

Foreword



People are constantly creating new cultural expressions as a way to adapt themselves to natural and social environments that are constantly changing. Once a community introduces newly created culture, its members learn and practice it: this is how human society progresses. Also both traditional and new culture is being transmitted to the next generation through language and other expressions and keeps accumulating. Consequently culture is unavoidably always in a state of change. Cultural transformation can be the result of several different factors: for example, internal conflicts, frequent contacts with neighbouring cultures, or the assimilation of new cultures. For this reason, universality and particularity can be equally influential in relation to almost every ethnic culture that can be found across the world. 'Universality', in this sense, means the common values of all human culture, while 'particularity' is seen in cultural distinctiveness.

Therefore the cultural particularity or distinctiveness of a country can be one of the standards that define a people's culture. In other words, every piece of the tangible heritage, whether a building, monument, work of art or specimen, also contains its own intangible heritage value and arguably the tangible expression is now valued because of its intangible associations. From this perspective, we need to bring out and integrate those aspects that connect these two concepts. In the case of the tangible heritage of collections of specimens and works of art, the museum is the traditional place where people can preserve and study both aspects of them most efficiently and effectively.

According to the ICOM definition, a museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment. In this definition, the material evidence includes both tangible heritage and visually transformed intangible heritage. Consequently a museum needs to archive, visualise, and document all kinds of testimonies to human culture and history from its creation to its final condition, and not least the intangible heritage information associated with its collections, by using various forms of audiovisual and digital equipment. The documentation of these intangible elements can, for example, be used as the key to interpreting the collections or as additional references for future exhibitions. Even more important perhaps they can also be a great help in understanding the value and integrity of different cultures.

The most important thing to the museum in its researching, educating and exhibiting of the intangible heritage, is to recognise the cultural diversity that is based on cultural relativism. If this is done, different ethnic groups or other culturally distinct populations will come to respect each other and, it is hoped, this in turn will lead to continual development of each people's culture. Therefore the intangible heritage is a most important testimony to the cultural diversity, creativity and identity of human race.

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