Conversations about Intangible Cultural Heritage

CONFERENCE MAY 17 & 24, 2022

unesco
Canadian Commission

ABBREVIATIONS

ICH	Intangible cultural heritage
ICICH	International Scientific Committee for Intangible Cultural Heritage
NGO	Non-governmental organization
UNBC	University of Northern British Columbia
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Language Educator

"One of the best teachings my dad ever gave me was based on the medicine wheel; he'd always say that there are four directions: east, south, west and north. And our hand represents and reminds us of this teaching, he said: there are people of all four directions of this Earth. But one thing that is always forgotten is the centre. That's the fifth direction, he always says, and that's why our hands remind us of this teaching: because the thumb is what connects us to our heartbeat. We are all capable of having a heartbeat, no matter where we're from. So, everyone should have access to this knowledge, nobody should be denied, and we should all be equal."

- John Mainville, Resource Management and Forest Extension Assistant, Aleza Lake Research Forest, and Student, University of Northern British Columbia (Forest Ecology and Management)

Conversations about intangible cultural heritage: Overview and objectives

This conference aimed to facilitate a national dialogue about intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and to examine what the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage means in the context of Canada today. By promoting conversations among those who work in the heritage sectors across the country, the conference aimed to raise awareness of ICH and its importance, support knowledge exchange and resource mobilization, encourage initiatives and promising practices, and contribute to the development and growth of the ICH network in Canada.

The conference took place online over two days (May 17 and 24, 2022) and brought together practitioners, government representatives, community members, academics, students and other stakeholders interested in heritage. This participant diversity was essential for productive discussions that aimed to bridge gaps between theory and practice. Living heritage requires us to consider not only the daily experiences of individuals from different social, cultural, spiritual and linguistic backgrounds, but also the diverse strategies they use to protect culture, transmit it across generations, revive knowledge and work toward reconciliation. The 2003 Convention interprets language as a vehicle for heritage, and the conference tried to make room for socio-linguistic diversity and made clear that language is crucial for the transmission of certain knowledges. In this regard, contributions from ICH custodians offer new insights into how communities, families and individuals practice their living heritage.

The conference took place in English and French with simultaneous translation. Introductions to each event were made in Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe), one of the languages of the partnering institutions. Territorial welcomes were offered by Elders speaking from the territories of the host institutions: the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), which is located on unceded Lheidli T'enneh Whuten territory, and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, which is located in Ottawa on the unceded, unsurrendered Territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation. Lucas dos Santos Roque, the ICH coordinator, was located on the unceded territory of Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish Nations.

FORMAT AND THEMES

To foster an in-depth understanding of ICH and ICH policy in Canada, the conference was organized around complementary themes: the theory, policy and practice of safeguarding ICH (panels 1 & 2) and community approaches to issues relating to rupture, revival and continuity of ICH transmission (panels 3 & 4).

The conference also showcased ICH practitioners, highlighting the diversity of what ICH encompasses and exemplifying collaborative possibilities with academia. Panels 3 and 4 responded to the previous panels and were geared toward giving space and voice to those learning or nurturing living heritage. Even though many of the speakers in these panels might not have heard the term “intangible cultural heritage”, they were able to explain why we need to nurture heritage—and in doing so, illustrated that familiarity with technical language is not necessary for many ICH custodians.

Finally, at the end of each day, networking sessions brought attendees together to share their experiences, initiatives and perspectives.

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE SHOWCASE

ICH showcases were meant to reflect Canada’s cultural diversity and honour practitioners.

Each “showcase” permitted representatives from various communities to illustrate a specific cultural expression and show how their practices connected to their identity and well-being. The conference featured Emelyne Mugisha and Venantie Kabahizi from Le Cercle des Canadiens Français de Prince George, who performed a dance from Burundi, and Way-gozis-amin (Bill Morrison) from Couchiching First Nation in Ontario, who spoke about and demonstrated aspects of pow wow drumming. The second day included Ami Hagiwara, a Japanese language instructor from UNBC, who performed a Japanese flower-tea ceremony, and Charly Maiwan from Charly Maiwan Production, who showcased the Congolese rumba.

