

# Critical review to Filomena Sousa (2018), *The Participation in the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* *The role of Communities, Groups and Individuals*

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Lisbon: Memória Imaterial/ISBN: 978-989-99397-4-5/71p.

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The book *The Participation in the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* seeks a comprehensive approach to the use of participatory methodologies, concerning safeguarding practices of cultural heritage.<sup>1</sup> In this exercise, on the one hand, what we consider a summary of the state of the art of these methods' application was written, and on the other hand, an instrument for technical support has been provided.

Filomena Sousa states that the mapping analysis of the 158 Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) inventories, published online, carried out under the project *Digital Cultural Heritage: Platforms and Inventories of the Intangible* (Sousa, 2017),<sup>2</sup> led her to write this book. This analysis showed that only 22 e-inventories visibly announced the collaborative nature of the

inventory, result that activated the need of having a broad picture of these methodologies' applications. Besides the issues of inventory and digital platforms, the safeguarding process was analysed in a general perspective.

The defined analytical *corpus* was based on an enlarged literature review focused on: the reports States Parties submitted to UNESCO and the application processes to inscribe ICH elements in the two World Lists;<sup>3</sup> museum projects; the mapping of ICH e-inventories; inventorying processes and audiovisual materials production, from different geographical contexts. The analysis' proposal is to learn from the best practices and weaknesses of the real experiences of heritagization. At the end, the author presents a methodological proposal for activities promoting the involvement of Communities, Groups and Individuals (CGIs), adaptable to each cultural context and at different stages of the ICH safeguarding.

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<sup>1</sup>The UNESCO 2003 Convention Art. 2 identifies 5 categories of the Intangible Cultural Heritage: Oral expressions and traditions; Performing arts; Social practices, rituals and festive events; Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.

<sup>2</sup>SOUSA, Filomena (2017). "Map of e-Inventories of Intangible Cultural Heritage". In *Memoriamedia Review*, vol. 01, Nº 1. [online] Available at: [http://memoriamedia.net/pdfarticles/ENG\\_MEMORIAMEDIAREVIEW\\_Mapa\\_einventarios.pdf](http://memoriamedia.net/pdfarticles/ENG_MEMORIAMEDIAREVIEW_Mapa_einventarios.pdf)

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<sup>3</sup>Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding

The 2003 Convention's approach is more focused on people who live and keep alive the heritage (*emic* perspective) and less on authorities outside the communities (*etic* perspective).<sup>4</sup> This book attested one main evidence: although there was a real shift in the legal and political agenda (which was felt as urgent), after a decade of implementation of the Convention it has not substantially reflected onto different safeguarding contexts.

The author begins to explain why in 2003, at the UNESCO General Conference, Member States voted for the Convention adoption. First of all, there was no legal or binding instrument bringing the Nations together in a commitment to safeguard the ICH at risk of degradation, disappearance or destruction. On the other hand, that document states the importance of ICH safeguarding as generator of cultural diversity and human creativity, having CGIs<sup>5</sup> a central role in the production, safeguarding, maintenance and recreation of the ICH. It was stated that intangible cultural expressions can not be separated from people, their sensibilities and experiences, from the involvement and active engagement of the communities that are living it.

For the author it is important to identify and understand the conceptual developments and the proper applications of this commitment. To understand, in this way, how the measures and the Directives recommended by the Convention (which guide its implementation) are been materialised. More, to discuss the constraints and difficulties related to the CGIs participation in these processes.

The book is structured in two parts, the first part is a critical reflection on the "intangible cultural heritage", "communities, groups and individuals" and "participation" concepts. The starting point to identify and try to understand factual engagements of the CGIs, in the second part.

The book's theoretical framework starts to focus on the concepts of ICH, safeguarding goals and the recommended measures of the UNESCO 2003

<sup>4</sup>PIKE, Kenneth L. (1967) *Language in relation to a unified theory of the structures of human behavior* (2nd edition). The Hague. Mouton.

