Living heritage experiences and the COVID-19 pandemic

ICH Webinar Series Session 1: Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Asia-Pacific Region

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Living heritage experiences and the COVID-19 pandemic

Living heritage may be affected in different ways by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, while at the same time providing a source of resilience, solidarity and inspiration for many communities during these difficult times.

In this context, UNESCO is inviting its partners to share their experiences related to intangible cultural heritage during the pandemic to help enhance our learning on the topic and inspire communities through the exchange of experiences.

We would like to thank those who have responded to the survey so far and invite ongoing contributions through our online forms. Selected responses will be presented on the map below in their original language (English, French or Spanish) and via the photo gallery.

Link to Platform
Link to Survey
Responses received so far

To date | 260+ responses received | 86 countries

Europe 42%
Asia Pacific 25%
Latin America and Caribbean 20%
Arab States 9%
Africa 4%

Bearer / practitioner 28%
NGO 24%
NGO accredited 16%
University / researcher 16%
National authority 8%
Museum 8%

18 June 2020
To date

- 69 responses
- 20 countries
- 20% responses from University/Researchers
- 18% accredited NGOs to Convention
Impact on living heritage

Disruption to contexts and channels necessary for expressing, transmitting and safeguarding living heritage

- Access to cultural and natural spaces restricted
- Theatres, performance spaces closed
- Access to raw materials and markets limited
- Festive events cancelled and postponed
It is indispensable for costume-making of Noh to have special detailed knowledge and technique, with directly listening to performers about colours, patterns, and designs. These cannot be transferred to new generations in an indirect way, such as only via information on text or movies. Thus, if those costume-makers lose their traditional job, our traditional performances will face a fatal loss.
Impact on living heritage

Dynamic and adaptive nature of living heritage

- Adaptation through online modalities
- Living heritage reinterpreted acquiring new meanings in context of COVID
- Time at home provides renewed opportunity for intergenerational transmission
By and large we can say that in Kazakhstan, in the context of the fight against COVID-19, people began to turn more to the living heritage, finding in it not only an emotional outlet in a situation of self-isolation, but also as a spiritual support for an optimistic view of the future.

Dr. Evfrat B. Imambek, Member of Kazakhstan National Committee for ICH
Roles of living heritage

Source of resilience and recovery

- Psychological and spiritual comfort from practising and enjoying living heritage
- Channel of social support, solidarity and cohesion

*Kara Zhorga dance, Kazakhstan*
Communication tool to raise awareness about COVID

Traditional string puppet drama, Sri Lanka

Chapei Dang Veng, Cambodia
Roles of living heritage

Alternative source of income (crafts)

Traditional forms of mutual aid, local agriculture and food production

© Mazatzin textiles

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Safeguarding living heritage in emergencies

Ongoing reflection by governing bodies of the 2003 Convention

Operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies

• ICH plays a dual role in emergencies
• Dynamic and adaptive nature of ICH
• Primary role of communities

Thank you

Learn more: unesco.org
@UNESCO

https://ich.unesco.org/
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Reviving the living landscape system of Lai Chi Wo for urban’s sustainability

- *Echoes of communities, conservation moved by the nature*

Ms. Anna Yau
Project Manager
annawyau@hku.hk

*HSBC Rural Sustainability Programme*
30%
Urban
30%
Urban

70%
Rural
Lai Chi Wo is one of the oldest and largest Hakka villages in Hong Kong that has the most intact and authentic vernacular living socio-ecological and associative cultural landscapes.
Living heritage approach has been upheld in reviving the rural landscape system and cultural sustainability of Lai Chi Wo.

Conserve cultural heritage and reinstate continuity of heritage-community relationship.

Provide answers to sustainability issues in contemporary urbanized society.