Opening remarks by Tim Curtis, Secretary of the 2003 Convention

Tim Curtis started his speech by presenting the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which currently has 180 signatories among the 193 UNESCO Member States,. He explained that, according to the Convention, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) refers to:

"the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage" (Article 2.1).

ICH, also known as living heritage, carries a group's identity and values and gives them a sense of belonging and continuity. The Convention's main objectives are to safeguard ICH and promote the acknowledgement and appreciation of cultural diversity between and within communities and states parties. The Convention also aims to:

- ensure respect for the ICH of the communities, groups and individuals concerned;
- raise awareness of the importance of ICH at the local, national and international levels;
- provide for international cooperation and assistance.

To achieve these objectives, the Convention established two Lists—the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding and the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, as well as a Register of Good Safeguarding Practices. State Parties may nominate elements to be inscribed on the Lists. They may also nominate safeguarding practices and other experiences in implementing the Convention for selection on the Register.

The 2003 Convention is flexible and leaves considerable freedom to the signatories in terms of how to implement it. It also permits them to interpret certain concepts that are used in the Convention, to best reflect the local context. Countries that are party to the 2003 Convention can participate in the governance of the Convention,

benefit from technical assistance and knowledge exchange on ICH safeguarding and seek financial assistance from the ICH Fund. Other benefits of the 2003 Convention include:

- access to frameworks to identify, inventory and safeguard intangible cultural heritage;
- access to tools to raise awareness for and sustain cultural diversity;
- access to tools to mobilize and connect communities and stakeholders around safeguarding living heritage, sustainable development and peace building;
- access to tools, facilitators and training services to strengthen national and local capacities (such as UNESCO's capacity-building program);
- the opportunity to participate in the global debate on ICH as a full member of the international community and to make strategic decisions pertaining to the Convention;
- the chance to cooperate regionally and internationally by sharing expertise, experience and information;
- opportunities for intergenerational learning and making education more relevant and meaningful;
- opportunities for enhancing international standing by showcasing good practices (cultural policies, involvement of civil society, contribution of living traditions to sustainable development);
- the possibility to nominate elements and safeguarding projects to the UNESCO Lists and Register.

Participating countries also assume few key obligation: they must take steps to safeguard ICH (article 11a) by identifying and defining it with the participation of communities and relevant non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (articles 11[b] and 15). They can do this by drawing up and regularly updating inventories of ICH present in their territories (article 12.1), contributing to the ICH Fund (article 26) and reporting to the Intergovernmental Committee (article 29).

Finally, Tim Curtis highlighted some activities related to the 2003 Convention that are already present in Canada. For example:

- Canada has nine NGOs accredited to act in an advisory capacity to the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage;
- Canada has two UNESCO Chairs dedicated to the safeguarding of living heritage:
    - *Chaire UNESCO sur la transmission culturelle chez les Premières Nations comme dynamique de bien-être et d'autonomisation at the University of Quebec at Chicoutimi;*
    - *Chaire UNESCO sur le patrimoine vivant et les moyens de subsistance durables at the University of Northern British Columbia.*

- In 2021, Heritage Saskatchewan carried out a national survey of ICH work done to date.
- The Museum Association of Newfoundland and Labrador for the Canadian Heritage Information Network has created a how-to guide on digitizing ICH elements to contribute to their safeguarding.
- The Conseil québécois du patrimoine vivant (Quebec Living Heritage Council) has published numerous guidebooks to ensure local cultural vitality, including one to municipalities (in collaboration with the Quebec Ministry of Culture and translated with the support of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO).

Accordingly, Tim Curtis concluded that Canada is already satisfying most of the obligations of a State Party to the 2003 Convention.

« Il n'y a pas des termes parfaits : patrimoine traditionnel, « trad », patrimoine vivant. C'est juste les termes. Ce qui est important c'est qu'on parle avec le public et les communautés ». "[There are no perfect terms: traditional heritage, "trad", living heritage. They're just terms. What's important is that we talk with the people and the communities]."

