

The Republic of Korea ICHpedia wiki and the creation of a new web-based community of practice through online participatory methodologies

Jessica Rossi

Ca' Foscari University

Site: <http://www.ichpedia.org/>



This article aims at introducing the classification established by Korea's ICHpedia for users involved in the inventorying of intangible cultural heritage through the use of Web 2.0 instruments. The analysis moves from the definition of community developed since the adoption of the UNESCO 2003 Convention, and traces the recent shift from object-oriented to person-oriented safeguarding of cultural heritage, in order to understand what changes from the cyberspace are taking place and influencing the field of intangible heritage. The new concept of "heritage of all" is closely connected with collective intelligence theories from the Nineties'. Moving from this theoretical background I try to postulate the necessity of a new shift in the definition of community, which has been strongly influenced by information and communication technologies (ICTs), which provides the cultural heritage sector with new networks of people involved in the identification of ICH elements.

Keywords: community of practice, wiki, inventorying, intangible cultural heritage

The shift in paradigm from a tangible to an intangible heritage has been one of the fundamental changes set by the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereinafter ICHC). However, an even bigger change was launched by the international legal document with the introduction of a new concept of community (“groups, and individuals”, to cite the Convention text), which was previously taken into account not as an active part in the preservation and development of cultural heritage, but rather as a passive receiver.¹ Much has been said since the beginning of the twentieth century about community participation in the cultural life and construction of identities, mostly in other disciplines, just think of Geddes’s “Cities in evolution” (1915), more recently the theory of “collective intelligence” initiated by Pierre Lévy (1994), or “social capital” theories, which started by the end of XIX century and are still widespread and evolving. In the cultural heritage sector, it is primarily in the corridors of international organisation such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe, that the first attempts were made in order to include communities as participative and active stakeholders in the safeguarding of the world’s heritage and cultural diversity. Even though the 2003 ICHC does not provide any clear definition of “community, groups and individuals,” it recognises their importance, and article 1 precludes the existence of ICH in the absence of communities’ recognition of a shared common heritage.² Moreover, States Parties to the Convention should engage communities in the definition, identification and preservation of ICH³ through active management operations.⁴

In order to compensate for the lack of a clear definition of “community,” in the year following the adoption of ICHC, UNESCO published some useful booklets which re-address this topic, by stating:

“The Convention does not provide a definition of communities because it recognizes that communities have an open character, not necessarily linked to specific territories. They can be dominant or non-dominant and a single individual may belong to different communities at the same time or switch communities” (UNESCO, Implementing the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage).

However, a clearer definition was set during the 2006 Experts Meeting on community involvement in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. In this occasion and for the first time, UNESCO participants not only established stated definitions of “community, group and individuals,” but they also tried to draw a line between those individuals who “directly practice ICH” and those who are “external stakeholders” (UNESCO, 2006: 9). Especially this latter group has lately undergone an enlargement process also thanks to the work done by UNESCO in raising public international interest on the topic and also thanks to information and communication technologies (ICTs), which are useful tools in the dissemination and promotion of intangible culture.

A key activity within this objective is the identification of national intangible items (UNESCO, 2003, Art. 11) in collaboration with heritage communities. Technological tools were introduced as instruments for inventorying and sharing the access of this information to everyone, and in order to enhance “creativity and self-respect in the communities and individuals where expressions and practices of intangible cultural heritage originate” (UNESCO, Identifying and Inventorying Intangible Cultural Heritage). The Council of Europe Faro Convention (2005) also stresses the importance of taking into consideration the relationship between the cultural heritage and the information society (art. 14) and strengthening cultural development through the use of digital technology. For this reason, it is fundamental

¹ UNESCO, Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage (1972) states: Art.5 (a) “(...) each State Party to this Convention shall endeavour, insofar as possible, and as appropriate for each country: a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community (...).”

² UNESCO, ICHC (2003): Art.1 “The ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage’ means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith –

that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.”

³ UNESCO, ICHC (2003): Art. 11 “identify and define the various elements of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory, with the participation of communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations.”

⁴ UNESCO, ICHC (2003): Art. 15.

to improve the understanding of these new instruments' effects on participating community's building up and identity.

