This is the 1987 announced decade for cultural development with the 1988 published Brundtland Report on Cultural Development with the title: *Our Common Future* and the *UNESCO Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore,* adopted in 1989*.*

And as you can see in the definition above, although in those years the intangible heritage has been defined as folklore, with the recognition of the value of the intangible heritage, UNESCO has created a kind of awareness and consciousness of the fundamental function of this heritage in the globalized world. UNESCO has also defined a responsibility of all the member states to UNESCO for safeguarding this immaterial heritage.

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The Memory of the World Programme (1992)

The Gutenberg Bible

Ludwig van Beethoven: Symphony No 9

Fritz Lang: Metropolis

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Chronologically the adoption of the "1989 Recommendation" was followed by the introduction of the 1992 Memory of the World Programme. This programme was brought to life to preserve the documented intangible heritage of humanity in the form of handwritten, filmed or printed material. The Gutenberg Bible appears in the register as well as Ludwig van Beethoven's 9th Symphony or Fritz Lang's cult film "Metropolis". The objective of the programme requires the countries of origin to ensure the maintenance and conservation of the material by appropriate techniques, its ongoing accessibility and dissemination as well as to raise awareness for its significance, among others by electronic media.

In 1995 UN Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar and many others undertook yet another effort to redefine the relationship between culture, cultural development, heritage and identity. Here, in a very official way the relation between intangible heritage and cultural development comes in for the very first time.

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They developed models of mutual dependence between the most important categories of humankind. They proposed a value system, which was published in the UNESCO document "Our Creative Diversity". In the following years, UNESCO has taken practical steps to enlarge the concept of intangible heritage by defining cultural expressions, which needed to be safeguarded because they suffered to disappear in the globalized world.

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Thus, in 1996 the program of endangered languages and in 2001 the atlas of disappearing languages was adopted. Again, a focus was laid on the intangible part of culture and therefore on creating and developing identities.

Cultural landscapes

In the context of World Heritage, UNESCO opened the strategy for including the intangible elements of heritage with the amendment Cultural Landscapes as World Heritage

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Sites in the Operation Guidelines. This was in 1994 when it was decided that Cultural Landscapes as World Heritage Sites could be nominated as heritage sites as whole entities and the cultural expressions of peoples living in those landscapes could also be safeguarded.

Examples of the safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage of ethnic groups are e.g. the North American Indian tribes or the Sami people in Sweden by including their territories on the list. This most certainly has happened via incorporating living traditional cultures into the inscription documents of Cultural Landscapes, either defined as mixed heritage sites or by allowing traditional cultures to continue their lifestyles in a Natural World Heritage Site. In this respect, UNESCO aimed at another aspect: it is the aspect of the dynamism of cultures.

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Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

The intangible cultural heritage – or living heritage – is the mainspring of our cultural diversity and its maintenance a guarantee for continuing creativity

Carnival of Barranquilla, Colombia

2003
Adoption

2006
Entry into force on April 20; after ratification by 30 states

2011
3 types of nominations
35 new elements inscribed to the lists, nominated by 24 member states
267 elements up to now
Convention ratified by 166 states

2019
Convention ratified by 179 states
549 elements listed
• Urgent Safeguard List: 64
• Representative List: 463
• Register of best Safeguarding: 22

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The immaterial heritage receives direct protection now under the Convention adopted in October 2003. The 2003 Convention covers 1. "oral traditions and expressions"; 2. performing arts"; 3. "social practices, rituals and festive events"; 4. "knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe" and 5. "traditional craftsmanship". The protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of humanity offers new dimensions in communication and leads the way to balance the unifying tendencies of globalization. Meanwhile in 2019, 179 states ratified the convention and 549 elements of intangible cultural heritage are listed. Out of these 64 elements are inscribed in Need of Urgent Safeguarding; 463 are inscribed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and 22 are on the list of Best Practices.

Some expressions of the Masterpieces of immaterial culture are presented below:

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1. Oral traditions and expressions - Jordan: The Cultural Space of the Bedu in Petra and Wadi Rum

The Bedu have preserved wide-ranging knowledge and skills related to the area around Petra and Wadi Rum, including traditional medicine, camel husbandry, tent-making craftsmanship, tracking and climbing as well as rituals of coffee-making and oral traditions reflecting their mythology.

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2. Performing arts - Central African Republic: The Polyphonic Singing of the Aka Pygmies of Central Africa

The polyphonic songs of the Aka Pygmies are an integral part of their hunting and life-cycle rituals, a tool of communication and reaffirmation of community values. With socio-economic changes, deforestation and rural exodus, the Aka traditions are inclined to gradually disappear.

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Slide 17:

3. Social practices, rituals and festive events -
Zambia: The Makishi Masquerade

As part of initiation, boys leave their communities to live in a bush camp where they are taught practical skills as well as knowledge about nature, religion and social values. For their reintegration into the community, they perform the Makishi masquerade involving beautifully painted masks that represent different spiritual characters.

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Slide 18:

4. Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe -
Mexico: The Indigenous Festivity Dedicated to the Dead

Coinciding with the maize harvest, this annual festivity commemorates the transitory return to Earth of deceased relatives or loved ones. People gather at cemeteries and in churches throughout Mexico to leave flower petals, candles and offerings to celebrate and facilitate the return of the souls.

