

Intangible Cultural Heritage

An Introduction



Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) encompasses the underlying fabric of our lives -- stories, skills, traditions, ways of doing things, ways of speaking, and ways of interacting with each other and the environment. It does not always leave a material record behind, but rather is passed from person to person and from generation to generation. It is so deeply embedded in our cultural identities that we oftentimes take it for granted.

ICH does not reside solely in the past. It is those elements of the past which continue on in the present. As such, it informs who we are and where we hope to go. Due to the increasing reliance upon technology in our society, globalization, and other factors, many elements of our ICH are endangered.

From the UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, *“Intangible cultural heritage includes: oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.”*

ICH is: i) traditional, contemporary and living at the same time; ii) inclusive; iii) representative; and iv) community-based.

From UNESCO: *“Communities themselves must take part in identifying and defining intangible cultural heritage: they are the ones deciding which practices are part of their cultural heritage.”*

Saskatchewan's cultural landscape is as diverse as its geography. The way we speak, the foods we eat, how we celebrate traditions, all tell a story, the story of who we are.

By exploring Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), individuals, communities and organizations can develop our understanding of our place(s) in the world and nurture our Living Heritage, thus improving our quality of life and the vitality of our communities.

www.heritagesask.ca

info@heritagesask.ca

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Some Examples of ICH in Saskatchewan

Language: languages, local dialects, word usage, place names, figures of speech

Food: family recipes, use of local ingredients in food preparation, fowl/fall suppers, potlucks, feasts, funeral lunches, holiday meals

Customs and traditions: shivarees, trick or drinking/mumming, local community traditions, weddings, graduations, funerary customs, powwows, festivals

Environmental knowledge: hunting and fishing practices, foraging (mushrooms, herbs, etc.), berry picking, trails and wilderness knowledge, farming and ranching practices

Play: practical jokes, playground games, card games, dances, community drama/theatre, sports and recreation

Work: traditional knowledge of farming, hunting, mining, chores, domestic work, and craft production

Music and Dance: folk songs, shanties, fiddling, drumming, square dancing, jigging, two-stepping

Belief: worship, ceremonies, superstitions, supernatural beliefs, divination, prayer



Photo Credit: Kristin Catherwood

Safeguarding ICH – Four Goals

1. **Document** ICH and living traditions (audio/video recordings, interviews, photographs, written narratives, et cetera.).
2. **Recognize** and **celebrate** ICH with festivals and community events.
3. Support and encourage the **transmission** of knowledge and skills (workshops, mentorship, classes, et cetera.).
4. Explore the potential of ICH as a resource for **community development**.

Ideas for Working with ICH in Communities

- ◇ Compile a list of traditions and customs (brainstorm with community members).
- ◇ Identify tradition-bearers and elders.
- ◇ Consider which traditions, customs, or knowledge are under the greatest pressure.
- ◇ Celebrate/incorporate ICH in existing community structures (eg. museums, cultural centres, festivals/events).
- ◇ Create workshops, events, programs based on identified ICH in the community.

Questions

- ◇ What is your community already doing to safeguard local ICH and nurture *Living Heritage*?
- ◇ How can your community curate its own *Living Heritage* in a way that is inclusive and representative of all its residents?
- ◇ How can you create opportunities in your community for people to tell their own stories, in turn telling the larger story of your region?
- ◇ How does place inform your personal cultural identity, as well as your community's cultural identity?

Why is this Important?

- ◇ This kind of knowledge is rarely documented, and is often lost or diminished by the increasing influences of globalization and mass media.
- ◇ Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is vital to sustaining a community's innate creativity and sense of identity.

How Your Community can Incorporate ICH into its Cultural Planning

- ◇ Host an ICH workshop with Heritage Saskatchewan's ICH Development Officer.
- ◇ Implement ICH principles into existing community infrastructure (museums, galleries, festivals and events).
 - ◇ Create a new festival/event celebrating your community's unique *Living Heritage*.
 - ◇ Undertake a documentation project in your community (oral history, documentary videography, photography exhibition).



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Heritage Saskatchewan

#200-2020 11th Avenue
REGINA SK S4P 0J3

P: (306) 780-9191 F: (306) 780-9190

www.heritagesask.ca