

## What is Intangible Heritage? (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003>)

The term 'cultural heritage' has changed content considerably in recent decades, partially owing to the instruments developed by UNESCO. Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as **oral traditions (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/oral-traditions-and-expressions-00053>), performing arts (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/performing-arts-00054>), social practices, rituals, festive events (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/social-practices-rituals-and-00055>)**

**knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/knowledge-concerning-nature-00056>)**

or the

**knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/traditional-craftsmanship-00057>)**

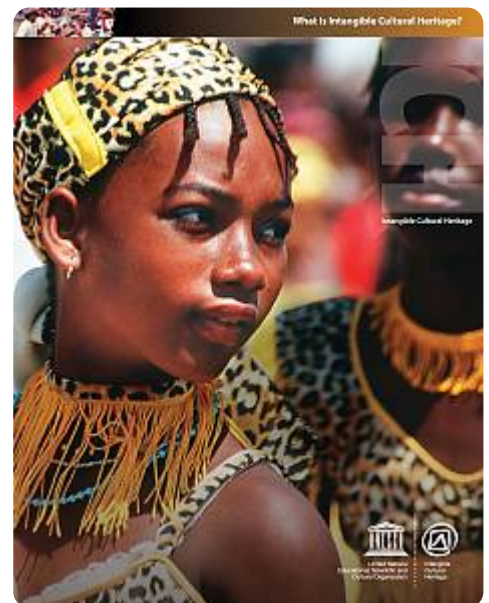
While fragile, intangible cultural heritage is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalization. An understanding of the intangible cultural heritage of different communities helps with intercultural dialogue, and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life.

The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a State, and is as important for developing States as for developed ones.

Intangible cultural heritage is:

**Traditional, contemporary and living at the same time:** intangible cultural heritage does not only represent inherited traditions from the past but also contemporary rural and urban practices in which diverse cultural groups take part;

**Inclusive:** we may share expressions of intangible cultural heritage that are similar to those practised by others. Whether they are from the neighbouring village, from a city on the opposite side of the world, or have been adapted by peoples who have migrated and settled in a different region, they all are intangible cultural heritage: they have been passed from one generation to another, have evolved in response to their environments and they contribute to giving us a sense of identity and continuity, providing a link from



Infokit 2011 - "What is intangible cultural heritage?"

© UNESCO

our past, through the present, and into our future. Intangible cultural heritage does not give rise to questions of whether or not certain practices are specific to a culture. It contributes to social cohesion, encouraging a sense of identity and responsibility which helps individuals to feel part of one or different communities and to feel part of society at large;

**Representative:** intangible cultural heritage is not merely valued as a cultural good, on a comparative basis, for its exclusivity or its exceptional value. It thrives on its basis in communities and depends on those whose knowledge of traditions, skills and customs are passed on to the rest of the community, from generation to generation, or to other communities;

**Community-based:** intangible cultural heritage can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it – without their recognition, nobody else can decide for them that a given expression or practice is their heritage.