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**Chapter 2.**  
How to Safeguard the Value of ICH?

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# Sustainability and Cultural Diversity in Safeguarding ICH: Tools and Perspectives'

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Peter SEITEL

Senior Folklorist Emeritus  
Smithsonian Institution

The primary value of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) lies in its ability to create locally based knowledge that performers, practitioners, and other participants use to contemplate, understand, and act upon their lives. Its scope is utilitarian as well as spiritual, ethical as well as aesthetic. Through ICH, local participants realise a wide range of benefits—ranging from practical techniques to affirmations of individual identity and group solidarity. National cultural institutions that programmatically recognise this value develop policy both to help safeguard local ICH and to promote cultural diversity, an ethical and political principle that recognises the creativity, beauty, wisdom, and legitimacy of the variety of human cultures. Cultural diversity at a national level can help safeguard local practices of ICH.

This presentation addresses these two areas of institutional policy: on one hand, the safeguarding of local ICH, and on the other hand, the development of methods to promote cultural diversity at the national level. A central concern in collaborating with local communities to safeguard their ICH is sustainability—the capacity of local ICH practices to maintain themselves over time. To assist

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1) I wish to thank James Early of the Smithsonian Institution for reading a draft of this presentation and providing many useful suggestions.

policy development in this area, I propose a conceptual framework that enriches the idea of ICH expressed in the 2003 Convention by employing the concept of social institutions. I hope to show that this idea, which is already implicit in the Convention, offers a perspective that facilitates the observation, analysis, discussion, and planning of sustainability in ICH.

The second part of the presentation describes and offers an institutional method for promoting the value of cultural diversity at a national level—a digital tool that facilitates the curated dissemination of recorded ICH performances. Curating performances, that is, framing them in an engaging, respectful, and understandable way enhances their ability to communicate their value. It helps to legitimise their ICH practices at a national level and promotes a place for ICH and its practitioners in a national cultural dialogue.

## I. A Wider Conceptual Frame: Social Institution

It was certainly necessary to broaden the understanding of ICH stated in UNESCO's 1989 Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore to develop the 2003 Convention. I believe it is also necessary to broaden the understanding of ICH stated in the 2003 Convention to develop policy for collaborating with local communities to safeguard ICH in a sustainable way.

In the 1989 Recommendation, ICH (then termed folklore or traditional culture) is defined as 'the totality of tradition-based creations of a cultural community'. The substantive 'creation' is then qualified according to some aspects of folklore theory, and examples are given: ICH is those creations 'expressed by a group or individuals and recognised as reflecting the expectations of a community in so far as they reflect its cultural and social identity; its standards and values are transmitted orally, by imitation or by other means. Its forms are, among others, language, literature, music, dance, games, mythology, rituals, customs, handicrafts, architecture, and other arts'. What is to be emphasised here is that ICH is defined as 'creations', that is, products or items, the results of cultural processes. The recommendations that followed in that document are mostly aimed at safeguarding this cultural patrimony by recording and collecting these products

and preserving them in archives and other repositories.

By the time of the 1999 evaluation of this Recommendation and in the years leading up to the 2003 Convention, folklore or traditional culture had been renamed intangible cultural heritage, the translation of a Japanese term promulgated in 1950 as part of a program for safeguarding important features of Japanese culture in the face of Westernisation. UNESCO's strategic intent became the development of policy to preserve the living cultural forms, the processes of cultural production, not merely its products. A UNESCO definition of ICH was required as a basis for this policy.

Thus, the 2003 Convention states that ICH is to be defined as '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 recognise as part of their cultural heritage'. Practices are granted pride of place; knowledge is present (but its crucial relationship with practice is not noted); some products of ICH processes are mentioned (representations, expressions, objects, and artefacts, in addition to knowledge); and the very important feature of cultural space in which ICH practices are performed. At the center of the definition, however, are the practices of ICH, and these are the objects of the policy prescribed in the Convention. Broadening the perspective on ICH from a narrow focus on cultural products to a wider vision centred on processes informs the formulation and implementation of safeguarding policies for living cultural practices.

Broadening the perspective even further, we can understand living ICH practices, which produce songs, rituals, dramas, crafts, agricultural techniques, medicinal treatments, etc., as patterned forms of social interaction that have a relatively stable structure that persists over time and are shaped by cultural values. That is, ICH practices can be understood as social institutions<sup>2</sup> with particular roles, norms, and modes of material exchange. Like other social institutions, living ICH practices reproduce themselves through recruitment, training, and the possible control of access to non-shared information. Like other social institutions, they help to reproduce society as a whole by creating the utilitarian and aesthetic

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2) Institution is used here in a social anthropological sense, as set forth by Malinowski and others; however, its use here does not imply a strictly functionalist theory of social organisation.

forms that sustain social life and the ethical knowledge that informs it. Like all social institutions, they coexist with other institutions in various and potentially complex relationships: interdependence through various kinds of economic and/or strategic support or as smaller institutions included within larger ones.

