

Intangible cultural heritage, landscape and livelihoods: ‘More than just a sideshow’

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There is growing recognition within the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) of the contribution made by intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as an important additional element in helping a geopark to generate a more complete presentation of its landscapes. However, the deployment of ICH brings with it its own complex sets of issues. The sustainability of ICH expressions is closely linked to the social, cultural and economic viability of communities living in and from the landscapes of the geoparks. Avoiding the drift towards static, museumified folkloric expressions, which may struggle to retain their relevance to the daily reality of the geopark, means taking seriously the challenges of ICH safeguarding and management.

Drawing upon experience from a number of geoparks, but most significantly from Katla Geopark in Iceland, this paper highlights the importance of bringing an understanding of the present day economic, social and political context to the promotion, safeguarding and use of ICH in the geopark setting. This may differ substantially from the context out of which cultural expressions and traditions initially grew. Through ongoing case studies, we explore how ICH may be able to adapt to the challenges of being thrust, through exposure to international tourism and to networks such as the GGN, from the local to a regional and global stage. Key questions such as ‘how far can a “traditional” expression flex whilst maintaining its “authenticity”?’ and ‘what stimuli are required to ensure the valorization and transmission of an ICH expression down to future generations?’, are explored in detail. In so doing, this paper touches on the 2003 *UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* to consider whether ICH practice may offer a further mechanism through which geoparks can converge with other UNESCO programmes and tools.

Presented in Theme 7