

Introduction

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Volume 45, Number 1, 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1111885ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1111885ar>

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Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Butsenko, O. & Nahachewsky, A. (2023). Introduction: The Two Roles of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Emergencies. *Ethnologies*, 45(1), 3–14.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1111885ar>

INTRODUCTION

The Two Roles of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Emergencies

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Ukraine ratified the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2008, one of the 182 state parties that have joined this initiative so far. The country made a preliminary list of 6 items in their National Register, which has now grown to 80 elements. Since 2013, three elements from Ukraine have been inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity¹, and two others are inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding².

This volume is dedicated to Ukrainian intangible cultural heritage in a state of emergency. The articles in this collection make frequent reference to the Russian invasion of 2014 and the greatly intensified war since February 2022. In some cases, they describe how the fighting has changed

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1. Petrykivka decorative painting as a phenomenon of the Ukrainian ornamental folk art (inscribed in 2013): <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/petrykivka-decorative-painting-as-a-phenomenon-of-the-ukrainian-ornamental-folk-art-00893>; Tradition of Kosiv painted ceramics (inscribed in 2019): <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/tradition-of-kosiv-painted-ceramics-01456>; Ornek, a Crimean Tatar ornament and knowledge about it (inscribed in 2021): <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ornek-a-crimean-tatar-ornament-and-knowledge-about-it-01601>
 2. Cossack's songs of Dnipropetrovsk Region (inscribed in 2016): <https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/cossack-s-songs-of-dnipropetrovsk-region-01194>; Culture of Ukrainian borscht cooking (inscribed in 2022): <https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/culture-of-ukrainian-borscht-cooking-01852>

the form of the element of intangible heritage. More often, the authors write about how it has changed the context and meaning. In 2019, in the context of the war in Syria and the growing Covid-19 pandemic, and since then, UNESCO Secretariat of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage produced documents and programming to deal with “Intangible Cultural Heritage in Emergencies”³. Following three years of reflection on intangible cultural heritage in emergencies and an expert meeting in May 2019, “Operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies” were proposed to and endorsed by the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the ICH at its fourteenth session in Bogotá, in December 2019 (UNESCO 14.COM 13) and approved in 2020 by the 8th General Assembly of the State Parties to the 2003 Convention (UNESCO 8.GA 9). As elaborated in the introductory article by Valentyna Demian and in the closing summative article by Oleksandr Butsenko, these operational principles underline the “dual role” of ICH in emergencies, its particular vulnerability on the one hand, and also its role in strengthening community and identity, in helping to recover (UNESCO 8.GA 9).

Numerous authors in this volume write of a first role – the devastation of material objects and immaterial components of culture because the context has been altered or has completely disappeared (workshops for carrying out crafts, natural settings such as forests and wetlands, and social infrastructure such as markets and festivals). Both the consumers for their cultural elements and the creators themselves have been killed or wounded, or more likely displaced from their homes to other regions or countries (some 6 million refugees within the country and 8 million displaced internationally). In spite of the dislocations, many elements of ICH survived and even rebounded after the pandemic, and some have adjusted themselves rather sustainably during the military crisis as well.

The dominant theme of most contributors relates to the second role of ICH in emergencies that was mentioned by UNESCO: its value in reinforcing identity and increasing resilience in a community. Indeed, the war has powerfully changed those elements of ICH that have come to function as national symbols, making them much more potent, valued and shared. Poignant examples of the increase in the significance of ICH are described here in Butsenko’s reference to the rooster-flask that remarkably survived a bombing in the town of Borodianka (Natsional’nyi Memorial’nyi

3. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/emergency-situations-01117>

Kompleks 2022), in the activities of the *kobzars* described by Mykola Tovkailo, Maryna Hrymych, Myroslava Vertiuk and Andrii Levchenko, the nativity performances called *vertep* treated by Andriy Sendetskyy, the Petrykivka workshops worldwide which Iryna Voloshyna speaks of, the success of Ukrainian songs with folkloric references at Eurovision and countless other manifestations.

The articles by Demian and Butsenko also signal the great intensification in the ICH structures themselves and their initiatives in Ukraine. Contributors to this sphere have been profoundly activated by Russia's brutal denials that Ukraine exists as a nation. About two-thirds of the elements inscribed in the National Register have been added since the full-scale war started two years ago. Lawmakers, staff in development centres and other non-governmental organizations, oblast-level cultural centres, local communities and countless individuals have all been energized and have increased their dedication to promoting Ukrainian culture in what Manuel Castells calls "resistance identity" (Castells 1997), considered in more detail in Butsenko's article.

