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The *Handbook on Intangible Cultural Practices as Global Strategies for the Future* is part of a series of publications (Albert, Bernecker, Cave, Prodan, Ripp, Eds., 2022; Edmondson, Jordan, Prodan, Eds., 2020) that aim to critically reflect on both the theoretical and practical understanding of World Heritage, Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the Memory of the World. This voluminous edition invites scholars to look beyond UNESCO's established frameworks and legal structures and to conduct systematic scientific research that broadens the knowledge of the heritage field in contemporary times (Wulf, Ed., 2025). The publication of the Handbook on Intangible Cultural Practices comes out shortly after the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. It is the first to provide an extensive review of developments in the field since its ratification.

Compiled by Christopher Wulf, a renowned anthropologist and member of the German Commission for UNESCO, whose work focuses on embodied cultural practices and performativity, this handbook features contributions from 45 authors worldwide, spanning across more than 20 countries. The authorship originates from diverse professional backgrounds, including academia, government institutions, and community-based organisations, demonstrating that living heritage requires collaboration between both research and practical heritage management. The international contributions broaden the scope of the book, offering meaningful insights from heritage governance practices not only in the global North but also throughout Africa, the Americas, and Asia. As Wulf puts it, “result is a complex picture of living culture on all continents, where commonalities and differences are interwoven” (Wulf, 2025: 25).

The handbook aims to analyse the complexity of topics related to living heritage, including its similarities and differences with tangible heritage, the reasoning behind the 2003 Convention, the selection of intangible cultural practices, community and

participation, sustainable development, education, and digitalisation. It does so in five separate chapters. It would be ambitious to analyse them all in one article; this review, therefore, attempts to highlight the overall idea of each chapter and selected contributions.

The initial section of the handbook lays down the basics, introducing intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as both a symbolic and practical initiator of transitions that contribute to sustainable development and global peace. For example, in Marlen Meissner's work, the author emphasises the importance of cultural heritage in empowering people during times of social disruption and insecurity (Meissner, 2018, 2025). This argument is indeed also seen as a priority within UNESCO frameworks, where a toolkit has been developed to recognise the dual nature of living heritage as both valuable and vulnerable during crisis (UNESCO, 2020). The importance of bridging community agency with policy frameworks is also evident in the chapter by Pier Luigi Petrillo. He advocates for the need to follow legal frameworks but also to critically reflect on them as "given its elusive nature, protection [of ICH] passes through the protection of cultural rights and identity rights" and "if the ICH is to be safeguarded, the rights to cultural diversity must first be guaranteed" (Petrillo, 2025: 64).

The contributions from the second section all relate to the topic of marginalised communities and the struggle for human rights, which is yet another priority within UNESCO's operational principles (UNESCO, 2022). The authors show how ICH policies can both elevate and essentialise a living practice. Particularly interesting is the research on Samba de Roda do Recôncavo Baiano by Nina Graeff. Here, the author argues that specific aspects of Samba, such as improvisation and gestures rooted in African musical traditions, were overlooked in the process of inscription simply because they were too fluid and ungraspable by Eurocentric modes of perception (Graeff, 2025: 128). Through this selective process, Samba became simplified and stripped of its diverse forms, making it more suitable for tourism and cultural branding. The author criticises such normativity in the process of inscription of ICH. Graeff's article serves as a reminder that if the inscription is not sensitive to the diverse nature of living heritage, it can, in fact, contribute to cultural homogenisation. It is, however, essential to note that Samba de Roda do Recôncavo Baiano has been inscribed on the List of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity – a precursor to the current Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Over the last 20 years, the process of inscription has become more inclusive, with community consent at its core. The Operational Directives of the 2003 UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage emphasise that community participation is essential at every stage of safeguarding, requiring the free, prior, and informed consent (UNESCO, 2024). Communities play an active role in applying for inscription, compiling the nomination file, and designing the safeguarding actions. To embrace the multi-vocal, diverse nature of living heritage, the participation of various actors within the inscription is essential.

However, a consensus must ultimately be reached. The study by Kumínková, Voľanská, and Andrade Pérez offers insight into how to reach an agreement within the UNESCO Convention, framing it both as an ideal situation and a necessity. They argue that while dispute occurs on national and local levels, subtle differences, the consensus on the intergovernmental committee is often influenced by stronger geopolitical interests.

The authors view consensus as an active process, where “no total harmony can be expected when it comes to an issue as complex as human culture” (Kumínková et al., 2025: 215).

