

The popular reaction in front of the COVID-19 in the Intangible Heritage of UNESCO in the member cities of ICCN

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Abstract

ICCN, Interurban Cooperation Network for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, is an international organization of local governments and cultural institutions which includes 31 states, 29 cities and 34 associations. Its main objective is the protection of the intangible cultural heritage around the world and the promotion of sustainable local development. Moreover, it also seeks to achieve cultural peace through mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue between the different populations that are part of it.

Annually, the organization celebrates the General Assembly or Round Table of Mayors. So as to coordinate the work of all members and organize the activity of ICCN, the Executive Committee and the Secretariat were created, apart from the General Assembly. The first of these institutions, with a maximum of ten members, represents the cities of Gangneung (South Korea) Isfahan (Iran), Beit Sohour (Palestine) Flokland (India), Slovakia and Algemesi (Spain) and it has the main function of setting the ICCN's annual agenda. On the other hand, the daily work of managing the activity of the ICCN is carried out by the Secretariat, which has its physical headquarters located in the Spanish city of Algemesi, the previous headquarters was located in the Korean city of Gangneung.

The assemblies were held at: Gangneung 2012 (South Korea), Dubrovnik 2013 (Croatia), Isfahan 2014 (Iran), Slovakia 2015, Sicily 2016 (Italy), Beijing 2017 (China), Algemesi 2018 (Spain) and Beit Sahour 2019 (Palestine). The 2020 Assembly should had been held in the Korean city of Gangneung between the last 22 and 25 of June, but it had to be cancelled due to the international sanitary situation that we are suffering.

All the intangible heritage celebrations in our cities and communities have been cancelled for this reason and at the 2020 ICH NGO Conference Secretary, we would present the current status of all our intangible assets, after having a virtual assembly next October by the ICCN members.

The UNESCO Intangible Heritage Festival of Algemesi, the host city of the ICCN Office, and the community I represent, which was to take place on September 7 and 8, have also been suspended. But this suspension, as well as that of the rest of the ICCN member cities, does not alter their heritage essence, since the invisible force of the tradition that from generation to generation has maintained our celebrations is stronger, at this time, than the external problems that may affect them.

Concretely, in the case of Algemés, the confinement to which we were subjected during the months of March, April and May, has served to keep the tradition more alive on dates that did not involve so much activity in the rituals.

The "dolçaina y tabal" school and the music band have continued their online lectures and preparations and rituals such as the two "Muixerangues" and the "Tornejants" have also followed their preparations through the network, with preparations open to the general public, which have contributed even more to publicizing these activities that take place behind closed doors.

The Bell Ringers Guild has performed the manual ringing of bells, with the necessary precautions, sometimes as a contribution to some crucial moments lived during lockdown. As in many other Spanish and worldwide towns, the balconies have been adorned with images of our immeasurable heritage, the celebration of which, as we all know, is declared Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

To sum up, after having our virtual assembly with ICCN, we will present the popular reaction in the assembly due to the temporary suspension of our tradition.

The popular reaction to Covid-19 from the Intangible Heritage among member cities of the ICCN

The Intangible Heritage is a living legacy that grows and adapts to new times without losing the essence and value that our ancestors placed on it, and that has reached us generation after generation as a cultural and identity symbol of the society that produces and protects it.

In difficult times, this living heritage has always been a source of resilience, solidarity and inspiration for most communities, not only now when we fight the global pandemic caused by Covid-19. Our intangible heritage has faced a number of times, some recent and other long gone, pandemics, wars and many other shifts that our society has outlived throughout history. And despite this, intangible heritage has held alive because our traditions, as humankind, adapt and stand.

Many of our expressions are adversely affected by globalization. We adapt far away traditions that have nothing to do with ours for their showiness and for social interaction. But in this moment, the same globalization allows us to share information on the safeguarding of our heritage and on the reaction to the pandemic among communities all over the world in a constructive manner. This we have perceived among the members of the ICCN (Inter-city Cultural Cooperation Network for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage).

The ICCN, whose Secretariat is now located in Algemés (Spain), is an international organization of local governments and cultural institutions which includes 31 states, 29 cities and 34 associations. Its main objective is the protection of the intangible cultural heritage around the world and the promotion of sustainable local development. Moreover, it also seeks to achieve

cultural peace through mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue between the different populations that are part of it.

Annually, the organization celebrates the General Assembly or Round Table of Mayors. So as to coordinate the work of all members and organize the activity of ICCN, the Executive Committee and the Secretariat were created, apart from the General Assembly. The first of these institutions, with a maximum of ten members, represents the cities of Gangneung (South Korea) Isfahan (Iran), Beit Sahour (Palestine), Payyanur (Kerala, India), Cachtice-Kopanice (Slovakia) and Algemés (Spain) and it has the main function of setting the ICCN's annual agenda. On the other hand, the daily work of managing the activity of the ICCN is carried out by the Secretariat, now located in the Spanish city of Algemés. Previously it was located in the Korean city of Gangneung.

