

DPRK initiates the safeguarding of Intangible Heritage

 unesco.org/ru/news/article/dprk-initiates-the-safeguarding-of-intangible-heritage

UNESCO » Bangkok Office

DPRK authorities and community representatives engage in Training Workshop on Community-Based Inventorying of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Pongsan County, taken place from 29 August to 1 September 2016.



Locals in Pongsan County perform the Pongsan Mask Dance ©National Authority for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (NAPCH)

The sound of coach engines rumbling ever closer is easy to catch in the noiseless, tree-covered hill slopes of Pongsan County. To a group of village people draped in red and white robes, it's the awaited signal of visitors into their community of crop growers and the vast span of their cultural heritage.

As 36 guests and participants of the Training Workshop on Community-Based Inventorying of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) arrive at Pongsan on 1 September 2016 and begin to alight from the coach into the open air, drums that were rolled flat besides some of the village people are sat up straight, in the hands of others gong-like devices are readied and flute shaped instruments are tucked into their lips.

Soon all the red and white dressed men and women put on an oil-paint-based mask of the Pongsan Mask Dance and on their feet take to express courtesy from a cultural practice that symbolizes the value their heritage places in connection to protecting their crop during the harvest season.

Presently only two of a multitude of cultural elements of DPRK's intangible culture are inscribed on the UNESCO Lists including the Arirang Folk song and Kimchi – making, (a Korean cabbage dish) but additional cultural practices like the Pongsan Mask Dance alive in communities like the ones in Pongsan offer a special insight into the history of the people in DPRK, and this is where the work of safeguarding of elements unique to specific communities gains its significance.

For participants of the fieldtrip – who included national authorities (the National Authority for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (NAPCH)) and local cultural workers from different provinces, UNESCO Beijing personnel, researchers and community members – the vibrant welcome was the first real scenario since the beginning of the workshop to engage in the process of involving communities as equal participants in inventory-making and to practice knowledge documenting techniques they had learnt days earlier in the training at the Pyongyang Science and Technology Center.



Participants interview locals using documentation methods acquired during the workshop ©NAPCH

Pongsan County with its ancestry preserved high in hill-top pagodas and low where music is danced to in proud performance of by its local people offered the holistic context by which to engage in safeguarding practices learned so far.

Following the guidance of Mr Anthony Parak, a UNESCO-accredited facilitator, training on methods to engage with communities to document Intangible Cultural Heritage, participants along with the village people sat under a canopy of trees and began active exchange. Over the course of the afternoon the experiences of the Pongsan people were documented in interviews and captured on camera based on principles of free, prior and informed consent advocated by the *2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* studied during the in-class sessions.

The fieldwork session during this 3rd capacity-building workshop organized in DPRK by UNESCO offered a unique breakthrough of its kind by involving a wide-variety of all key stakeholders. In his report Antony Parak remarks “it was encouraging to see top ranking officials of NAPCH attending the field work, something which was rarely seen in other workshops I have been to in the Pacific region”.



Mr Anthony Parak gives presentation on safeguarding ICH ©NAPCH

Over the formative years of UNESCO’s provision of capacity-building to safeguard ICH in the country (UNESCO’s support started in 2010, two years after DPRK’s ratification of the 2003 Convention), workshops have endeavored to develop knowledge and skilled human capacity around the areas: National Safeguarding Awareness-Raising (2011) and Implementation of 2003 Convention (2013).

This year’s workshop expanded from the theoretical sphere of the previous workshop into establishing practical strategy and skills sharing to safeguard ICH. This was introduced through community-based inventorying as participants received training on ways to implement the approach which helps communities identify, maintain and transmit ICH.



Participants pose holding their certificates of participation for a group photo at the closing ceremony of the workshop

Positive milestones could be observed during the workshop including a considerable number of participants belonging to different communities (44%), with fruitful exchange among female (28%) and young participants (19%).

“On their own initiative, participants created an action plan of how to develop activities in their own localities that can equip others with the skills they’ve learnt for community-based inventorying... we are seeing a possible multiplier effect from this workshop” said Himalchuli



Participants of the field practicum with Pongsan Mask Dance performers ©NAPCH

Participants shared that although the country has established both a state inventory and several provincial inventories and has also recently passed the State legislation for the protection of cultural heritage (which includes both tangible and intangible heritage), “human resource and funding remain the two biggest obstacles to carrying out safeguarding measures in the country.”

The National Authority for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (NAPCH) together with the National Commission of DPRK for UNESCO and UNESCO Beijing Office were responsible for the organization of this training. The workshop is made possible thanks to the financial and organizational support of the International Training Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO (CRIHAP).



Participants engage with each other during the practical exercises in the workshop ©UNESCO

27.10.2016