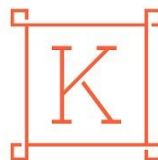




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The Situation of Safeguarding and Actualizing Intangible Cultural Heritage and How it Can be Improved

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

BGI|consulting

KULTUR
kultūros ir turizmo projektai

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The opinion of the authors does not necessarily correspond to the opinion of the contracting authority.

AIMS, SCOPE AND METHODS OF THE STUDY

This is the first empirical study on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Lithuania since 2004, when Lithuania ratified the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereinafter referred to as the Convention).

The study aimed to analyse the actualization of intangible cultural heritage in Lithuania and identify its main trends as well as the reasons behind them. Based on the analysis, the study had to provide recommendations on how the situation can be improved.

The study analyses elements included in the national inventory of the intangible cultural heritage (48 elements) as well as elements included in local inventories (6 elements), in total 54 elements.

The period analysed is between 2016 and 2021.

The data collection methods used in the study include the review of Lithuanian and foreign literature, the analysis of administrative documents, two online surveys of (164 respondents), eight focus group discussions (79 participants) and five case studies. Conclusions were drawn based on methodological triangulation and comparative analysis of data.

THE MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The actualization of cultural heritage is defined as the means to highlight the significance, value, and accessibility of cultural heritage, and encourage contemporary society and (or) local communities to integrate cultural heritage as a valuable resource into everyday cultural, social, and economic life. This multi-faceted term has no equivalent in English, and it is differently interpreted in practice. Therefore, there is a risk of mutual misunderstanding among the actors within the ICH field in Lithuania and internationally.

The national inventory of ICH has proved to be effective as a means of awareness-raising. It encourages communities, groups, and individuals to research their ICH, gain a better understanding of its value and, consequently, rediscover their identity. The study shows that when the element is included in the inventory, its community gains more self-respect and awareness that their tradition is valuable and recognised. The element gets more media coverage, and the communities are encouraged to share it with others.

The communities, groups and individuals have expectations regarding the inclusion of their ICH element in the national inventory. They expect that their element would be more visible, they expect brokerage and mediation to solve their element-specific problems, especially at the municipal level, and they also expect direct or indirect financial support to safeguard their ICH. However, these expectations can not be satisfied. This could be explained by the fact that the aim of the national inventory is limited to the management of data about ICH elements and their monitoring. Thus, it does not correspond to the view of safeguarding ICH provided in the Convention.

An example of drawing a local inventory of ICH shows that this process is effective in raising awareness of local communities and organizations about their ICH. The recognition of ICH elements has encouraged their communities to be more active, attract more members and gain more pride. The process has also stimulated cultural and other organizations to cooperate and generate ideas on the development of new products and services based on ICH.

The study shows that local (municipal) authorities play a significant role in safeguarding their local ICH. They fund cultural organizations, issue permits for traditional festivals and events, support local communities, and recognize local identity. There are examples of cooperation between local authorities and

ICH communities. However, in some cases local authorities lack awareness about the value of ICH and do not support local ICH communities and their initiatives to safeguard ICH.

The analysis and comparison of safeguarding plans and actualization measures of ICH elements show that applicants (to the inventory) and community members see no difference between safeguarding and actualization of ICH, since activities aimed at safeguarding and actualization correspond to a great extent. Education activities and publicity events are predominant measures. Education activities as well as festive activities are considered as the most effective safeguarding and actualization measures. Education activities were named as a funding priority.

Survey data shows that, on the one hand, ICH communities were the primary target group of actualization activities. On the other hand, ICH communities were the most interested in ICH, in comparison with other social groups. Participants of focus group discussions also admitted that awareness-raising of their own community members on the value of their ICH was a challenge.

The analysis of community practices shows that the safeguarding and actualization of ICH is most effective when ICH communities are actively involved, when the ethical principles for safeguarding ICH are respected, when safeguarding and actualization activities are combined and when cooperation between different actors (communities and cultural organizations) takes place.

Awareness-raising activities taken by ICH communities mainly include personal communication and communication through social media. The ICH communities need regular and professional awareness-raising activities, for which they lack human and financial resources. The community members also express the need for more communication, exchange of information and experience.

Survey data shows that actualization activities carried out by ICH communities were funded (in descending order) from municipality funds, from the organization or community funds, from Lithuanian Council of Culture funds, from private funds and other. Three major problems were identified regarding funding. First, the project-based funding alone does not correspond with the need to safeguard recurrent traditional activities. Second, there are considerable difference in the attitudes of ICH communities and members of Lithuanian Council of Culture regarding funding priorities and evaluation criteria of the programme "Ethnic Culture and Intangible Cultural Heritage". Third, the national inventory of ICH and all ICH-related activities of Lithuanian National Culture Centre, which is responsible for the inventory, are funded from the programme of one ICH element. These problems show that safeguarding and actualizing of ICH is given low priority and little visibility at the national level.

While applying to the national inventory, ICH elements are represented mainly by local and national institutions (local administrations, cultural centres, museums, Lithuanian National Culture Centre, and others). In some cases, institutions apply together with communities. Applications submitted by ICH communities make less than a quarter of all applications. This trend shows that a relatively small share of ICH communities is well-organized and able to take responsibility for safeguarding their ICH. Others need support from local or national institutions. The study shows that some local institutions are actively involved in safeguarding ICH and bringing together their communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for ICH communities

Organize and strengthen ICH communities, as they are the basis for safeguarding ICH. In the future we recommend considering applications for the inclusion in the national inventory of scattered traditions only when their communities are organized or the applicant institution takes responsibility to organize it, so that the community itself, not only institution is involved in safeguarding its own heritage.