-Antoine Gauthier, Director General,
Conseil québécois du patrimoine vivant

PANEL 1

Key concepts and applications of intangible cultural heritage

In this panel, participants discussed the 2003 Convention and critical definitions for working with concepts such as living heritage, "patrimoine vivant" and ICH in Canada.

Panelists discussed these definitions in relation to other themes, including territoriality, climate change, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action, and education. Panelists considered how federal, provincial and municipal governments can work together to develop policies to safeguard ICH. While acknowledging that ICH custodians play a critical role in carrying out public policy goals for safeguarding heritage, the assistance of all levels of governance, and Indigenous leadership, is crucial.

Finally, they discussed the benefits and challenges of becoming a signatory to the 2003 Convention and how it could be implemented in Canada.

MODERATOR

Katharine Turvey, International Council of Museums

PANELISTS

1. Antoine Gauthier, Director General, Conseil québécois du patrimoine vivant
2. Kristin Catherwood, Director, Living Heritage, Heritage Saskatchewan
3. Odile Joannette, Member, Pessamit Innu First Nation, and Director of Creating, Knowing and Sharing Program, Arts Granting, Canada Council for the Arts

KEY MESSAGES

There are many ways to refer to and conceptualize ICH in Canada. On one hand, its diversity brings a richness to the notions of "intangible" and "heritage." On the other hand, it is possible to see misconceptions about ICH in the heritage sector at both the policy and community levels. For example, a common misconception is that ICH supplements "stories" associated with built heritage. Another is the general view that communities are defined by geography.

However, cultural expressions can be maintained by diaspora communities or organized around a practice, such as the global practice of training and flying falcons. In many instances, community members are not familiar with the concept of ICH and may not conceptualize their lives using this terminology. As a result, it is necessary to increase awareness of ICH, the 2003 UNESCO Convention, and the tools the Convention offers to support ICH policy in Canada.

> **"It's not about taking theoretical concepts and saying 'community, now you can apply for these programs, you can fit yourselves into our box.' Intangible cultural heritage does not work like that. It needs to be allowed to live and breathe in a community."**
>
> *- Kristin Catherwood, Director, Living Heritage, Heritage Saskatchewan*

All panelists emphasized the fact that ICH is not something that resides in the past, but is contemporary and vital to living cultural identity and belonging. Considering the diversity of communities and ICH manifestations and domains, it is important not to pigeonhole communities or their traditions, and to understand community capacity. This means recognizing that community engagement and relationships are crucial; they build trust and contribute to programs.

It is also important to understand that ICH projects don't necessarily stick to strict timelines. For example, as Odile Joannette pointed out, for many Indigenous cultural carriers, specific protocols are often immersed with respectful engagement. Therefore, to promote ICH at a policy level, multiple stakeholders must collaborate respectfully, including governments, NGOs, Indigenous Nations, universities, cultural organizations and individuals.

Although Canada has yet to sign the 2003 Convention, individuals, communities and organizations across the country have done a lot of the groundwork to promote and support the safeguarding of ICH. Antoine Gauthier reminded participants that, generally speaking, there is a desire and will to keep ICH alive at the community level. Kristin Catherwood concurred; in some provinces, communities are already working with regional NGOs to do so. These collaborations extend to the provinces or territories, providing opportunities for policies to be informed by community needs.

Without provincial or municipal ICH legislation, there is no specific funding, making it difficult to guarantee ICH. However, those who are advancing ICH work can look to the 2003 Convention. UNESCO's principles, and best practices for guidance.

"One of the wonderful lessons I learned from working with Indigenous communities is the idea of deep listening– how critical it is to really listen without any kind of preconceived approaches. Sometimes, we stop listening because we want to be able to speak, we have to interact. But deep listening is really about not interacting, truly just listening and processing from that place."

