ICH Webinar Series

Session 3: Higher Education Networks for ICH Safeguarding – Global Efforts within and beyond Asia

Concept Note

1. OUTLINE

Date 
July 2020

Venue 
Webinar

Participants
- UNESCO Montevideo Office
- Representatives of higher education networks for ICH safeguarding in the Asia-Pacific, African, and Latin American regions
- Individuals with keen interest on the subject

Language 
English

Co-organizers
- International Information and Networking Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO (ICHCAP)
- UNESCO Office in Bangkok

2. BACKGROUND

Tertiary education institutions play an important role in training future cultural practitioners, artists, curators, policy-makers, and leaders to work in the field of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Currently, the teaching of ICH is highly dispersed throughout different disciplines (heritage studies, anthropology, music, architecture, literature, et cetera). However, academic programmes centred on ICH remain at the margins of the academe. At the 12th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage held in Jeju, Republic of Korea, a roundtable discussion on the integration of ICH in university programmes emphasised the need to show to young people how their connection to ICH manifests in the everydayness of their lives and how they can play a key role in ICH transmission. In the context of developing countries, the discussion heard the need to show a strong link between ICH and development. Though these needs are timeless, persistent across geographies, there are continuous efforts that track the achievement of these needs in integrating ICH into higher education. Significantly, the discussion pointed out a fundamental area in this agenda: the lack of cooperation and networking among universities, research institutes, and degree-conferring colleges.

In Latin America, the UNESCO Office in Montevideo held a regional meeting on cooperation mechanisms in integrating ICH into higher education in 2017, which was participated by 40 representatives from 36 universities based in 9 countries across the region. The meeting promoted exchange and reflection on ICH and higher education, focusing on tertiary-level cultural management programmes.

Meanwhile, to ensure the possibility of cooperation and networking among relevant higher education institutions in the Asia-Pacific region, ICHCAP and UNESCO Bangkok Office co-organised the First Meeting for Asia-Pacific Tertiary Education Network for ICH Safeguarding in July 2018, in which 19
universities and educational institutions from 11 countries arrived at a consensus to establish a higher education network for ICH safeguarding. Later that year, the Asia-Pacific Education Network for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (APHEN-ICH) was officially formed, beginning with 15 member institutions. These orchestrated efforts stemmed out from a survey co-conducted by ICHCAP and UNESCO Bangkok Office in 2017, which aimed at identifying universities with curricular programmes focused on or significantly covering ICH.

A similar direction was journeyed in Europe when the European Network on Cultural Management and Policy (ENCATC) carried out an extensive mapping of higher education programmes throughout the continent, identifying a total of 146 programmes at all levels containing ICH subjects. This 2017 UNESCO-ENCATC project dubbed as "Learning on intangible heritage: building teachers’ capacity for a sustainable future" pushed recommendations for the further insertion of ICH in higher education curricula, which have to do with sharing terminologies and rationales, envisaging the needs of the job market, sharing knowledge and practices, as well as cross-disciplinary pollination and cross-assessment of relevant policies.

In 2018, UNESCO also commissioned a survey (SAU-ICH Survey) on ICH in African universities. Conducted for over two months, the survey found that only one academic programme solely focused on ICH was offered in an African country (Zambia since 2019) while multiple programmes related to ICH were available across the region. The survey etched out the necessity for national and international cooperation in the agenda of bringing ICH in higher education, with most of its recommendations anchored on the long-term benefits of having a network with an online platform to further promote and build capacity around the safeguarding of ICH in Africa.

It is crucial to take note that these germinal efforts around the world collectively call for an amplified cooperation and networking among higher education institutions for ICH safeguarding. This is chiefly because the ways in which ICH is integrated in university programs is not a single-institution problem, but importantly a transnational issue reaching a global scale as ICH found anywhere in the world belongs to the entire humanity. But building a higher education network and drafting a cooperation mechanism are complex tasks situated within diverse contexts which may pose technical difficulties and resource deficiency. For example, the exponential growth of the use of new technologies has had great implications to how people experience heritage and consequently engender new modalities of connectivity. In the case of younger generations, their first experience of cultural heritage is often through a digital surrogate that shapes their understanding (Economou, 2015: 215). The changing configurations of communication and the creation of electronic data-driven emergent publics at high speed indubitably direct us to questions of building higher education networks for ICH safeguarding as a form of stable gathering positioned within societal evolutions such as cosmopolitanism, urbanisation, as well as the authority of political ideologies over various forms of agenda-driven assemblages.

The third session of the ICH Webinar Series attempts to have a deeper engagement with ideas of building cooperation and networking among higher education institutions for ICH safeguarding. Primarily, this session aims to examine the state of networking activities in different regions around the world, how networks were formed, and how they became functional associations for the study of ICH as a means of heritage transmission. Furthermore, the session looks into what it means to be in such kind of network, their significance to teachers, students, non-teaching professionals in higher education settings, research, community service, and intellectual exchange, amongst others. Finally, the session intends to address questions of expandability of networks, with emphasis on the possibility of inter-regional cooperation through linkages among higher education institutions, national/international/regional competent bodies, and other relevant groups.
3. OBJECTIVES

(1) to examine the state of networking activities in different regions around the world;

(2) to assess the significance of higher education networks for ICH safeguarding to teachers, students, non-teaching professionals in higher education settings, research, community service, and intellectual exchange;

(3) to address questions of expandability of higher education networks for ICH safeguarding, with emphasis on the possibility of inter-regional cooperation;

(4) to identify the roles of non-academic institutions such as UNESCO Field Offices and Category 2 Centres, NGOs, informal ICH transmission schools, and international organisations might assume in contributing to the stability of higher education networks for ICH safeguarding.

4. WEBINAR QUESTIONS

The first session of the Webinar Series is guided by the following questions:

* How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the life of higher education networks for ICH safeguarding?

* How were higher education networks for ICH safeguarding built? What conventions, guidelines, measures, and operational instruments served as the basis for their formation?

* What technical conditions and resource availability permeate higher education institutions as they coalesce to form functional assemblages for ICH safeguarding?

* How do active networks contribute to increasing young people's interest? What activities do they conduct that have direct implications on ICH safeguarding, such as in raising public awareness and disseminating knowledge on living heritage?

* How do higher education networks for ICH safeguarding build a relationship with ICH communities, tradition bearers, the larger public, and those who aren't necessarily within the education sector?

* How do higher education networks for ICH safeguarding maintain inclusivity, particularly in (1) ensuring a transdisciplinary approach to cooperation (e.g. synergy between humanities and natural science fields) and (2) supporting academic departments, institutions, and even individuals who contend with exclusionary circumstances such as those in rural areas with constrained accessibility to online communication?

* What have been the implications of higher education networks for ICH safeguarding on the teaching of heritage, as well as the development of heritage in discourse and public consciousness? How do these networks address contemporary trends in market demands for ICH professionals, research, and intellectual exchange in areas of professional development and skill mastery for teachers and students, respectively?

* How do higher education networks for ICH safeguarding become a source of empowerment for professionals teaching in ICH academic programmes and those who design their curriculum, as well as a source of strength and validation for ICH academic programmes?

** Detailed programme will be provided soon.**