Hana Schreiber, in the handbook’s third chapter on Identity, Building, Participation, and Conflicts, follows Poland’s journey of ratifying the 2003 Convention, which, unlike other neighbouring countries, occurred significantly later, only in 2011. This allowed the creation of a comprehensive and institutionally recognised safeguarding process that offers public consultations and expert recommendations. The ICH has also been incorporated into urban policies, as exemplified by the city of Warsaw, which has allowed its residents to co-create, manage, and take responsibility for their heritage (Schreiber, 2025). Schreiber’s article illustrates how the 2003 Convention evolved over the

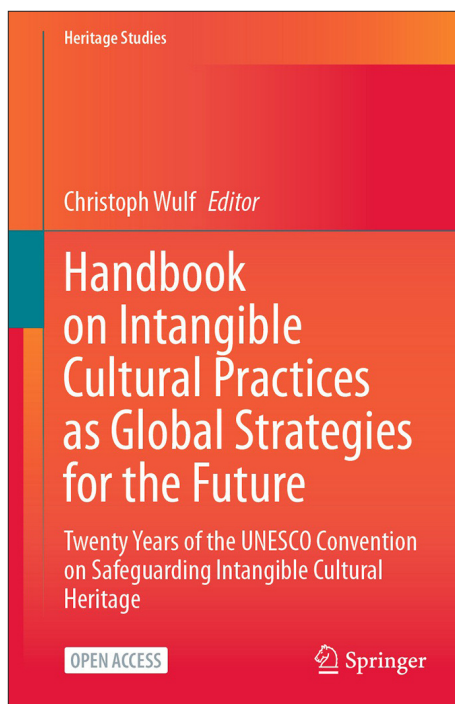
years and how its later ratification in Poland allowed for a more tailored, community-driven approach. It shows that the Convention is a living document that has been reflecting on its practice and adapting to societal changes.

In the following section, the authors investigate the aesthetic in living heritage, researching how music, dance, theatre, and even spaces are bound to become vital in shaping the cultural identity of communities. The distinction is made between ‘music as art’ and ‘music as dynamic practice/living heritage’ – emphasising improvisation and performative exchange between musician and community (de Oliveira Pinto, 2025: 411).

An important observation is made in Julius Heinicke’s article on the former Berlin Palace, highlighting how a cultural heritage site that carries colonial-era legacies can, through various programs and practices, transform into a place that invites critical reflection and intercultural dialogue (Heinicke, 2025: 455).

Towards its final pages, the handbook looks to the future, addressing trends in digital heritage and social media, and offers case studies in disaster risk reduction and events related to climate change. Recognising that the way knowledge and skills are transmitted to youth today is evolving, UNESCO has been advocating for a more innovative and digital approach to learning about one’s own heritage (UNESCO, 2021). A particularly interesting example in the digital heritage world is the Inuit game *Never Alone*, where “cultural narratives, values, and practices can be re-articulated and transmitted through the affordances of digital technologies” (Jörissen, Klepacki, 2025: 457).

Building on this understanding of heritage transmission, the article by Tomo Ishimura on the case of the Great East Japan Earthquake highlights the importance of not only restoring rituals or artefacts but also rebuilding the community itself. When communities



relocate, their context changes, and post-disaster intangible cultural heritage is no longer identical to its former state (Ishimura, 2025: 568).

In conclusion, the *Handbook on Intangible Cultural Practices as Global Strategies for the Future* dives deep into various contexts of ICH. It includes the work of elite scholars in the field of cultural heritage. It serves not only as a guideline for other academics but also for other actors involved in safeguarding cultural heritage. In the end, one specific message stands out throughout this volume, and that is to include and inform those who have been excluded from the heritage process.

The volume balances critical reflection with practical relevance. The contribution across the various sections demonstrates that ICH is a living and contested space. It is a field that requires both critical awareness and ethical responsibility.

By engaging in the topics of power, representation, participation, and inclusivity, the Handbook makes a valuable contribution to the field of critical heritage studies. It is not a collection of highly specific academic texts on intangible cultural heritage but a work that challenges the reader to rethink the frameworks through which living heritage is recognised and safeguarded.

By reflecting on two decades of developments since the UNESCO 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage, the handbook emphasises the growing importance of living heritage for the sustainable development of the world. Through addressing a range of issues, from colonialism and minority rights to digital transformation and community resilience, the volume demonstrates that safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is both a global and a local concern. Inclusive participation and innovative strategies will be essential for ensuring that living heritage continues to foster identity, creativity, and dialogue for future generations.

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