- Howard Jang, Executive and Artistic Director of ArtsSpring Arts Centre

PANEL 2

Promoting, safeguarding, and transmitting living heritage in the 21st century

Around the world, ICH is at risk due to the effects of colonization, assimilation, displacement and globalization. When we think about risks and threats, it is important to think about safeguarding measures. The objective of this panel was to highlight the challenges in safeguarding ICH and discuss astute practices to address these challenges. The panelists shared their approaches to archiving, inventorying and transmitting ICH by addressing questions related to accessibility, sustainable development, new technologies and innovative pedagogies.

MODERATORS

Barbara Filion, Canadian Commission for UNESCO and Lucas dos Santos Roque, ICH Facilitator

PANELISTS

1. Howard Jang, Executive and Artistic Director, ArtsSpring Arts Centre
2. Lara Maynard, 2021 Heritage NL Craft-at-Risk List, Heritage Skills Training Coordinator, Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland & Labrador
3. Agnieszka Pawłowska-Mainville, Associate Professor, UNBC and the International Scientific Committee for Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICICH)

KEY MESSAGES

When discussing the transmission, safeguarding and promotion of ICH, it is important to understand that these are three different concepts:

- Transmission of knowledge, beliefs and values generally occurs among community members as part of their daily lives or during formal or informal educational processes.
- Safeguarding means ensuring the favourable conditions for the continuation of a practice.
- Promotion includes activities like identifying or documenting a practice in a catalogue or register (such as by a community or institution).

Despite these nuances, all three may include activities to support a practice or program, generate public awareness or create bridges for intercultural dialogue and understanding. For example, Lara Maynard explained that Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland & Labrador surveyed builders, makers, artisans and crafters in the province to ask about the health and viability of their crafts. The survey became the 2021 Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland & Labrador Crafts-at-Risk List. The list identifies ICH elements that may be viable, endangered, critically endangered or extinct, and aims to help implement solutions to safeguard any at-risk elements. Suggested solutions included educating the public, promoting ICH, and equipping ICH practitioners with marketing and entrepreneurial skills to help them illustrate the level of expertise possessed by practitioners across the province.

Howard Jang elaborated on the creation of a storytelling centre that helped promote awareness that stories and cultural knowledge matter because they inspire and shape how we see the world. His example showcased interrelationships between people, objects and nature as well as built heritage and illustrated how cultural practices give meaning to places and spaces. In other words, intangible cultural practices, embodied through stories and memories create emotional ties to tangible heritage. These reflections brought forth important considerations for museums, galleries and other related institutions that display treasures and belongings (artifacts) outside of their cultural contexts. The ensuing discussion emphasized the importance of including stories when presenting tangible cultural heritage to offer a richer and more complete understanding of the value, vibrancy, and importance of cultural treasures and belongings.

> **"Bringing people back together made me realize how important my culture was, and it's these kinds of [ICH] projects that bring people together, that enhance a feeling of being a part of something important."**
>
> *- Michel Landry, Member, Le Cercle des Canadiens Français de Prince George*

