Sub-theme C: Conserving and managing intangible heritage - methods
Sous-thème C : Conservation et gestion du patrimoine immatériel - méthodes

Section C1: Conservation, documentation management methods
Session C1 : Méthodes de documentation et de gestion

PROCESSES OF IDENTIFICATION AND DOCUMENTATION
Ethel NOMVULA MBANGELA*, Afrique du Sud / South Africa

Oral history is the most narrative of all disciplines; it is a recollection of participants in and/or eyewitnesses to a historical event. Oral history refers to the knowledge that is transmitted orally over several generations within a given society. Oral history can therefore be defined as a record of information gathered in oral form, usually by electronic means, as a result of a planned interview. In contrast with written history, oral history is an inclusive and involving history in which each generation adds its knowledge and transmission of the past generation. The purpose of oral history is to create a spoken record where none exists or to supplement existing records for future studies. These histories are easily remembered and presented in imaginable forms to assist the process of memory and production. Oral traditions depend on human memory for their preservation. If tradition is to survive, it must be stored in one person's memory and be passed on to others. Memory is of importance. For instance, consider the ways in which learning and teaching takes place in a social situation such as a performance or a ritual, or the ways in which meaningful stories are taught and remembered. Cultural transmission is remarkable as it allows for mastery by one person (teaching) and enough opportunity for observation and modeling by others (learning). Oral history can be a very useful tool in bridging the gap between scholarly and community-based research. Language is to a large extent embedded in culture and vice-versa. Language is as much a cultural product as culture is a linguistic product, since language is the vehicle on which oral traditions travel. The focus of this presentation will be the discussion of the importance of language in the processes of identification and reading of places, the interpretation of the intangible dimensions and associations in a place.

DEFINITIONS

- Living Heritage – means intangible aspects of inherited culture and may include cultural tradition, oral history, performance, ritual, popular memory, skills and techniques, indigenous knowledge systems and the holistic approach to nature, society and social relationships (NHRA, No.25 of 1999)
- Site - means any area of land, including land covered by water and any objects or structures thereon (NHRA, No.25 of 1999)
- Heritage Resources - means any place or object of cultural significance (NHRA, No.25 of 1999)
- Cultural Significance – means aesthetic, architectural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, linguistic or technological value or significance (NHRA, No.25 of 1999)

OVERVIEW

Africa has a blend of unique sites, rock art and historic landscapes that have continued to impress, challenge and intrigue scholars, experts and ordinary people who come in contact with them.

The South African parliament passed a new legislation in 1999 (National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999) to protect and preserve our unique heritage. The National Monument Council has been modified in unique but dynamic ways and we no longer focus on old buildings as monuments. This approach provides for the protection, conservation and management of heritage resources.

A site can be considered as part of a national estate according to the National Heritage Resources Act, no. 25 of 1999, chapter 2, section 27 (3) due to the following factors:
- Its possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of South Africa's natural or cultural heritage;
- Its importance in the community and its ability to reflect a pattern of South African history;
- It has a strong and special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons and
- Sites of significance relevant to the history of slavery in South Africa

One of the most important elements of the new legislation is the opportunity it provides for communities to participate in the identification, conservation and management of heritage sites.
The NHRA refers to heritage resources as cultural assets or to a national estate. The national estate encompasses heritage resources of cultural significance that may include, among others, places to which oral traditions are attached (e.g. Lekgotla), places associated with living heritage, historical settlements, landscapes, graves and burial grounds, including ancestral and royal graves, graves of victims of conflict and sites relating to the history of slavery in South Africa. Movable objects are also included, e.g. objects recovered from the soil or waters of Africa, objects associated with living heritage, books, documents, photographs and recordings.

In order to afford an effective and efficient management of heritage resources, the National Heritage Resources Act introduced a three–tier system for these resources. In terms of this system, heritage resources are categorized as Grades 1, 11 and 111.

o *Grade 1:* Heritage Resources have qualities that are so exceptional that they are seen to be of a special national significance. In terms of the heritage resources legislation, these resources are managed by SAHRA.

o *Grade 11:* Heritage Resources that have special qualities, which make them significant within a provincial context. These resources in terms of the law are the responsibility of a Provincial Resources Authority.

o *Grade 111:* Refers to other Heritage Resources, whose significance is only relevant to a town or municipal area. These heritage resources are the responsibility of local authorities.