The "branding" of Ukrainian culture portrays it as based on traditional village culture more than others, partially because of colonial relations in the 18th and 19th centuries, during the periods of Enlightenment, Romanticism and thereafter. Folklore studies developed strongly in this land and had an outsized symbolic potency for the national movement. As industrialization arrived late, more remnants of earlier layers of technology, worldview, customs, relations, recreation and aesthetics remained evident than perhaps in other parts of Europe. By the 19th century, as this area became increasingly conceived as a nation in the modern sense, Ukraine's reputation for having a rich folklore and vibrant cultural expression persisted. This perception continues to this day, and the self-ascription has been a longstanding keystone in the movements for Ukrainian national consciousness.

In the Tsarist Russian Empire, this image of the colourful Ukrainian peasant was not inconsistent with the Russocentric imperial perspective. In the 20th century, Bolshevik ideology did not dispute this claim either, but rather harnessed it for its political purposes. Marxist-Leninist policy added urban workers to the rural peasants and argued that these masses are the living core of humanity, the font of all creativity. The culture of the masses was to be celebrated as beautiful, fair, optimistic and communal. An early Soviet period of "*korenizatsiia*" (indigenization, *коренізація*, "Ukrainianization" in our case) allowed for a flowering of expression, artistic

creativity and limited growth of national identity, including modern urban culture, until it ended abruptly in February 1932. By the mid 1930s, as Socialist Realism was being institutionalized as the monopoly for artistic expression, folk-based art was gain highly esteemed. Artistic expression could well be “National in form, Socialist in content.” The first part of the slogan showed tolerance for the expression of Ukrainian (or Georgian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz...) identity, though within strict boundaries. The emphasis of this slogan tended to shift decidedly to its second phrase and to merging with Russian culture. Several articles in this volume indicate the pattern of Soviet government engagement with folk arts and intangible cultural heritage.

During the most recent three decades, the time of Ukrainian independence, the legacy of celebrating “folk” culture has continued to a degree. Whereas the Ukrainian nation was historically conceived of primarily through the model of “ethnic national identity” (which would specifically prioritize the majority group’s ancestry, language, history and culture in national life), a model of “civic national identity” (based more on citizenship, residency, equal rights and openness to multi-ethnic inclusion) is rising (see Shulman 2008; Barrington 2021). Indeed, scholars are noting that Ukraine is interesting because “Ukraine is becoming more Ukrainian” (Arel 2018) at the same time as its civic identity is growing notably stronger (Barrington 2021). Both of these models for Ukrainian identity are closely interwoven with the country’s interests in ICH. As Demian and Butsenko note, several Laws of Ukraine protect the existence and cultures of the three indigenous and the many minority cultural groups in Ukraine, and several of the elements identified in the National Register of ICH specifically represent their sub-cultures.

The adjective “narodnyi” (народний) in Ukrainian can be translated as “folk” but also as “of the people” and “national.” This ambivalence was very useful from the Soviet perspective. Thus, they could call an elderly village woman singing to her granddaughter a “*narodna spivachka*” (folk singer \equiv national singer) and the same term could be used for an eminent soprano at the opera. Indeed, the highest awards for artistry in the USSR gave the status of “*narodnyi artist*” (national artist \equiv folk artist). The Soviets insisted on emphasizing the historical continuity between these two singers (or sculptors, painters, actors, dancers, event managers ...), consistently ascribing “improvements” in artistic quality and technique to the Revolution and building of Soviet culture. Western perspectives on culture, including folklore studies, emphasize context and recontextualization much

more, attentive to the differences between the two singers at least as much as their similarities (even if they might sing the “same” song).

One key difference of course, is the *meaning* of the activity. The tradition-bearers performed and crafted these elements because they were useful, because they built social relations in a desired way, because they reflected the way the world was, or the way the world might be, because they were holy, pretty, fun, because “our people do it this way” in contrast to “those people” over there, or for numerous other reasons. For them however, these elements of vernacular culture were mostly unmarked as “heritage,” and unmarked as “national.” They had no reason to highlight those particular qualities or be particularly historically self-conscious.

The concept of “heritage” actively implies a historical self-consciousness, marking the relevant cultural element specifically as “traditional,” and very often “old” and “a symbol of the nation.” “Heritage” has increasingly been associated with this “reflective,” “looking-in-a-mirror-at-your-past” quality. In this respect, “heritage” contrasts with “traditional” and “vernacular” culture, which are also shared in a community, may also be passed on generationally, may also be old, but are not necessarily marked for these characteristics in the minds of the culture-bearers. The fact a cultural item might have been previously unmarked, but then has taken on these meanings, activates the neologism “heritagization” as “the act or process of making something into heritage” (see Harrison 2013). The lore becomes “value added,” as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett famously described it (1985: 370-372).

