

Agnieszka Pawłowska-Mainville, *Living Heritage Landscapes: An Anthropological Approach to Intangible Cultural Heritage and Language Valuation in Canada and Poland*,

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The Cultural Landscape of Living Heritage in Canada and Poland – Intangible Cultural Heritage as Everyday Life and Anthropological Reflections on its Safeguarding

Drawing on her ethnographic fieldwork conducted in both Canada and Poland, cultural anthropologist Agnieszka Pawłowska-Mainville highlights the value of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as it is embedded in the everyday lives of local communities and emphasises the urgency of its preservation. While the book's style makes it accessible to a general readership, the author's scholarly insights and field-based approach offer meaningful academic implications for researchers in the field of ICH.

Part of the *Intangible Heritage Public Series* published by the National Folk Museum of Korea, the book also aligns with and adds to the accumulated body of research presented through the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*. The author warns that the preservation of ICH has become increasingly challenging in the face of global development agendas and environmental degradation. At the same time, she focuses on the custodians of intangible heritage – individuals and communities at the periphery who continue to employ traditional knowledge and skilled

practices – offering a nuanced analysis of their role in the transmission and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

Professor Pawłowska-Mainville, a first-generation Polish-Canadian immigrant, has a deep familiarity with the 'cultural narratives' of both Poland and Canada. This dual cultural literacy enables her to attend closely to micro-level cultural practices embedded in everyday life – practices that often elude the perception of the general public. Drawing on this anthropological sensibility, the author conceptualises the environments inhabited by Indigenous communities in Canada and local populations in Poland as 'living museums' – spaces where customs, ecological knowledge, oral traditions and modes of life are intricately interwoven. Through this grounded, site-specific approach, she underscores a critical task for scholars of ICH: to illuminate the dynamic interplay between intangible heritage and the multiple components that constitute a cultural landscape.

In this book, the author specifically explores how custodians of ICH in Canada and Poland have sustained and practised integrated relationships among nature, culture and language. In this context, the first key point she

emphasises is that what we commonly refer to as 'nature' is, in fact, a cultural landscape. The natural environment is not an untouched, pristine space, but rather a symbolic and practical cultural site – formed, shaped and transmitted across generations. It is, in other words, both a living museum and a repository of intangible heritage. For members of certain communities, such natural spaces serve as the foundation for a sense of belonging and the formation of collective identity. As such, they should rightly be understood and studied as cultural landscapes.

Second, the author emphasises that ICH, composed of systems of knowledge and expressive forms, is deeply interdependent with the natural environment that surrounds local communities. She highlights that cultural practices follow the cyclical rhythms of nature, emerge from specific ecological conditions and resources, and are continuously transformed and reconfigured through their interaction with the environment.

Third, the author emphasises that the protection of Indigenous languages is essential not only for sustaining everyday life but also for the intergenerational transmission of ICH. In this regard, urgent attention must be given to the development of multilayered strategies that include community-led language revitalisation efforts alongside the establishment of sustainable livelihoods. The loss of minority and Indigenous languages often leads to the irreversible rupture of the intangible heritage embedded within them.

This book comprises three main sections. In the first section, the author examines the relationship between cultural landscapes and ICH systems in Canada and Poland. She highlights that, despite their geographical separation, both countries face similar cultural and social challenges, including the decline of traditional livelihoods, language extinction, cultural homogenisation and the younger generation's reliance on American culture. Based on these observations, the author advocates for the development of intangible heritage protection policies that transcend national and cultural boundaries and address these shared concerns.

The Canadian case study focuses on the cultural and environmental damages experienced by Indigenous communities in the northern regions during the 1960s due to the construction of hydroelectric power plants. Gillam, located along the Nelson River and a centre for the

hydroelectric industry, is also rich in Indigenous cultural heritage. However, Western knowledge systems have historically viewed this area's nature as untouched by humans, justifying developmental projects. The Western dichotomous view of nature and culture has contributed to the invisibility of ICH and, as a result, development ideology has been pursued in ways that exclude Indigenous rights and cultural heritage.