South Africa has eleven official languages at the national level. Our Constitution is acclaimed as one of the best constitutions in the world today, and it is unequivocal about the role of languages in the transformation of society. Section 6 of the Constitution is wholly devoted to the languages of this country and Sub-Section (2) stipulates: "Recognizing the historically diminished use and status of our indigenous people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages." It appears, therefore, that there is a definite desire on the part of the people of South Africa to place indigenous languages at the centre of the process of change and growth. I regard as the most central premise for any language expert and language user Section 30 of the Bill of Rights in our Constitution, which reads as follows.

"Everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice ……"

INTERPRETATION OF THE INTANGIBLE DIMENSIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS IN A PLACE.

Heritage is not only about monuments, statues and objects. Memories and stories are significant parts of living heritage inside people. Living heritage is also about the social connections and cultural relationships between people. People express themselves by using language through folklore, urban legends, traditions and other forms of storytelling. These are the colourful threads that weave the fibre of communities.

Intangible heritage has been defined by UNESCO (2001) as "people's learned processes along with the knowledge, skills and creativity that inform and are developed by them, the products they create and the resources, spaces and other aspects of social and natural context necessary to their sustainability. These processes provide living communities with a sense of continuity with previous generations and are important to cultural identity, as well as to the safeguarding of cultural diversity and creativity of humanity."

Intangible heritage, which is sometimes called living cultural heritage, includes, amongst others, performing arts, oral traditions, expressions and languages, rituals cosmology and spiritual beliefs, and even traditional systems of healing. Communities and groups constantly recreate the intangible cultural heritage because, in contrast to written history, oral history is more inclusive and involves the history in which each generation adds its knowledge and transmission of the past generation. Language is the vehicle through which oral traditions travel. Even though transmissions are constantly recreated by communities in response to their environment and the interactions thereof, language still provides people and groups with a sense of identity and continuity. In addition, language is a tool that gives definition and expression of the tangible and intangible heritage in order to select and interpret the associations one has with a place.

In most cases heritage resources have different meanings and interpretations for different cultural groups. The name/term attached to a heritage resource (place or object) has its origin from an event, animal, person, etc. Therefore, when explained in the original language it has meaning, but once it is translated to another language it loses its meaning and thus its cultural significance. Consider the following examples:

1) *Event* – Among the AmaXhosa, people are sometimes named after certain events. For example, Nomvula and Mvuleni, female and male respectively, were born on a day or time when there was abundant rainfall and Nomfazwe's name coincided with the war. (Mtuze P.T 2003)

2) *Animal* - There are several pointers to the fact that Africans closely relate to nature, animals, wildlife and the landscape. One given natural object is thus considered an emblem of such a clan, for instance, a snake called "Umajola". Another strong indicator can be found in idiomatic expressions, a large number of which relate to animals, wildlife and the landscape. Secondly, elephants are associated with sovereignty or political supremacy. Oral tradition tells us that whenever hunters killed (ukuzingela) an elephant they were expected to report it to the Great Place (Komkhulu) where the king stays, and donate the ivory to the king. Ivory bands (umxhaka) were for chiefs and senior counselors of the land (izinxibamxhaka). The hoisting of a tail of an elephant marked a political takeover of a territory by another chief. Consider another example: Thohoyandou means Head of an Elephant. Thohoyandou was a king of the VhaVenda people and during the Homeland Era they named their capital Thohoyandou.

3) *Person* - For example, amongst the AmaXhosa Robben Island was known as Isiqithi sika Nxele (Makanda), who was captured in Grahamstown and sent to the Island. The AmaXhosa have always believed that he will come back. The island was known as his, since he was regarded as a powerful person. Thus, he had not been captured but was still ruling on the Island. Hence, Isiqithi sikaNxele, meaning Nxele's Island.

4) *Place* - A grave of a king in some Nguni nations was not known, since people would not assist to the burial, only an elderly person who was killed when he returned so that the grave site would remain unknown. As a result, the whole area, usually a hill or mountain would be known as the King's grave.

Language plays a pivotal role in the interpretation of heritage sites. For instance, Africa was for ages regarded as an illiterate and dark continent because our languages were not used to interpret our heritage. This distortion of facts is still crippling our continent, as can be seen in what concerns the issues of restoring original place-names of some of Africa's heritage sites. This is one of the major challenges for South Africa's Geographical Place-Names.

Language, though often seen as a product and reflection of an economic, political and cultural order, is itself a material force of the highest order. That is why no African Renaissance can be possible if keepers of memory are working outside their own linguistic memory. Some heritage sites can be better understood if interpreted in the language of the people concerned. The reason for this is that heritage sites, just like history, do tell about a people's customs, traditions, belief systems, language and identity, as well as skills and art forms. This then calls for the development and respect of indigenous languages as part of our heritage.

