



Chapter II

Building Information Systems: Identification, Documentation, and Archives



Parameters of Collecting Data for ICH Information Systems

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ABSTRACT

Measures taken in identifying the initial Philippine nomination to UNESCO on the first proclamation of Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity were based on the contingency and the availability of comprehensive information.

Subsequent formulations on the collection of data were based principally on the identification of ICH that is evolving and/or devolving but still viable. Focus is made on the ICH processes that are still viable within the culture of the practicing societies. This is made possible by the fact that domestic and political institutional structures maintain much of what were in traditional cultural heritage, that were not affected by the introduction of world religions that have altered beliefs and values systems. The complication is that there are more than eighty ethno-linguistic groups in the country from which inventories will emanate.

Finally, the manner by which the collection of information is organised along the lines of the structure of Philippine societies, from the municipal level uploaded to the provincial level, then to the relevant national cultural agencies; and finally to

the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, that will maintain the national registry. Both literature search and primary field research will constitute the methods in data collection.

To manifest the processes of identifying and collecting data for ICH inventory undertaking by the Philippines since the year 2000 is best described by:

- i) the initial emergency measures taken by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) in identifying the initial nominations of ICH to UNESCO by the Philippines in the year 2000;
- ii) from the initial experience above, the formulation of the subsequent action plan for the ICH programme of identification and collection; and
- iii) the methodology of identification and collection.

I. The Initial Emergency Measures

The announcement of the submission for nominations for proclamations to the Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage for All Humanity was received by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) in July 2000, with the information that the deadline for the submission was five months hence at the end of December. There was a definite time pressure.

The initial reactions to the announcement were as follows:

- 1) It was recognised that there are quite a few oral and intangible heritage elements of the Philippines that may fit into the stipulated category. However, none had been described and documented as required for nomination. The deadline was too close, so immediate action was needed.
- 2) There was no single structure in the NCCA with an operational budget that could handle this enterprise that had numerous implications and demands, since it was not involved with only one nomination but a continuing concern, not only with respect to UNESCO, but for the country as a whole. There was, therefore, a perceived need for an Intangible Heritage Committee within the

NCCA with an operational budget, but even this would take time to organise.

The immediate response was a request for the NCCA to put together an ad hoc core group to work on the nomination and other attendant concerns. A consultative meeting among experts was called immediately to organise a priority listing of oral and intangible heritage from the stand point of history, artistry, ethnography, sociology, anthropology, etc. The mobilisation of a documentation team was also considered. The results of the literature search was submitted to determine which of the known oral and intangible heritage of the Philippines are most significant and well-documented enough to require minimal preparation in time for submission. The availability of collateral information was also considered. Four were initially selected:

- (1) Hudhud of the Ifugao of the Ifugao province
- (2) Darangen of the Maranao of Lanao del Sur province
- (3) Labaw Donggon/Hinilawod (Sugidanon) of the island of Panay
- (4) Tuwang of the Manuvu of the island of Mindanao

Upon assessment of the available information, the consultative meeting decided on the Hudhud of the Ifugao as the Philippine nomination. The underlying reasons were that

- (1) the epic has an outstanding traditional value that is valid contemporaneously of a nature that can be considered an achievement of humanity,
- (2) there are sufficient available publications about it,
- (3) the area where it is practiced is close enough to enable quick audio-visual documentation without too much logistic problems,
- (4) there are easily identifiable resource persons, and finally,
- (5) there are identifiable practitioners who can participate in the documentation.

Simultaneously, an action plan was drafted and implemented to address this matter and others in the future.

A documentation team was sent to Ifugao province to interact with practitioners who were organised by resource persons. At the same time, the text work was started based on available ethnographic data. The nomination was

submitted in time.

By May 2001, the NCCA was informed that the Hudhud was among the nineteen elements proclaimed as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

II. Identification of ICH in the Philippine Registry of Cultural Properties, Keeping in Mind the Need for Safeguarding Priorities

It was evident that the concerns of the Philippine Registry of Cultural Property (PRECUP) mandated by Republic Act 10066, the Cultural Heritage Act of 2009, where all cultural property, tangible and intangible, are to be inventoried, will include

- (1) ICH still being practiced and evolving or devolving,
- (2) ICH still being practiced but endangered and devolving but still viable,
- (3) ICH still being practiced but endangered and no longer viable, and
- (4) ICH no longer practiced but still in recent living memory.

