

## Constructing Intangible Heritage



# Constructing Intangible Heritage

Edited by

Sérgio Lira  
and  
Rogério Amoêda

# Constructing Intangible heritage

The Editors

Sérgio Lira  
Rogério Amoêda

Cover Photo: Festivity of the Holy Ghost, Pico Island, Azores

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## ***Foreword***

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*Cristina Pinheiro*

*President of the General Assembly Green Lines Institute*

Scientific research being one of the fundamental aims of Green Lines Institute for Sustainable development, it is our goal to publish original work from academics and experts in the areas of heritage and sustainable development. Under this orientation, Green Lines Institute for Sustainable development has set a publication policy that includes scientific indexed journals, proceedings of scientific events and books on focused thematic.

As part of this editorial activity Green Lines Institute publishes this new book on Intangible Heritage that gathers the contributions of experts and scholars whose research is forwarding the discussion of this fundamental theme. Aiming at a positive contribution to the debate on Intangible Heritage this book focus on the conceptual controversy that involves the theme but also on field work experiences and contributions thus providing a comprehensive overview of the contemporary state of the art.

Green Lines Institute for Sustainable development is therefore pleased to publish this volume and, as President of the General Assembly, it is both our duty and satisfaction to thank all contributors for their original work and care for the publication of this book.

Green Lines Institute for Sustainable development will continue this editorial line in forthcoming publications on sustainable development.



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Alison McCleery is Professor of Geography at Edinburgh Napier University where she is also the Director of Research. She is the Principal Investigator on the AHRC-funded Intangible Cultural Heritage in Scotland project that is being run in partnership with Museums Galleries Scotland. She has published widely on Cultural Geography and on the development of North Atlantic marginal regions.

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Andrew Hall is a Vice-President of ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments & Sites, and President of its intangible heritage committee. He is Senior Manager for Heritage and Museums in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa and has considerable experience with the ICH and World Heritage Conventions, having served in his country's delegation on the drafting committee of the former and in many capacities nationally and internationally with the latter. He holds two degrees in history from the University of the Witwatersrand and an MS in historic preservation from the University of Pennsylvania where he was a Fulbright Scholar. Emeritus professor, University of Leicester, United Kingdom.

### **Brian Osborne**

Professor Brian S. Osborne (Professor Emeritus, Queen's University; Adjunct Research Professor, Carleton University) is currently researching the development of local, regional, and national identities by examining the construction of symbolic landscapes and heritage, and the commodification of place in an increasingly plural global society with all its trans-national linkages.

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Daan van Dartel works as a researcher for larger exhibition projects and (web) publications at KIT Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. Her interests range from specific collection research to larger theoretical themes such as illicit traffic in art and the social role of (ethnographic) museums. She has written several publications concerning the collections and broader issues concerning the Tropenmuseum. Daan organised a large international symposium on the museum's renewal 1995-2008 and the future of ethnographic museums in general in December 2008 and edited the accompanying publication. She is also part of the editing committee of the virtual centre of the Tropenmuseum.

### **David Hill**

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Ehab Kamel is an architect and urban designer. He has been working in practice, teaching, and research since 1998. Ehab got both his first and Masters Degrees in Architecture from Ain Shams University, in Cairo, where he practiced and taught architectural design for nine years, before he moves to UK, for pursuing his PhD, in 2007. Currently, Ehab is writing-up his PhD thesis on Cultural World Heritage Sites' management; with a particular focus on the importance of intangible heritage in forming the identity of place, and how to manage the built-heritage in a way that emphasises their values and meanings.

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Gerard Corsane is a Senior Lecturer within the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies (ICCHS) at Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, England. Gerard's research interests relate to his experiences in Africa and revolve around issues of identity construction and representation in colonial and postcolonial museum, heritage, public history and cultural tourism contexts. Linked to these, his research focuses on integrated heritage management, the value of intangible cultural heritage resources, new museology, ecomuseology, community museology and sustainable development. He is particularly interested in the management and interpretation of natural and cultural heritage resources by indigenous peoples.

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Dr John Carman is University Research Fellow in Heritage Valuation at the University of Birmingham, UK. He is author of *Valuing Ancient Things: Archaeology and Law* (1996), *Archaeology and Heritage: An Introduction* (2002) and *Against Cultural Property* (2005), co-author with Patricia Carman of *Bloody Meadows: Investigating Landscapes of Battle* (2006) and co-editor with M.L.S. Sørensen of *Heritage Studies: methods and approaches* (2009). Forthcoming publications include the co-authored *Heritage Handbook: Archaeological Practice and Heritage in Great Britain* (Springer) and the co-edited *Oxford Handbook of Public Archaeology and Heritage* (OUP). He sits on the Editorial Board of the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*.