<sup>5</sup>As noted in the book, the expression "Communities, groups and individuals" (CGIs) was not defined in the 2003 Convention, but later in following documents accompanying the implementation of ICH safeguarding processes, in particular The Experts 2006 Meeting report, in Tokyo.

Convention<sup>6</sup> - "ensure the enhancement, diversity, sustainability and transmission of intangible culture to future generations" (p.3) - issues guided by criteria and directives drafted in the Convention and later documents. In spite of these guidelines, the author observes that doubts remain about ICH operationalisation, especially with regard to the implementation of participatory methodologies, which raise different interpretations.

Those difficulties are accentuated by the fact that "social, economic and political conditions and pressures" (p.4), in the context of heritagization agents with different interests, determine the identification and the safeguarding of an intangible cultural expression.

Reflecting on ICH is understanding it as a "social construction that depends on its key players, temporality, space and the narrative that is chosen to tell" (id. ibidem). In other words, the culture is not tight, or unilateral, it is alive and lived by the CGIs, it is changeable and should always be understood in multi-perspective.

The 2003 Convention recognises the community as a central active agent in ICH safeguarding contexts. According to the author, that centrality is only possible due to a network of agents, which promotes "shared responsibility" and collaborative work between different actors. A broad and diffuse "community" with different roles and interests - CGIs, States, NGOs, experts and professionals, academics, international organizations, etc. To implement safeguarding measures, respecting the Convention, the States must know and engage these networks.<sup>7</sup>

In this regard, the "community" is perceived as a heterogeneous and dynamic entity. In this work and reporting to different theoretical references,

<sup>6</sup>The safeguard measures recommended in the 2003 Convention include: identification and enhancement of ICH; research, documentation and inventorying; preservation, protection, transmission (formal and non-formal) and its' promotion; education, awareness raising and communities' capacity building; inscription in the UNESCO World Lists

<sup>7</sup>Concerning: BLAKE, Janet (2015) "From Global to Local Heritage: Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Role of the Museum". In *Anthropology of the Middle East*, Vol. 10, Nr. 1. 22-40 and BLAKE, Janet (2018) "Museums and Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage – Facilitating Participation and Strengthening their Function in Society". In *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, Vol. 13. 18-32.

different meanings of this concept are presented. Keeping in mind the complexity of the definition of community, the author stresses 4 key-points in the context of safeguarding ICH: 1) the collective and broad profile of the concept (embracing differences, but not retaining them); 2) the mandatory connection with the heritage (so that is enhanced, maintained and transmitted); 3) the community as an active agent and not just a heritagization spectator or beneficiary; and 4) despite the enlarged network of actors, the importance and centrality of the practitioners and bearers.

In addition, it would be essential to be aware of the differences, the interests and motivation struggles, the inherent power relations in these working networks, where cross-perspectives, negotiations and decisions are fundamental. That could cause conflicts, so mediators and managers of the heritagization processes must search for consensus and consider and work very well on commitments.

Regarding the concept of participation, it is important to retain the democratic and enabling character of the CGIs and the fact that participation is mandatory criteria for any process related to ICH.

Another important issue is that CGIs' "free, prior and informed consent", while fundamental criteria in safeguarding processes, is however subject to very diverse interpretations. The current practice is often that consent is given through official authorizations or CGIs signatures lists, without the clear understanding of how they have been involved and how these consents were implemented (Ruddolff & Raymond, 2013)<sup>8</sup> – by referendum, by consent at public sessions, by independent experts' validation or other ways?

Towards a major involvement of CGIs, the author underlines the Operational Directives that explicitly recommend the actions that States Parties should promote, such as: the creation of new institutions and mechanisms (which currently do not have significant expression) like advisory bodies; building regional, sub-regional or inter-community networks and the implementation of awareness and empowerment programmes.

The author concludes that, between the diverse safeguarding measures, the inscriptions in UNESCO international Lists have become a mainstream. Sometimes, the States (their representatives, delegates and ambassadors) understand the Lists as boosters of their international visibility and not for the enhancement of CGIs and ICH, subverting the Convention's central objective. The overvaluation of inscription in the Lists reflects on the lack of investment in other measures, in particular, in CGIs information, training and empowerment.