The “discovery” of the “folk” and their “lore,” by Johann Gottfried Herder, the Brothers Grimm and many others thereafter constituted a major change in the meaning of that lore. The signification of the tradition changed in the minds of the intellectuals, though not necessarily in the perception of the culture-carriers themselves. These educated ideologues started travelling to the villages in the countryside (or downstairs to their servants’ kitchens) to document the newly appreciated texts, verbal expressions, customs and rituals. The lore was appreciated even more if it seemed ancient, pre-rational or endangered. It was also thought of as having extra value if it was “locally specific” (more to the point, associated with that geographic range of the nation that they were helping “reveal” [and “build”]).

For perhaps a century or more in many cases, the meaning of the traditions for the folklorists and their colleagues was different than that

for the “folk” themselves who lived the cultural elements. Many earlier folklorists imagined their work somewhat like archaeologists, saving valuable items nearly lost in the dust, not able to capture (or perhaps not interested in, not believing in) what the carriers of those elements understood those items meant. Just as Sir James Frazer’s savages with “strange customs” and Cecil Sharp’s Morris dancers, the hunter-gatherers, peasants, or commoners were not necessarily aware that their songs, stories, customs, and beliefs were valuable and “heritage.” The early social scientists did not see this as a problem, as they believed it was the job of the scholar to interpret and explain, while they imagined the tradition-bearers as behaving mostly without agency, quite uncritically repeating what they had inherited.

Of course, this depiction oversimplifies the situation, and there have long been threads of scholarship which did engage, sometimes profoundly, with the understandings of the cultural traditions expressed by their subject groups. By the 1960s and 1970s, with the rise of cultural studies, the “writing culture” turn, deeper awareness of orientalism, post-colonialism and many other changes in academic perspectives in social sciences and humanities, this divide was largely reconciled. The folklorists, anthropologists, sociologists, art historians and literary scholars who once may have thought that they “revealed the truth” about these traditions now strive to understand the meaning of the cultural content in ways that are more in tune with the understandings of the culture bearers. The older asymmetrical sets of meaning continue to resonate, however, in many situations: Popular perspectives of “other cultures” and of “folklore” at home certainly often perpetuate biases about their content as exotic, irrational and archaic, indicating a distinct *a priori* “national character” (whether the culture-carriers in their local settings see it in these ways or not).

All of the authors of the articles in this volume take this “heritage-aware” position that the traditions symbolize the nation, have value and merit attention, consideration and safeguarding. Most of our readers no doubt share this view that these elements are “heritage.”

The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage enshrines an important further development in this two-level asynchronous shift of meanings towards “heritage” and its associated qualities. To participate in the ICH movement, not only the folklorists and other nation builders, but the carriers of the cultural elements themselves must actively conceptualize the cultural content as “heritage.” Furthermore, they must engage with the regional and state levels of administration.

Of course, that older asymmetry in meanings has also long been eroded from the “bottom-up” as well. Many traditions are born in the city and involve engagement by people who are not isolated from elite culture, but even the most isolated non-modern villagers could not remain unaffected by the folklorists who asked them to sing songs out of context, who kept writing words onto paper during a wedding, and who bought their pots but were not ever going to use them for cooking. Traditional elements that involved barter or payment became further commodified. Certain local individuals, perhaps already semi-specialists or gatekeepers, gained a reputation as “experts” or “living treasures.” New items were developed to suit the newly interested audiences. As early as the 19th century and increasingly in the 20th, people who liked to perform were assembled into groups and taken to the regional towns or capital cities to present their local traditions to the city folk. Enlightenment organizations and various government initiatives introduced or reinforced national consciousness and encouraged them to join the great “imagined community” beyond their earlier parochial horizons. With the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the participants in the community are explicitly expected to be well cognizant and supportive of their element as “heritage.” This asymmetry has mostly closed.

This “heritagization,” marking the elements as “traditional,” “valuable” and “national” by the nation builders, the oft-delayed similar shift in meaning for the culture-carriers themselves, as well as the relative timing and intensity of these two transformations, show quite diverse patterns. A complex continuum of possibilities can be seen in the articles of this volume, and we hope this may suggest cross-cultural patterns to the interested reader.