In this context, Indigenous elders, known as '*kitayatis*' or traditional knowledge holders, play a crucial role. For instance, elders such as 'Noah' provide extensive knowledge of and insights about their lands, including ethno-ecological understandings of environmental changes such as shifts in caribou migration routes, rising water levels and fluctuations in fur-bearing animal populations. These individuals, possessing knowledge that complements scientific data, are 'living heritage' bearers and custodians of intangible cultural heritage. Furthermore, creation myths and oral traditions offer valuable perspectives on their worldview. Legends such as the Algonquin creation myth, the Yamoria story and the tale of the three beavers emphasise cooperative creation processes and ethics of harmony, reflecting value systems that prioritise balance and collaboration. The spirits of light and darkness cannot create the world independently, necessitating cooperation between the two forces. These myths and legends, passed down orally from generation to generation in both countries, exemplify the deep interactions between humans and the environment. Thus, nature is defined not merely as a backdrop but as a rich cultural landscape imbued with stories, knowledge systems, names and languages.

The Polish case study introduces the tradition of tree beekeeping, inscribed in 2020 on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This tradition has been orally transmitted across generations, encompassing not only beekeeping techniques but also extensive knowledge of the forest ecosystem, significantly influencing community cultural formation. Since its inscription, the tree beekeeping community has faced various challenges. The UNESCO listing did not lead to systematic governmental protection policies, and the intrusion of profit-driven enterprises has caused internal conflicts within the community. Nevertheless, by 2023, efforts to re-evaluate the cultural and ecological values of tree beekeeping have been expanding within the community, with beekeepers from neighbouring countries

such as Lithuania and Germany strengthening cooperation and solidarity for UNESCO inscription.

The second section of the book delves into specific examples of 'custodians' who practise and transmit intangible cultural heritage, highlighting their lifeworlds and practices. In Canada, Mildred, the great-granddaughter of Chief *Kw'eh*, shares stories about various traditional lifestyles, including trapping, tanning and fish smoking. Additionally, the author encounters 'Bill' at a First Nations Pow Wow event who offers insights into Indigenous music. Indigenous music and dance are cultural products directly inspired by the natural environment and resources. The rhythms, sounds and narrative structures are intertwined with the environment, indicating that Indigenous music embodies ecological sensibilities.

In Poland, we meet Jarosław, Director of the Complex of Landscape Parks, who is striving to preserve community traditions by re-creating traditional wooden raft transportation methods and organising food festivals. Meanwhile, the activities of Polish traditional dance groups demonstrate the influence of natural landscapes on the community's livelihoods, knowledge, sounds and cultural expressions. Through these examples from Canada and Poland, the author emphasises that the environment significantly impacts cultural identity and daily life. In particular, she illustrates how individuals internalise cultural practices through memory, behaviour and sensory experiences, reproducing and sustaining them in their daily life.

The third section of the book addresses the importance of language as a core element of intangible cultural heritage and the urgency of its preservation. Language functions as a medium for intergenerational transmission of knowledge and traditions, serving as a repository that encapsulates the cultural identity of the community and the relationship between humans and nature. Stories about the Douglas fir in Canadian Indigenous societies and legends from the Karkonosze region in Poland demonstrate how language, nature, myth and environment are woven into a unified narrative system. Furthermore, linguistic heritage plays a decisive role in forming the structural framework of culture. The author substantiates

this through examples such as the linguistic worldview of the Canadian Indigenous Dakelh language and the cultural calendar of Poland's Kashubian region, emphasising that language provides profound insights into understanding the lifestyles of local people. Highlighting the rapid global decline in linguistic diversity, the author underscores the urgency of protecting linguistic cultural heritage.

The most significant achievement of this book is its presentation of an in-depth and holistic framework for understanding intangible cultural heritage. The author emphasises that ICH is a 'living culture' deeply embedded in the everyday lives of communities. This leads to a reflection on the UNESCO Convention and the practices of certain member countries (e.g. South Korea) that aim to protect ICH through item-based approaches. Furthermore, the author reminds us that the communities embodying intangible cultural heritage are not passive bearers of fixed traditions. Instead, they are active agents who reconstruct and reinterpret ICH amid constantly changing political, social and economic conditions both within and outside the community. Communities sometimes strive to protect heritage in the face of external changes, while at other times they actively embrace change, creating new cultural dynamics. Considering these characteristics of intangible cultural heritage, the author emphasises the need to approach it as 'living culture.'

Therefore, intangible cultural heritage must be approached holistically, and protection policies should be formulated only after recognising this complexity. The limitations of item-based heritage policies and research stem from their failure to account for the complex cultural tapestry woven through the interweaving of everyday life, relationships and practices. Ultimately, this book underscores that the practice, revitalisation, transmission and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage all take place through dynamic interactions with the natural environment and resources in which communities are rooted. By framing intangible cultural heritage as 'living heritage landscapes', the author calls for a paradigm shift in both policy-making and in the direction of research. This stands as one of the book's most compelling insights and conveys a core message to its readers. 📖