### **The CGIs participation in UNESCO processes**

The author highlights, from the literature review, the Blake analysis (2015, 2018) about the States Parties' reports sent to UNESCO (2011-2013 cycle) which identifies positive examples of decentralised safeguarding ICH practices, involving a diverse set of active agents. However, she also remarks the States' tendency to centralise the politics, actions or decisions related to the Convention implementation. In other words, the demonstration of empowerment and shared responsibility cases with CGIs in ICH safeguarding is still limited.

Moreover, the author points out the work developed by Ruddolff and Raymond (2013) - the analysis of applications for inscription in the 2012 UNESCO List. The authors reach the following conclusions: not always are practitioners and communities identified in these processes; it is not clear how the subscribers interact with the ICH and become CGIs representatives; the lack of references to public consultations is evident, lacking proof of the relationship between the society, local government and other agents.

Considering the 49 applications analysed, only three examples<sup>9</sup> show the adoption of participatory methodologies – community meetings, debates, etc.; practitioners' concerns, declarations or opinions; participation proof and consent in all application stages.

In addition to State Parties' reports and Lists applications, the author analyses audiovisual materials presented to UNESCO. In particular, she focused on the works of Van Zanten (2012) and

<sup>8</sup>RUDDOLFF, Britta; RAYMOND, Susanne (2013) "A Community Convention? An analysis of Free, Prior and Informed Consent given under the 2003 Convention". In *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, Vol. 8. 154-164.

<sup>9</sup>Colombia, *Traditional knowledge of the jaguar shamans of Yurupari*; Peru, *Pilgrimage to the sanctuary of the Lord of Qoyllurit'i* and Portugal, *Fado, urban popular song*. (Ruddolff & Raymond, 2013).

Pietrobruno (2016), and also refers to her own research (2017)<sup>10</sup> about videos of the elements inscribed in UNESCO 2016 Lists. From several examples, we can conclude that, even here, the CGIs involvement is not evident – because the interactions between them and cultural elements, the practitioners and between other community members are not visible. In addition, the videos production overuses external agents' voice-over, mostly experts and journalists – which does not highlight the CGIs' meanings, discourse or opinions.

### **The CGIs participation in museum actions**

Considering that ICH has been worked on, in the last years, in diverse museum projects, the author analyses studies and reports different museum contexts. She concludes that democratic and collaborative approaches are very widespread in museums discourses, inspired by new museology assumptions (80's of the 20th century) – a holistic view of the heritage that also values intangible culture, the involvement of communities and their insights.

In this context, the author describes the promotion of activities with community participation, for instance: memory and story collections that give context and value to the objects: exhibitions, workshops, debates, inventory projects and others. These activities are considered positive as long as they: provide a major awareness of the ICH value; foster exchange of knowledge among practitioners, local community and enlarged public; give more visibility and prestige to cultural expressions and their practitioners; and produce knowledge about the ICHs' evolution and history.

Despite museums being privileged institutions for safeguarding heritage and although their discourse is aligned with the Convention, the author points out dispersion and divergences in the interpretations of the concepts.

For instance, in respect to ICH, there are regular activities about “expressions that are not ‘living heritage’ which refer to representations, memories and recreations of practices that have been extinct (...) without current cultural or social function” (p.30).

<sup>10</sup>Communication *Audiovisual Formats in Ethnographic and in Intangible Cultural Heritage Research* presented in the international Conference *The Visualization of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 20-10-2017*, at Ethnographic Museum of Slovenia, in Ljubljana.

Activities enunciated as ICH, but better framed as Oral History or Collective Memory.

Still, there are situations, where museums derive cultural expressions from the original context “to be presented in a showcase, a performance event inside the museum, at festivals or public shows that devalue the locality of practices and disregard further or adjacent contexts, as well as key elements that may need to be safeguarded” (id. Ibidem).

The author concludes that there is an effort to build relationships based on mutual trust and respect between CGIs and museums (considering all sensibilities).

