Information and reflection on the approach, strategy and general vision on documenting and inventorying Intangible Cultural Heritage in Newfoundland and Labrador

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Timeline of the ICH Inventory Initiative in Newfoundland and Labrador

In 2002, Dr. Gerald Pocius of Memorial University of Newfoundland's Department of Folklore represented Canada at a meeting of experts in Rio de Janeiro working on an early draft of UNESCO's Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage. Twenty specialists from around the world debated a number of key issues that the Convention hoped to address.

Pocius writes, "I returned to Newfoundland that January inspired and enthusiastic, convinced that UNESCO's work in this field was of immense importance to our province and our culture. I was optimistic that the Government of Canada would support UNESCO's work, and soon I became involved in ICH policy discussions in Ottawa, working with the Department of Canadian Heritage. I was naturally disappointed when the Canadian government decided not to sign on to the final version of the Convention that was ratified in 2003. However, a number of us had begun work here in our province on ICH, believing that we could pursue many of the UNESCO policies here even though our federal government was not a signatory of the Convention" (Pocius 1).

In 2006, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador released its Provincial Cultural Strategy, *Creative Newfoundland and Labrador*. In it, the government outlined the need for a strategy to safeguard Intangible Cultural Heritage, and recommended to "over the longer term, create a public advisory committee with responsibility for the recognition and designation of provincial intangible cultural heritage" (Creative Newfoundland 35).

To that end the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation appointed a Working Group to develop a draft strategy and to consult with stakeholders in the Province. In undertaking this task, the ICH Working Group drew extensively on the results of discussions and recommendations that came out of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Forum, held in St. John's in June of 2006, hosted by the Association of Heritage Industries (AHI). Among the participants were representatives from heritage organizations around the province, as well as many interested individuals. Participants identified as one of the major issues the need to identify, document and arrange for the preservation of collected ICH information. With the establishment of its ICH office in 2008, the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador (HFNL) began to organize an ongoing province-wide ICH inventory, by establishing a central digital archive

database and website.

Policy and budget

The overall vision of Newfoundland and Labrador's ICH Strategy is to ensure that Intangible Cultural Heritage is safeguarded as both a living heritage and as a source of contemporary creativity. The strategy has four goals: documentation, that work of inventorying; celebration, where we honour our tradition-bearers; transmission, where we ensure that skills are passed from person to person, generation to generation and community to community, and cultural industry, where we can build sustainable communities, using Intangible Cultural Heritage as a tool.

The overall budget for the ICH program for the fiscal year 2012-2013 is $130,300 CAD (approximately $100,800 Euro). Funding is not allocated specifically for inventory work. ICH inventory work is seen as an integral part of all ICH projects, though the total budget does include funds dedicated to assist with the salary of a technician working on the Digital Archives Initiative, who works primarily on the technical side of the inventory.

Who are the central actors at present and what is their role?

The Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador (HFNL) was established in 1984 to promote, preserve and protect the architectural heritage of the province. In 2008, HFNL was chosen to be the agency that would implement the province's ICH Strategy. As such, its mission is to safeguard and sustain the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Newfoundland and Labrador for present and future generations everywhere, as a vital part of the identities of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and as a valuable collection of unique knowledge and customs. HFNL employs a full time ICH Development Officer, and several contract and part time project workers and researchers, mostly recruited from Memorial University's graduate program in Public Folklore.

HFNL's ICH work is overseen by a steering committee of six. This committee consists of the ICH Development Officer, a representative of Memorial University's Department of Folklore, one provincial government representative from the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation, one member of HFNL's board of directors, one representative of a cultural sector organization (currently a representative of the Association of Newfoundland and Labrador Archives), and one member-at-large from the community (currently a folklorist employed by Parks Canada, the national parks body for Canada). The committee advises on broad directions for work and research, and assists in setting priorities for inventory work; the ICH Development Officer is responsible for enacting those recommendations and for the implementation of province's ICH Strategy. HFNL annually identifies select ICH themes at risk, and sets priority areas for action, but always remains open to suggestions of local projects or themes from communities and local heritage organizations.

What are the targets of the inventorying & documenting process?

The ICH Inventory, in cooperation with Memorial University's Digital Archive, is meant to be a repository of collected ethnographic material, including, but not necessarily limited to, audio interviews, oral histories, video interviews and recordings of events and practices, photographs, ephemera, and print material including maps, drawing, floorplans, and tombstone rubbings. The material is organized in one of two ways. First, it can be organized by community, allowing collections on a variety of topics pertaining to local ICH. The provinces is broken into five regions, then within each region a town or municipality can create its own collection. Secondly, material can be arranged by thematic categories, using the five broad categories of ICH defined by UNESCO, and then into sub categories. Topics represented in the collection include subjects such as boatbuilding, root cellars, forestry, fishing, basket making, and holiday traditions such as Christmas or Bonfire Night.