Understanding ICH practices as social institutions makes several things clear: First, that change in ICH is inevitable. As social institutions transform themselves to meet the needs of a developing social and natural environment, other institutions adjust their practices to actively respond to the systemic change. A living ICH practice does the same. Second, ICH practices become endangered when components of a formerly reproducing institution become weak or inoperative—local audiences do not provide sufficient support for performances; local markets do not support craft; recruitment processes of performers, craft workers, or healers do not replace the membership; or the loss of an exchange relationship with providers of raw material curtails craft production.

Further, an institutional perspective can lead to a better appreciation of the nature of the relationship between local culture bearers and the national cultural institutions that seek to safeguard their ICH. These institutions—like the Smithsonian Institution, ICHCAP, or a development agency—can be termed ‘collaborating institutions’, and in this perspective, their role is to safeguard ICH by planning with local communities to provide the institutional components a local ICH practice needs in order to sustain and reproduce itself. But an institutional perspective suggests that this new functional relationship between the institutions most likely leads to change in ICH—and in the collaborating institution as well if it learns from its practice and is democratically organised—just as any change in the social environment may cause a particular institution to change. This poses the question: as members of collaborating institutions that plan to work with local communities in safeguarding ICH, what kinds of change are acceptable to us and what kinds unacceptable?

Intended and unintended cultural change is a complex topic, with implications for project planning and evaluation on one hand and for personal and professional ethics on the other. Broadly, though, I think we can state that among the acceptable changes would be those that encourage the cessation of ICH practices that violate international ethical norms, also probably acceptable would be those that encourage the valorisation of older, indigenous aesthetic

forms over those more recently imported into the local ICH from international media. But more importantly, I think we can agree that any change originating in a relationship with a collaborating institution would be unacceptable if it weakened the production of utilitarian, aesthetic, and ethical knowledge in ICH processes. It would be unacceptable, for example, to decrease the autonomy of ICH practitioners by subordinating them to a larger institutional process—like poorly run festivalisation or cultural tourism—in which practitioners may neither augment their knowledge-creating practice nor gain sufficient material support. In the safeguarding of ICH that is informed by an institutional perspective, the highest value is placed on sustainability, that is, the ability of an ICH process to maintain and reproduce itself as its participants continue to create the knowledge that addresses local historical conditions.

There is a further implication to an institutional perspective on safeguarding ICH. Because social institutions, including those of ICH, are complex and because relationships among institutions are interwoven, the possible strategies for collaborating with local communities to assist ICH practices to attain sustainability are many. Those that immediately come to mind include, in addition to direct subsidy of ICH practices, the use of communications media to provide performance venues and marketing for crafts production, media recordings of various types and for various purposes, the use of microfinance and cultural tourism, and the periodic housing of ICH processes in educational institutions. The multiplicity of possible approaches to the sustainable safeguarding of ICH spans a variety of types of collaborating institutions: national cultural institutions, non-governmental organisations, educational institutions, development agencies, local arts agencies, etc. It would thus seem that a crucial area of safeguarding practice would be lively cooperation among collaborating institutions, from the sharing of project information to the joint planning and execution of particular projects.

## II. An Empathic Dialogue: Cultural Diversity in the Dissemination of ICH

Cultural diversity names an element of ethical knowledge that grows from an embrace of cultural difference as a defining human condition. It developed as a concept in a historical context shaped by decolonisation, globalisation and resistance to it, identity politics, and the continuing political evolution of multi-ethnic states. Cultural diversity informs social strategies that promote equal participation in society and lead towards empathetic understanding and mutual respect and away from dogmatic ethnocentrism and the conflict it supports. Cultural diversity is taken to be the basis of legal rights of individuals and groups to practice aspects of their culture, of special commercial regulations for particular cultural goods and services, and of responsibilities of corporations to create conditions for equal participation by all constituent groups in a multiethnic state. For national cultural institutions and others that engage in ICH safeguarding, cultural diversity promotes inclusion for all culture-bearing groups in all aspects of institutional practice not only in the provision of cultural content but also in its interpretation and its production in institutional representations and in the policymaking and administration of the cultural institution itself. Cultural diversity also sets a goal of developing ways to disseminate representations of ICH so as to promote mutual respect and understanding. It is in pursuit of that goal that I present the software I have developed.

Disseminated representations of ICH can work to support mutual respect and understanding when they encourage a relationship of empathy—an imaginative and intellectual connection between the feelings and ideas expressed in a particular performance or other artwork and those present in the observer. ICH can be disseminated in ways that encourage this ethical and aesthetic dialogue.