LANGUAGE AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

Language is a transmitter of cultural values, norms and practices. Some examples of the relevance of idiomatic expressions in promoting cultural values and practices:
o Impuku ieselweni (the mouse is in a calabash- the person is in a tight corner)
o Isithwalandwe (Blue Crane feathers were awarded to distinguished warriors)

The two idiomatic expressions, *intaka yakha ngoboya benye* and *izandla ziyahlambana* promote co-operation between people. It is therefore of importance that when we collect and interpret them, we should not lose their essence; we should try to retrieve the original sense by placing meaning within context.

Language, rituals and values

In the past, the interpretation of heritage was a matter of demonizing things indigenous and negating the good principles handed down by generations of people to their children and their children's children. It is important to note that the interpretation of heritage should be put into perspective within a certain cultural context. Initiation Schools for the AmaXhosa have a special language called *ukuhlonipha*. *Ukuhlonipha* also applies to brides and old married women who cannot use the first names of senior members of the lineage. This *special* or *avoidance* language also distinguishes those who went through the initiation school and those who did not follow *isiko*.

In preserving intangible heritage some words may be generalised. Especially when translating into another language compromises are made just for reaching an understanding of *traditional rituals.* These translations are often generalized and as a result do not capture the different meanings of ceremonies. Consider the following examples: people will just refer to a traditional ritual for ancestors without differentiating which aspect is specifically addressed.

Due to the generalization or translation of some concepts we miss their exact meaning and cultural significance. This is why Mtuze (2003:25) correctly points out to the reverence the AmaXhosa have for the departed, shown in the way in which rituals are performed after the death of the household head. Besides the ritual to send him off (ukukhapha), another ritual is performed to bring him back home (ukubuyisa) so that he can be with his family, albeit in an invisible form. Another example, as stated by Mtuze (2003), is an African woman's act of presenting her child to a member of the family who comes up to the doorway holding a goat by its horns before it is slaughtered as a ritual to introduce the new member of the family to the living and the living–dead (Imbeleko/ukukhutshwa komntwana)

Praise poetry and language

The understanding of language enables us to know the meaning behind oral traditions. It should be kept in mind, however, that for centuries oral tradition constituted the unwritten textbook of African education and culture, often summarized in proverbs. Language has been used both as an instrument of entertainment and education, especially in the form of folktales and oral poetry. It is also a medium to pass on traditions and beliefs, customs and ideals. Oral tradition has existed throughout South Africa's history and in many ways constitutes our truly genuine contribution to world literature in particular, and culture in general. The history of indigenous communities is contained in *izibongo* and *amabali*. Please note that the preservation of oral tradition does not mean that oral traditions have always survived. They are endangered when ethnic groups diminish in number, when key practitioners die without passing down the tradition, and when the social context that naturally triggers a performance is dislocated by time and circumstances. Largely, however, the growing urbanization of rural areas is accountable for several endangered oral traditions. The loss of tradition naturally means the loss of a specialized register or mode of speaking, the loss of specialized vocabulary, and the loss of unique grammatical structures (Yankah K 2003:9)

Ancestral graves

To indigenous peoples graves are special places where the white bones of the spirits reside. People visit graves for special reasons and children are encouraged to respect burial sites. In some Nguni nations a king's grave was not known, since women and small children would not go to the burial. Counselors and the royal family would know the actual burial site. As a result, an entire area, usually a hill or mountain, would be known as the king's grave.

A counselor and his family would then be assigned to look after the grave (*Umzi wengcwaba*). This is how heritage resources were interpreted.

Children do not visit gravesites without parental supervision. Adults are not allowed to visit a grave without the permission of an immediate family member of the deceased.

People also wash their hands after returning from the graveyard as a sign of purification.

There are, however, challenges in this area. Oral evidence should be considered alongside written evidence. There are instances where a burial site is disputed because of war-related circumstances. The AmaRharhabe have two versions of the death of King Sandile. Oral tradition states that he was killed in the Pirie Bush and buried there by izinxibamxhaka. The colonial version points to the Izidenge area in Stutterheim.

Graves are important in tracing the movement of people. In addition, an individual's grave tells a life story about a particular place and makes it easier to understand the circumstances of his/her death. Graves of chiefs like Hintsa at Nqabarha, King Velile Sandile at Mngqesha and King Ngubengcuka at Clarkebury tell us about the movement of those chiefdoms over a period of time. Royal graves, like battle sites, trigger the memory of people and help them to trace the movement of chiefdoms in history, their victories and defeats. Therefore, preservation and care of our ancestral graves is an expression of respect, honour and responsibility.