In 2005 the Republic of Korea also ratified the UNESCO 2003 ICHC, and since that time has always distinguished itself for the important progress it made in fostering intangible cultural heritage and communities' safeguarding and sustainable development, creatively following UNESCO recommendations. In 2015, Korea enacted a new Act on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which focuses even more attention to the importance of creating a suitable environment for the creative transmission of intangible traditional culture among citizens. Not only a well-structured 'bricks and mortar' organisation has been built up since the Sixties, following the first legislation on this topic,⁵ but Korea has also carried out the digitalisation of most of its intangible cultural heritage. There are various websites and associations taking the responsibility of this task, one of the most interesting experiments is represented by the online Korean intangible cultural heritage wiki: ICHpedia.

ICHpedia is an online based encyclopaedia, which relies on users' interaction and a bottom-up approach for the collection of information and materials about intangible cultural heritage. This project follows the example of Wikipedia and enriches it with multimedia files uploaded by private users. Since 2010 the project has collected more than 60,000 miscellaneous materials and organised them in a way that are easily searchable by any user from any PC. Thanks to ICTs, information is easily spread through the network and anybody can check all the materials collected and regarding traditional culture just using a simple search bar. Users can also contribute to the enrichment of the encyclopaedia entries by adding new contents and transforming their experience from an inactive to a participative one. In this way, the website proposes two different approaches to the contents by involving different stakeholders, respectively: a more engaged

one, as well as a passive one. Moreover, a simple and fast interface was designed to provide the "democratisation of ICH safeguarding measures" (Park, 2014: 69,82) through collective work (Lévy, 1994: kindle 939). Accordingly users' participation is essential in order to keep the wiki alive, to improve and enlarge the database, in this way reflecting the idea of the creation and diffusion of a "collective intelligence shared repertoire" (Wenger, 1999: 72, 73) which includes an active cooperation between the members and their capacity for initiative (Lévy, 1994: kindle 564). It is thanks to the possibility of this online cooperation through web 2.0 platforms, that concerned individuals can take part in the identification, thus popular recognition, of intangible cultural heritage; hence contributing to two main aspects of the safeguarding process: knowledge building and awareness raising. This leads to the core issue, which is the enlargement de facto of the community involved in the inventorying and the need of establishing an identification differentiation system between the various users taking part in the project, arriving in this way to the creation of dissimilar groups and communities. However, internet-based shared-practice brings to the actual cooperation of two very distinct groups, respectively: the community of practice (CoP) and the community of interest (CoI),⁶ which are usually hard to collide in the real world, and that thanks to this kind of digital tool could lead to some positive as well as negative effects in the safeguarding ICH viability and in the strengthening of the heritage community.

In top-down inventorying systems, the stakeholders involved in the identification of ICH can be easily discerned: government organisations, researchers, experts, practitioners and some association members. On the contrary, through the use of web 2.0 platforms, contents and materials can be uploaded and updated by any internet user, with no territorial, belonging and language restrictions. In this way, internet tools could be reconsidered as a veritable new way of thinking and managing ICH knowledge, also bringing to unexpected

⁵ The Republic of Korea has since 1962 enacted a national legislation, similar to the Japanese one, and protected both tangible and intangible heritage.

⁶ Both these two communities are based on the descriptions provided by Lave and Wegener in their *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (1991).

social changes (Joinson, 2003). In fact, not only the practitioners' local community is in charge of providing information related with their cultural tradition, but also external stakeholders can dialogue with the same information, modify or add more data. Thus, one of the most relevant social changes, in the establishment of an ICH knowledge structure through

the use of online platforms, has been the abolition of social hierarchies between stakeholders. On ICHpedia different users can collaborate at the same level breaking the social constraints based on age, experience, participation and belonging to a specific group.



Image 1: ICHpedia Homepage: buttons translation

The website provides a user-friendly interface, which is intuitive and clear with few buttons and a simple search bar. In the upper part of the page, there is the possibility for any user to register and insert personal information in order to become an active editor and start contributing to the encyclopaedia items. While registering, the personal information sheet also asks to identify oneself inside one of the three main proposed “user groups,”⁷ respectively: general user (일반인), intangible heritage research user (무형문화연구소), and intangible heritage guardian (무형유산지기). Here comes the first relevant differentiation between users, which is useful for ICHpedia administrators in order to understand who has written what. This distinction also stresses the fact

that different groups could be active inside the website, and that following this categorisation it is possible to understand what kind of relationships each user would like to entertain with inventorying traditional culture. Moreover, users identify themselves before starting to contribute to the website entries, a system which is quite the opposite as the Wikipedia one. For instance, on Wikipedia once logged in, a user can make or not specific actions depending on its wiki-age and edits quantity,⁸ leaving apart any kind of self-pre-categorisation during the registration process. Thus, a Wikipedia user grows up inside the platform reaching a relative important status after some time and based on his/her involvement. On the contrary, in ICHpedia there is a self-identification system, which determines the

⁷ In Korean: 사용자그룹, where 사용자 means “user” and 그룹 is the Korean transliteration of the English word “group.”

⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:User_access_levels#Registered_\(new\)_users](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:User_access_levels#Registered_(new)_users).

users' belonging based on one of the three groups. This pre-established categorisation is connected with already existing parameters in use outside of the cyberspace, every user is not categorised following a reward system inside the platform, but should identify

him/herself as already part of an existing group/community outside of the web. Moreover, even though the users need to select a peers group while registering, the page does not provide any well-defined explanation of these.

The image shows a registration form with the following fields and options:

- 이름 (Name): [Text input]
- 아이디 (ID): [Text input] 중복확인 (Check for duplicates)
- 비밀번호 (Password): [Text input]
- 비밀번호확인 (Confirm Password): [Text input]
- 이메일 (Email): [Text input] 이메일 수신 (Receive email)
- USERS' GROUPS:
 - GENERAL USER
 - ICH GUARDIAN
 - ICH RESEARCH USER (Selected)
 - * 일반인 (General)
 - 무형문화연구소 (Intangible Cultural Property Research Institute)
 - 무형유산지기 (Intangible Cultural Heritage Guardian)
- 전화번호 (Phone Number): [Text input] SMS수신 (Receive SMS)

Buttons at the bottom: 확인 (Confirm), 재작성 (Rewrite), 취소 (Cancel).

Image 2: Registration sheet with users' groups

For the purpose of systematising the meaning applied to these proposed subsets, some definitions can be drawn. The first group, commonly referred as “general users,” could mean any person who is interested in registering but who is not directly involved in researching, safeguarding or transmitting ICH expressions. It is the largest community, which can also be defined as “community of interest.” This is the ensemble of all the individuals who are interested in the topic, but who are neither experts nor practitioners. Any person who is sincerely interested in ICH but does not hold any specialisation in the field, nor participate in the protection or administration of Korean traditional culture can belong to this group. Even though, it represents by far the largest group, as it addresses to the larger public, nevertheless, it is not really close to the ICH expression, due to the fact that these users usually just hold a general interest in it.

The second group is identified as “intangible heritage researchers,” a generic definition could be provided by the Centre for Intangible Culture Studies (CICS), which

although does not specify the meaning of intangible heritage researcher for ICHpedia, but it states a general description of the work done by the study centre, that deals with tangible and intangible heritage integration through research and recording methods. This second group should comprise researchers and experts in the field of traditional culture: scholars, researchers, government experts, and so on. We can address to it with the name of “research community”, they all take part in the heritage transmission and development mainly through more technical means. Users part of this group probably don't practice this cultural expression but they take charge of the identification, description, preservation and protection.

The last group is addressed to as the “intangible heritage guardians,” who are those people involved in the investigation, discovery, preservation and

promotion of ICH, if we abide by CICS definition.⁹ It should be the enclosed circle of people who are directly involved in the identification, description and transmission of the traditional culture. We should consider any kind of practitioner and holder as part of this cluster, which is the one closer to the ICH item, and where the sense of belonging to a local based community should be stronger, making it a “community of practice.” After having established

some clear definitions, it becomes evident that a hierarchical system has been applied between the three groups, here explained in ascending order of importance, and relevance to the transmission.