In her point of view, it is only possible through the creation of interdisciplinary teams, joining professionals and experts in participatory methodologies – the mediators. A profile that brings together communication skills and expertise that is able to bring the tradition meanings (in actuality) inside and outside museums - transmitting, reinforcing and fulfilling the “cultural, educational, economic and social functions of the ICH” (p.33).

### **The CGIs' participation in the inventory processes – general perspective**

Among others, inventorying is the most explored ICH safeguarding measure. That is why, Filomena Sousa, from the literature review about inventory building, in general, and ICH e-inventories,<sup>11</sup> in particular, tries to answer two questions: do communities participate in the creation and management of the inventories? In the case of e-inventories, in what way are technological resources being used to promote CGIs' involvement?

The author starts to points out whatever the inventories' territorial scope – local, regional or national – they usually are created by national and international organizations. The public institutions belonging to national governments have the direct responsibility on the majority of inventories – even if CGIs, at certain moments, are invited to participate in these processes.

<sup>11</sup>Defined in the work as “ICH e-Inventories are inventories of expressions of one or more domains of intangible cultural heritage published online, with free access.” (p.43).

In this part of the book, the author presents an innovative contribution to the analysis of the participatory methodologies in ICH safeguarding processes. The author proposes a typology with four levels of CGIs' involvement in the inventories' creation: "Informative/Advisory" - when "external agents define the problems to be solved and the solutions to be implemented, while considering the CGIs only as beneficiaries and informants, or even as consultants, but without the possibility of deciding or influencing the defined plan"; the "Advisory/Mobilizer basic level"; "Mobilizer medium level"; and "Mobilizer advanced level" - the ideal and maximum level "achieved when the initiative of the inventory process begins with the CGIs and when, in partnership with external agents, it is the communities, groups and individuals who self-mobilize and manage the project" (p. 34-35).

These involvement levels admit different techniques and issues to consider and the author gives several examples from the analysed experiences. In that sense, she concludes that the real CGIs' engagement in these processes entails a mix of techniques, several approaches towards/with the community. So a big promotion investment is not sufficient (public campaigns, surveys, calls for inscription of proposals of cultural elements in UNESCO Lists) when one neglects the direct and face-to-face contact with communities (seminars, meetings, working groups or discussion forums with mediators).

It is not sufficient either, to involve the communities through discussions and training about inventorying processes, deepening the complexity of the ICH concept (for instance, by citizen juries, safeguarding actions proposed by themselves) and then, in practice, make no real effort to materialise these proposals.

It is not sufficient either, to boost CGIs empowerment workshops, enabling them to start and maintain inventory projects (by social intervention and research-action logics) without guaranteeing the technological, financial, material or human resources needed to continue it in the post-project period.

Here the author reinforces the importance of the monitors-facilitators' competence and experience concerning active pedagogical techniques, being able to motivate and match the practitioners'

expectations and transmit the issues correctly - concepts, methodologies and technological tools.<sup>12</sup>

### **ICH e-inventories and CGIs participation**

In terms of ICH visibility, the ICH literature has considered that the implementation of safeguarding measures benefits with the growing use of new technologies (Web, digital platforms, apps, social media, etc.). As the author remarks, from the CGIs' participation point of view, digital platforms provide diverse advantages: the growth of "zones" and moments of contact, boosting new "patrimonial communities" (with more and diverse actors); the possibility for agents to contribute with registration, documentation and inventorying in an immediate and voluntary way; democratic access to large quantities of information, at low costs; customised searches, interactive experiences that can be organised and shared in/outside the internet; and ICH and safeguarding processes' dissemination, through the platforms and audiovisual records.

The article review helped the author conclude that the CGIs' participation in the above-mentioned e-inventories or mapping— where she characterised 158 ICH inventories online - was weakly demonstrated. 66% of the e-inventories refer to the importance of CGIs' involvement, but do not show the methods used for that purpose.