With his intimate exposure to many details in the region, Yuriy Rybak is in the position to choose three cultural elements that are somewhat obscure, not connected (or hardly) with the international heritage flow. Indeed, the shepherds were not thinking of “heritage” when they twisted the heartwood out of young pine stems and made flutes from the resulting sapwood tubes. In earlier generations and still at the time of Rybak’s colleagues’ fieldwork, they played mostly for their own entertainment, to pass the time as they herded their animals, maybe playing *for* the animals, and then perhaps extending into an additional context to play in the village for dances. Similarly, the solo singers Rybak describes, who improvised on melody, rhythm and mode, were also initially disengaged from the larger more official cultural trends. Indeed, such engagement would probably disable them from singing in the traditional way, as Rybak notes: “it is important

that the singers [...] have been minimally influenced by academic music making.” Later, if the shepherds started playing on stages, or if the singers vocalized specifically for the microphone, the function of “heritage” had clearly arrived. Indeed, these recontextualized performances were a striking innovation and became “representations of themselves,” serving specifically as symbols of their music in its earlier vernacular settings (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995: 371). They became “heritage.” It is clear that Rybak chose to nominate these cultural elements to the Rivne Centre of Folk Creativity and to write about them here precisely because of their non-integration with more global cultural practices. The residents of these villages are not the initial leaders in this process. Rybak however, values them strongly as remnants of older and localized expressions. It is also clear that these musical practices are in urgent need of safeguarding because they have not otherwise found some niche in which they have enough value in the new cultural realities of those villages in the 21st century. Rybak and his colleagues are among the early “discoverers” and “promoters” that are converting these traditions into “heritage.” “Heritage organizations ensure that places and practices in danger of disappearing [...] will survive. [They do] this by adding the value of pastness, exhibition, difference, and where possible indigeneity” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995: 370).

Maria Verhovska’s article on basket making in the Lubny area reveals similarities to the traditions Rybak describes in terms of this continuum. These baskets were not made as “heritage” items but because they were effective containers for carrying milk, vegetables, schoolbooks and other things. In contrast with Rybak’s examples however, the craft became formalized and actively organized in early Soviet times. Still, they were promoted and became semi-mass produced primarily because the baskets were useful. Even after this striking growth in basket making in the area, it decreased rapidly once other technologies for similar containers became increasingly available (such as plastic after WW2). Verhovska’s text suggests that the baskets may have gained a hint of heritage value when she reports about the “really beautiful” *korzhyky* style that became popular in the 1980s, and when Svitlana Iakuba, one of the last traditional basket makers describes the situation in 2019: “Now they fight for my baskets. [...] Certainly, I have clients!” The process of heritagization, which includes Verhovska’s very project to study this cultural element, may have come too late if the goal was to change the historical trajectory of the craft.

Andriy Sendetsky describes Christian nativity presentations called *vertep* in numerous variants and urges their inclusion in the Ukrainian

National Register for ICH. This complex of traditions has largely retained its earlier functions as part of Christmas spirituality, social commentary and community binding as the performers engage in house visitations or perform in public community spaces. This tradition has long had connections with clerical print culture and had caught the imagination of ethnographers by the 19th century. Thus, some of its participants have been rather historically self-conscious for generations, though the “heritage” function was only one of numerous motivations for people to practice it. The suppression of *vertep* during Soviet times certainly helped springboard it to increased value as a national symbol in the period of Ukrainian independence. Clearly, Sendetskyi’s example of the *vertep* performance by the emigré community in Rome, incorporating the Russian president as the main antagonist, has a strong and intentional message of national and cultural symbolism in a “heritage” mode.

The Petrykivka painting tradition that Iryna Voloshyna describes also has an intermediate position in this continuum. Paintings from Petrykivka were first researched by ethnographers in 1911 and were displayed in international exhibits in 1913 and 1928, clear signs of moderately early heritagization (Kara-Vasyl’ieva 2005). Even before that, the painters could sometimes earn money or goods for their work, though outsider recognition clearly added value in a literal way. Whereas the Soviets suppressed *vertep* traditions because of their Christian association and extirpated them from many areas, the Petrykivka paintings started in one limited geographic zone and were made portable (now painted on paper, wood or on other objects). The painting tradition was converted into a form of souvenir art. Like the Lubny area baskets, the Soviets institutionalized support for this item, though the author and her interviewees make it clear that this support was an ambivalent blessing. By the 1990s, the Petrykivka tradition was quite strongly re-conceptualized (and re-contextualized) to symbolize the Ukrainian nation specifically rather than being a variant of Soviet creativity. This reconceptualization had implications for form and context.