**Rural Landscape System**

- Hakka Indigenous Knowledge System
- Intimate human-nature Relationships
- Fengshui Principles
- Craftsmanship and skills

**Innovative Conservation Model**

- Climate Change
- Poverty
- Excess production and consumption
- Public Health issues
- Mental Health

Issues arising from COVID-19
Thank you very much

Ms. Anna Yau
Project Manager
HSBC Rural Sustainability Programme
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Living Heritage in the time of COVID-19
Experiences from Singapore

Yeo Kirk Siang, Director (Heritage Research & Assessment)

Webinar on “Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the COVID-19 in the Asia-Pacific Region” 18 June 2020
Impact of COVID-19 on Singapore

- First case of COVID-19 in Singapore confirmed on 23 January 2020
- Strict restrictions on activities and businesses during the “Circuit Breaker” period from 7 April to 1 June 2020.
- People were advised to stay at home and only go out for essential needs (e.g. buying food and groceries). Significant impact to daily lives.
- Impact to ICH practices across all forms, performing arts, crafts, festive events, rituals.
- Gradual easing of restrictions from 2 June; many businesses reopening on 19 June 2020.
Impact on ICH in Singapore

Good Friday (10 April 2020)

Catholic masses and worship services were streamed online (right) in place of the usual large gatherings of the congregation (Source: The Straits Times and Catholic.sg)

- Safe-distancing measures has affected all religious and cultural festivities.
  - Access to places of worship are restricted.
  - Festive events are not allowed to take place
- Communities have shown resilience during these times, by finding alternative ways to celebrate and/or continue their practices through the use of digital means
Impact on ICH in Singapore

Qing Ming Festival (清明节) – 21 March to 19 April 2020

ICH Practice
Families would clean the graves of their ancestors in a practice known as sao mu (扫墓) or “sweeping the graves”. Following which they will make offerings and prayers to their ancestors.

Impact of COVID-19
- Cemeteries and columbarium's limited the capacity of people who could visit
- Mass chanting sessions were also streamed online while offerings could also be placed electronically

(Source: The Straits Times)

(Source: Screenshot from Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery)
Impact on ICH in Singapore

Tamil New Year (14 April 2020)

ICH Practice
Hindu families would typically visit temples to conduct prayer rituals before gathering a family or friend’s house for celebration with festive food.

Impact of COVID-19
Hindu families held simple meals within their immediate households and use digital conferring tools to connect with families. Hindu temples also hosted online poojas (prayer rituals) for devotees.

(Source: The Straits Times)
Impact on ICH in Singapore

Vesak Day (7 May 2020)

ICH Practice
Buddhist devotees would often gather at Buddhist temples for large-scale prayer ceremonies, and conduct practices such as the bathing of the Buddha statue and the lighting of oil lamps.

Impact of COVID-19
With restrictions on gatherings, temples groups developed online initiatives such as talks on Buddhism and meditation sessions. Members of the community also gathered online together to conduct their on sets of prayers.

(Source: Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery)
Case Study – Ramadan Together

- Month of Ramadan (24 April – 23 May 2020) – holy month of the year for Muslims. Involves fasting and other social-cultural practices involving families and wider community.
- Closure of mosques and cancellation of bazaars; families not allowed to interact outside of their immediate household.
Case Study – Ramadan Together

• NHB started a month-long campaign titled #Ramadan Together:
  – Foster sense of togetherness amongst local Muslim community during COVID-19 times
  – Raise awareness of Ramadan to non-Muslims
• Anchor Website (Roots.SG/Ramadan) & Use of Social Media
  – Provides details of ICH practices of Ramadan
  – Links to online events (e.g. videos & live-streaming)
Case Study – Ramadan Together

Activities of #Ramadan Together Campaign included:

- Online concerts
- Live-cooking demonstrations of festive foods
- “Iftar Together”: Digital conversations about Ramadan & breaking fast together online
- Bite-sized information on Malay heritage and culture through social media
Case Study – Ramadan Together

• Positive feedback from community on the campaign.
• Maintains some degree of normalcy & enabled communities to interact and carry on their practices despite the challenges.
• Reaches new audiences who may not be familiar with cultural and religious practices associated with Ramadan and Hari Raya Puasa.
Other Digital Initiatives

- Promoting cultural heritage from various ethnic communities in Singapore by Heritage Institutions in Singapore.
Other Digital Initiatives

Fun ways of promoting oral traditions & expressions (e.g. “Attack of the Swordfish”)

Performing Arts Groups like the Singapore Chinese Orchestra have also held virtual concerts for their followers.
The annual Singapore Heritage Festival (19 June – 5 July) will be going completely digital.