The assemblies were held at: Gangneung 2012 (South Korea), Dubrovnik 2013 (Croatia), Isfahan 2014 (Iran), Slovakia 2015, Sicily 2016 (Italy), Beijing 2017 (China), Algemés 2018 (Spain) and Beit Sahour 2019 (Palestine).

The 2020 Assembly should have been held in the Korean city of Gangneung between the 22nd and 25th of June, but it had to be cancelled due to the international health situation that we are suffering.

All these social expressions, despite their cultural and geographic remoteness, share an extensive common ground that may largely match other experiences all over the world:

* Social distancing has caused a strange atmosphere that has disturbed the course of our lives and has caused the cancellation of cultural and traditional events. Among them festivities that have been declared Intangible Cultural Heritage by Unesco, such as Mare de Déu de la Salut in Algemés (Spain) or the Danoje Festival in Gangneung (South Korea).

* The cancellation of festivals or cultural events has seriously affected people who rely on these celebrations as means of income through the sale of local products or hospitality services for visitors.

* On the other hand we may signal the implication of mass media and social media on the broadcasting and sharing of our traditions that has provided both a national and international visibility unprecedented in our recent history.

After contacts we have maintained along these eight months adaptation we will share the experiences from Algemés (Spain); Gangneung (South Korea); Folkland International Center in Payyanur (Kerala, India); Beit Sahour (Palestine); and the Vietnamese Women's Museum in Hanoi (Vietnam).

Mare de Déu de la Salut (Algemés, Spain)

A colorful butterfly flight with the tonality of rituals and dances emerging from the image of Our Lady of Health announced this year the ephemeris of the most characteristic celebration in Algemés. The feast we celebrate the 7th and 8th of September was suspended due to Covid-19,

but the organization edited the yearly poster to keep the tradition alive. This year the word feast was avoided and the poster became a homage to those who fight to eradicate the illness. The motto that underlines the image was 'To all the people who work and give their lives to keep health and hope'.

The design of the poster emphasizes human's fragility through butterflies. When we watch carefully we may appreciate how the wings echo the colors and forms of dances and rituals. A closer approach shows how the butterflies form, in their struggle for health, the silhouette of Our Lady and in lifting flight they symbolize freedom and a return to normality that it may take us long to enjoy again.

Among society and community reactions to the pandemic, social distancing has affected all our celebrations. But, on the other hand, it has brought around our intangible heritage solidarity and broadcasting actions without precedent for our feast since we started lockdown.

The festivity of Algemés is a celebration of medieval origin (1247) with great popular participation. Its rituals, passed from grandfathers to parents to children, crystallize in a series of tales of mysteries and martyrdom and music, with up to 63 compositions played by more than 200 dolçainers, the choir of the Schola Cantorum and the local music band. Among the scores stands out the solemn and rhythmic sound of the Muixeranga de Algemés, a melody that has extended its symbolic power far from the city limits, becoming a cultural heritage of all the people of Valencia and since 2011, of all the citizens of the world.

Biblical representations and centennial dances show reminiscence of Roman, Christian, Muslim and Jewish rites; cultures that interweave the essence of our land and that are materialized in the creation of the musical instruments, in the inspiration for the melodies and in the varied outfits used in the festivity.

The music of the dolçaina and tabal, the orchestral compositions that accompany the human towers of the Muixeranga and the dances of the Bastonets, Pastorettes, Carxofa, Arquets, Llauredors and Tornejants, along the Volants (carriers of the Virgin), recreate and stimulate the collective memory, transmitting common and universal messages of sonorous and visual feelings of great plasticity.

During the celebration Algemés becomes a living museum of Mediterranean and Valencian tradition with the social framework of faith and culture that comprise the liturgical celebrations, the sonorous landscape of the bells and the monumental environment of the 17th century where the processional parades are performed by more than 1.400 participants.

The sixth UNESCO's Intergovernmental meeting held in Bali (Indonesia) highlighted "the implication of Algemés's whole society in guarding and perpetuating their traditions" when they decided to enlist the festivity of Mare de Déu de la Salut as Intangible Heritage.

During the lockdown we have noticed this social implication. Although the training of the different groups that take part in dances and rituals extends all year long, the final preparations start in July. During the lockdown, all groups, followed the international dynamic and shared

unity messages from home showing a series of performances through social media. From the Valencian Museum of Festivities we shared and exchanged these performances with rituals in Korea, India, Iran, Italy, Slovakia, Croatia, France, Estonia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Palestine.