Involvement of communities, groups and individuals within the process

The selection of topics for inclusion in the ICH inventory is both proactive and reactive, allowing for a great deal of fluidity in terms of what placed within it. The ICH Committee has, in the past, set thematic priorities for research and collection, based on traditions which the committee feels are under threat. For 2012-2013, for example, these priorities included such topics as: knowledge about the inshore cod fishery (including salt fish, tool manufacture and use, fishing marks, berths, mnemonics); the woods industry: mill culture, local sawmills, and woodsmen; aboriginal culture and language; traditional dance – set dancing, and traditional, "in-kitchen" step dancing; unaccompanied singing and oral traditions; and the history of whaling in the province.

Communities also help set priorities based on local needs and perceptions of what is at risk. In a few instances, community participants were led through a process of facilitation where they were introduced to the categories of ICH, as defined by UNESCO. Participants then wrote down all the types of ICH they could think of in their neighbourhoods and in their communities in the region. Participants the looked at the long list of items of ICH they had identified. They then selected the top five or six things that they thought were most under threat in their communities. They did this utilizing a voting system where every participant checked off the items that they thought to be interesting or at threat, or things that needed to be worked on by the communities. One project that emerged from this approach was a study and revitalization of "old time concerts" - community-based concerts that incorporated music, recitation of verse, monologues or short plays, and dance. Several concerts were organized, and a number of interviews, photographs and oral histories on the topic were placed into a specially-created collection within the ICH inventory.

Where possible, community members are trained in the inventorying and documenting process, giving them the ability to document their own ICH. HFNL regularly runs workshops on ethnographic collection techniques and cultural documentation, and workshops on technical aspects of collection like photography, Google mapping, cognitive mapping, audio recording, and workshops on project planning. HFNL also regularly works with Memorial University's Department of Folklore in training graduate students in the work of cultural documentation. This has resulted in a 3 week built heritage/ICH field school in 2012, and in student-run documentation and transmission projects such as a 2012 workshop on "pillow tops" - a type of fabric art originally created by men working in the lumber woods in the early to mid twentieth

century.

HFNL also works with community museums, archives, and heritage organizations to assist with the digitization of existing collections, placing them online as part of the ICH Inventory. Recently, HFNL worked with the School of Nursing at Memorial University to digitize a large number of audio tape interviews conducted with nurses over a period of thirty years, and created a nursing collection as part of the ICH inventory. Other communities have partnered with HFNL to digitize their own folklore and oral history collections.

As a provincial agency, HFNL works in all regions of Newfoundland and Labrador, partnering with community organization to assist with inventory work, where budget and travel time allows.

Information and reflection on the used methodology and plan of action

As noted earlier, the documentation of ICH is seen as one element of a four-part strategy, along with celebration of tradition, the transmission of traditional skills, and the development of sustainable communities. The collection methodology therefore usually includes some type of archival research, coupled with fieldwork and documentation of the living tradition, as well as some sort of activity or public workshop that valorizes or attempts to teach the tradition under study. As Canada is not a signatory to the UNESCO Convention on ICH, the listing of elements is not a priority, instead, the safeguarding of living traditions, and development of best practices, are seen as paramount.

As an example, a 2012 project to document the traditional maritime knowledge around a type of single-cylinder boat engine known locally as a "make and break" engine involved different types of information collection. A co-op student in the Masters level public and applied folklore program at Memorial University was hired for 14 weeks to work on the project. The student undertook a survey of print material, and worked with the Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador to digitize a series of archival documents including instruction manuals. She then worked to identify living owners of this type of boat engine, and undertook detailed audio interviews with them on various aspects of the tradition. A flotilla was organized to allow traditional boat owners to gather on the water, and an informal parts swap was organized to allow tradition bears to trade information, techniques, and to sell or trade engine parts. The process and events were documented in photographs, audio interviews and some video, and all materials were placed online as part of a "Make and Break" Engine collection on the ICH Inventory, as part of the Digital Archives Initiative (see below). As followup, HFNL will work with the Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador to continue the project, and will hopefully see the continuation of the annual flotilla and parts swap, allowing for future collection and documentation work to take place.

This approach is typical of the methodology used by HFNL. Essentially, a topic or community is identified, background research is conducted, and then fieldwork is undertaken to document living knowledge. Then, some sort of event is organized, utilizing the information collected, which allows for public participation in and/or celebration of the tradition under study. Everything is documented, and then added to a topic collection on the ICH Inventory.

Different research techniques are used depending on the tradition or community under study. Currently, HFNL has been exploring the use of cognitive mapping as a tool with one of its ongoing projects - the documentation of a proposed heritage district in the rural community of Heart's Content. HFNL staff have been working with town committees and local tradition bearers to map out such things as vanished landscape features, traditional pathways and shortcuts, traditional place names, and place of emotional and historic importance. Much of this material, including photographs and audio interviews, will be plotted on an interactive Google map of the community. This is a technique HFNL has used with documenting other traditions, such as Bonfire Night celebrations and the placement of root cellars - traditional underground cellars used primarily for the storage of root vegetables.

