Musée de l’Homme as the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires (MNATP), building on what Rivière had first launched as part of the Musée de l’Homme at the Trocadéro in the 1930s. Opening in two stages in 1972 and 1975 (by which time Rivière had officially retired under French Civil Service rules), the new MNATP building accommodated, alongside the Museum and its curatorial staff, a much larger number of ethnographers, linguists, art historians and other experts employed by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (France’s elite national scientific research service). These worked in parallel with the museum in what quickly became France’s national research unit for the study of both the material and the intangible heritage of the country.

Furthermore, Rivière, along with Hugues de Varine, his collaborator and successor as Director of ICOM, promoted very actively the value and potential contribution of museums and the wider cultural sector in community development and empowerment. This was seen in particular in their promotion of what they termed ‘ecomuseums’ – a word first used during ICOM’s 1971 General Conference in Grenoble and Paris. These were seen as expressions of a ‘new museology’, providing facilities for housing, and promoting equally, much more than what is typically seen within the walls of a traditional museum. This wider context must include, it is argued, the traditions, feelings and artistic and cultural expressions of the ecomuseum’s community and territory – their intangible heritage. The 2003 Intangible Heritage Convention’s commitment to communities, groups and in some cases individuals who recognise the value of the intangible cultural heritage is identical to that of those who create, devise and run these museums and other such ‘community and site’ museums.

This new Journal of the Intangible Heritage will therefore provide a major service to cultural and community development within the field of museums, but also of course far beyond these. It is very much hoped that it will help to shape the discourse, and improve understanding of how intangible and tangible heritage are intrinsically linked to one another.

ICOM’s living tradition of investigating, supporting, and protecting intangible heritage is demonstrated by its active participation in the technical and scientific evaluation of nominations for UNESCO’s Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, in the work of members of its International Committee on Museum Ethics (ICME) among other ICOM Committees, and the work of ICOM Korea in both its successful organisation of the ICOM 2004 General Conference on Museums and the Intangible Heritage, our first General Conference in Asia, and in promoting the now well-established Korean cultural heritage protection model of ‘Living Heritage’ internationally. All of these, and many similar initiatives are worthy heirs to ICOM’s sixty years of service to, and development of, the cultural heritage in its broadest sense. This common cause of preserving the universal spirit of cultural diversity can be likened to the spirit of the gift, as Marcel Mauss termed it in 1924. This also describes ICOM’s purpose in supporting this first international journal dedicated to the intangible heritage.

The new International Journal of Intangible Heritage, which has been promoted by the National Folk Museum of Korea and the Korean National Committee of ICOM with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Korea, is an exceptional initiative. The first scholarly journal of its kind, the International Journal of Intangible Heritage will not just report but, we hope, will help to create new knowledge that will be disseminated to all corners of the world. We trust that this will help to create an irreplaceable bond between cultures across the world and consolidate common values by researching, protecting, and collaborating between the differences and similarities that are the intangible treasures of humanity’s heritage. ICOM is deeply grateful for this spirit of the gift that the promoters of this Journal are offering the international heritage community.

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President, International Council of Museums (ICOM)

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 relations. 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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