

Get to know and appreciate the living cultural heritage!

Cultural expressions directly related to human knowledge and skills are central to the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Forms of intangible cultural heritage are *inter alia* oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; as well as traditional craftsmanship.

Communities and groups, being the **bearers of cultural expressions**, play a central role for the vitality of the intangible cultural heritage. In some cases this role is taken up by a single person. "Community" is understood not only on a territorial basis but also in terms of interest groups and networks.

Groups of people with common interest and permanent commitment to their mutual and well-kept heritage are hereby invited to participate in the implementation of the Convention in Germany! This especially applies to NGOs whose activities lie in the field of intangible cultural heritage.

The upcoming German ratification of this important Cultural Convention of the UNESCO offers exciting opportunities for cooperation with the other 144 State parties. Among others, colleagues from Asia-Pacific, Latin America and Europe have already signaled their anticipation concerning Germany's contributions and their interest in closer collaborations.

Forms of intangible cultural heritage are bound to the ability of people to maintain, transmit to future generations, and further develop their knowledge and skills, their traditions, languages, festivals, rituals and social forms. The passed on knowledge, handed down through generations in form of a variety of skills, such as art and craft techniques as well as forms of music and specific performance practices, are **important cultural resources**.

This living heritage is an expression of creativity and ingenuity. Thus, intangible cultural heritage also plays an important role for education. The exposure to different forms of culture stimulates the formation of a mature and open-minded personality. Each generation is thus able to define anew what is relevant for them and how to shape the encountered. The resulting cultural exchanges, the variety of forms of expression and the creative recreations are especially interesting.

A national inventory of forms of intangible cultural heritage will be continuously set up in the coming years. This is not a competition! Groups, communities and individuals maintain very different and multiple forms of intangible cultural heritage. The forms of transmitting and organizing these traditions, as well as the **spectrum of diversity** are so far largely undocumented. Such documentation is going to be one of the most exciting, yet also one of the most challenging tasks of the actual implementation of the Convention.

The following questions play a key role in this working process:

- Which cultural expressions are intangible cultural heritage in and from Germany?
- How do the bearers (communities, groups and individuals) of intangible cultural heritage organize themselves?
- What role does the adoption of formerly foreign cultural elements and trans-cultural interactions play for the intangible cultural heritage in and from Germany?
- To what extent exist inter- or trans-cultural forms of intangible cultural heritage, such as in the field of migrant and mobility processes or with regard to new media networks?
- Which cultural expressions are suitable for cross-regional nominations and are to be included in the national inventory?
- Which cultural expressions are particularly suitable for joint nominations with neighboring countries and / or other State parties to the Convention?
- How can contributions from Germany set new impulses within the context of this UNESCO Convention and in cooperation with the other 144 State parties?

Comments and suggestions concerning the questions above are very welcome and should be communicated via e-mail to: ike@unesco.de.

The **disruptions of German cultural history** – above all the violence and cultural distortions of the colonial era, crimes against humanity in the era of National Socialism, particularly the Holocaust, and the German division from 1946 to 1989 – should be explicitly taken into consideration. These incidents have impacted many cultural forms. They should not be relativized or ignored.

In Germany, "folk culture" did and does not always have a "folkloric" sense, but it was re-created and interpreted over and over from **progressive and democratic approaches**. However, due to the instrumentalization, *inter alia* by the National Socialists, reservations remain when speaking about "folk culture" (*Volkskultur*) or single forms of it. The current international and European discussions on the importance of intangible cultural heritage are thus also for Germany a chance to take a new approach to the broad spectrum of cultural heritage.

It is important that forms of intangible cultural heritage are neither artificially revived nor performed or presented beyond their proper context. Relevant are living traditions that emerged as a creative re-creation, and that are handed down and carried on **from generation to generation**. Living intangible cultural heritage is characterized by improvisation, variation and change, especially through creative practice and modifications through succeeding generations.

The worldwide experience of globalization has created new awareness of the **complex relationship between modernization and tradition**. Conservation should not lead to the suppression of new impulses, or to the rejection of the development of cultural elements. A suitable management of the economic dimensions and tourism interests of successfully nominated intangible cultural heritage remains an ongoing task also in the context of this UNESCO Convention.

The ratification of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage holds great opportunities to recall a collective cultural memory that goes beyond individualism and a pure economic orientation, and to make it “useable” for the future: **Living Intangible Cultural Heritage promotes the successful management of cultural diversity.** The range of forms of cultural knowledge, expressions and practice reflects the wealth of a society in terms of its action and development potential. Diversity, or at least its potential, is rooted in every society. It can however only contribute to the common good if it is respected, appreciated and recognized. This is especially true for living intangible cultural heritage which originates mostly from local and regional characteristics and responds to these. - nevertheless it can also be fragile and vulnerable at the same time.

Germany's accession to the UNESCO Convention is particularly bound to an active **appreciation of the intangible forms of culture and treasures** in other countries and world regions. Diversity, variety and heterogeneity - internationally and in Germany - are thereby highly respected.

The implementation of this Convention in Germany is another German contribution to international cooperation in cultural policy-making as well as to international cultural law.

Bonn, 31-08-2012

Ideas and suggestions concerning this working paper are very welcome, please contact us via e-mail: ike@unesco.de.