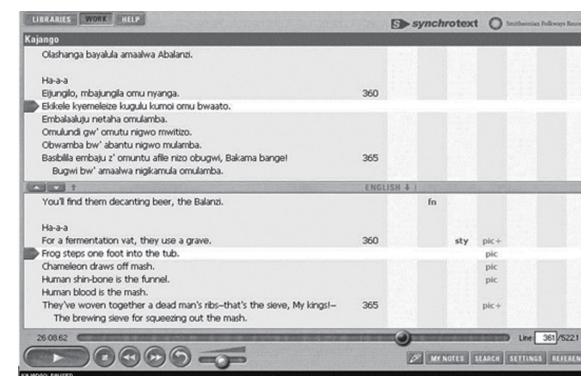
The digital tool I have developed, called Synchronotext, supports this empathic dialogue. It encourages one's engagement through an interactive viewing experience, and it strengthens one's intellectual and imaginative grasp by providing multidimensional information on the social and historical context in which an ICH performance was created.

The current version of Synchronotext software is available via [www.performedwords.org](http://www.performedwords.org). The best way to experience how Synchronotext works, if you

have a Windows-based PC and broadband access to the Internet, is to see it at the following link: [www.performedwords.org/synchrottext.htm](http://www.performedwords.org/synchrottext.htm) Your computer needs to be equipped with Apple Quicktime, and you may be prompted to install Adobe Shockwave; both are free programs downloadable from the Internet. You need do this only on the first time you visit the site.

To get an idea of Synchronotext if you have a Mac, you unfortunately can only view a Flash tutorial. The link to this is at the bottom-right of the introductory page [www.performedwords.org](http://www.performedwords.org)—a planned update will run on a Mac as well.

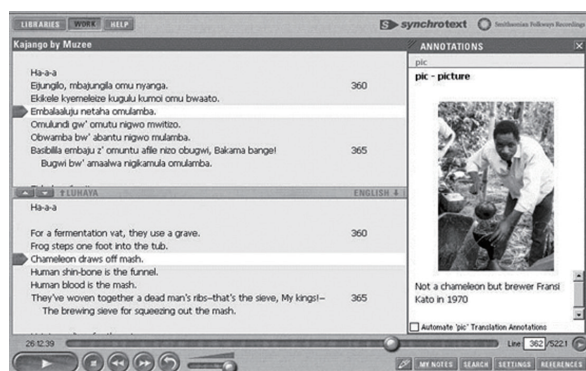
If you do not have a broadband link to the Internet, I offer the following image:



Here is the Synchronotext player with an audio file loaded and paused, as you can see, a little more than 26 minutes into a sung narrative, on line number 361. (The player also handles video files as demonstrated below). The example comes from Kajango as sung by the bard Muzee; it is one of the heroic ballads in the Haya heroic ballad library on the Performed Words website. I recorded this performance during my initial field research in north-western Tanzania, 1968 to 1970.

The screen has the following features. In the large top window is a transcription of the audio recording in the Luhaya language, which is written with the Roman alphabet. In the bottom window is an English translation. As the audio file plays, the transcript and translation scroll upward automatically in unison; the paired corresponding lines are indicated by pointers on the left margin of each window. In the columns on the right are two- and three-letter abbreviations of words that constitute links to particular kinds of contextual information: 'pic' refers to pictures or images of items or activities mentioned in the ballad; 'fn' refers

to footnotes that provide local historical and cultural information and explications of poetic images; ‘sty’ refers to stylistic commentary that analyses poetic forms in the ballad. The number of possible comment categories and of individual comments on each line is unlimited and is determined by the editor of a particular presentation. When a user selects a particular comment, the player pauses and another window opens, like this one:



Here the fantastic image in line 362, ‘Chameleon draws off mash’, part of a larger sequence in which reptilian spirits brew beer, is explicated by a photo of this part the brewing process demonstrated by a neighbour.

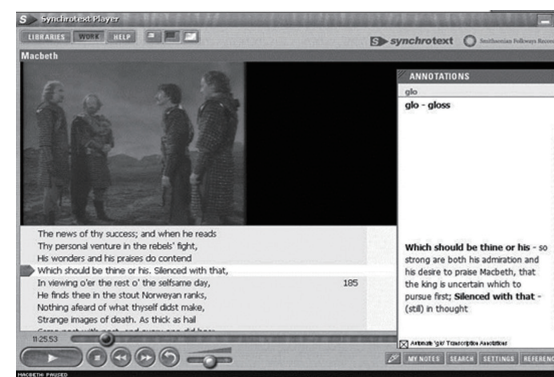
The observer controls the flow of the bard’s performance with the player controls at the bottom of the screen and chooses the commentary he or she wishes to see. Controls at the bottom move the point of playback forward or backward on a line-by-line basis. Other methods of navigation are also possible and are visible on the screen.