Technical story: what's the digital strategy?

HFNL has been able to partner with the Digital Archives Initiative (DAI) at the Queen Elizabeth II Library at Memorial University (collections.mun.ca). This is a long-term initiative to digitize holdings at the university, and the DAI has proven to be a useful tool for the ongoing digitization of ICH documents. HFNL and the Department of Folklore at Memorial University have created a website portal devoted to ICH activities (www.mun.ca/ich), and are continually adding new material.

Collection of ethnographic materials for the ICH Inventory component of the Digital Archives Initiative has required the development of guidelines for metadata content, compiled in cooperation with the Queen Elizabeth II Library. These guidelines follow recognized best practices for the description of digital resources on the Web, and include an ethnographic thesaurus of keywords, based on a similar resource created by the US Library of Congress, and modified to better reflect the ICH of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Every individual media item (video, still image, and audio) that is placed on the ICH inventory has an associated metadata file, with fields completed as needed for each item in the collection. While it is not necessary to complete every field in all cases, each metadata record should contain at least a Descriptive Title, Keywords (based on the ethnographic thesaurus), Description, Date, Collector, and Collection. Other metadata fields include, but are not limited to: Person as Topic, Informant, Biographical Data, Location Depicted/Discussed, Recording Location, Recording Format, Language, Access Restrictions, transcripts of interviews, and GPS coordinates.

HFNL has developed guidelines and sample consent forms for both new ethnographic fieldwork and collection, as well consent forms for community archives wishing to place existing collections on ICH inventory. In addition to meeting standards of practice for metadata, all collected information must meet the technical standards established by the Memorial University's Digital Archives Initiative. Detailed standards have been developed for both visual media (prints, manuscripts, text, paintings, maps, newspapers, drawings and books) and for digital audio, with standards for video in development. These forms and standards have all been made available to the public through the ICH web portal (www.mun.ca/ich).

Evaluation methodology and future plans

Community support for the ICH program overall has been high, though communities have at the same time been slow to undertake their own inventory projects. This is largely due to the lack of funding for such projects, though some communities have undertaken work with an ICH focus. HFNL and the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation continue to advocate for best practises in cultural documentation, and continue to spread the word about the ICH Inventory, and the potential for communities to work with HFNL to create their own community or topic categories on the inventory. This is a slow process of education, and reaching the right community leaders who will spearhead initiatives at the local level.

Since the creation of the provincial ICH Strategy in 2008, the need for ongoing evaluation has been recognized. In reality, HFNL staff, who would normally be the ones completing evaluations, have been busy working on new and ongoing documentation, celebration and transmission projects. A review of the effectiveness of the methodology would clearly be useful, but time and budget restrictions mean that methodological review is often given lower priority than project delivery.

In 2012, HFNL created an "Occasional Papers" publication, which will be a series of case study documents which provide details, reflection and evaluation of complete projects. Two short papers have been complete, one on HFNL's project-based training method, and one case study on the community concerts project. Possible future papers include reviews of the "Make and Break" engine project, and a 2012 research project on traditional basket making.

Future work will include a review of thematic priorities and traditions at risk, as well as more work to identify community partners who will be able to start local inventory projects.

Lessons learnt

It is important to note that the ICH inventory for Newfoundland and Labrador is perhaps best seen as a process rather than a final product. It is in a constant state of evolution, reflective of the organic nature in which information is collected by and from communities. HFNL, along with its university and community partners, is constantly tweaking and adapting the way the inventory works, to ensure that it is able to meet changing needs, requirements and opportunities. This seems to be working, but it is important that each jurisdiction finds a system that works for them and their specific needs.

While the methodology for compiling records and collections for the ICH Inventory is somewhat fluid, it has been incredibly important to identify, disseminate and implement best practices related to collection, digital recording standards, and ethics. The development of clear metadata and digital file standards ensures that whatever we collect is presented in a consistent way across the entire inventory.

The partnership we have developed with the Digital Archives Initiative (DAI) at the Queen Elizabeth II Library at Memorial University has been incredibly important. This provides us with permanent, secure storage for all our digital materials. It takes the burden of website management and hosting completely off of HFNL and its community partners, and allows the general public free, unfettered access to everything we collect. Instead of being limited to a

website that would only allow us to showcase a few small audio clips, as one example we can make available full audio interviews, regardless of length or file size. This makes the inventory an incredibly valuable resource for future academic researchers, as well as a tool and access point for community participation in its own heritage.

To be kept alive, intangible cultural heritage must be relevant to its community. Any ICH Inventory should therefore contain information that is not only useful to community members, but which is also reflective of how the community sees itself. Having the community help identify topics for consideration is crucial, so that there is some sense of pride or ownership in the collection. Ideally, training locals to document their own ICH may be one way to increase this sense of participation in and ownership of the ICH inventory.

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