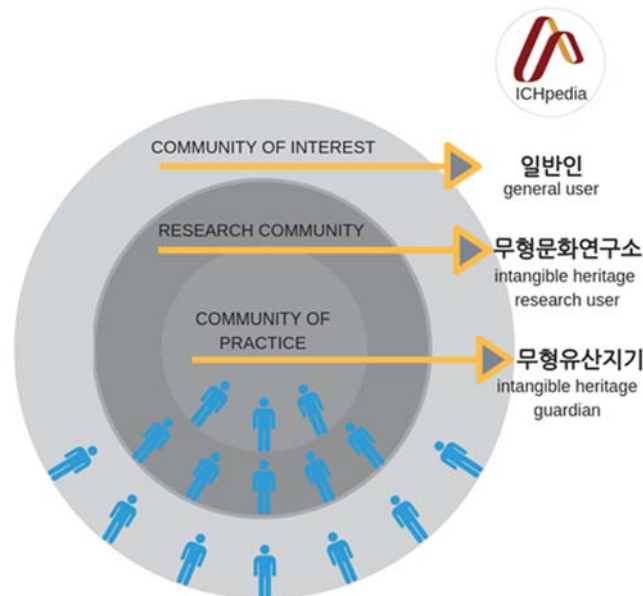


Image 3: Communities' concentric hierarchical system

Even though, new technologies have permitted the enlargement of the base community, which is the “heritage community,” meaning drawn from the Preamble of the European Faro Convention, where it is stated that “every person has a right to engage with the cultural heritage of their choice,” the website still retains some elements typical of physical communities, in contrast with cyberspace communities. For example, the pre-classification is one of those elements typical of local identity-based communities. In contrast with the free possibility of every person, who holds a basic knowledge of the internet, to access to the ICHpedia website and register inside one of the groups described above, and

starting to add and modify encyclopaedia edits, documents, and media files. Thus, it is necessary to reconsider at the international level the definitions, or at large, the idea of community in order to best describe the actual possibilities introduced by web-based technologies, which permit the mass-diffusion of information and collaboration.

⁹ The definition here mentioned can be checked at the following URL:
http://cics.center/board/?board_id=2¤t=5&id=1072.



Image 4: ICHpedia user's editing options.

ICHpedia provides a useful example of how communities of practice (CoP) and communities of interest (CoI) can effectively collaborate and mutually help in the construction of a shared repertoire, in strengthening knowledge management, and in the acquisition of social capital. Following the idea of Wenger's perfect functioning of the three main elements of: domain, community, and practice (Wenger, 1998: 73, 84), we can assume that ICHpedia has achieved great results in the building up of an ideal knowledge structure in the networking environment, thus creating an actual web-based community of practice. For instance, the main domain is well specified by the name of the website itself, which has coined a new term merging ICH with encyclopedia, and by the description of the issues and goals that the wiki tries to address and achieve. As it concerns the community element, three different types of communities are here cooperating in order to accomplish two main tasks: identifying and inventorying traditional culture expressions. Cooperation and initiative are fundamental in order to understand the real involvement of the individuals in taking care of this same subject. With this final statement the practice element is also clearly reached and authenticated by the increasing number of entries

and data collected since 2010, which has now reached more than 60,000 in number. After having demonstrated the working completion of Wenger's three necessary elements for the creation of the knowledge structure, I can also try to postulate a posteriori the creation of a new community of practice, which is wider in the scope if compared to the local ones, more comprehensive, as it also includes scattered individuals which are not part of local-identity-based communities, and more flexible in trying to reach its goals, due to the miscellaneous nature of the data uploaded and the tools available. The presence of the three elements and their good functioning inside ICHpedia experiment should make us consider the possibility to create new successful communities of practice in the cyberspace in order to transmit, raise awareness and safeguard ICH outside of the classical enclosed territorial and identity-based community, and fostering the idea of a shared heritage between all the people.



Image 5: Modifying existing data created by other users.

To sum-up, ICHpedia is a web-based encyclopedia, which collects all the data regarding Korean and partially non-Korean intangible cultural heritage from web-users. Even though the registration process asks for a self-identification into a community/group already existing outside of the cyberspace, the online platform cooperation is horizontal and democratised in order to allow every user to add, modify or update data. In this way, the real community of practice composed of nominated holders, associations' members, practitioners can closely cooperate with other individuals who make up the community of interest. The edits backend do not set any kind of differentiation between the two communities, recognised under three different groups identities inside the information system, thus allowing everybody to work hand-in-hand on everybody's edits. We can, thus, talk about a factual enlargement of the community of practice by also including people usually outside of the formal cluster involved in the preservation and transmission. Online participation to the inventorying of ICH can not only strengthen ties

between existing communities, but it can also lead to the common participation of worldwide set individuals who share a common interest; besides, it can encourage mutual understanding and knowledge learning. Together with the positive aspects already stressed above, the opening up to a wider public hides various problems connected with intellectual property rights (IPRs) and local communities' consensus. In the light of the actual international legislation in the field of ICH, the main concern is on the recognition of liability of the enlarged community of practice on the web and its role and rules inside international documents.

Projects such as the one presented in this research, can actually lead to a broader understanding of ICTs effects on community participation and their new emerging responsibilities and rights in an increasingly connected ICH world.

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