Mykola Tovkailo’s strongly diachronic survey exemplifies still earlier and stronger heritagization. The *kobzar* tradition was never a “mass” phenomenon but was the preservation of a clearly identifiable minority of specialists who underwent training and formal initiation. Tovkailo argues that these minstrels have long maintained a sense of historical self-consciousness. The *kobzar* tradition was also marked as “heritage” and “national” very early and very strongly by the intelligentsia. Shifts in Petrykivka painting and basket making were somewhat subtle from

the 19th century to the Soviet period and then to the period of Ukrainian independence. By contrast, shifts in the *kobzar* tradition were radical and traumatic, leading to an almost total annihilation of the tradition early in Soviet times. This cultural element has experienced a powerful revival since Ukrainian independence, vigorously engaging its functions as a national symbol, a heritage activity and as a performing art.

Iryna Zubavina writes about neo-poetic cinema in Ukraine and pushes the paradigm of heritagization one step further in her article. Films in this genre clearly present and represent a great deal of content of Ukrainian intangible vernacular culture through their powerful audio and video montages. Rather than shifting from vernacular into heritage modes, the contents of these films are mostly “born as heritage.” The films themselves, having entered a third generation since 1930, also constitute a powerful element of intangible culture. Indeed, since they are doubly or triply “reflective,” symbolic and historically self-conscious, they may arguably be the most intense example of all of intangible cultural heritage.

The article by Maryna Hrymych, Andrii Levchenko and Myroslava Vertiuk contributes uniquely to this volume in that it highlights the recent activities of a particular municipal institution, a museum and cultural centre, in terms of promoting and programming intangible cultural heritage activity. The successful initiatives of the Ivan Honchar Museum can serve as an instructive example of intense safeguarding practices in action.

One clear overall pattern in the articles of this volume is to confirm UNESCO’s premise about the second of the two roles of ICH in emergencies, that “the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage [...] can effectively help communities to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies” (UNESCO 8.GA 9). At this moment, the dominant mode is “response” to the dire situation: “recovery” belongs rather to the future. The threats against the Ukrainian state, culture and citizens have resulted in intensified awareness of the “heritage” qualities of their traditions and vernacular practices. Many of the authors explicitly state how the war has made the population increasingly appreciate the “added value” of their culture as a symbol of their national identity and thus as a significant mechanism for Ukrainian resistance, part of the “cultural front” during the war. The process of “heritagization” has markedly accelerated and intensified for the nation building activists, and also for average citizens, something which is extremely important. In this way, the war redoubles the process of reintegrating that historical asynchrony of heritagization. Cultural heritage is a key tool used to build an increasingly shared and strongly felt Ukrainian

identity in all its regions (consistent with the findings of Korostelina and Toal [2023] near the front lines, for example). One of the stated goals of the aggressors for the current invasion is to de-Ukrainianize the country (deriving from their false allegation that the Ukrainian nation is artificial, unrooted and just a provincial deviant within Russian civilization). The war has backfired terribly for them in this regard.

This collection of articles brings together authors with diverse backgrounds. Valentyna Demian and Oleksandr Butsenko work directly with the ICH institutions in Kyiv. Maryna Hrymych is a historian, ethnographer, publisher and activist. Her co-authors Myroslava Vertiuk and Andrii Levchenko are musicians, teachers and engaged leaders in an innovative style of ethnomusical revival. Mykola Tovkailo is the elected leader of a *kobzar* guild, also deeply engaged in the tradition from the inside. Iryna Voloshyna is a PhD student in folklore in the United States, bringing a strong American and international perspective from her graduate studies. Andriy Sendetskyi is a researcher and theatre professional. Iryna Zubavina is a scholar, cinema historian and film critic. Yuriy Rybak and Maria Verhovska are more classically trained ethnomusicologists and ethnographers respectively.

The structure of this volume reflects the editors' desire to present the intangible cultural heritage of Ukraine starting from a general overview of the current situation, through presentation of concrete cases related to particular elements, traditions and practices. They each shed light on the role of the ICH in the ongoing state-identity-building supported by society during the war and especially in post-war Ukraine. The sequence of presentation of the articles does not reflect the importance of the materials. The reader is invited to choose to read them in any order.

The original Ukrainian articles by Demian, Hrymych, Levchenko and Vertiuk, Rybak, Sendetskyi, Tovkailo, Verhovska and Zubavina were translated by Nahachewsky. Key words are transliterated using simplified Library of Congress standards and provided in the Ukrainian original. Ukrainian names, titles and other terms are transliterated via Ukrainian (rather than Russian as has often been the case). Similarly, colonial terms that reflect Russophile perspectives are Ukrainianized. The word "region" is used for ethnographic or other informal geographic zones. The word "oblast" (область) is the name for each of 24 administrative territories in Ukraine, somewhat like Canadian provinces. We use the word "district" for the Ukrainian "raion" (район) subdivisions of each oblast, rather like municipalities. Rights for the illustrations belong to authors.

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