On the discourse level, the respect for the free and informed consent of the communities for the inventories' execution is stated, although there is rare proof of how it was obtained. Only 14% (22 inventories) "call for the direct participation of practitioners, local institutions, other actors and the general population" (p.46).

From these 22 e-inventories, the author highlights and describes five projects (already worked on in the reviewed literature): two e-inventories based on a conventional structure, like private database sites with restricted access<sup>13</sup> and three free access e-

<sup>12</sup> The project *Vídeo nas Aldeias* [<http://videonasaldeias.org.br/loja/>] is referred as a good example of empowerment activities in respect to ICH audiovisual registration; led to the compilation of a large collection of audiovisual records, the creation of an audiovisual training school and it was responsible for the empowerment of diverse indigenous populations.

<sup>13</sup> The ICH inventory of the Italy-Switzerland border region (Artese & Gagliardi, 2017) and the national inventorying process in Estonia (Tamm, 2017).

inventories, in Wiki format.<sup>14</sup> She concludes that the communities' involvement is not guaranteed by the online inventories' configuration itself (site or Wiki) and, for that reason, the presented examples conciliate different participatory methods and techniques at different phases of the inventorying.

In other words, it is important to join public awareness initiatives aimed, in particular, at CGIs, as well as other activities that enable and empower them to use digital tools. The distance or non-personal online interactions should be complemented by face-to-face activities, which promote engagement and trusting relationships between heritage actors – for instance, monitoring practices *in situ*, workshops, seminars, thematic meetings, citizen boards, networks and working groups, discussion forums, etc.

Besides all above-mentioned questions, others about online inventorying processes should also be taken into account: despite the growing democratization of access and availability of online technological tools, if the CGIs do not have enough knowledge and do not know how to use them, they could be excluded from the ICH safeguard on digital contexts; Web technologies' evolution entails a constant investment in technological and human resources; the need to use efficient search systems; the importance of proper moderation (without losing the CGIs' opinion, nor the quality and credibility of content); the confusion often made between digital heritage and ICH itself; and, lastly, the possible risk of confusing knowledge produced by technological and multimedia resources and actual "reality" (and not a "new representation" of ICH).

### **Obstacles to CGIs' Participation**

From the confrontation of the theory with practices, the author concludes that "CGIs' participation is emphasized in the discourses but, in practice, the real involvement is still residual" identifying, "in the scope of ICH safeguard projects, five aspects that make this difficult to achieve (...): 1) excessive centrality of the States Parties in the heritagization process; 2) diversity of interpretations of the concepts; 3) deficit of information among the CGIs; 4) deficit of

experience in the improvement of teams composed of different actors and 5) deficit of methods and professionals to operationalise the participation" (p. 53).

In conclusion, the author, after describing the obstacles, presents a broad methodological proposal, comprehensive enough to associate different participatory methods and techniques to the different phases of the safeguarding process (diagnostic, information, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) and different involvement levels, previously conceptualized (informative, advisory and mobilizers - basic, medium and advanced levels).

The author stresses in different moments of the book the important role of the experts on participatory methodologies – figures like the facilitator, the "icebreaker". It would be interesting to think, from the current and others reflections, on works focused on the profile and skills of the mediator, his practices, and, support materials for communities – for instance, about how to participate, identify and record ICH.

The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has an enormous potential, although it is important to understand, in this path of ICH safeguarding, how distant communities can be from the digital world and, in this sense, it is important to discuss and accept possible technological constraints or obstacles to the effective communities' involvement.

Reading this book makes it clear that there is a lot to do in relation to ICH safeguarding and the application of participatory/collaborative methodologies. In particular, the creation and promotion of tools that help technicians and communities in the empowerment mission. So it would be very useful to think about the creation and dissemination of outputs springing from the research which resulted in the present publication.

<sup>14</sup>The *ICH Scotland*, Scotland's Live Culture Inventory (Giglietto, 2014; McCleery & McCleery, 2016; Orr & Thomas, 2016); the *ICHPEDIA* – Encyclopedia of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Republic Korea (Park, 2014) and the Finland living heritage Wiki (Kivilaakso & Marsio, 2017).