Estonian National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage – crowdsourcing practising communities

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Estonian National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage has been opened for submissions of entries from Estonian communities since 2010. This article introduces this inventory and expands upon the ways compiling an inventory with the method of crowdsourcing can be purposeful, and views which heritage discourses are in hand.

Intangible cultural heritage (hereinafter ICH) though as something ephemeral and perceptional has been defined as a term by UNESCO in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage article 2 (UNESCO, 2003). I will not repeat the text that most of us, dealing with safeguarding ICH, know by heart. Herein my focus is on one of the measures the states parties to the Convention according to article 12 are obliged to facilitate – drawing up one or more inventories of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory (id.ibidem). The inventory of ICH mediates ICH both inside and outside practising communities.

"The Convention is a permissive document and the majority of its articles are worded in nonprescriptive language, allowing governments to implement it flexibly. However, drawing up inventories is one of the specific obligations outlined in the Convention and in the Operational Directives for its implementation. Inventories are integral to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage because they can raise awareness about intangible cultural heritage and its

importance for individual and collective identities. The process of inventorying intangible cultural heritage and making those inventories accessible to the public can also encourage creativity and self-respect in the communities and individuals where expressions and practices of intangible cultural heritage originate. Inventories can also provide a basis for formulating concrete plans to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage concerned" (UNESCO, 2011: 4).

As community participation is the key method in assembling the inventory of intangible cultural heritage in Estonia and all the entries are compiled by community members or other interested people I would state that Estonian National Inventory is created by means of crowdsourcing, especially given that the relationship between the author of the entry and the element of ICH described in the entry is meaningful. Crowdsourcing, originally defined by Jeff Howe, represents the act of a company or institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined (and generally large) network of people in the form of an open call. This can

take the form of peer-production (when the job is performed collaboratively), but is also often undertaken by sole individuals. The crucial prerequisite is the use of the open call format and the large network of potential labourers (Howe, 2006). Mia Ridge states that "crowdsourcing in cultural heritage is more than a framework for creating content: as a form of engagement with the collections and research of memory institutions, it benefits both audiences and institutions". Ridge also refers to crowdsourcing in cultural heritage as "coalescence around a set of principles, particularly the value placed on meaningful participation and contributions by the public" (Ridge, 2014: 3, 8).

"Representing heritage seen as communication is embedded in the social contexts in which heritage is produced and consumed. Thus, production (the putting together the exhibitions), texts (the exhibitions themselves: slide shows, audio-visuals, tableaux, etc.) and consumption (the active interpretation of texts by visitors) are all aspects which determine how heritage communicates" (Dicks, 2000: 71–72). This necessity for context is a compelling argument why entries of an inventory of ICH are best compiled by practising communities.

Estonian Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage
Following the accession to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006, the Minister of Culture of Estonia designated the Folk Culture Centre as the main body responsible for the national implementation of the Convention. The Centre participates in the process of developing and carrying out the cultural policy, organizes training courses, and administers support programmes for ICH. A Chamber of Intangible Cultural Heritage was set up. This department organises awareness-raising and training activities, advises the communities and administers the National Inventory of ICH. The ICH specialists work in close collaboration with other staff members of the Centre and its regional network of 15 folk culture specialists (one in each county of Estonia) as well as other relevant institutions, NGOs and communities. The Estonian inventory does not directly

build on existing databases in order to ensure that the inventory focuses on ICH as living heritage and also to ensure community participation. The purpose of the inventory is to serve the interests of local communities and therefore it is based on the initiative of the communities themselves.

It was clear from the beginning that the inventory could develop only with good cooperation with communities, point people, NGOs, museums, universities, research institutions, local governments, and other partners. At first the approach was put to the test on 2007 in one of Estonia's west coast islands Hiiumaa, in a smaller and more clearly determined and traced community where, like in many other areas in Estonia, the processes of safeguarding and adding value to ICH were already in work for some time. The experiences and conclusions of the work in Hiiumaa form much of the basis for the inventory opened to the public in 2010.

