

Zagreb, September 8, 2010

**The role of NGOs in implementation of the
Convention for the safeguarding of the ICH
Capacity-building workshop
1-4 September 2010
Tallinn, Estonia**

Session Three: Safeguarding ICH

Summary of the discussion of the Break-out group 1:

Practice, Creation, Maintaining, Transmission

Facilitator: Tvrtko Zebec

Very important contribution of this workshop is that we have an opportunity to hear and see some very illustrative practices and examples of work in NGOs and very inspirational experiences that help us all in our future work. We are not discussing like we are living in an ideal world like it was on some previous UNESCO expert meetings I attended. We can now rely first hand on very concrete, very lively experiences.

As group 1, we discussed practice, creation, maintaining and transmission. Most of the group were our hosts, Estonian colleagues. Some of them are from national museums, dealing with handicrafts. Some of them are dealing with educational groups, teaching music or being trainers in the village movements within society, organising also festivals of music and dance for children, or working with the traditional culture within the Ministry of Culture supporting umbrella organisations dealing with heritage and looking for output information, also working on regional programs of cultural spaces, etc.

1. Around the table we are all professionals in the field of ICH. One of the first thoughts is that there are no clear borders in distinction between a community and a professional. We are mostly dealing with our own communities, but at the same time our identities are multiple and as Kirsten Hastrup said – as anthropologists, or ethnologists, folklorists or other “ologists” we are here to bridge the native voice with the outside world. In that process we have to be responsible and moral, and often it is not so important to look at our background than to see what we are doing in the field.

2. In efforts to reach local knowledge, teachers (and others active in NGOs) can serve as catalyzers – not to impose the final results but rather to show *what* to find, and *how* to discover valuable material within the community. Demonstrators from local communities through the informal school can work together with formal education. That kind of teaching bridges different approaches and serves as an oasis of more complete education to show (guide) the way where knowledge is, to connect with the local masters or people who know how.

3. In Estonian village movement there is already a positive experience with several organisations, which establish life style centres that help the community to evaluate

their own community. Sometimes it is necessary to awaken the society and to show how important it is to transmit knowledge from generation to generation. There are examples when young people return to their homeland and are keen to join the elders – for example in midsummer night bonfires with all old customs. There are projects to learn from grandparents bridging a kind of "lost generation" of the parents, who are from a time of totalitarian, in our cases mostly communist regimes, when people from villages were encouraged and forced to move to industrial centers and towns, and to forget their roots, religion, and so on.

4. Another topic is how Estonian mass media treat handicraft specialists; the way media represent transmission of tradition. For example, the handicrafts are often represented as passed from a grandmother to her granddaughter – thus it is represented as *female* activity, and *male* masters are missing because of this kind of misrepresentation. Speaking about gender balance, there were organised training sessions for male professions – for example carpenter work – with 30-40 men participating. In this kind of transmission through the generations UNESCO serves an important argument – “*I want to tell to my grandchild that this is in UNESCO!*”

5. We notice that *festivals* are also a *driving force*, and could be a good injection – for example, for ship builders who are brought forward to opening themselves as well as some male dancing groups.

6. In that sense, one of the important outcomes of successful transmission is to find more solid ground for *practice* and *performance* that influence the audience. We should not forget that even if practices are not present, continuity might not be broken – it might still be living heritage through the collective memory that can be activated depending on conditions of the context in a particular community.

7. We heard that the *question of pride* or *competition* can be a way to influence better transmission and to revive some forgotten practices.

8. We find out that leadership within the community is very important. It is not always easy to find a real leader in the community. Sometimes too strong leadership in a community can have a negative effect. Even when schools are supported by the Ministry, attitude can be negative if there is no willingness of teachers when they have a feeling that they are not continually involved because of too strong and non flexible leadership in the community.

9. *Continuous work* is very important – some educational, or better to say, most of the educational processes, formal and non-formal should be long-term processes, and not only for one year, as governments and other institutions providing financial assistance sometimes expect.

10. *Standardisation* is one of the threats we have to think about. It is more expensive to work with individuals but traditional knowledge is as much collective as it is personal and creative. Again the question of financing. We should more often reintroduce master's knowledge with not only parents paying for children to learn handicrafts as well as local government and society as a whole (we hear great examples from Norwegian Crafts Development and Belgium Tapis Plein NGOs).

11. *Birocratisation* is a serious threat, as we heard from our Latvian colleague and my assistant in the group, Anita Vaivade, to whom I am grateful for help. We know this Convention opened a huge field of possibilities as a legal instrument at the international level, but we should be very careful with other legal instruments on national and local levels. Together with biocratisation they could be very harmful in case of *specific* frameworks – *general* frameworks are more appreciated.

All the processes in implementation of the Convention should be in agreement with ethical issues and morality – those should be present at any time within every community in question, and with every work of experts or NGOs, essential in successful transmission of knowledge and intangible cultural heritage.