Intangible Cultural Heritage. UNESCO. 2003–2018. In English, French, and Spanish.

URL: https://ich.unesco.org/

UNESCO's 2003 *Convention for the Urgent Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* articulates the contemporary value and relevance of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). It offers a framework to help current and prospective States Parties understand the dynamics of ICH and measures that may be taken to support it. The Convention was a landmark in the evolution of international policies relating to cultural expressions and cultural diversity, building on the 2001 *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* and later informing the development of the 2005 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.*

UNESCO's *Intangible Cultural Heritage* website is the definitive site for information and resources relating to the 2003 Convention. It comprises six main sections. The menu tab *Convention* contains the text of the Convention itself, along with general information about ICH, the need for safeguarding, and a list of Frequently Asked Questions. The *Safeguarding* tab includes pages about some of the principles and intentions behind the Convention – the involvement of communities, ethics, role of transmission, inventorying processes – as well as other Convention-related safeguarding projects and activities. The *Lists* tab sets out the contents, purposes and processes of the three Lists that relate to the Convention: *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding*, *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*, and *Register of Good Safeguarding Practices*. In this section of the website, by browsing these Lists, the reader is able to learn in depth about the 'elements' (intangible cultural expressions) inscribed onto them.

These *Convention, Safeguarding and Lists* areas of the website may be most useful for readers wishing to gain a better foundational understanding of ICH, UNESCO's approaches to supporting it, and the intentions behind the Convention. However, some of the most engaging resources on the site are found under *News*, which comprises over 230 blog posts on matters relevant to the Convention, searchable by country and year. Here, for example, visitors to the site can preview a video series currently being developed by UNESCO that focuses on the perceptions of youth of intangible cultural heritage. Also available is a set of informative video interviews with delegates to statutory meetings in 2011 and 2012, which cover a range of topics including the relationship of ICH to sustainable development, changes at national level since ratification, and the meaning for specific communities of inscription of ICH onto the Lists of the Convention. The videos and the blog posts in this section of the website could make particularly useful and provocative learning and teaching resources.

The final two key areas of the site are *Events*, which contains details of ICH workshops, expert meetings, and exhibitions (co)-organised by UNESCO, and *Actors*, which lists information about the various committee and bodies that oversee the Convention. *Actors* also hosts guidelines and resources for current and prospective NGOs, centres, institutions, donors and partners working within the frameworks of the Convention.

The website is not particularly easy to navigate, mainly for the sheer quantity of information. Some of the areas of the site are clearly directed toward the public ('What is Intangible Heritage?' 'Why safeguard ICH?'). Others are most relevant to prospective or current States Parties, such as the submission instructions for nominations to the Lists, or the information about the required periodic reporting by States Parties to UNESCO. Still others seem to act as a public repository for related administrative documents, such as the agendas, minutes, files and recordings of all statutory meetings of the *Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of ICH*, all housed under the 'Events' tab. The apparent attempt to cater for all possible audiences means that any given visitor is unlikely to find the site relevant in its entirety. Fortunately, functional and well-designed search

boxes throughout the site allow the user to search for specific information, for example by country, List, or element.

On the page titled 'What is ICH?', UNESCO clarifies that it understands ICH as being community-based, 'traditional, contemporary and living at the same time', and inclusive (in that it 'does not give rise to questions of whether or not certain practices are specific to a culture'). However, these values have not always carried through to States Parties' implementation of the Convention and associated safeguarding measures, with adverse consequences for both the communities and the ICH 'elements' involved (see, for example, Smith and Akagawa 2009, which contains a revealing chapter by Tony Seeger on 'lessons learned' from ICTM's involvement in evaluating the nominations for one of the ICH Lists). As the impact of the Convention continues to grow within its 176 States Parties and beyond, students and scholars will find it illuminating to engage with this website in conjunction with the now extensive body of literature that critiques UNESCO's approach to safeguarding ICH.

<div align="right">CATHERINE GRANT</div>

Reference

Smith, Laurajane, and Natsuko Akagawa

    2009   Eds. *Intangible Heritage.* Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Biography

Catherine Grant is author of *Music Endangerment* (OUP 2014), co-editor of *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures* (OUP 2016), and chairs the Australia-New Zealand Regional Committee of ICTM. She is Senior Lecturer in Music Literature and Research at Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University, Australia.