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## ***The Editors***

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## ***Part 1***

### Introduction

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## ***Chapter 1***

### Constructing intangible heritage

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*Sérgio Lira & Rogério Amoêda*

The idea of publishing this book emerged from the significance of the theme, as emphasised by the 2003 UNESCO Convention and its first Operational Directives adopted by the General Assembly in June 2008. UNESCO definition, as it was presented in 2003 (article 2 of the Convention)

The «intangible cultural heritage» means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development. (UNESCO, 2003)

is rather eclectic, including a vast range of domains, such as

oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices; rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe and traditional craftsmanship. (UNESCO, 2003)

The safeguarding of this fragile heritage has become one of the priorities of international cooperation, the role of UNESCO being of major importance in this process. At present, 181 elements corresponding to 80 countries are listed as intangible heritage by UNESCO, and the list will certainly grow throughout the next years. In 2008 only, 90 new elements entered the list clearly demonstrating the interest and the urgency of the theme. Furthermore, in all UNESCO priorities established for the period 2008-2013 (Africa, gender equality, small island developing states and linguistic diversity) the issue of intangible cultural heritage is now a strong presence.

Apart from UNESCO, however under the framework of its Convention and Directives, the recognition of intangible heritage, and the consequently undertaken research, is possibly one of the most interesting phenomena on what concerns heritage studies of the present. ICOM (the International Council of Museums), ICOMOS, and other international and national organizations have been emphasising the need to preserve and study intangible heritage and to include it as a concern in professional practices, and to adopt accurate methodologies and guidelines. The much repeated assertion that material culture is often (or even always) meaningless without the corresponding associated information (Vergo, 1989; Woodead & Stansfield, 1994; Dean, 1996) is giving place to another axiom: the so-called "associated information" became an independent cultural entity, gradually gaining autonomy from materiality, and presently standing alone as an independent cultural good (Kavanagh, 1996; Anderson, 2004). The possibility of analysing elements of intangible heritage per se, rather than connected to material culture items, is therefore a recent and stimulating approach within heritage studies.

Museums, while institutions having a core concern with heritage, and their main worldwide organisation (ICOM) have been focusing attention on intangible heritage at least for the last decade. At its general conference in Barcelona (2001) ICOM emphasised the importance of intangible heritage in museums and the urgent need for the definition of accurate methodologies. The year of 2002 was marked by the workshop on museums and intangible heritage in Shanghai and by the CIDOC (ICOM's International Committee for Documentation) world conference, "*Preserving cultures: documenting non-material heritage*" that took place in Porto Alegre. In 2004 the main theme of the ICOM/CIDOC general conference in Seoul was, in fact, intangible heritage.

Other than this laborious activity of ICOM concentrated in the first decade of the 21st century, a number of expressions of what is now considered under the designation of intangible cultural heritage had already been the focus of previous research. The folklore studies of the 20th century are a good example of this. Either under political pressure set by ideological agendas, or as a result of academic work, such studies dealt with intangible heritage, even not being expressly named as such. In spite of evaluative and eventually negative assessments, those studies somehow paved the way for intangible heritage as we consider it today and that work is to be acknowledged when discussing the theme.

One of the uses of intangible heritage with a long lasting tradition is oral history. However, oral history is not to be taken as equivalent to intangible cultural heritage. While oral history seeks to collect and preserve, as historical records, pieces of information obtained from individuals and/or from groups (Thompson, 1988; Dunaway & Baum, 1996; Perks & Thomson, 1998), ICH attempts to study and preserve cultural heritage in straight connection with the people/community of its origin (Archibald, 2004); the process involves protecting traditions and shared knowledge, enabling them to be passed to the future generation (UNESCO 2003), not only the archive preservation of information. Nevertheless the use of oral history as a resource for museum work is rooted both in a conceptual framework established during the second half of the 20th century (Kaplan, 1996) and in an anthropological tradition (Ames, 1992). The Oral History Society and the Oral History Journal, dating back to the early 1970's are another relevant example of the importance oral history gained in the last four decades.

A number of academic works on intangible heritage have been recently published contributing to the discussion and raising fundamental questions on this issue. Perhaps two of the most significant are *Intangible Heritage Embodied* (Ruggles & Silverman, 2009) and *Intangible Heritage* (Smith & Akagawa, 2009). In Ruggles & Silverman (2009) a significant set of international cases are presented, the focus being problems raised by "ephemerality, reiterative performance, and local, regional, and national interests" (Ruggles & Silverman, 2009: v). The book from Smith & Akagawa (2009) departing from the analysis of the 2003 UNESCO Convention further discusses theoretical and practical aspects of intangible heritage:

The first part of the book traces the history of the Convention and identifies the debates and concepts that influenced its development and drafting. The second part of the volume reviews the utility of the ICHC against a range of issues, concerns and practices, while exploring the diversity of the ways intangible heritage may be understood and expressed. (...) The third section takes the philosophical debate beyond the boundaries set by the ICHC and

explores the concept of 'intangible heritage' more broadly. (Smith & Akagawa, 2009: 1-2)

Intangible heritage is thus an issue of the present, which fully entered into the realm of academic discussion during this last decade. For that reason, and for the relevance of the theme it deserves attention and debate. Fostering that debate is the primary intention of this book.

