

**Alternate, Lighter ways of Sharing Intangible Cultural
Heritage Safeguarding Experiences**

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

This executive summary presents the findings of a survey undertaken in 2018 by the Secretariat of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (herein after the 2003 Convention). The survey aimed to find alternate ways of sharing good safeguarding experiences that may complement the existing Register of Good Safeguarding Practices (herein after 'the Register') as per Article 18 of the 2003 Convention.

Two-hundred and twenty-five respondents participated in the survey, representing governmental and non-governmental organizations, private and public companies, foundations or associations, intergovernmental institutions, indigenous communities, academia and experts. The responses illustrate a keen interest in finding new lighter ways of sharing good safeguarding practices that do not involve bureaucratic structures, but are assessed and validated through multidisciplinary teams comprising communities, experts, institutions and organizations based on a new set of considerations before dissemination.

I. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Article 18 of the 2003 Convention highlights that the 'Committee shall periodically select and promote national, sub-regional and regional programmes, projects and activities for the safeguarding of the heritage which it considers best reflect the principles and objectives of this Convention, taking into account the special needs of developing countries'. The Committee's selections are based on proposals by States Parties and are evaluated against nine criteria as stipulated in the Operational Directives of the 2003 Convention (Chapter I.3).

The Register is underutilized compared to other listing mechanisms of the 2003 Convention. In 2017, out of the 470 elements inscribed on the Lists, 399 were inscribed on the Representative List, 52 on the Urgent Safeguarding List, and only 19 were selected for the Register. The Evaluation of the Internal Oversight Services on the standard-setting work of the Culture Sector (IOS/EVS/PI/129, 2013), undertaken in 2013, recommended to '*reconsider and complement the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices [renamed the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices in 2017] by developing alternate, lighter ways of sharing safeguarding experiences such as dedicated websites, e-newsletters, online forums, etc.*'

Consequently, the Committee at its eighth session called upon 'States Parties and the General Assembly, as well as the Secretariat, category 2 centres, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to [...] complement the Register, by developing alternate, lighter ways of sharing safeguarding experiences' (Decision [8.COM 5.c.1](#)). Two years later, the Committee during its tenth session further requested the Secretariat to work on finding lighter ways of sharing good safeguarding practices to complement the Register (Decision [10.COM 10](#)).

II. SURVEY OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The survey had four main objectives:

- **Objective 1:** Identify a wide range of stakeholders directly involved in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and concerned by sharing mechanisms.
- **Objective 2:** Collect information from these stakeholders on their (a) safeguarding activities, (b) experiences in sharing them (c) aspirations in terms of learning from others' experiences, (d) views on dynamic, light, flexible ways of sharing safeguarding experiences, (e) lessons learned from their own 'sharing projects', and (d) experiences and perspectives on partnerships.

- **Objective 3:** Investigate opportunities for partnerships to implement sharing mechanisms among the different groups of stakeholders identified above.
- **Objective 4:** Provide an analytical report enabling the Secretariat to inform the Committee on this subject.

The Secretariat commissioned the *Centro Regional de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias (CRIM) – National Autonomous University of Mexico* to prepare the survey. The investigation was structured around five different themes in an effort to capture key information on ways and means of sharing living heritage safeguarding experiences (see also objective 2 above). The survey was open for a period of six weeks, from 1 June to 16 July 2018, and targeted 2,232 contacts in the field of intangible cultural heritage, including NGOs accredited under the 2003 Convention, indigenous organizations, cities/local governments, national or sub-national/local institutions, academic communities, UNESCO Chairs or Category 2 Centres.

III. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY FINDINGS

- Of the 225 survey respondents, 103 were from non-governmental organizations, followed by representatives from governmental bodies or institutions, local organizations and foundations. The majority of the organizations work in the field of cultural management and cultural policies and have a very good understanding of the 2003 Convention. Most of the respondents were from countries in Europe, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean.
- One of the main findings of this survey is that there is a clear interest in learning from one another through the sharing of respective experiences. Almost all (94%) of the 225 respondents stated that when developing their activities, it is imperative for them to consult with others regarding safeguarding experiences; only 13 participants did not think this to be important. A similarly large proportion (97%) consider their safeguarding experiences to be potentially useful to others.
- Eighty-two per cent of the survey respondents confirmed that they share their safeguarding experiences with other organizations and institutions. These are mainly being shared at the local or country level (131 mentions), followed by the regional level. Organizations directly implementing safeguarding activities highlight the need to gather information on others' experiences directly from the field rather than from a specialized dissemination tool or other such modalities.
- 156 out of 225 respondents (69 per cent) rank the Register as the mechanism that contributes most to providing potentially inspiring information. This is followed by capacity-building materials, project and activities under the 2003 Convention, and finally, nomination files of elements inscribed on the Lists of the 2003 Convention. In addition, for several of the organizations, face to face interactions are a key component of a successful sharing experience.
- Responses reflected some variation according to the area and geographic level of intervention of the participating organizations:
 - o Those operating at the local level highlighted the need to recognize potential mistakes and risks associated with safeguarding activities.

- Institutions involved in research, capacity building, and training emphasized the need to focus on actual experiences in order to better design and use educational materials for safeguarding living heritage. In addition, the main reasons for sharing were disseminating information and awareness-raising on the importance of safeguarding living heritage.
- Public or governmental institutions stressed the importance of improving ways of complying with their duties and responsibilities. For them, sharing allows getting to know actors and practices or activities operating at the ground level.
- Numerous organizations reported that they disseminate their own activities and experiences, more so than looking at others' safeguarding actions, from which inspiration and learning could admittedly be gained.
- The majority of the organizations stated that they share information in non-formal, intuitive ways. The main challenges noted were the absence or insufficiency of human and financial resources, lack of time, knowledge and know-how on how to share information.
- While social media is the most frequently used channel, it is evaluated as the least meaningful way to get information from others. This is partly because information shared through such platform privileges selected content for quick and wide distribution. They often fail to communicate an overall detailed context. Specialized search engines and databases are the least used channel when actually sharing the safeguarding experiences, yet they are the third most valued in terms of their hypothetical efficiency.
- A large number of respondents highlighted the importance of local communities in the sharing of safeguarding experiences, as they are the ones that create and recreate living heritage. The need for collaboration between communities and institutions working in the field of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage was also emphasized.
- Relatedly, the extent to which their safeguarding practices should be shared must be delimited by the communities. A sharing protocol needs to address ethical issues, as well as those of copyright and author rights in order to explicitly establish what can and cannot be shared, as well as to address proper and pertinent authorization mechanisms.
- With regard to new ways of sharing safeguarding practices, the majority of the respondents stressed the need to have a filtering and validation mechanism in place. To this end, most of the respondents favoured having a multi-disciplinary team, with UNESCO playing a major role in the selection and dissemination of these safeguarding practices.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Appoint a multidisciplinary working group mandated to validate proposed safeguarding experiences. The group could be coordinated by the Secretariat of the 2003 Convention and include representatives from NGOs, national and local governments, researchers and practitioners, with the aim of developing a simple and concrete protocol for sharing living heritage safeguarding experiences along with a sharing tool kit that could be disseminated among the organizations.
- Establish a simpler validation process, based on concrete standards that are devised on practical considerations such as the actual existence of the safeguarding experience or of the organization that is working on it.

- Organize consultations with the organizations that are already sharing their experiences using internet-based platforms, in order to learn from them and hear specific proposals for the conceptualization, organization and design of a formal web-based sharing outlet for safeguarding experiences.
- Ensure that the sharing mechanisms include not only virtual sharing through digital platforms, but also face-to-face interactions that could be organized on all geographical levels (from the local to the international arenas), depending on the available resources.
- Encourage a bi-directional understanding of the sharing process, recognizing that exchanging entails both an imparting of own experiences, and a consulting of those of others, allowing to learn from one another.
- Strengthen the existing networks such as universities and NGO's by clarifying what each of the actors involved can do in terms of safeguarding, and how their specific activities could benefit other sectors. The purpose being to achieve a more consolidated and coordinated safeguarding process corresponding to each relevant practice or manifestation of intangible cultural heritage. This could be initiated by publicly sharing the list of recipients of the survey, as well as maintaining an up-to-date record of organizations working on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.