Improving the approaches and content of the inventories' guidelines and forms for making an entry is an ongoing process. Problems and possible solutions are discussed regularly by the Estonian Council for the ICH – an advisory body of experts. The council gives strategic orientations for safeguarding, development and promotion of the ICH in society and approves the entries to national ICH inventory. The Chamber of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Folk Culture Centre functions as the secretariat of the Council.

The inventory is structured in a twofold way. On the one hand there are four types of entries: elements of ICH, individual practitioners, organisations that are connected with this element and places or regions that are important for this element. Other entries are subordinated to the entry of an element. Every entry includes short analytical texts and audiovisual materials. The entries focus on current social and cultural functions of the element, and on the current activities of practitioners and organisations giving an overview of the essence of every element and of the place it has in peoples' lives at present. They also

include historical background information and information on the sustainability of the element.

On the other hand, the entries are arranged according to the domains of ICH they represent. A three-level list of domains (settlement, way of life, living environment; management of natural resources; food and nutrition; crafts; language and poetical genres; customs and religion; pastime and playful activities) and sub-domains were developed with the help of a folklorist from the University of Tartu. Since an element of ICH is often related to more than one domain the inventory also includes links to as many domains as necessary (ICH-10-2014).

With six years Estonian communities have made 86 entries to the National Inventory of ICH. The entries vary from elements of ICH bound exclusively to a particular community to customs followed by people all over Estonia.

A travelling exhibition called "Heritage Lives!" is composed of 14 elements of ICH from the National Inventory. Short descriptions of the elements with some pictures are printed on mostly linen clothes and hanged on a clothesline imitating drying of the washing. The exhibition stays in one location depending on how long the hosts want it there, sometimes a month, sometimes more. There are also colouring pictures and worksheets for children and adults, visitors can braid a band, sit on a rocking chair, and write down their own intangible heritage. Usually the exhibition is opened with a presentation or a lecture with a discussion about the meaning of ICH and introducing the inventory, encouraging new entries, by a specialist from the Folk Culture Centre. The exhibition is one of the ways ICH specialists are trying to raise awareness about the notion of ICH and encourage people to notice it around them.

Community representing its heritage

The main criterion for an element to be included on the inventory is that the community wants to include it. Nevertheless, it has to correspond to the definition of ICH, to be an element of living heritage that is important for the community at present and has been passed on from generation to generation. The uniqueness of the element is not relevant; neither is the ethnic background or the size of the community. All communities from Estonia can contribute to the inventory. However, the entries have to follow certain guidelines (e.g. be analytical) in order to be informative and compendious (ICH-10-2014).

At first the question of liability raises. A representative of a cultural group has responsibilities before its own community and in broader society as well. By a representative I mean a person who acknowledges that there is a line between their home environment, customary social environment and its elements by which they identify themselves, and outside. A person taking on this task to compile an entry to include on the inventory should be "passionate" enough about the heritage and aware of the social value of transmitting ICH both inside and outside the practising community. However, the author of the entry should also be able to construct an analytical overview. It is also important to realise that an entry to the inventory alone will not keep the heritage alive. Although each entry has an author, a person who gathers information and does the research, the entry has to represent the element of ICH as seen by the practising community in general.

Communal heritage creates a base for identifying as a community but nevertheless individual comprehensions of the elements vary. This is the point where the facilitators of the inventory, like the ICH department of Folk Culture Centre in Estonia, should allow generalisations or the entry must note that differences occur. It is impossible to render views of every member of the practising community. The authors of the entries act as cultural brokers, "their work is visible and can be viewed as a product" (Jacobs, 2014: 273).

Regarding the ICH notion, it is noted that between communities persist interpretations that require clarification and discussion. The self-awareness of a cultural group can be reduced to symbols and ICH certainly provides them. Most of these symbols are

perceived to be attractive and noticeable like handicraft, food culture or performing arts, or in other ways distinguishable like language or religion. Paradoxically these attractive elements of ICH are most used and reproduced but also the practising community is on guard for the preservation of their "authenticity". Although organisations and institutions administrating safeguarding ICH don't encourage the pursuit for "authenticity" the communities often still have their own understanding that heritage is something "old", "right"' and "genuine". A phenomenon of ICH perceived as "authentic" is more distinguishable from others' heritage, and makes it easier to differentiate between common and special, as a consequence more likely to acquire social capital. Moreover, representing ICH within a community often examples are chosen which seem "pure".