The book is divided into six parts. After an Introduction from the Editors, it starts with the discussion of the theoretical standpoints of intangible heritage, which runs through parts two and three. In the first one a scenario for the use of intangible heritage as an operative concept is drawn, and the second the reader is invited into the discussion on the theoretical conceptualisation of intangible heritage. A presentation of some significant case studies follows in part four, in which cultural manifestations of intangible heritage are analysed. Part five is dedicated to the museology of intangible heritage, one of the prominent shifts in museum theory and practice of the last decades. Finally, in part six conclusions are presented, summarising the main aspects of this book. It was the editors' goal to gather a set of texts that would coherently present the state-of-the-art concerning both the theoretical discussion and empiric practices involving intangible heritage today.

The book opens with a chapter by a renowned author on material culture: Susan Pearce states that "material matters" and all the discussion in this chapter asks the reader to answer the fundamental question on the actual existence of intangible heritage. Attention is drawn to a number of arguments that can be played against the conceptualisation of "intangible heritage" as such. The bottom line could be arguing that all is material, and that even the most "intangible" manifestations of heritage or culture do have a material basis, undeniable and ever present. This challenging approach is followed by Andrew Hall's more institutional contribution, presenting the view of the International Committee of Intangible Cultural Heritage (the ICOMOS committee that began its work in September 2008). In his chapter, "The relationship between physical and intangible heritage", Andrew Hall reviews some of the most problematic criteria for declaring heritage intangible, by drawing on some examples from his fieldwork and professional activity. Trying to answer the crucial question "What do we mean by heritage?" is the core idea of Marmion, Calver and Wilkes contribution to this book. In this chapter and after the theoretical review of some of the main issues concerning the definition of heritage, the authors present a number of examples of individual perception and definition of heritage, by resorting to first-person speech quotations. In the next chapter, Carman discusses the intangibility of some very tangible monuments, analysing intangible meanings behind material warfare memorabilia

The third part of this book received the contributions of Myriam Jansen-Verbeke, Wanda George and Ehab Kamel & Jonathan Hale. The chapter from Jansen-Verbeke goes deeply into the issues of the touristic uses of heritage, namely intangible heritage, arguing that tourist maps can illustrate the process of the tourismification of heritage. George departs from the UNESCO definition in order to analyse processes of ownership, appropriation, commodification and tourism uses of intangible heritage in rural communities. Under the light of the ICOMOS charters Kamel & Hale present the two main conflicts they identify - the conflict of identity and the conflict of conservation – and provide an analysis of their importance, on what concerns the management of World Heritage Sites.

The fourth part includes the chapters on intangible heritage and cultural manifestations. Five major cases from various regions and different cultural meanings are presented. Rimesteer & Jhonson presents Niagara as a case study with a special focus on wine production and related narratives. Osborne contributes to this part with a chapter on the intangible heritage along Canada's upper St. Lawrence, presenting a geographer's vision and emphasizing the "sense of place" of the region. Another very interesting case study is presented by Fernandez Correias in her chapter on the Water Court of Valencia; its long lasting tradition was recently recognised by the UNESCO under the statute of Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Another approach is provided by McCleery & McCleery & Gunn & Hill, on the Scottish case; based on a comprehensive project of mapping intangible cultural heritage in Scotland this chapter presents an up-to-date overview of the results achieved so far. In the final chapter of this part Tan produces a brief historical background of Chinese policy on intangible heritage and discusses the present situation in that country.

For the fourth and fifth part of this book a set of chapters concerning intangible heritage and museums were gathered. Actually it can be argued that museums as one of the most preeminent heritage institutions have a major role to play on what intangible heritage is concerned. Alivizatou examines this question, using the National Museum of the American Indian as a case study; van Dartel, referring to the Tropenmuseum, argues that "there is a story behind everything" and presents the most relevant collections and exhibitions of the museum; from another perspective, Roigé proposes an analysis of the Spanish civil war museums, a recent trend in museology where traumas of the past are addressed as important pieces of memory and, as such, intangible heritage; finally, Stefano & Corsane's chapter raises a number of pertinent questions concerning the role of traditional museums in safeguarding intangible heritage and proposes new ways forward, in conjunction with the implementation of ecomuseum principles.

The book concludes with a chapter by Osborne, the reader being confronted with a primeval and fundamental question: "What's it all about?". From there Osborne discusses further all the issues raised in this volume, exemplifying and confronting perspectives and assumptions. And he ends not that far from the beginning, inquiring "How intangible was it after all?".

Thus, this book intends to present a valid and original contribution to the academic discussion on intangible heritage. From the fundamental issue of defining and conceptualizing Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) to the practical uses of the concept, presenting and analysing cultural manifestations and the museology of ICH, *Constructing Intangible Heritage* aims at covering some of the core issues of the contemporaneous scientific and academic debate on the subject, as it is (and will probably remain for the forthcoming years) one of the most significant themes in heritage studies.

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