



Keynote Paper



ICH Safeguarding Activities in Sustainable Development

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I would first like to thank the International Information and Networking Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO for its excellent initiative in organising this meeting regarding the notion of sustainable development in relation to intangible cultural heritage.

I have known Korea for more than thirty years now. I have always been impressed by the way in which your country manages to reconcile tradition and modernity, how, in respect of its heritage and its roots, it has preserved its traditional forms of expression and assured their development while promoting contemporary creation that is indissociably linked to the specificities of Korean culture. That's why I have always cited Korea as an example to be followed and respected. And for this reason, over the past four decades, I have worked to make the intangible cultural heritage of Korea better known in France. Thanks to the support of Professor Kim Jeong Ok and the directors of the Korean Cultural Center in Paris, I have presented to French audiences, since 1974, several dozen performances such as Bongsan Mask Dance, Pansori, Sungmu, Salp'uri, Ssikkim Kut, Son Mu, Court Dances, Gagok, Samul Nori, different types of puppet and theatre performances, and so many others, offering a better understanding of the culture of your country to audiences who had been unaware of its richness.

In this keynote speech, I will simply touch on a few issues that, I am sure,

others among you will be addressing in your presentations. The concept of sustainable development is not a new one. Some researchers put its origins at the beginning of the last century, but it is only relatively recently that it has been formalised internationally. In fact it is only in 1987 that the United Nations released the Brundtland Report, which included the following definition: ‘Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. During the drafting of the convention for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, this notion was omnipresent in people’s minds because it was one of the foundations of another convention, which was in preparation at the time, the one addressing cultural diversity. This latter convention immediately included it among its objectives and guiding principles: ‘Being aware that cultural diversity creates a rich and varied world, which increases the range of choices and nurtures human capacities and values, and therefore is a mainspring for sustainable development for communities, peoples, and nations’.

It may seem surprising then that in the convention that interests us here, the one for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, the term *sustainable development* only appears once, at the very end of the definition of the intangible cultural heritage, in the body of a list of negative limits on what can be considered intangible cultural heritage: ‘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.’

We find sustainable development mentioned in only two of the 169 Operational Directives:

In Chapter II—The Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund, directive 73: ‘No contributions may be accepted from entities whose activities are not compatible with the aims and principles of the Convention, with existing international human rights instruments, with the requirements of sustainable development or with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals. The Secretariat may decide to put specific cases of contributions before the Committee.’

In Chapter IV—Raising awareness about intangible cultural heritage and use of the emblem of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural

Heritage, directive 111: ‘The media are encouraged to contribute to raising awareness about the importance of the intangible cultural heritage as a means to foster social cohesion, sustainable development and prevention of conflict, in preference to focusing only on its aesthetic or entertainment aspects’.

The term *development* is cited on two other occasions [directives 109 (e) and 123 (f)].

Let us admit from the outset that this is a negligible quantity compared with all of the documents covered by the Convention and the Operational Directives. The question we must ask is why there is so little mention of sustainable development within the framework of this convention. But perhaps we should ask another question first: Is there a relationship between the intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development?

To be able to answer this second question, we must first agree on what we mean by sustainable development. As you know, there are now different approaches to this concept, which is even challenged by some people. As for me, I will go with this supplement to the definition of the Brundtland report, as it was established in 2012 by the Association française de normalisation (Official French Standardisation Organisation, a member of the International Organisation for Standardisation), which specifies that a state is said to be ‘sustainable’ if ‘the components of the ecosystem and their functions are preserved for the present and future generations’. In this definition, the ‘components of the ecosystem’ include, in addition to human beings and the physical environment, plants and animals. For human beings, the concept suggests equilibrium in satisfying essential needs: economic, environmental, social, and cultural conditions of existence within a society.

As intangible cultural heritage is indissociably linked to the essential social and cultural needs of a society and must be preserved for the present and future generations, is it an inherent part of sustainable development?

But what intangible cultural heritage are we talking about? There is confusion—very unfortunate in my opinion—which is in the process of becoming established in the very use of the expression ‘intangible cultural heritage’. While it is true that this expression has been in fashion and has been an unquestionable success since its use by UNESCO and it has replaced things that were previously covered by various other terms, it is important to remember that it is not limited

solely to intangible cultural heritage as defined by the terms of the Convention for its safeguarding. There are two distinct approaches: an anthropological approach and another approach governed by the norms established to include a part of the intangible cultural heritage within the framework of a convention that is intended to safeguard the elements of this heritage that are thought to correspond to these norms. In other words, the fact that elements of intangible cultural heritage do not correspond to the norms adopted by the international community in 2003 cannot in any way exclude them from the intangible cultural heritage as such. A football player remains a football player even if he does not belong to a football club. The same is true for the intangible cultural heritage: its elements will always remain part of it even if they do not fall within the framework of the 2003 Convention.

The issue was already raised at the time of drawing up the Convention regarding a subject still thornier than sustainable development: mutual respect among communities, groups, and individuals. Since the creation of the universe, history has been composed of unceasing struggles between individuals, groups, tribes, communities, and nations, and their ritual and performance practices, their literature, and all of the forms of expression of these individuals, groups, etc. were nourished by them and are the reflection of them. I would even say that, along with love, they are their main source of inspiration. Not all of this intangible cultural heritage falls within the framework of the Convention, and as such, it cannot be safeguarded by the international community, but nothing forbids them from being safeguarded by each of the sovereign states that are concerned about preserving their national heritage. The same is true for sustainable development. Not all of these ancient expressions are necessarily compatible with a concept born just a few years ago. We cannot claim that the people practicing a given form of expression were concerned, at the time of the creation of this expression, about making sure that it preserved for the future an ecological equilibrium that was only understood intuitively, if at all.

Let's take a commonplace example, the celebration of Christmas in some parts of Europe. This holiday involves families acquiring Christmas trees for their homes that they decorate and illuminate before throwing them into the garbage a few days later. This tradition of Christmas trees led to cutting down millions of trees every year. Over the course of several decades, nobody worried about this until a recent rise in ecological awareness led to this tradition being modified

and synthetic trees replacing natural pine trees. (It is interesting to note, about this example that there is also a different approach to this question: planting trees specially dedicated to that practice, creating jobs and economic growth). In the same way, various vegetable products or those drawn from animals are used in the making of instruments, objects, and clothes linked to traditional cultural practices without their actors being aware of the damage that they could be causing. It would be naive to think, believe, or lead people to believe that these practices can be reconciled with sustainable development. We must therefore make a distinction between the intangible cultural heritage that cannot necessarily be reconciled with sustainable development and those of its elements that are and thus can be covered by the Convention of 2003.

This brings us back to the question that I asked at the very beginning of this presentation: Why is sustainable development so rarely mentioned in the text of the Convention and its Operational Directives? This is in fact a false question because there is no need to repeat things for them to be heard. The introduction of the concept—a new one at the time—in an inter-governmental Convention was in itself a major first, and it reflected the attention that was paid to the evolution in thinking in this regard. The single mention of this concept, unique but absolutely imperative and unavoidable, was sufficient to draw the attention of the States to the need to comply with this if they wanted to benefit from the advantages of the Convention. These advantages are certain with regard to the specific subject of the Convention: safeguarding intangible cultural heritage elements, but the advantages are less so for what has become, unfortunately, the visible part of this Convention: registration on the Representative List. As some of you know, I have constantly opposed these excesses, which go against the very spirit of the Convention. But that is another subject that will require serious thinking, and I think that some academic and scientific initiatives are already being taken in this regard.

In closing, let me just thank you for your attention and wish you all success for our discussions.