

Education, Youth, and Intangible Heritage

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UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage on October 17, 2003. It did so in a framework of peoples' reaction to globalization's threats to cultural uniformity, which seemed to forcefully impose a single direction on cultural trends worldwide.

However, while in the world of culture a kind of music, a type of clothing and even the food consumption were becoming universal, concurrently arises an inalienable wish to remain and preserve traditions. This includes languages, ways of being and living in the world and ways to connect with nature.

The aspiration for a harmonious existence with the environment is reborn in the hearts of new generations. This is an encouraging sign that provides humanity with opportunities to reinvent itself. Also, to renew its relationship with the earth as a unique and unrepeatable heritage. But what are the signs of current society that conspire against the preservation of intangible cultural heritage?

According to Bauman, the current world is characterized by its fluid and volatile state³⁴. This is what he calls liquid society. This is a society in which the uncertainty caused by the dizzying speed of changes has weakened human bonds. The heart of intangible cultural heritage lies precisely in the human bonds that can generate fruitful and faithful community relationships.

The fragmentation of identity, job instability, an overdose of unfiltered information, the economy of excess and waste, the lack of credibility of educational models, the end of mutual commitment, and fleeting interpersonal relationships shape the liquid society as it is defined.

Individualism, understood as the tendency to think and act according to one's criteria with total independence from social determinations external to each person, is another sign of the current society. This is a society that opposes the spirit of a convention that seeks to grow on individuals' devotion to their heritage, identity, and culture.

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34 The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman is the author of the concept "liquid modernity" to define the fluid and volatile state of today's society.

On the other hand, we live in a reality in which the fluidity of communication is imperative, and rites are perceived as obsolescence and a dispensable hindrance. According to contemporary philosopher Byung-Chul Han, we are facing a kind of disappearance of rituals due to the pressure to produce and the speed with which unscrupulous consumption surrounds us with a decline that destabilizes life.³⁵

Rituals provide stability to life. The philosopher recalls the words of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, to explain that rituals are to life what things are to space. He also mentions the political philosopher Hannah Arendt, to explain that the durability of things makes them “independent of the existence of man.” Things have “the mission to stabilize human life.”

Ritual forms, like courtesy, enable not only kind treatment between people but also orderly and respectful handling of things. In the ritual framework, things are not consumed or spent, but used. That’s why they can become aged. The preservation of different cultural heritages in our countries is closely related to the ability of communities to constantly maintain and recreate their rituals and cultural expressions.

“Intangible cultural heritage” is defined by Article 2 of the Convention adopted in 2003 as:

the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts, and cultural associates therewith – that communities, groups, and in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.

This intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation. It is constantly recreated by communities and groups based on their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history. All of this provide them a sense of identity and continuity and encourage them to promote respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.

We observe that the 2003 Convention expresses that intangible cultural heritage is: traditional, contemporary, and living at the same time. It is inclusive, representative, and community-based. It is necessary for countries that promote the implementation of the 2003 Convention to develop the ability to guarantee local appropriation of memory spaces and heritage assets. Additionally, they should promote decentralized and democratic development of cultural industries, even through the implementation of new digital tools.

The richness of this heritage lies in its social, economic, and environmental value, not only in the traditions inherited from our ancestors but also in our region’s contemporary rural and urban practices. The reflections that we propose from now on will have to do with the relationship between intangible cultural heritage, sustainable development, and education.

35 In his latest book, ‘The Disappearance of Rituals’, warns us: the disappearance of the symbolic practices that bind us to the community and the constant pressure for us to work and be more and more productive lead to the desecration of life.

The safeguarding of cultural expressions from communities must be promoted from a comprehensive perspective, considering the connection within cultural values and values transmitted from educational systems. The first one aims to maintain a harmonious relationship with the environment and the practices, while the second one is seen as part of sustainable development policies assigned to education.

Latin America and the Caribbean is a region that inherits and bears great cultural wealth. This includes sounds, colors, flavors, techniques, and knowledge of this region. It is here that the roots of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage can be found. They emerge as an imminent response from communities who were concerned about the overwhelming expansion of globalization that threatens to standardize the world. The valorization of knowledge about nature and the universe, worldviews, social practices, oral traditions, customs, skills, languages, music, dance, and philosophy has become a necessity for the sustainable development of its bearers.

The twentieth anniversary of the Convention is an opportunity to evaluate the implementation of the Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in the region since its adoption in 2003. It must become the driver of a new perspective on intangible cultural heritage, admitting the importance of promoting the development of new mechanisms for the registration of cultural manifestations. Moreover, recognizing that Latin American countries need to play a greater role in the multilateral governance of culture.

Paraguay, as a member state of the 2003 Convention, observes with concern the imbalance in its lists and advocates for more dialogue in the region. Primarily, there's a need for a greater exchange in the development of capacities to promote public policies on the rescue and safeguarding of the cultural heritage of our peoples.

Likewise, we believe that State Parties must promote a combined action of culture and education, learning experiences, and emerging artistic forms. Also making use of digital technologies and media, among other things, understanding that there will be no veritable educational transformation if there is no cultural transformation.

Culture and education are two sides of the same coin. It is through education that commitment to cultural heritage can be sown in the hearts of new generations.

Therefore, we should try to give greater attention to teaching related to heritage. Particularly, a special attention should be given to education regarding cultural heritage and throughout it, considering its multiple dimensions. It helps to increase the recognition and understanding of various cultural manifestations and expressions. Also, contributes to evaluate education programs to bring value to national and local practices.

Education and culture relationships must be developed in a broad framework that encompasses everything from formal education to social life needs, especially in community interaction and integration.

References

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