Support ICH communities in those areas which surpass their competences, i.e. organize national or local publicity campaigns, awareness-raising actions, provide support in solving legal and administrative issues, etc.

Support and promote individual efforts of people who want to pass on their knowledge and traditions, publicly recognize bearers and practitioners of ICH.

Involve the communities, groups and, where applicable, individuals concerned in the process of developing the national ICH inventory, so that it better corresponds their needs.

Recommendations for municipalities

Encourage local municipalities to draw up their local ICH inventories: share experience between municipalities, prepare and regularly update methodological guidelines, organize more awareness-raising events for local authorities and communities, provide consultations.

Recommendations for the sectoral direction. National level.

I. Awareness-raising. Continue drawing up the national inventory, increase its visibility, create the development model of the inventory, raise awareness of ICH communities on the value of their heritage, encourage local municipalities to draw up their local ICH inventories, prepare methodological guidelines for the municipalities, etc.

II. Capacity-building. Strengthen the role of the Lithuanian National Culture Centre as the coordinator of ICH safeguarding and actualization activities, allocate additional human and financial resources to implement this role. Increase the capacity of ICH communities to safeguard and actualize their heritage. To this end, organize capacity-building activities such as workshops, seminars, and the exchange of experience.

III. Promotion. Enhance the visibility of the national inventory, support media campaigns and the broadcasting of ICH using all forms of media. Focus on the qualitative rather than quantitative development of the audience, especially on the involvement of different age groups in the safeguarding and actualizing activities of ICH.

IV. Networking and collaboration. Aim for closer collaboration between the Ministry of Culture and the Lithuanian National Culture Centre on the further development of the national inventory and related activities. Create a network for the exchange of information and experience between local municipalities by providing discussion forums. Encourage collaboration between local cultural and educational institutions and elderly people who safeguard their ICH and/or live in remote areas, in order to give them access to information technologies.

Recommendations for financing

Consider increasing programme-based funding for ICH.

Reconsider the priorities and evaluation criteria of the project-based funding for ICH, so that they better correspond to the needs of ICH communities in safeguarding and actualizing their heritage.

Alter and/or develop new funding measures so that they give priority to collaboration and partnership development projects aimed at horizontal issues which are common to few ICH communities.

Give priority to educational and other activities which build capacities of ICH communities.

Give priority to those ICH funding projects or activities which are aimed at collaboration between state/municipal organizations and ICH communities, including digital networking. Such collaboration should be based on mutual respect.

Give priority to the use of digital technologies and the development of digital skills in creating new projects for the actualization of ICH (e.g., a discussion forum, an event, an information site, etc.).

Build the capacities of practitioners of ICH to raise funding and attract volunteers, support the exchange of experience on these topics.

Explore the fundraising experience of other countries and within other policy areas and try new forms of funding, e.g., crowdfunding, to safeguard and actualize ICH.

Recommendations for the content of ICH policy

To clarify the term „actualization” and bring it closer to the terms used internationally, we recommend splitting it into few other terms:

While talking about actualization as a means to highlight the significance and value of ICH, use the terms awareness-raising and enhancement.

While talking about actualization as a means to highlight the accessibility of ICH, use the term promotion and ensuring/facilitating access.

While talking about actualization as the integration of ICH into everyday cultural, social, and economic life, use the term integration.

Foster broad and inclusive involvement in ICH safeguarding and actualization policy, especially by the institutions, organizations and individuals concerned, as well as foster their understanding about safeguarding ICH as a common responsibility.

Recommendations for the results of ICH policy

Capture and spread the moments of joy which comes because of practicing ICH. Enjoying ICH could be considered as a qualitative result indicator of safeguarding and actualizing ICH.

Data on qualitative results could be collected through feedback on events and other activities from participants directly or through social media, etc.

The main quantitative result of safeguarding and actualizing ICH could be participation in the safeguarding activities. Its indicators could be the number of traditional events, the number of people involved in the organization of traditional events (including volunteers), the number of participants in the traditional events, the number of people who want to start practicing ICH, the number of people who want to learn traditional crafts, acquire traditional instruments, the demand for traditional heritage products, etc.

In the digital area the interest in ICH could be assessed by using such indicators as the number of Facebook groups and their members, the number of views and followers of ICH-related content.

Recommendations for the trans-sectoral direction (integration)

Raise the awareness of cultural staff about the safeguarding of ICH: include the development of skills which are necessary to safeguard and actualize ICH into the training programmes for the staff members of cultural institutions, especially cultural centres, museums, and libraries.

Raise the awareness of contemporary artists about ICH and encourage them, in collaboration with communities, groups or individuals safeguarding ICH, to integrate ICH into contemporary art.

Raise awareness of local authorities about the role of ICH in revealing local identity, organizing its community, and strengthening collaboration.

Integrate the safeguarding and actualizing of ICH that belongs to national minorities into the common policies of Lithuanian heritage. Raise the awareness of national minorities about their ICH in Lithuania and the need to safeguard it.

Aim for better integration and synergy of communication measures of the „National Heritage Product” label and the safeguarding of ICH.

Foster networking and collaboration among ICH practitioners, traditional craft centres, tourism information centres and local businesses.

Foster trans-sectoral collaboration and coordination between the Ministry of Culture and other ministries (the Ministry of Economics and Innovation, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture). Involve their representatives into the Board of Ethnic Culture and Intangible Cultural Heritage.