However, for purposes of the UNESCO Convention, the focus was on numbers 1 and 2, which will be safeguarded, while numbers 3 and 4 would be only for documentation.

There were also the following considerations in identifying bits of ICH information:

- a) The most critical consideration, at least in the Philippines, is that the ICH item is a social process still viable within the practicing society. It should be a social act participated in by members of the culture. Following the UNESCO intent, the ICH item has to be preserved in its proper social context in accordance with tradition;

Secondarily, while it is true that ethnic societies have changed in terms of cultural evolution that has resulted making a great number of intangible

heritage elements no longer functional, all the more it becomes imperative that these be preserved, if at all possible within the context of its traditional milieu.

The first needs to be done as the most desirable since it is the most basic of the tasks. This will give us a transection of what is included in this form of cultural heritage. This will pose difficulties because it will have to contend with contemporary social organisations and structures, in some cases, that will inhibit the re-insertion and development of these traditional practices within the context of traditional practices and societies. This, while desirable, may be wishful thinking if the ideal is aimed at, but can be made practical in certain cases. Much of this stems from the fact that indigenous religions have been supplanted by major world religions like Christianity, Islam, and so on, changing as effect, belief and value systems, but without altering the structure and organisation of the society. Domestic structures in ethnic areas are largely intact, and that is why social processes can still be reintroduced in their proper social context without too many problems.

- b) There is a perceived need to prioritise due to the magnitude of the task considering that there are at least eighty major Philippine ethno-linguistic groups, complicated by more than four hundred subgroupings, each with their particular cultures. More immediate attention will be given to groups that are in a more advance state of acculturation and are in graver danger of cultural degradation.
- c) The focus of the Committee due to expediencies is framed against the five UNESCO domains, although this is limited by available manpower expertise.
- d) This prioritisation considers what intangible cultural heritage forms are most ephemeral and are in gravest danger of disappearing. The program is particularly focused on item letter b above—elements of oral and intangible heritage that are still extant, that although are in danger of disappearing, and that can, however, still be made viable within the context of the culture-bearing society.

- e) Another consideration is the availability of information/data about an item of ICH for documentation. Immediate attention will be given to items that are provided with more information materials since these will be easier accomplished. This is the reason the ICHCAP initially worked on the Ifugao Hudhud and the Maranao, which are both oral expressions but already with sufficient data available.
- f) Much of the intangible heritage of traditional Philippine societies rests on rituals and specialists—Balian, Baylan, Babaylan, Mumbaki, Mumbunong, Man-aalisig, Monkintema, and Monlapu—and epic chanters and other chanters of the various ethnic communities. It is well pointed out that traditional practices are usually founded on or associated with rituals. If and when the above specialists die out, entire segments of the intangible heritage of the Philippines will have also disappeared. This is why it is an imperative to attend to this concern—that practitioners be given the necessary attention before these culture bearers disappear without some assurance that the heritage they bear is preserved if not perpetuated.
- g) The implication of the work of the inventory is virtually the creation of a cultural map of the peoples of the Philippines that will cover the areas defined by UNESCO with respect to intangible cultural heritage.

While the ideal cultural mapping envisioned will include the totality of oral and intangible heritage, the sheer magnitude of the material is daunting so that for practical purposes, parameters need to be drawn to make a comprehensive map within practical terms.

Each culture group would have its own belief systems with different sets and subsets, which are all associated with specific rites and rituals. It is therefore contingent to the person doing the documentation to be discerning enough to be sensitive to the nuances of the culture being studied so that the different intangible heritage categories can be isolated and recorded. As an example, a major subsistence activity like the agricultural ritual cycle would have subsets rites.

- h) It is also true that not all the members of a culture group would know all the

aspects of that culture, and the specificity of whatever knowledge is possessed varies in degrees from person to person. It is important that a wide range of data gathering is resorted to.