Even so, there are ICH elements so common that the practising community itself in general doesn't even consider them as heritage, ordinary heritage or as Bella Dicks (2000: 37) has phrased – "vernacular heritage". Peter Groote and Tilda Haartsen distinguish between lay heritage discourse and popular heritage discourse, former being "based on individual experiences and information shared with familiar people, latter is developed on broader cultural and social ground, for example in media" (Groote & Haartsen, 2008: 183). Crowdsourcing materials about ICH from practising communities for the Estonian inventory of ICH is, in my opinion, still part of the lay heritage discourse, though outcome, a public detailed description of an element, could become a basis for popular heritage discourse. Also, the more attractive the element the more likely it is picked up by the public. "Adding value to heritage is active and dynamic which means that heritage is always a phenomenon in process that is a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past" (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1995: 369).

Making lists like compiling entries for the National Inventory even by the practising communities is still an issue of (re)interpretation and rendering meaning to ICH through communication. Creating a text about an element of ICH understandable to people outside the community makes the process of representing community and ICH also a process of verbalisation and translation. In the case of Estonian inventory of ICH the Estonian Council for the ICH and an editor will overview every entry before its publication and make their suggestions. This may also lead to further alteration of meanings, stresses, and connotations of the texts and audiovisual materials. However, the author of the entry always has the right to decline these proposals. The Council for the ICH and the Chamber of ICH are more like the "brokers of the brokers". The information is gathered by crowdsourcing, the ideas for entries must come for the communities and entries are made by communities, heritage communication in this case should start from the practising community and information passed on as viewed by practitioners.

Johannes Fabian (2001) has accused cultural sciences of keeping a positivist tradition and argues that instead of yearning for the past and celebrating unchanging traditions they should pay attention to the dynamic and performative nature of culture. Talking about ICH it is necessary to emphasise the continuity but even more it is about the values and sustainability. The practising community should not only appreciate their heritage for what it has given to generations before but also for what it will give to generations to come. Often the practising community has been trapped by the pursuit for "authenticity". Also, the aim of the inventory is not to conserve the perfect eye-catching and ear-striking element of ICH but to carry the idea that heritage is valued. The main intent of the National Inventory of ICH in Estonia is to represent Estonia's peoples' heritage in the present and as dynamical, and also to encourage heritage bearers to look at their traditional cultural elements more broadly and to understand heritage's essence also as a set of values.

Conclusion
This article focused on Estonian inventory of intangible cultural heritage as an example of community

describing its own heritage. The inventory is drawn up by a bottom-up approach – practising communities initiate and carry out the process of compiling an entry to the inventory. Chamber of ICH of Estonian Folk Culture Centre and the Estonian Council for the ICH advises the compiler and the latter also has to approve the entry before publication although the author has the final word.

The process of compiling an entry to the inventory is multidimensional. The author of an entry inevitably adds their own voice and opinions to the context developed in the practising community, and this must also be comprehensible to outsiders. The element of ICH in this process switches into and moves between different discourses of heritage depending on the agency of the heritage bearer (as a describer, as a translator, as a transmitter, as a publiciser, etc.).

With the six years the Estonian National Inventory of ICH has been open to the public it has gathered 86 entries of different elements of ICH practised in Estonia. The elements described are from different domains of the ICH, some elements are commonly known in Estonia, some less inclusive, many are attractive and festive, most of them are seemingly mundane – all of them are important to their practising communities. To describe and verbalise the meaning of something as elusive as ICH needs concentration and work but can be done most competently by people who live with the heritage. Although it is a process of translation and the entry can be viewed as a product of cultural communication, the objective of the inventory on ICH is to foster and conduce transmission of the elements of the ICH within the practising communities and that the ICH as a phenomenon would be valued.

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