
**Towards Efficient Roles of NGOs
for Safeguarding ICH
in the Asia-Pacific Region**

Chapter 1

**Identities and Contribution of
ICH NGOs**

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ICH NGOs in Scotland and Their Contribution to the Development of Identity at a Local, Regional and National Level

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2014 is an important year for Scotland as it hosts a year of Homecoming, the Commonwealth Games, and an historic Referendum in September, where the nation will vote on whether to become an independent Scotland breaking away from the rest of the UK. The people of Scotland have a strong sense of national identity, which has undoubtedly played a part in the journey to the referendum.

What Scotland projects internationally of this national identity can, however, be overly simplistic and one dimensional, and does not reflect the true richness and diversity of cultural life that exists in Scotland today. Scotland is best known for whiskey, golf, and castles, but there is much more beyond this with a rich cultural legacy creating a vibrant living culture, be it in the island cultures of Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles, or in the Scottish Borders. Communities have distinct cultural traditions and practices that collectively make up identities on a local, regional and national level throughout Scotland. NGOs are central to the delivery of this cultural provision, with museums being just one example of community involvement, where over half the workforce for this sector is made up of volunteers working through NGOs. Museums Galleries Scotland is working in partnership

with Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland to strengthen the networking among NGOs in Scotland and as a potential mechanism for future capacity building.

Identity in Scotland is currently a hotly debated topic in the run-up to the referendum, as those living in Scotland decide whether they would like to define their identity in the context of a United Kingdom or an independent Scotland. Scottish, as defined by the Scottish Government, is inclusive, not based on ethnicity, but rather on if one would wish to be self-defined as Scottish, living and working in the geographical location of Scotland. The notion of being Scottish will continue whether the people of Scotland vote for independence or not; what will potentially change is the relationship with the rest of the UK. Identity is, however, not just defined by place or sense of place; one can have multiple identities many of which are related to cultural practices, such as family name or being a member of a particular group. These identities coexist alongside notions of nationhood, and one can define oneself as being from more than one place, such as family, village, region, and so on. These are not mutually exclusive identities together—they are how we describe ourselves, who we are, and where we are from. Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) NGOs deliver on the ground at all levels of community and play a vital and active role in helping to shape these varying identities.

When we describe our place, we do so perhaps by starting with a map but the names on the map have been given by people and the boundaries and areas have been drawn by people; more usually we describe who we are with reference to what our place is known for. Our identity is often described in reference to cultural activities that take place in a location, so for example in describing oneself as Scottish, one would make mention of the practice of making whiskey, playing golf, or wearing kilts if talking to an international audience. One is more likely to describe oneself on a day-to-day basis as being associated with something such as the things we like to do. This might be being part of an ethnic grouping, defined by its language and traditions or it maybe something as simple as being in the local choral society, traditional Scottish dancing class, or knitting group, all of which will doubtably involve NGOs in the delivery.

NGOs in Scotland and the rest of the UK have a wide ranging role in both the defining and delivery of identity at many levels. Culture and its expressions are one of the main anchor points by which we define and describe our identity. The mediums for cultural participation are varied and far ranging, going beyond

what is on offer through state channels. That said, in Scotland, local government does have a statutory responsibility to provide cultural services and citizens have an entitlement to culture; however it is not defined in statute as to what this service should be. In the cultural heritage sector in Scotland, there is a high prevalence of NGOs, and the development of new provisions is often out with the state. There is great diversity of culture at the local level that is very much community led, there is then a jump to national provision with only a basic regional infrastructure in place with few larger local authority services. This infrastructure means that cultural provisions are very organic and community driven, but they do present challenges in ensuring that communities can access a cultural provision.

There is a very strong voluntary sector in Scotland, and people are generally willing to give their time to cultural delivery. In the museum sector, this equates to over 50 per cent of the workforce being volunteers. This large community participation in the creation and delivery of cultural provision is reflected in other cultural and heritage areas. The infrastructure on the ground also reflects this community-driven approach through the large number of NGOs that make up provisions. In the museum sector alone, the majority of museums are NGOs.

Museums are well established as platforms for the exploration of identity as well as places where identity or identities are showcased. Such a strong infrastructure of NGOs implies that it is communities who are shaping their own identities rather than a state intervention through local or national government. As there is a lack of a strong local government regional infrastructure in Scotland, and with geographically dispersed communities in the Highlands and Islands, there has been a need to adopt a different approach, with instead the development of an infrastructure of networks and partnerships. This has been a more appropriate approach for the NGOs rather than a formal state-driven infrastructure. The development of such networks and partnership forums has been facilitated in the case of museums and galleries by Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) and for the arts by such organizations as Voluntary Arts Scotland.

A networked approach between NGOs is growing, perhaps made easier because of the smaller scale of Scotland, with a population of less than six million, it is perhaps easier for a strong partnership culture to develop. There is also a tradition in Scotland of a very strong sense of family identity based on what was the 'clan' system with communities still adhering to a sense of identity around family name

or clan. The clan or extended family are usually identified with a particular location where the clan chief would reside. Traditions around family such as the clan name or a distinctive design for a 'tartan' continue to be practiced with families commissioning kilts to be made for family occasions as a regular practice sustaining a 'kilt maker' in most towns.

There is a great range of NGOs associated with intangible cultural heritage practice existing with sometimes very separate networks, MGS has recently developed a partnership with another support body to try and bring some of these NGOs and ICH practitioners together to see if there are areas of potential collaboration. The partnership is with Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland (TRACS), which brings together individual practitioners and NGOs from storytelling, traditional music, and dance. Working together, MGS and TRACS are developing a series of events to bring people together to explore where there might be shared identities across organizations and arts forms. One pilot event has been held to date in Inverurie, which was very successful as people explored the links of some of their shared content. Further events are planned, and the next one will be in the Scottish Borders. The events are held on a Saturday to be more accessible; the only challenge with this is ensuring that the date does not clash with major ICH events, such as the 'riding of the marches,' which are held in the Borders throughout the summer.

A piece of action research is also planned through the medium of the seminars to explore how the different practitioners approach their shared ICH content. The pilot session in Inverurie was a platform to introduce the context of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage to practitioners to see if the Convention was a useful framework relevant to their own work and a platform on which to share work across the mediums. The Convention was enthusiastically received by all the practitioners across traditional music, storytelling, dance, and museums, which is a promising start for the future seminars. The action research will look how different domains of practitioners approach shared content, such as a place or a series of objects, and whether this inspires a different perspective of the content and how that is reflected in a new shared identity.

Since 1999, Scotland has been a devolved nation and has developed its own cultural policies. In the run-up to devolution, culture played a major role in helping

to define identity, and there was resurgence in the notion of Scotland as a confident outward-looking nation. The current administration of the Scottish National Party has supported culture and protected cultural investment. They appear to value the role of culture in the development of identity as they have moved forward with their manifesto commitment to hold a referendum on Scotland's independence. In the desire to create a shared Scottish identity, there is a danger that this could become stereotyped, parochial, and inward looking, only looking at a surface layer of identity and not embracing the rich deeper diversity that the many NGOs in Scotland represent.

Scotland now needs to recognize that its identity is complex and multi faceted and that this richness is due to the great variety of cultural practices that can be found throughout this small nation. If the notion that one can hold identity on different levels and that they can co exist and not be exclusive could be adopted, then perhaps we would see a growing confidence and greater visibility for some of the lesser seen aspects of culture in Scotland and new connections could start to be formed. Whether Scotland votes for independence or not, identity in Scotland will be changed by the debate that is currently being staged and by the re-introduction to the notion of an independent Scotland.