A viewer is thus engaged in playing and pausing the performance, in deciding what kinds of supporting information he or she would like to have, in repeating a passage if desired. The viewer integrates the sound of a recorded performance with its transcription, translation, and explication within an experiential framework that is collaboratively created by both performer and viewer. The linked commentary is crucial to this experience, for it generally contains the knowledge that a performer expects an audience to have as he performs for them—knowledge of themes and patterns based on other local texts, practices of ICH, and historical events. That is, the commentary contains local expert knowledge that supports an

engaged viewer’s powers of intellect and imagination for an empathetic dialogue with the represented performance.

Synchronotext can also be used to encourage this dialogue with video recordings of ICH. Consider the following screen shot:

This shows a video presentation paused with a commentary window open displaying a textual comment. This particular presentation has been published, stored, and played locally, from a CD-ROM or other storage device, not from the Internet.



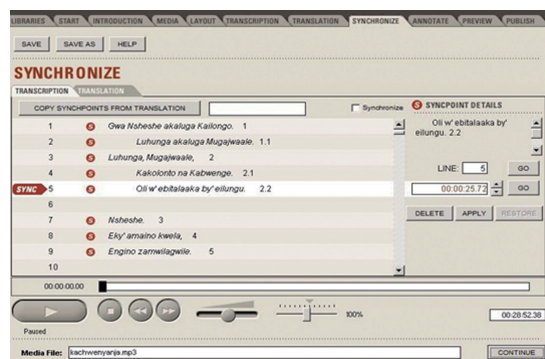
Three small button controls in the upper left of the video player select the image size; a larger image reduces the number of adjacent lines of transcript that appear. The small box at the bottom left of the open annotations window has been checked so that during playback the player automatically displays a particular kind of comment when encountered. The Elizabethan English of this presentation of Macbeth is glossed automatically, when needed, as the player runs with the annotations window open.

Synchronotext presentations are assembled with a separate editing program, which can create presentations to be played both locally from a CD-ROM disk or other storage media and on the Internet. These features enable Synchronotext to be used in areas where broadband access is not available.

Synchronotext’s separate publisher is freely downloadable from <http://www.performedwords.org/publisher/synchropub.zip>. Separating publishing and playing functions simplifies both; the software is intended to enable people with only moderate computer skills to assemble synchronised presentations. How easy is the



process? Here is a screenshot of the publisher:



The tabs across the top of the screen access separate work spaces, each designed to facilitate a particular set of publishing tasks. In Libraries, one begins or recalls a synchronised work for editing. In Start and Introduction, an editor composes two pages that name, give the screen credits for, and introduce the synchronised work. In Media, one specifies and imports the recording to be synchronised. In Layout, one chooses the video-image size the player will display on opening. In Transcription and Translation one enters or imports the texts and coordinates their formats so that they will scroll together exactly.

The figure shows the player open to the Synchronize tab. In this space, the editor starts the media playing with the controls near the bottom and inserts 'synchpoints'—media time-code values that specify points of correspondence between text and sound. This is done on the fly by pressing the keyboard spacebar at the desired moments. One reviews this process, correcting and/or fine tuning the time-code values by entering numbers in the window on the right about half-way down or using the arrows to move the synchpoint forward or backward in 1 second increments. The scale at bottom centre decreases the playback speed if desired to assist synchronisation.

On the Annotations screen one specifies the categories and formats of commentary and enters individual notes. Finally, one uses the Preview tab to see how it all goes together, and the Publish tab to choose the Internet or local storage media as the destination of the published work. The separation of tasks on different tabbed screens and the linear progression of the tabbed processes from

left to right are designed to simplify publishing as much as possible.

Sychrotex software is designed for use by both scholars and local communities. Its player provides an interactive interface for recorded ICH enriched by contextual information implicit in the performance. Presented in this way, the performances can engage a user's intellect and imagination to create conditions for the empathic understanding that supports cultural diversity. But the player also can contribute to the mission of archives that collect ICH. Sychrotex—or other software like it—can provide a creative interface between archival holdings and a variety of users, particularly the practitioners of local ICH. Recorded performances annotated with implicit contextual information can provide community members not only cultural memory banks and libraries of classic performers, styles and repertoires for upcoming performers but also educational materials adaptable to a variety of learning contexts. The archival interface would of course serve scholars and, as we have seen, the general public as well.

Sychrotex is functional, but far from perfect. Obvious flaws are its lack of support for East Asian writing systems and for the Macintosh operating system. It needs its planned upgrade.

Sychrotex is a tool for promoting cultural diversity and for supporting local ICH practices. It links ICH to broader information networks through an interface tailored specifically for its needs. I hope you can use Sychrotex, or at least the ideas in it, in your practice.