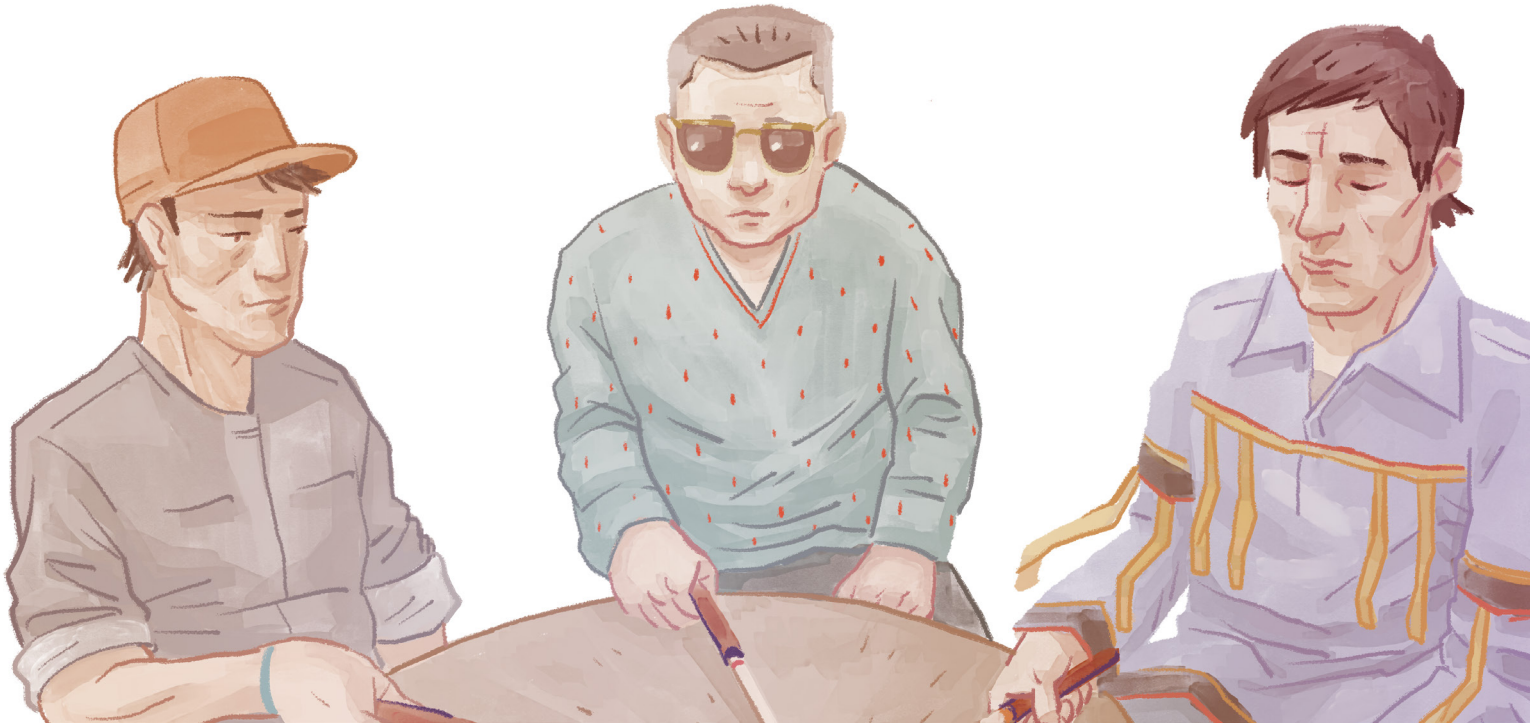
One way to safeguard ICH is through educational programs that support the transmission of traditional skills and knowledge. Agnieszka Pawłowska-Mainville emphasized that including mentor–apprenticeship programs in public policies and bringing academia together with ICH custodians can be useful tools in this respect. For example, integrating "living heritage" concepts and incorporating multiple languages in a variety of subjects like land management, art, environmental and global studies can help students appreciate the hard work it takes to learn a particular skill, maintain a language or transmit a specific cultural tradition. Integrating living heritage practices into scholastic activities can also heighten the visibility of socio-linguistic diversity in Canada and motivate students to learn a language or art form by showing them its value within cultural traditions. The benefits of such courses include the engagement of academia in community-based knowledge, embodied learning for students, and transmission of the knowledge. If done well, such educational frameworks can help students recognize the value of ICH and strengthen pride in their own communities' or families' socio-cultural practices.

Globalization and the use of technology have a mixed effect on the viability, safeguarding, and transmission of ICH. Whereas time-honoured, informal transmission occurred from Elders to youth in particular contexts (and generally encompassed social interactions within a community), today people can study certain ICH elements using online tutorials. Not only do relationships and values change with the use of such transmission methods, but communities may also lose some of the local nuances and regionalization that characterizes cultural diversity.

However, technology does have a role to play in safeguarding living heritage. If properly safeguarded, the technical abilities embedded within an ICH element can also protect a whole universe of associated beliefs, values and history. For example, tradition bearers may create and share podcasts or online workshops where more people can learn a skill at a lower cost than through private apprenticeship. Technology can also connect people through social media, digitize at-risk heritage, offer opportunities for language acquisition, and much more.

There are downfalls to information technology in the ICH context. This includes the inability to obtain quality information about a specific craft (for example, information may not be freely available or communities may have connectivity issues). Another concern is how to guarantee community sovereignty over data (it is common to use information online without seeking permission or crediting the source). Indeed, some of the biggest challenges are related to intellectual property rights.

There is also much debate about the relative importance of collective knowledge versus individual bearers' knowledge, and who should have the authority to consent on a community's behalf to share information beyond the community. The panelists affirmed that communities, including Indigenous communities, are already using technology to organize their knowledge online according to their own protocols and procedures. Therefore, it is essential to be clear about the risks and give custodians the power to decide what to share.



"There's always been cross-cultural transmission of some kind. Technologies and social media are just a new way of learning and transmitting ICH. The challenge, then, becomes how you safeguard the local traditions so that they are not lost within that."

- Lara Maynard, Heritage Skills Training Coordinator, Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland & Labrador

PANEL 3

Collective remembering and selective forgetting

The safeguarding of ICH requires communities to engage in their heritage continuously and prioritize the values, beliefs and traditions that are important to community identity. But transmission can be disrupted when the communal processes of passing knowledge from one generation to the next are interrupted due to shifts in the social, political, economic or environmental context. Increasing globalization, technological changes, state policies, exclusion from the dominant narratives of identity and history, or distancing or displacement from the land that carries a people's stories can also interfere with ICH transmission. At times, individuals, families and communities may choose to discontinue a practice or not transmit a language.

In this panel, participants discussed the critical role of ICH in helping community resiliency in the face of discrimination, colonization and homogenization or assimilation. Touching on themes of exclusion and inclusion, Truth and Reconciliation, and collective memory and community well-being, panelists shared their lived experiences of what happens when the links of transmission are limited or broken.

Panelists also highlighted the personal and collective consequences for communities that are prevented from expressing their cultural heritage. They shared how racism and oppression impacted their own access to cultural knowledge and how they are now working to strengthen elements of their heritage and transmit it to future generations.

MODERATOR

Kristin Catherwood, Heritage Saskatchewan

PANELISTS

1. Michael Abe, Landscapes of Injustice Project
2. Darlene Cooper, Black Loyalist Society
3. Michel Landry, Le Cercle des Canadiens Français de Prince George
4. John Mainville, Resource Management and Forest Extension Assistant, Aleza Lake Research Forest, and Student, UNBC (Forestry and Environmental Management)

KEY MESSAGES

When a certain culture, group of people or language is suppressed, tradition bearers may be forced to assimilate with the mainstream culture. They can also be prevented from passing on languages that are intrinsically linked to culture, resulting in barriers between generations. Canada has a history of oppression perpetrated against different cultural groups through government-sanctioned legislation and assimilationist policies. When groups cannot express and celebrate their cultural heritage, it causes harm and trauma. Survivors of such policies may have difficulties with socio-personal relationships or with accepting or accessing their heritage. Some may reject their cultural identity altogether. All panelists spoke to the shame and exclusion they felt and experienced for not appearing to fit into the mainstream. In such cases, considerable healing may be necessary before cultural transmission is possible.

Some children do not learn their cultures and languages, yet as adults, they may grow to appreciate the importance of ICH, particularly when parents or grandparents begin to pass away. They may then be inclined to learn (or relearn) their native language(s) and recover elements of their culture, such as recipes and foods they grew up with, or to share culturally relevant stories with their children or younger family members. In some situations, it may take three or four generations for a resurgence in interest to occur.