USE OF ORAL SOURCES: TWO CASE STUDIES

Defiance Campaign of 1952

My first case study deals with some personal involvement with the research of a historical site. I have definitely seen and experienced the importance of utilizing all available resources. When it comes to the undocumented history of historical sites, oral information sources are often not all reliable. One must use physical evidence as backup, in the form of archival sources, photographs, etc. In addition, one other advantage is that I was able to communicate with the participants in the language of their choice.

This concerns the National defiance campaign in South Africa in 1952. This was a defiance campaign against unjust laws of the Apartheid Government of the time. I focused on the events in Kimberley, with specific reference to Galeshewe township. This uprising took place on November 8, 1952, resulting in 13 people dead, 78 injured and 37 detained.

Work done on this project:

➢ A Monument in the township in honour of all victims, those who survived and all affected communities.
➢ 13 Gravestones for those who died on November 8, 1952.
➢ Newspaper supplement (8 pages). 15-minute Documentary (video available)
➢ Display (Brief history of the people involved and events before and after that day)

➢ Mayibuye Production. (Helped writing the script for a piece performed at theatres aimed at educating and transmitting information about previously neglected research to the younger generation and to preserve it for future generations).

Gore Brown Native Training College (1935 – 1960)

My second case study deals with a site that is of significance and that was, and still is, used for educational purposes.

Gore Brown Native Training College (1935-1960). This was a training college for Africans established out of segregation policies of the South African Government in 1935 and was finally closed due to the Group Areas Act in 1960.

Work done on this project:

➢ Newspaper supplement (8 pages).
➢ Annual reunion of all former teachers, learners and students that were part of this college.
➢ Permanent display depicting the history of the school and the experiences of those who were there. (1935-1960)

OPPORTUNITIES

Oral tradition is transmitted through language. Oral history is a valuable recording method that will enable a learner to understand that there is a range of perspectives in the world. The voice of previously disadvantaged societies is thus recognized. Therefore, recovering the silenced voices and experiences in African history may reconstruct and re-orientate our society. In addition, recordings serve to preserve historically significant memories for future use. Furthermore, it offers the following opportunities, amongst others:

o Recording previously unrecorded stories on tape, in writing or on visual media.
o Has the potential to democratize history (make it available for the masses).
o Reminds society of tradition and its predecessors, whose intellectual property still guides society.
o Motivate local participation in the preservation of heritage.
o There are still large areas of historical enquiry that would benefit from the use of oral evidence, e.g. a deeper understanding of rural and urban histories. Note that when collecting oral histories it is advisable to do so in the participant's first language so as to retrieve the original sense.
o Ensure community participation so that participants who create, maintain and transmit such heritage are actively involved in its management.
o Raise awareness on the importance of intangible cultural heritage in order to ensure mutual appreciation. This can be done through identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection etc.

o Documentation, preservation, research of the intangible heritage can play a significant role in rebuilding the moral fibre of society and the spiritual rejuvenation of a people who have lost their soul and have become disconnected from their roots and their own past, as well as contributing to the process of reconciliation by placing the untold suffering into perspective.

CHALLENGES

o People allow spiritual, moral and ethical values to be overshadowed by consumerism. As a result of the attitudes regarding indigenous languages, people do not worry about them. (Canton G, 1996) This situation renders our languages more vulnerable because they exist in the macrocosm of the English language and its awesome ability to displace and eliminate other languages. Therefore, we are all charged with the responsibility of ensuring that we restore, revive and preserve our languages as there are people who are positively conscious of their languages without having taken a course in linguistics to intellectualize it for them.

o Lack of standardization is a problem in many African languages.

o As stated in the Unison publications of Endangered Languages, it is estimated that half of the 6,000 languages spoken in the world are doomed or likely to disappear in the foreseeable future. The disappearance of any language is an irreparable loss of heritage for all mankind. South Africans are also grappling with the apparent under-utilization of other indigenous languages, such as Xitsonga, as well as the preservation of Khoi and San languages. In addition, the fact that not all the Khoi and San people can speak their languages today means their identity has been erased and can therefore not interpret the non-material or intangible part of their culture.

o Identification of historical sites has been one-sided and distorted on a continuous basis with little reference to the role of women, in general, and of black people in the history of South Africa.

o Every language grows and every culture changes. Some words hang on after they are no longer culturally in use. For instance: Qamata. The use of the God name Thixo, word borrowed from the Khoi and San languages, which the missionaries preferred to the original Xhosa word for God, Qamata. This word was not accepted at a linguistic level as part of the spiritual terminology. (Mtuze P.T 2003:45)

o Teaching our languages as if they have no oral tradition is one factor that amounts to a tradition failure. In addition, we lose the products of human creativity and the extent to which language gives insight into our nature.

o There should not be an overemphasis on policies in order to ensure the survival of the most remarkable examples of cultural expression without prejudicing their development.