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Summary and Outlook

The Convention was created mainly due to the initiative of Japan, which has a long record in safeguarding intangible heritage. Therefore, it was Japan's understanding of (intangible) heritage which influenced the new convention; even the phrase "intangible cultural heritage" derives from the translation of a Japanese concept into English.

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On the other hand, this convention was a chance and challenge for African countries to protect their heritage because e.g. the nomination procedure was less difficult compared to the World Heritage convention. It was furthermore much more related to the people e.g. in African countries and to what they identified with their heritage.

The Intangible Heritage Convention has been introduced as a 'sister convention' to the World Heritage Convention. UNESCO emphasizes to implement its two main heritage conventions in a cooperative and complementary manner. However, UNESCO also highlights the differences, which are indeed significant.

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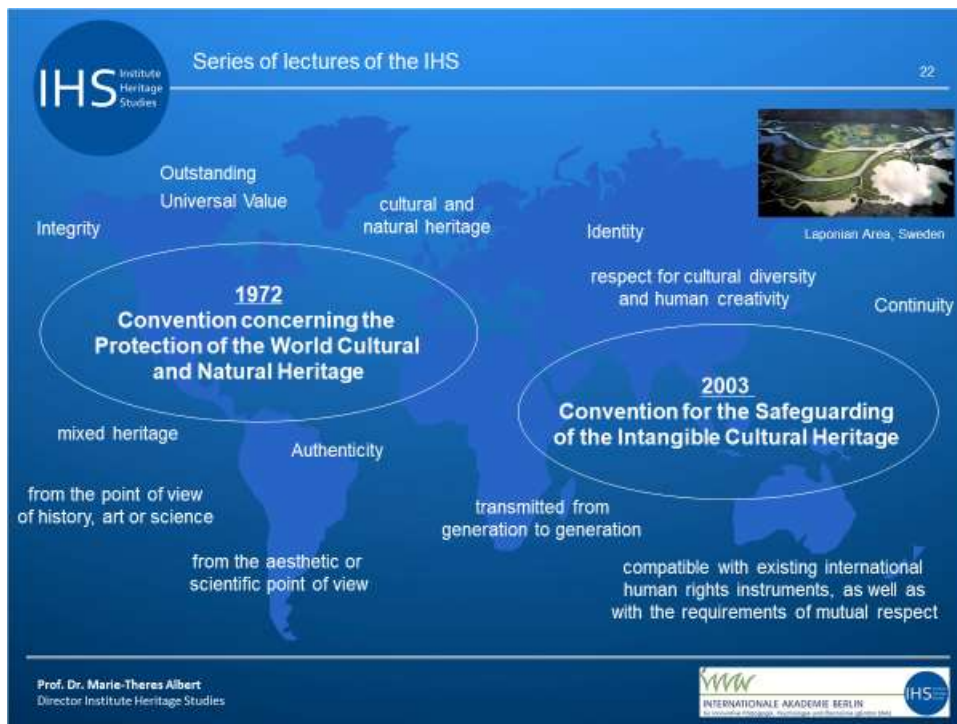
The criteria for World Heritage try literally to ensure 'material' properties of cultural assets, such as the authenticity of original materials. The criterion of 'outstanding universal value' tries to capture the most outstanding cultural assets of the world. In contrast, the 2003 Convention does not emphasize such values, but tries to shift the focus on representative cultural practices and customs. This is a 'must' in globalization. The intangible heritage shall capture the identity of a community across generations.

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After having been adopted in 2003, the Convention entered into force in only 3 years, after 30 countries had ratified the convention. This unprecedented fast adoption is an undeniable success. But also here, we have to look closely at the details. During the first years of its implementation, it was largely the developing and fast developing world, which has acceded to the 2003 Convention. Only a few wealthy European industrial nations, such as Belgium (2006), France (2006) or Spain (2006), were among the list of early ratifying countries. This has changed, up to now out of 193 member states and 11 associate members to UNESCO, 179 states have ratified the 2003 convention (2019).

In 2005 UNESCO celebrated its 60th anniversary. Again, Claude Lévi-Strauss held the speech for peace. And yet again, he pointed out the founding principles of UNESCO's work, i.e. that heritage and identity are elementary factors for culture and cultural development, independent of how, where and when they manifest themselves. This has to be considered in any form of cultural work or project.

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2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity

In this respect, the protection of cultural expressions as basis of the diversity of the world is only possible by acknowledging diversity. And this requires respect and openness. The need of acknowledging diversity has been emphasized in UNESCO's "Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity" of 2001.

Today, in times of growing nationalist movements, both respect and openness are more important than ever. Across the world, we can observe that processes, which untie societies lead frequently to nationalist movements. This concerns equally extremist movements and those, which try to redraw lines between peoples, ethnicities, or cultures.

<u>Concluding Remarks</u>

There are many interesting issues to be regarded with this convention, one of the most important and innovative element of this convention and its implementation strategy being, that from the start people themselves shall become the initiators of their own human development as socio-economic development. That is achieved with the stress put on the fact that cultural immaterial heritage should be alive and contemporary, as stated in the implementation guidelines of the convention.

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Thus we can state, that the idea of protecting immaterial heritage contains indeed constructions of understanding heritage as process of the identification of the community with their heritage. For this reason, the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage can be considered to be truly progressive and helpful for processes of socio-economic, cultural and democratic development worldwide.

Thank you for your attention!

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