People's lockdown helped to keep alive the traditional rituals in months that usually are quiet for the rest of the community. The dolçaina and tabal schools continued their training on line. And ritual dancers as both Muixerangues or Tornejants also hold their instruction on line.

The Valencian Museum of Festivities closed its doors, but kept working inside, helping and sharing the on line schooling and all other solidarity messages through the ICCN.

We also started virtual visits to the museum and to the september celebrations through panoramic views, photographs and 360 degree videos of the different dances along with context information in spanish, catalan and english.

The experience has been a great success and has been followed from Germany, Portugal, Mexico, Colombia, United Kingdom, Belgium, Argentina, Estonia, Netherlands, Brazil, Ukraine, Switzerland, Uruguay, France, Austria, Romania, Peru, Andorra, Czech Republic, Venezuela, Bulgaria and Libya.

Town Hall and Feast Board

In June the feast was definitely cancelled. Only the liturgical celebrations were held with the required social distancing. The bell tolls were mechanically played and the Nit del Retorn's concert was held indoors without public and broadcast through local television.

The 6th and 7th of September a successful campaign was conducted to flood social media with photographs of the celebration under the hashtag #AlgemesisUNESCO2020.

We may maintain that except for the cancellation of the celebration itself, our Intangible Heritage has been minimally affected.

The groups that take part in the ritual dances have kept constant contact through social media and when lockdown was lifted they held periodical meetings with the required security measures.

The only dance that has been lightly affected is the Muixeranga. Training the boys and girls that crown the human towers has been impossible because due to their age and weight they need constant practice. But whenever we return to normality the problem will be easily solved.

The cancellation has also affected the girls that take part in the Carxofa and Arquets dances because they need to have a certain age, but the waiting list to participate in these dances is very long and new girls are ready and prepared to take part.

The rest of rituals have scarcely suffered the suspension. Musicians in the Local Band and the Dolçaina and Tabal School followed their formation on line and are back to new normal as the rest of students in conventional education.

7th and 8th of September the feast was present in the media and valencian regional television broadcast the whole 2019 celebration.

Danoje Festival (Gangneug, South Korea)

The Gangneung Danoje Festival was designated a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2005 and is Important Intangible Cultural Property number 13 in Korea since 1967. The festival serves to preserve the folk culture of the Joseon Dynasty and has been a popular festival since 1975.

Danoje Festival includes rituals such as the Daegwallyeong Guksa Seonghwangje (a tribute to Monk Beomil, believed to protect Gangneung) and Yeongsinje (a deity greeting ritual). Folk performances, ssireum wrestling, swing riding, and tug-of-war competitions follow these rituals. During the Danoje Festival, visitors are also invited to participate in various events: watching a traditional wedding ceremony, making surichui rice cake, washing one's hair in iris-infused water, and drinking beverages offered to the gods. There are also regional dialect contests and other cultural programs.

The organization decided to cancel the celebration in 2020 but on line communication has kept the tradition alive. The regional television broadcast some of the rituals that were held without public and keeping all the required security measures.

Folkland International Center for Folklore and Culture (Payyanur, Kerala, India)

The Folkland International Center is a NGO promoting folklore and culture housed in Payyanur, Kerala, India. It is a registered society under the Indian Societies Act of 1860 and exists since 1989. Its main domains are performing arts, oral traditions, crafts, rituals and festivals. This organization has been the most active among the ICCN members during the pandemic and along these months it has shared on line experiences on traditions, crafts, rituals or festivals nearly every day.

The following is one of these experiences shared by Doctor V. Jayarajan, Founder Chairman of the Folkland International Center, during the lockdown.

“Many Indian states had several types of indigenous rain guards and umbrellas using palm leaves and other bio materials to use during rainy season. People in the villages and hilly areas of almost all Indian subcontinent and especially those living in North Eastern states were seen holding these kinds of bio gadgets to protect their body from rain. But nowadays all those rain guards and umbrellas are not a common sight even in the remote villages. The palm leaf umbrellas and natural rain guards have already been replaced by folding umbrellas and plastic rain coats. Here we are introducing a crafts man that belongs to an indigenous community of Kerala state making rain guards using leaves and canes. Mr Ambadi, who lives in Kasargod

district, is adept in making rain guards and started making them again during the pandemic period. With the support of Folkland, he started his craft after a gap of four decades. It is called Koramba in local language. There are three types of Korambas. One with coconut leaves (Ola Koramba) which lasts for two years. The second one is palm leaf (Palmira leaves) Koramba (Pana ola Koramba) and the third one is Mara Koramba (wooden Koramba) using leaves of rhizomatous herb sandwiched between reeds. This kind of rain guards lasts for several decades. With reinventing their age-old tradition, Mr Ambadi and others belonging to the Mavilan indigenous community conserved their traditional skills by bring back the craft of Koramba to the tribal colony during the lock downperiod. It also endorses the community's keen interest for sustainable development. For making more and more wooden rain guards, the entire community is forced to grow more reed plants and herbs.