RECOMENDATIONS

o Promote and embark on projects that will ensure the survival of the most remarkable examples of cultural expression without prejudicing future developments

o Use oral sources in the recreation of historic sites in order to document and reconstruct the tangible and intangible past. It is also of importance that oral sources should not be utilized as the only source of information.

When dealing with historic sites, one is also dealing with permanent manifestations of the past (structures and buildings). Therefore, oral sources must be used and verified by other information sources, for example, photographs, maps, plans, documents, the landscape itself and many more

o Researchers should guard against looking at the tangible aspect of cultural heritage alone, but should also consider the relationship between the two (tangible and intangible) and the people's associations thereof. Therefore, there is a need to record and reconstruct the history of thoughts and ideas, in other words, how people experienced and internalized events.

o Facilitate the survival of intangible heritage by helping the people concerned through extensive and sustainable programmes in order to transmit it to future generations. If everything is just done to be part of archival material, then we are leaving humanity in danger of losing its past and perhaps jeopardizing its future as well. Therefore, individual initiatives should be backed up by associations, specialists and institutions.

o Encourage contributions by NGO's, local community, individuals and groups to take lead in the identification, preservation of and drawing attention to their oral and intangible heritage.

o Promote and deal with issues by learning successful language-preservation methods and create opportunities for the use of African languages.

CONCLUSION

Heritage is the personal collective asset of everyone, South African, African, all. Our efforts to rebuild Africa through the preservation of heritage (tangible and intangible), should be based upon the values of equality, justice, freedom and democracy. Our children should appreciate their heritage as one victory over the injustices of oppression.

Therefore, we hold within us the great potential to raise awareness of our living heritage as a nation. There was a distortion of indigenous cultures that outlawed rich African traditions, which were based on the principles of "Ubuntu". We should hold on to these values and continue to build upon the foundations that have been laid thus far. Bear in mind that culture should constantly remind us of who we are through our languages and their practice.

In this African century there is an opportunity to contribute towards changing the mindset of people through all heritage-related activities. This is an intangible but yet a powerful spiritual objective that we need to reaffirm for the sake of our future and that of generations to come. We are therefore all in a position to work together to enable a new order in which respect, honour and dignity will form the cornerstones of our society. These are the bases of African society and have been over centuries. I THANK YOU.

(WHEN) A Language disappears; traditional knowledge tends to vanish with it ... ...
E. Linden, Lost Tribes, Lost knowledge, Time, September 1991

> "The most important relationship between language and culture gets to the heart of what is lost when you lose a language. Take it away from the culture, and you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its songs, its riddles, its literature, its laws, its songs, its proverbs, its wisdoms and prayers. The culture could not be expressed and handed on in any way. Therefore language stands for that whole culture. It represents it in the minds of speakers and the minds of the outsiders. It just stands for it and sums it up for them…the whole economy, religion, health care system, philosophy, all that together is represented by language. So losing a language is losing all those things that essentially are the way of life, the way of thought, the way of valuing, and the human reality we are talking about." (Canton G 1996:2)

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ABSTRACT

Oral history is the most narrative of all disciplines; it is a recollection of participants in and/or eyewitnesses to a historical event. Oral history refers to the knowledge that is transmitted orally over several generations within a given society. Oral history can therefore be defined as a record of information gathered in oral form, usually by electronic means, as a result of a planned interview. In contrast with written history, oral history is an inclusive and involving history to which each generation adds its knowledge and transmissions of the past generation. The purpose of oral history is to create a spoken record where none exists or to supplement existing records for future studies. These histories are easily remembered and presented in imaginable forms to assist the process of memory and production. Oral traditions depend on human memory for their preservation. If tradition is to survive, it must be stored in one person's memory and be passed on to others.

Memory is of importance. For instance, consider the ways in which learning and teaching take place in a social situation such as a performance or ritual, and the ways in which meaningful stories are taught and remembered.

Cultural transmission is remarkable as it allows for mastery by one person (teaching) and enough opportunity for observation and modeling by others (learning). Oral history can be a very useful tool in bridging the gap between scholarly- and community-based research. Language is to a large extent embedded in culture and vice -versa. Language is as much a cultural product as culture is a linguistic product, since language is the vehicle on which oral traditions travel. The focus of the presentation will be the discussion of the importance of language in the processes of identification and reading of places, the interpretation of the intangible dimensions and associations in a place. Therefore, it will basically be the relation between language and the interpretation of Monuments and Heritage Sites.

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