The festival will include performances, online tours, workshops and other programmes featuring ICH groups and practitioners.
Other Digital Initiatives

COVID-19 SPECIAL

Neither dusty nor old: Youth come up with fresh ways to document heritage during Covid-19 pandemic

Youths starting their own ICH projects during COVID-19

Source: The Straits Times (8 June 2020)
Documenting COVID-19

The National Museum of Singapore and National Library Board have launched a project to gather photos from the public to document the impact of COVID-19 in Singapore.
Conclusion

- ICH continues to play important role to society and communities during times of crisis.
- Physical interactions of ICH are important; but necessary to find ways for communities to continue their practices.
- Digital platforms opens up ways to engage new audience; but risk of segregating others
- COVID-19 further emphasised the need for adaptation amongst ICH communities, and embracing digital transformation.
- COVID-19 situation continues to evolve globally and in Singapore:
  - Need to further analyse and observe the impact on ICH over the next few months/years and explore how safeguarding measures will need to adapt in order to help ICH and their communities
Thank You
Disaster as Opportunity in the era of COVID-19?

Chris BALLARD

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18 June 2020
COVID-19 in the Pacific Islands

• Very low infection and mortality rates – 314 cases, and 9 deaths (17 June)
• Major impact has been economic, especially through loss of tourism
• Performing culture without tourists?
• What impact do disasters have on ICH, and how can ICH mitigate those impacts?
• But Pacific Islands historically lost up to 95% population to epidemics (up to 22% in Spanish flu)
Cyclone Pam at Chief Roi Mata’s Domain World Heritage site

- Category 5 cyclone in March 2015 impacts community-managed WH site
- Tourism infrastructure largely destroyed
- No more than superficial damage at the ancestral sites
- Opportunity for community reflection about the state of traditional disaster mitigation strategies, and their transmission as ICH

Disasters and ICH

• Are disasters – including pandemics – always and only disastrous for ICH?

• Safeguarding and Mobilising Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Context of Natural Hazards (UNESCO 2017) – shows the link between disasters and negative impacts is not inevitable.

• Defining Methodological Guidance for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Emergencies (UNESCO 2019)

• How can we safeguard if we don’t understand transmission?

• Need to model how ICH is actually transmitted, and thus how it is at risk from disaster and what is required to safeguard it

Reconsecrating the Chief Roi Mata’s Domain World Heritage site
May 2015
“Jellyfish, earthquakes, military coups, insurgencies, fortune and the miraculous are so interwoven into the fabric of Filipino cultures, both in the present and in the past, that attempts to compartmentalise them into discrete domains of knowledge and deal with their effects separately runs not only the risk of seriously underestimating the dynamics of these societies, but of analysing them only through the lens of one’s own culture.”

Greg Bankoff, *Cultures of Disaster*, pp.2-3

“The complexity of linking culture, risk and disaster.” Bankoff et al 2015 p.11
A simpler rubric: “People, Place and Story”

The three basic components or modalities of cultural heritage:

**People**
Individuals, communities, agents, transmitters, transactors, institutions, states

**Place**
Material or tangible settings, sites, environments, resources, settlements, objects, artefacts

**Story**
Immaterial or intangible, knowledge, narrative, tradition
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modality</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Articulation</th>
<th>Transmission</th>
<th>Safeguarding</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>People</strong></td>
<td>Individuals, communities, agents, transmitters, transactors, institutions, states</td>
<td>Performance, expression, language, practice, mobilisation, production</td>
<td><strong>Space:</strong> Intra-group, external, exchange, trade, theft, conquest</td>
<td>Local, national, regional and international strategies to enhance the viability of the forms, articulation and transmission of culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place</strong></td>
<td>Material or tangible settings, sites, environments, resources, settlements, objects, artefacts</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Time:</strong> Inter-generational, monumental, archival, memory</td>
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<td><strong>Story</strong></td>
<td>Immaterial or intangible, knowledge, narrative, tradition</td>
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