- i) There are uniquely or jointly owned ICH forms, so it is necessary that inventories can differentiate between them.
- j) If there is the question as to whether an item is a piece of intangible heritage, this has to be documented first, and then the issue can be resolved afterwards.

III. Methodology of Documentation of ICH

There was the need to be able to identify and make an inventory of existing and viable items of ICH whether evolving or devolving among the eighty or so ethno-linguistic groups in the Philippines. Most of those known are found in different publications from multitudinous sources and need to be collated. The first task was to go over available literature and identifying significant items of intangible cultural heritage and making a tentative listing.

- a) Initially, the collected information from literature is typed. (At present, there are some 390 pages of roughly 260 intangible cultural heritage elements, with thumbnail sketches, randomly covering all the domains).
- b) Simultaneously, a library is being organised, collating ethnographic literature not yet on hand to augment the collection with the aim of completing an ethnographic coverage of all the ethno-linguistic groups in the country.

This is a long-term programme that will include the collation of existing literature. This will give us a transect of what is included in this form of cultural heritage. There are a great number of different forms of intangible heritage with existing examples. However, a comprehensive compilation of

these forms and specific examples has to be organised. Although there had been enumeration in literature, there has really been no listing that can be said to be a last word on the subject.

There is a large body of documentary material on intangible cultural heritage—publications on some Philippine epics, folklore, and other forms of oral literature—but much more remains to be done. There is little textual documentation of specific major rituals of different ethnic groups. The Ifugao is one of the most documented of ethnic groups, and much has been written about their belief systems and rituals; most of these are very cursory in nature. It is known, for instance, that theirs is probably the richest and most complex religion in the country and that they have a pantheon of some two thousand deities. Much of this, however, is not well-documented and this is more especially true in terms of the myths that are the bases for these innumerable deities. The text of the rituals, which are epics in themselves, are largely undocumented. We do not know actually how many Hudhuds chants there are, or what the Alim really is. The Darangen of the Maranao has never been completed. This is true in all areas of the country.

Action Plan

The Phase I.

The Action Plan involved a nation-wide registration of cultural property inventories that initially included the following

- a) The inventories already existing in the five national cultural agencies of the country will be prioritised since these are bodies of collection with already collated data that have been researched and validated:
 - i. Cultural Center of the Philippines
 - ii. National Museum
 - iii. National Library
 - iv. National Archives of the Philippines
 - v. Commission on National Language

- b) The main issue about the above inventories is that the formats of each are different from all the rest, such that the main task is to be able to integrate them all into a single format with the main difference between each being the number of fields in each of the specialised inventories.

The Phase II.

The next level of action will be the regional inventory. This will involve the inventory done at the local government level. In the Philippines, this will be the provincial government structure composed of any number of municipalities with their respective *barangays* and *sitios*. However, for practical purposes, the most viable work unit within the inventory is the municipality (covering the lower levels) where control will be more manageable. Moreover, the results of the municipal inventories will in fact automatically constitute the provincial tallies.

Corollary to this is that, since the concept of intangible cultural heritage is relatively unfamiliar, there is an urgent need to organise an orientation program to acquaint the authorities on the issues of identification and collation of ICH items among the various ethno-linguistic groups. This orientation program is envisioned to be done at the level of the province, bringing in the relevant municipal officials who will implement the inventory in their respective municipal levels. It is envisaged that these local officials, in turn, will orient local leaders among the ethno-linguistic groups about intangible cultural heritage.

This orientation program will include the all-important compatibility among the various inventories in term of format so that all these can be integrated with the databases at the national level, and depending on the nature of the inventories, these will have to be uploaded to the relevant national cultural agencies in the database format, which have been made to conform with each other.

Once the format is established, the collection of information can begin to be initiated. The inventories from the municipal levels will be uploaded and compiled at the provincial level, where these will be validated and verified. In turn, these provincial inventories will be uploaded to the national level, depending on the relevant national cultural agency. Finally, the inventories will be deposited in the Philippine Registry of Cultural Properties (PRECUP) maintained by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA).