Why Local Governments Matter in Implementing the UNESCO 2003 *Convention*: the Case for ICCN

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ABSTRACT

Since the adoption of the UNESCO 2003 *Convention*, the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage has become more systematic and more active. The *Convention* stressed the role of local communities, and more local governments around the world now actively participate in safeguarding and promoting their local intangible culture for various purposes. The Inter-City Intangible Cultural Cooperation Network (ICCN) was established in 2008 on the initiative of Gangneung City in the Republic of Korea to help local governments around the world make a concerted effort to safeguard their ICH while developing their cities. There are two notable achievements of the ICCN; firstly, the empowerment of local governments and communities through the ICCN conferences, and secondly, a positive impact on local development through the hosting of the ICCN Festival. Holding ICCN conferences gives local governments a forum where all information can be shared and local challenges discussed. The ICCN conferences empower local communities and government in the safeguarding of local ICH as they not only raise awareness of issues but also set priorities and draw attention and support from the international community and central governments. The ICCN Festivals are key cultural events for celebrating world ICH, and have had a positive effect on the economic, tourism and socio-cultural sectors of those local governments hosting them. The ICCN Festivals are increasingly significant as they uphold the spirit of the UNESCO *Convention* - safeguarding and respecting intangible cultural heritage, recognising the importance of ICH, increasing mutual understanding on an international level and realising international cooperation.

Keywords

Inter-City Intangible Cultural Cooperation Network (ICCN), local government, sustainable development, ICCN festival, Gangneung, *Gangneung Danoje* Festival, Gangneung Declaration, Gannat, Santa Fé, Isfahan, International Round Table of Mayors

I. Introduction

Local communities and governments do a better job of implementing the *Convention* both financially and strategically where there is a particular local cultural heritage in need of protection. Discussions on the role of local government in respect of cultural heritage can raise awareness of the city/region as a 'brand', which leads to increased revenue from tourism and boosts the economy by creating more jobs. This creates a virtuous cycle of more and more local governments in the world actively participating in safeguarding and promoting their intangible cultural heritage.

The city of Gangneung, a small city in South Korea, actively sought ways to attract tourists to its cultural heritage. The *Gangneung Danoje* Festival was successfully inscribed on the UNESCO *Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* in 2005. In so doing, the city of Gangneung began to cooperate with other local governments around the world. This initiative led to the establishment of the Inter-City Intangible Cultural Cooperation Network (ICCN), an organisation comprised of numerous local governments from all over the world. This paper describes how international cooperation among local governments has been effective through case studies of ICCN and its member cities. [Plate 1]

II. The role and the importance of local government in safeguarding ICH

1. *The essential role of local government in the implementation of the Convention*

In accordance with Article 29 of the 2003 *Convention*, States Parties are required to submit reports every six years to the Intergovernmental Committee on the legislative, regulatory and other measures they have taken for the implementation of the *Convention*. These reports verify States Parties' capacity to implement the *Convention* and serve as a means to check, make corrections and exchange information about the inscribed cultural heritage.

The first set of reports was reviewed during the 6th Intergovernmental Committee session in 2011. In the first three reporting cycles (2011-2013), 47 countries' reports were submitted and examined. The report by the UNESCO Secretariat indicated that only 20% of States Parties had submitted reports (ITH/13/8.COM/6.a-page 6). Among those reports, the role of local government was rarely mentioned. It is suggested that local communities and cultural transmitters play pivotal roles in safeguarding ICH and that policies made and implemented by local organisations alone have a limited effect. In the 2012 reports, local government is



Plate 1
Jojeonje morning ritual at the *Gangneung Danoje* festival.
Photo: Gangneung City.

mentioned as one of actors, however in the 2011 and 2013 cycle reports, some actual local cases are reported. These reports are the focus of our examination of the role of local governments and States Parties' awareness of it.

The reports indicate that most States Parties held festivals based on their ICH, or had cultural transmitters who participated and introduced their heritage at regional festivals with different social and cultural backgrounds. In particular, all the countries acknowledged that their ICH is one of the factors determining their national identity. The fact that the countries submitting reports in 2011 acknowledged ICH as one of the factors determining their national identities in our view essentially contradicts the *Convention*'s goal of raising awareness of cultural diversity (Aikawa: 2011). It also shows that the *Convention* itself fell short of understanding that one form of cultural heritage can be shared with multiple groups, or that an individual may identify him/herself with more than one cultural form or identity (Han: 2009). As the 2003 *Convention* is strictly country-based, political conflicts around ownership issues may arise as was seen between Korea and China when the *Gangneung Danoje* Festival of Korea was inscribed. Also, while support from central governments could create large-scale festivals, these can only be one-off events which is not what holding festivals is about.

Reports indicate that States Parties use various methods and tools for implementing the *Convention*. However, there is still room for local governments to improve. Unlike tangible heritage, it is not easy for central government to manage local ICH. Tangible heritage is fixed in its place, and preservation, restoration and management are not particularly difficult. However, there are various communities that possess intangible heritage and their ways of safeguarding it are all different. This makes it especially difficult for central government to implement a single, unified set of measures to manage ICH in different local communities. Article 15 of the 2003 *Convention* specifies that each State Party shall endeavour to ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management. In other words, all stakeholders, including individuals, communities and groups, should make an effort to safeguard ICH. Above all, the importance of the role of local government cannot be over-emphasised, for it works closely with communities, can avoid inter-governmental political conflicts, and can concentrate better on the sustainable development of communities.

Studying the 2013 reports, they show that making policy and implementing it is not limited to central government and that there is increasing participation by local governments. In the case of Hungary, some villages actually hired a mediator to negotiate between local communities and the central government. At the same time, Senegal runs fourteen community-based cultural centres bridging the gap between local communities and central government. These centres develop rules and regulations, make lists of their cultural assets, establish safeguarding plans, provide financial support, promote tourism and exhibit handicrafts. The 2013 reports also indicate increased interest in intangible culture and its continuing growth. Burkina Faso and Turkey see their ICH as an engine of growth, and Senegal thinks of its ICH as a strategic tool to eradicate poverty. Handicrafts and tourism are regarded as the main sources of growth for local economies. These reports also show that festivals held at community level serve as tools to raise awareness of ICH. In Bulgaria, over 300 folk festivals a year are held and are an effective way to introduce ICH to young people and help to engage and involve them more closely with ICH-related matters and events.

The reports from 2011 and 2013, however, show that the extent of local government involvement was very limited. A number of countries mentioned the importance of having physical places for cultural gatherings or exhibitions, and Bulgaria reported that local communities, and especially market places, museums and community centres, manage these spaces. The city of Beypazari in Turkey described the achievement of its local government. It built a people-friendly museum that provides hands-on experiences to re-vitalise local ICH. As traditional cultures from various regions and communities ICH should be understood and safeguarded in it's place of origin, the role of local government in providing the necessary infrastructure cannot be underestimated. Comparisons are drawn between local and central governments' implementation of ICH-safeguarding activities covered in the 2011 and 2013 reports submitted by ICCN member cities.

2. ***Communities and their closest partners, local governments***

The city of Gannat, in France, is an excellent example, illustrating how important the role of local government is when it comes to safeguarding ICH. Gannat has been holding a renowned festival, '*Les Cultures du Monde*' annually since 1974. The Association of National Cultures and Traditions (ANCT), one of the NGOs in Gannat, organises the festival, and in so doing showcases various types of the world's intangible cultural heritage in the form of performances, workshops, exhibitions and films. Performances of Gannat's traditional culture by local people, along with the ones from around the world, are eye-catching events. Over 500 volunteers and local shops, restaurants, hotels and businesses join in the festival. The organisation of the festival is shared by ANCT and the local government of Gannat. More specifically, ANCT plans and operates the festival while recruiting and managing volunteers, and the local government seeks the cooperation of city representatives, business people and other stakeholders, providing administrative and financial support. During the festival, more than 60,000 people visit this small city of 5,000 inhabitants. This is an excellent example of combining NGO's planning and operational capabilities with the administrative and financial support of local government to safeguard heritage, encourage tourism and continue to make and improve policies. All in all, the festival is contributing towards the sustainable development of the city. The 40 year history of '*Les Cultures du Monde*' shows the important roles both communities and local governments play when working hand in hand.

Possible conflicts between two countries over the ownership of certain heritage elements can be significantly reduced when dealt with by local governments. These conflicts arise because central governments see intangible heritage as one of factors comprising national identity. However, an example of cross-border cooperation between the eight-city coalition of Cachtice-Kopanice and the six-city coalition of the Eastern Czech Republic near the border with Slovakia, is exceptional. These two coalitions share similar cultures as they are situated on the Slovakian border and they are cooperating with each other for mutual growth, the safeguarding of ICH and the promotion of tourism. Cross-border cooperation is a brilliant example of a way of alleviating tensions between two countries by having local governments cooperate with each other.

With the trend for policy-making and implementation shifting from central government to local government, local government is much more active in safeguarding and promoting ICH with local legislation. The artistic city of Santa Fé, New Mexico, USA, holds two annual festivals known as the Indian Market and the Spanish Market. The



Plate 2
Street parade at the *Gangneung Danoje* festival.
Photo: Gangneung City.

Indian Market was first held in 1922 and now attracts about 1,200 artists from across the globe to come to this international festival. About 600 volunteers help at the festival and about 80,000 tourists flock to Santa Fé, a city of 85,000 people. Santa Fé has put in place a law to collect 1% of the total taxes from lodging facilities to go towards supporting art organisations or artists. This illustrates how well heritage policies and laws can be implemented when appropriate methods are developed by the city – which is only possible when policies are made with a good understanding of heritage, culture and community.

The city of Gangneung, with a total population of 210,000, is rich in many forms of traditional culture. Among them is the most famous and representative one –the *Gangneung Danoje* Festival. Held in May according to the lunar calendar, the entire ceremony re-enacts the reconciliation, truce, history and unity among religions in the region. It has a 1,000 year history and since 1990, when it turned into a festival for all, *Gangneung Danoje* has seen a revival. Tourists and residents alike are invited to attend traditional ancestral ceremonies, plays and a large-scale market. The city of Gangneung aimed to safeguard the tradition and use it to its full potential so that it could be appreciated and enjoyed. [Plate 2]

A project named 'Dano Culture-Creation City' focuses on regional development by creating spaces for cultural experiences and youth training. In 2005, this element was inscribed as a *Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*, which attracted more attention and more tourists. Now, about a million people visit the city during the festival to witness the history and culture and have fun. This is a good example of how local government-led festivals can result in increased and on-going local development.

The examples listed above demonstrate that the role of local government is very important. However, while discussions about safeguarding ICH on national, community and NGO level are vibrant, discussions about the role of local government in safeguarding ICH are still lacking. Article 79 of the *Guidelines* of the *Convention* calls for the governments of States Parties to ensure that many agencies, including local communities, can form mutually complementary systems for safeguarding ICH. In so doing, Article 79 suggests establishing institutional strategies and ensuring their implementation (Sangmee Bak: 2014). In this context, local government's role should receive more attention as it is closest to the local people. Furthermore, policies and experiences gained through implementing those policies should be shared with communities around the world that have the same goals. Such activities of a few local governments were brought together to form a more structured organisation in 2008 – the Inter-City Intangible Cultural Cooperation Network (ICCN).

III. Concerted efforts of local governments: the birth of ICCN

1. *How it evolved*

When it comes to safeguarding ICH, the role of local government is as important as the roles of central government and of international organisations such as UNESCO, because it is local government that holds the key to preserving, safeguarding, promoting and transmitting local traditional cultures (Kim: 2004). Realising that ICH can bring sustainable development to local communities, the city of Gangneung started holding the International Round Table of Mayors in 2004 to promote the famous *Gangneung Danoje* Festival. During the Round Table meetings, the need for establishing an international network emerged. The consensus was that policies for ICH should be shared globally. The participants adopted the Gangneung Declaration and agreed to found an inter-city network aimed at safeguarding ICH and seeking sustainable growth (Gangneung: 2004).

In 2008, twelve cities from eleven countries gathered in Cairo, Egypt, and announced the establishment of the ICCN. During this meeting, the city of Gangneung was chosen to be the ICCN Representative and Secretariat. ICCN exists for the concerted efforts of the member cities sharing the common goal of safeguarding and developing intangible cultural heritage, which is a challenging issue for everyone in the world. ICCN's vision is 'Worldwide Living Heritage Celebrated and Communities Empowered.' It is the only organisation of its kind in the world in the field of ICH. As of now, 40 cities from 39 countries and 25 organisations have joined as members. Members come from all parts of the world - Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, South America and the South Pacific – which makes it a truly worldwide network.



Plate 3
The International Women's Forum at the second ICCN Festival, Isfahan, Iran, 2014.
Photo: ICCN.



Plate 4
Field Trip from the ICCN Conference, Dubrovnik, Croatia, 2013.
Photo: ICCN.

ICCN's main activities include the ICCN conferences (including a General Assembly, Workshops, and a Youth Forum), ICCN Festivals and cultural exchange programmes. ICCN conferences are held in a different member city each year. So far, many different issues have been discussed at ICCN conferences, for example, the role of women in safeguarding ICH, the cooperative relationships between local governments, and the approaches central and local governments should take for implementing policies about culture. [Plate 3]

The ICCN Festival is also noteworthy. It is a festival that brings various ICH elements, experts and young people together to share our valuable heritage and promote discussion about the future of ICH. The festival is sponsored by local governments and it is the only festival in the world that focuses on ICH. It was first held in 2012 in Gangneung, and the second one was recently held in the city of Isfahan in Iran in 2014.

2. Achievements

1) Empowering local government through information sharing

ICCN was established as a network of local governments and mayors. Furthermore, in this globalised world, local government's work does not only remain within the region, but local governments are actively seeking ways to join hands with other cities and countries around the world. As the importance of the role of local government is increasingly recognised, empowering it becomes ever more important. In this context, ICCN can provide examples from which others may learn.

In Dubrovnik, Croatia in 2011, what was notable was the rate of participation from cities and regions near the host city for the 6th ICCN workshop. Around 100 people from the surrounding area, in addition to participants from member cities, joined the Workshop. These people were the actors and tradition-bearers who are closely involved with their local intangible cultures, members of NGOs focusing on safeguarding ICH, and cultural experts from nearby villages and towns. During the Workshop, they shared their experience and knowledge with local and central governments and also with other international participants. What was more was that they also talked about difficulties and challenging issues in safeguarding, preserving and transmitting ICH. In turn, the participants were able to learn about the latest news and developments in the field of ICH from experts. Just by sharing, questioning and answering, all of them were empowered with new and updated information. The annual conferences also serve as a venue for open communication between people working in the same field, both internationally and in central government, where they can share their experiences and their success stories. [Plate 4]



Plate 5
The ICCN Conference, Gangneung, Korea, 2012.
Photo: ICCN.

Modern society is a 'networking society,' in which labour, people, and knowledge are all connected. Through these networks, all elements are interconnected and they change, move and shift together. In other words, all the material, knowledge and information are not separate units, but they are intertwined. This flow of information knows no geographical borders. Information technology and the internet encourage free communication and such information flows at a fast pace. (Castelles: 2008)

In this context, ICCN is an information networking society for local governments concerned with safeguarding their ICH, which encourages voluntary and free communication to re-vitalise the wider community for the safeguarding of local ICH. It raises awareness of challenges and issues faced by local communities and local governments in safeguarding their intangible culture. Taking a particular issue which will be studied seriously by the media ensures that the general public recognises the topic as an important one, and this eventually affects how people think about issues (McCombs and Shaw: 1972). In other words, ICCN acts as a form of media to help the members see certain issues as important by repeatedly discussing them.

Furthermore, based on the active participation of network members, the media agenda becomes the public agenda (McCombs: 1997) for members to consider and evaluate. Also, since all share a common background in local government, everyone can share their thoughts and reactions to the agenda.

ICCN members not only share their knowledge and information, but they come together to ponder possible solutions to their problems. In other words, ICCN acts as a forum for discussion and setting priorities. Furthermore, since local governments are policy makers too, the common agenda set by the conference may be reflected in actual policy - the synergy effect. [Plate 5]

2) ICCN Festivals: joint efforts and its outstanding outcomes

Establishing an inter-city network naturally leads to a virtuous cycle of learning, sharing and benefiting. The network facilitates direct and indirect contact between people and enables them to share their wisdom, ideas, history and view of the world. These ideas lead to cultural events and increased tourism which can re-vitalise local economies (Gangneung: 2004). Based on such assumptions, ICCN and its members decided, during the 2009 Jamaica Conference, to hold an ICCN World Intangible Cultural Heritage Festival (hereinafter 'ICCN Festival') that would raise awareness of safeguarding ICH and bring together many different types of ICH in one place. During this meeting, Gangneung was chosen to host the first ICCN Festival.

Tourists demand more cultural experiences today and incorporating ICH into tourist activities both satisfies the tourists and brings financial benefit to local communities. Unlike tangible heritage, ICH cannot be seen or touched. Therefore, the best way to incorporate ICH into tourism is to let people learn about and

experience a particular ICH element. Tourism involving ICH is gaining popularity because organising and hosting ICH-related festivals has a ripple effect to other cities and regions (Kim and Jeong: 2013). A cultural-tourism festival highlights the uniqueness of particular communities and it becomes a great resource for tourism planning. In any case, this kind of festival serves as a strategic tool for re-vitalising local communities. This was the consensus when ICCN members voted to hold ICCN Festivals to enable policy makers, human cultural assets, experts, NGOs, and young people to gather together.

The city of Gangneung began to plan a ten-day festival to expand the city and tourism. The first ICCN Festival was held in October 19-28, 2012. The Festival consisted of performances, exhibitions, hands-on activities, an international conference and a youth forum. About ten ICCN member cities introduced their UNESCO-inscribed ICH through performances. Hands-on activity booths were set up so that people could themselves experience different forms of ICH from performers and experts. These booths were very popular and it was estimated that about 350,000 people from home and abroad visited one or more of them during the ten-day period. [Plate 6]

The positive impact of events can be measured from economic, socio-cultural and tourism points of view (Ritchie: 1984), and it turns out that the ICCN Festival does have a positive impact on the hosting city. From a socio-cultural standpoint, the ICCN Festival demonstrates the importance and significance of cultural heritage and satisfies local inhabitants' cultural demands by presenting UNESCO-inscribed elements of ICH together in one place. Secondly, the people of Gangneung who took part in the Festival enjoyed a sense of solidarity by proudly sharing their culture with people from around the world. Through this experience, the people of Gangneung became more aware of safeguarding ICH and more willing to actively participate in future safeguarding efforts. [Plate 7]

From an economic standpoint, the total amount spent by all the visitors and tourists was calculated to be 13.2 billion won (about $12 million) and the City of Gangneung spent 2.8 billion won (about $2.5 million). The effect on productivity within the region of the Festival was estimated at 17 billion won (about $16 million) and the effect on productivity in nearby cities was estimated at 6.6 billion won (about $6 million) (Kim and Jeong: 2013). Secondly, the Gangneung ICCN Festival led to the re-vitalisation of the local traditional market. The Festival was held in downtown and the organisers refunded 50% of the price of the admission tickets in the form of vouchers to use at the local traditional market. This was a win-win strategy both for visitors and stall holders in the market. Ritchie (1984) argued that economic impacts lead to increased expenditure and the creation of employment, and the ICCN Festival showed that his argument holds true. Although the 2012 Gangneung ICCN Festival was a one-off event, it was



Plate 6
Tango performance at the first ICCN Festival, Gangneung, Korea, 2012.
Photo: ICCN.



Plate 7
Street parade during the first ICCN Festival, Gangneung, Korea, 2012.
Photo: ICCN.

estimated that its impact on the economy of Gangneung was enormous (Kim and Jeong: 2013).

From the tourism point of view, the ICCN Festival in Gangneung served as an opportunity to form an image of the city as an international cultural tourist attraction by bringing in various intangible cultures from around the world and combining them with countless aspects of the tangible heritage of Gangneung. During the Festival, about 350,000 visitors visited Gangneung, a city of 210,000 inhabitants. As tourism can create jobs immediately through employing local residents in hotels, restaurants, and entertainment and services that cater directly to tourists (Tatoglu, Erdal, Ozgur and Azakli: 2002), the Festival created employment for 399 people. The category of cultural and religious events included a diverse collection of activities which are held for non-commercial reasons but which provide important contributions to the tourism industry of the region involved, even though it may be unfashionable to openly admit to this fact (Buck: 1977). In short, the ICCN Festival benefited the host city, Gangneung, in cultural, social, economic and tourism terms, leading to the development of the region.

Hosting the 2nd ICCN Festival in Isfahan, Iran, was very significant. It was the very first cultural festival held in Iran in the 35 years following the Islamic Revolution of 1979. This was a great opportunity for communities, human cultural assets and policy makers to share cultural diversity and recognise each community's identity as well as the beautiful culture of Persia. Hosting the Festival galvanised the city of Isfahan into restoring its downtown in an effort to revive its local economy, an excellent opportunity in the midst of on-going instability in other Middle Eastern countries such as Syria and Iraq. [Plate 8]

Festivals in modern society open up opportunities to transmit and improve traditional cultures, reaffirm local inhabitants' sense of identity and promote tourism. Therefore, festivals achieve a dual goal of safeguarding local heritage and boosting tourism (Lee, Kang and Kim: 2011). As such, the two ICCN Festivals in Gangneung and Isfahan were hugely successful. Furthermore, the ICCN Festivals are increasingly significant as they uphold the spirit of the UNESCO *Convention* - safeguarding and respecting intangible cultural heritage, recognising the importance of ICH, increasing mutual understanding on an international level and realising international cooperation.

IV. Conclusion

Some of ICCN members' efforts in this field received a lot of attention and their local ICH was recognised as global heritage after one of the ICCN conferences. For example, the 'Ride of the Kings' in Vlcnov, Czech Republic was inscribed on the UNESCO *Representative List* in 2011. The 'Centre for the Traditional Culture-School Museum of Pusol Pedagogic Project' from Spain



Plate 8
Opening of the second ICCN Festival, Isfahan, Iran, 2014.
Photo: ICCN.

was selected as an example of UNESCO's *Best Safeguarding Practices* in 2009.

These are only two examples of many that show how local government is empowered and policies are devised by participating in ICCN activities. Clearly, information shared among members is being used to let central governments know what local governments are doing to safeguard and promote their ICH and is enabling them to receive support. In modern society with its advanced technology and the networks of information that creates, a single agency is not effective. Local government should act as the first mediator between ICH, the local community, central government and international society, and should participate actively in the international network. Biennial ICCN Festivals, as the actual platform for the sharing, allow the exchange of cultural experiences and ideas for future growth and mutual understanding. In addition to these natural benefits of the Festival, the spirit of the UNESCO *Convention* is realised and actualised in a diverse way with the characteristics of each locality. In so doing, local government will be empowered, adding synergy to its efforts.

ICCN members showed the importance and the potential role of local governments in the safeguarding of ICH and implementing the UNESCO *Convention*. However, the current ICCN system needs to be strengthened if it is to develop further. At the institutional level, ICCN showed its instability in its complete dependency on one local government for financial support. To function as a network it should build its strategic relationships and partnerships with as many other institutions as possible to increase its expertise in the field and its financial stability. In the meantime, members of ICCN should try to increase its membership by sharing case studies of successful ICCN projects. They should feel proud of being part of the network and of its project, the ICCN Festival, which was set up to create a platform where diverse local cultures could be harmonised and celebrated. By doing so, they will eventually realise that they are fundamental actors in safeguarding ICH and implementing the UNESCO 2003 *Convention*. The contribution of local governments in safeguarding ICH will be emphasised and realised in a positive way if ICCN continues to develop as it has done so far.

ENDNOTES

1. ICCN is now recognised for its important roles in safeguarding ICH and was accredited to the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2012. As an UNESCO accredited NGO, its role is to promote local ICH and increase its visibility in the international arena with the cooperation of local governments around the world.
2. The first ICCN Festival was joined by 28 cities and organisations from 23 countries, and there were 58 teams of performers from around the world and 38 teams of performers from Korea.

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