Intergenerational transmission may also be disrupted by migration and displacement resulting from inter alia economic, political, environmental reasons. These factors create both the loss and, later, the possible (re)creation of ICH elements. For example, John Mainville highlighted that the lands we call “home” often carry stories, and being removed from those lands may lead to a loss of stories and practices. Other panelists, such as Darlene Cooper and Michael Abe, argued that being displaced also requires people to rebuild their lives from scratch and, as such, may shift the focus toward survival, sometimes at the expense of preserving living heritage.

However, migration may also promote the development of very strong bonds between friends and families and can help new relationships form, adding uniqueness to the “living” part of heritage. This also illustrates that the evolution of cultural heritage is dynamic and malleable.

Cultural heritage is transferred from one generation to the next, but custodians decide what their heritage is and how they want to safeguard it, if at all. Transmission cannot be forced, but it can be encouraged or facilitated. For example, the panelists all agreed that watching TV is easier than learning something traditional. In this sense, it is important to find a balance when approaching the safeguarding of ICH. Safeguarding and transmission require personal commitment.

John Mainville said that he leads by example and follows this rule: “When you’re going to teach about the way you live, you must also walk what you talk, you must also live what you teach. If you want somebody to be a certain way, you have to be that way yourself.” In that sense, safeguarding, promoting and transmitting heritage is both a collective and an individual effort.

Maintaining ICH practices can fight inequality and teach us about the richness of human cultural diversity. Growing up with a strong sense of one's own cultural heritage contributes to a sense of well-being and pride, confers familiarity with and ties to rich cultural histories, and can give people a voice. But ICH transmission may not be straightforward: a custodian may not want to teach it, or a child may not want to learn it. We must promote and improve awareness of ICH in Canada to support its multicultural characteristics and bolster dialogue about and appreciation of cultural differences. ICH transmission can also support reconciliation between generations and help heal traumas caused by oppression and injustice.

> **"Technology helps, especially with the future generations, and you have to keep up with them in order to teach them. I think apps and online teaching are really helpful tools, even though the best is in person."**
>
> *-Yvonne Pierreroy, Dakelh Elder, Member of the Carrier Linguistic Society*

PANEL 4

Community approaches to nurturing living heritage

In the context of the historical policies of "linguicide" and culture loss in Canada, as well as the ongoing cultural homogenization that is fostered by globalization, this panel focused on the importance of culture and language as carriers of values and knowledge. Languages and oral expressions (such as proverbs, riddles, legends, myths, songs and poems) recount our world back to us.

The value and significance of a diversity of worldviews and languages was conveyed by the panel. One example was the word that describes the month of June. In each of the six languages discussed, the word signified a completely different way of life, demonstrating that languages are immensely important for ICH transmission. Given the precarious status of many Indigenous languages and the increasing number of non-English or -French speakers in Canada, the panel demonstrated the urgency of creating policies that will support the diversity of cultural and linguistic heritage in Canada.

From the perspective of ICH custodians and learners, this panel addressed the importance of culture, the role of language in identity, and what custodians and learners need in order to continue to ensure the transmission of their ICH practices.

MODERATOR

Agnieszka Pawłowska-Mainville, UNBC and ICICH

PANELISTS:

1. Yvonne Pierreroy, Dakelh Elder and Member, Carrier Linguistic Society
2. Sara Sam, Dakelh Elder, Member, Carrier Linguistic Society, and Dakelh Language and Culture Teacher, Nakal'bun School
3. Gary Wilson, Professor of Political Science, UNBC and Manx Language Learner
4. Patrycja Legut, Language Educator

KEY MESSAGES

Cultural practices and knowledge are often passed down through oral and linguistic expressions. Languages carry specific cultural information, and once a language is gone, many of its embedded insights and nuances disappear. Likewise, because language is heavily tied to culture, once a practice is no longer performed, many linguistic aspects of the tradition (such as vocabulary, sounds and specific songs) may also disappear. In the same way, legends and folklore may represent the contents of a particular knowledge, and by maintaining them, a community reinforces its traditions and beliefs, and even its ties to a particular landscape.