Beit Sahour (Palestine)

Social distancing and lockdowns have disturbed the course of life in Palestine and caused cancellation of a number of traditional social and cultural activities and events. For instance, the annual March of Virgin Mary took place, but with strict social distancing measures and limitations, which, for many people, unfortunately removed the joy attached to the sacred occasion.

Several activities have taken place with the idea of preserving community heritage and face the Covid-19 pandemic. Women-led municipal committees presented online meeting courses via zoom for local women and families focused on coping with the stress created by the pandemic as well as maintaining a safe and secure home environment.

The main issue is the loss of employment and businesses for many locals, which has greatly affected many families. One of the most important community heritage activities that is taking place to help alleviate this problem is an agricultural project. Citizens have embraced community and the heritage of agriculture by using their lands to produce, not just to grow food for themselves but also to give access to food for those in need.

Local families donated use of their land to Beit Sahour Municipality to be cultivated for food, reflecting the spirit of the Sahouri heritage in social cooperation between locals for the public benefit of the community as we face the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic crisis it has produced.

Intangible heritage has been widely affected by the cancelation of annual traditional activities that reflect the heritage of Beit Sahour, leaving a social and cultural gap on the local community. Vital community events such as Hikaya Market, a local festival accompanied by traditional music and selling of local handcrafts with the goal of revitalizing and reviving the historical old town of Beit Sahour could not happen this year.

A number of other events that fall under the intangible heritage have been canceled, leaving a tangible emptiness in the social life of Beit Sahour. These festivals and events are traditionally

trademarks for the city of Beit Sahour and have lasting benefits to its citizens, which has further devastated the intangible heritage.

The cessation of traditional marriage activities is another important way we see the devastating effects of the pandemic. One such activity, called “Henna Night” or “Farewell Night”, is a celebration of the bride that coincides with the final day before the wedding ceremony. This is an ancient custom for many people, which has become one of the most important rituals of Arab marriage ceremonies. Since this celebration requires close gathering and physical contact, the ritual around that special night has completely stopped due to the fear of the virus spreading among women participants.

The cancellation of festivals has greatly affected people financially sustained by these cultural events through the sale of local products. Local musicians and cultural programs have tried to broadcast shows and performances on local television in an attempt to keep the festive atmosphere alive, but it just is not the same as being in the open air, enjoying the music and programs with friends and family.

Vietnamese Women’s Museum (Hanoi, Vietnam)

As one of the first museums in Vietnam to quickly modify activities in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Vietnamese Women’s Museum (VWM) adopted the motto: “When visitors cannot come to the Museum, we bring the Museum to their homes.”

Indeed, the Museum has shifted the focus to digital engagement as a means of communication. Museum staff upgraded the website to make some Museum exhibits accessible from home. The VWM also invested time creating media products in response to people’s desire for educational content during the lockdown. These include a series of video clips on YouTube sharing the stories behind Museum artifacts in the hope of introducing the history and culture of Vietnamese women to viewers of different demographics. In addition, using social media platforms such as Facebook to tell stories about objects at the Museum has been an effective way to attract and engage more viewers during the time of social distancing.

Despite hardships caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, Museum staff find ways to create videos with educational value on YouTube.

The Museum has shifted its focus on creating short yet interesting stories on Facebook. Understanding the challenges the Covid-19 pandemic brings to the exhibiting activities, the Vietnamese Women’s Museum created and launched two online exhibitions on the new website to continue to share the history and legacies of vietnamese women to a wide range of audience. The Exhibitions help educate the young generation about patriotism and pride through content and images painstakingly edited and designed by VWM’s curators. Along with that was the initiative in building a network with organizations that have common expectations in collecting cultural and historical artifacts for the collecting activities. Therefore, despite the social distancing, the Museum staff still receives donations of valuable objects and memorabilia from their owners and the public.

All the activities that the Museum has carried out so far have partly shown the efforts in preserving and promoting the values of heritage in any circumstances.

In short we may conclude that Covid-19 has had an undeniable economic impact on hospitality activities around museums, festivals and festivities that represent Intangible Heritage and that have been closed or canceled due to the pandemic. But, on the other hand, tradition has played a very useful role along days of lockdown in order to keep alive memories and community identity. New technologies have been very helpful to share and proudly show cultural elements that define us. And, in some cases, the need to stop normal life has helped us to recover crafts that connect communities to their past and to nature. Whenever we get back to normal, Intangible Heritage will show its importance as a vast deposit of true resilience for our communities.