Stories and songs transmit ideas and community values, teach life lessons and keep memories of people alive. One panelist, Patrycja Legut, revealed that even people's names can be imbued with meaning, and in some cultures, it is possible to determine what relationship two people have with each other just by listening to how they refer to each other. Every culture carries intricate social rules, and all panelists emphasized the importance of teaching traditional languages to younger generations.

Teaching children their parental tongue in school provides significant benefits. For Indigenous children, it helps them gain even more familiarity with a language they may also be learning or speaking at home. Education in native languages allows teachers to explain why they are learning it and why it matters, introducing the concept of language transmission to younger generations. Elder Sara Sam pointed out that culture and language education enables students to access and read language books, listen to verbal communication, and buddy up with a younger person to explore stories and language together.

Other panelists also shared that playing games and integrating vocabulary into students' daily activities allows for language transmission to happen informally and removes some of the possible strain of learning it. Because formally inserting non-dominant languages into institutional curricula can be a struggle, informally embedding these languages into teaching curricula is critical, particularly for Indigenous communities.

Elder Yvonne Pierreroy mentioned that new technologies can make language learning more accessible. For example, online classes and apps offer innovative ways of teaching languages. They can reduce transmission barriers, foster interest and increase accessibility. This may be especially relevant for younger generations, for whom technology is a daily and important part of life.

To continue the work of maintaining parental tongues and cultural traditions, all panelists expressed a pressing need to improve funding for educational programs and the development of culturally relevant educational resources. Learning a language requires many hours of work and resources; teaching one also requires time and the funding to develop materials. Language teachers need assistance to implement the resources needed to help students learn, particularly in the context of Indigenous language revitalization.

One panelist who is a teacher to his children and a learner himself also noted the "cost of culture," indicating that people ask for a lot of money to "show them his culture." The question was raised: "Are we teaching and passing down a culture for money, or are we passing it down for revitalization?"

In conclusion, language transmission can be fostered by increased visibility and representation in media and during traditional ceremonies and cultural gatherings. Providing visibility to Indigenous cultures and languages by giving street and buildings names in local languages is a simple way to make the languages more visible and contribute to their normalization.

It is important to include as much language as possible in daily life because language learning and transmission is an ongoing, non-linear process that requires frequent exercise. Gary Wilson emphasized that individuals, families and entire communities need to be part of cultural and linguistic learning. Panelists also acknowledge that a comprehensive language policy is also important in supporting language transmission. Finally, the panelists argued that promoting and incentivizing bilingual or multilingual families helps keep aspects of traditional cultural alive.

"Languages carry this kind of specific cultural information that gets passed down from generation to generation. Once the language is gone, you lose a lot of the information and insights that came with it, because it's so often so connected with traditional practices."

-Gary Wilson, Professor of Political Science, Manx Learner, University of Northern British Columbia

How you can help

- **Increase multi-stakeholder networking and collaborative engagement opportunities across the country,** with a focus on policy and programming. Policy-makers should dialogue with experts and communities about implementing effective ICH legislation or policies.
- **Create more opportunities for intergenerational ICH transmission and support community groups and organizations,** such as mentor–apprenticeship programs and ICH-based learning approaches, through public policies and in learning institutions.
- **Increase subsidies for language books and courses.**
- **Acknowledge local cultures and languages by promoting visibility.**
- **Show street and building names in local languages.** For example, seeing the Anishinaabemowin term “oshkiabinoojiwigamig” (daycare) allows people to learn and use the word.
- **Support communities in advocating for cultural safeguarding** and support the transmission of cultural skills, knowledges and languages.
- **Give knowledge holders time and support to teach and pass down their cultures to their youth and families.** One idea is to reduce organizational or workplace expectations about knowledge holders’ roles in this respect. For example, one panelist stated that his father was so busy travelling and working to “save” his community’s culture that he sometimes doesn’t have enough time to teach his own children.
- **Encourage Canada to adopt the appropriate legal, administrative and financial measures to safeguard, promote and transmit ICH.** This includes recognizing that ICH plays a central role in communities and among families.

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