LIVING HERITAGE SERIES



Traditional Food

Sharing Experiences from the Field

Eivind Falk and Seong-Yong Park Editors-in-Chief



ICHNGO FORUM
INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

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UNESCO
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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International Information and Networking Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO

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Printed in the Republic of Korea

Published by
ICHCAP, 95 Seohak-Ro, Wansan-Gu, Jeonju, Jeollabuk-do 55101 Republic of Korea
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ISBN 979-11-962602-8-6

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Foodways and Folklife

Experiences from the Newfoundland and Labrador Intangible Cultural Heritage Office

Dale Gilbert Jarvis and Terra M. Barrett
Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador

Introduction

The food we eat is an important part of culture. It is often also an expression of community identity. As American folklorist Millie Rahn writes,

> The kitchen, historically, is the place where families gather and where the everyday and the ceremonial meet and overlap. Here families interact and share private traditions, expressing identity through their food to each other and to the world. Creativity is alive in this space, from daily mealtimes to more elaborate feasts that mark rites of passage, religious and secular holidays, and other special events. This is where knowledge is passed on, from traditional ways of preparing and using various ingredients, implements, tools, and techniques to legends, stories, anecdotes, and cultural exchanges that have become part of familial and regional folklife.

We all eat, and associate different layers of cultural meaning to the food we consume. Explorations of food, then, can be an easy conduit into the complex world of intangible cultural heritage. This article gives several examples from the safeguarding initiatives of the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador that have used foodways as a means to get people thinking about, and engaged with, concepts of cultural transmission and heritage conservation.

Preparing to launch the "Maxwell Roy" built by Martin Gosse, Spaniard's Bay, late 1940s © courtesy of Daphne Robinson

Background and Context

Newfoundland and Labrador is the easternmost province of Canada. Situated in the country's Atlantic region, it incorporates both the island of Newfoundland and mainland Labrador to its northwest. It has a combined area of 405,212 square kilometers, with a population of just over 514,000. Most of the population is concentrated on the eastern portion of the island of Newfoundland.

It is a province with a rich cultural heritage, with both native indigenous populations and a settler population of predominantly English and Irish ancestry. The island of Newfoundland has a long history associated with the North Atlantic cod fishery, and much of its local culture and cuisine evolved in small fishing villages scattered along the island's long coastline.

Linguistic, cultural, and social traditions persisted in many small isolated communities after they had faded or changed in the European communities where they were born. After the collapse of the North Atlantic cod fishery, a moratorium on cod fishing was imposed in 1992. This, overnight, changed the course of the province's collective history.

Recognizing the potential negative impacts to local intangible culture, the province acted. In 2006, the government of Newfoundland and Labrador released its Provincial Cultural Strategy, Creative Newfoundland and Labrador. It outlined the need for a strategy to safeguard intangible cultural heritage (ICH) 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 35).

In 2008, the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador (HFNL) established its ICH office in the city of St. John's, and began work to safeguard local traditions. In 2012, HFNL was accredited as a non-governmental organization in the ICH field at the fourth session of the General Assembly of the States Party to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Since the very start of the provincial ICH initiative, culinary traditions have been recognized as an important part of the heritage fabric of Newfoundland and Labrador. Much of the province's history has been based around the catching and processing of codfish, but there are equally historic indigenous and settler traditions around hunting, trapping, gathering wild foods, subsistence agriculture, preserving, smoking, and salting as well as a wide variety of culinary and foodways traditions.

As rural economies change, so too have foodways changed. Researcher Kristin Lowitt (5) has noted this in her study on the changing fisheries and community food security on the west coast of Newfoundland, writing:

> Although changes in the fishing industry are potentially making local seafood harder to access, changes at a household level, including a lack of food skills and increasing constraints on time for preparing food, may also be contributing to less seafood consumption. As fewer young families enter into fishing, the food skills for preserving and preparing seafood are also declining. Some young families described not having the skills to prepare fish and ate less fish for this reason.

Woodstove typical of the traditional outport kitchen, shown here at the Livyers' Lot Économusée © Dale Jarvis

Declining access to traditional foods, changing demographics, and loss of traditional skills are all concerns that impact the work of HFNL. To deal with these challenges, HFNL is guided by its ICH Strategy. The ICH Strategy is based on four main pillars or approaches (see What 4-7): Documentation, Celebration, Transmission, and, Living Traditions in Sustainable Communities. Using this strategy, HFNL develops safeguarding projects and initiatives that address one or more of these four key approaches.

Documentation

The HFNL's documentation strategy includes collecting ethnographic items such as audio interviews, oral histories, video interviews, photographs, ephemera, and printed materials. 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. This ICH inventory was established as a central digital archive database and website. The ICH inventory is arranged geographically by region and community, and thematically by subject, following the five UNESCO domains of ICH.

All communities, settlers, indigenous people, and recent immigrants have their own food traditions, and research and documentation is usually the first step in developing a safeguarding project. Some of these food traditions are quite regional, such as the tradition of Easter buns in the community of Upper Island Cove, a culinary tradition documented in 2011. Tradition bearer Betty Rumbolt describes them thus,

> They're a little bit sweeter and they have some vanilla in them. They're white with raisins, almost like a cake-type thing, but different and they're in a different shape [than tea buns] as well because they're baked in small muffin pans that my mother called patty pans. (Squarey 3)

Easter buns were made fresh on Easter Monday for the children at the annual Easter party. Rumbolt remembers,

> We had no idea about the Easter Bunny and egg hunts like children do today. On Easter Sunday, you would wear your new clothes and go to church, but on Easter Monday we would 'have Easter' at my Aunt's house, boil eggs, and eat Easter buns…. I have particularly made buns since mom has passed away, because we've clung on to those traditions. The first Easter without her was strange to be without the Easter Buns so I made them for everybody…. There's nothing quite like food and family traditions that solidifies to bring that family together. (Squarey 3-4)

The documentation of food traditions allows us to better understand the meaning of food at the community level, and to investigate (importantly from a safeguarding perspective) the ways and means in which the transmission or decline of traditional knowledge occurs. It also allows us to record information on micro-traditions that might otherwise be overlooked or lost. Ethnographic documentation work conducted by HFNL has included research on the packing of lunch baskets for men working in pulp and paper mills, the collection of recipes for homemade mustard pickles, the use of goats for milk and meat, and weekly meal patterns.

Inside a papermill worker's lunch basket, Grand Falls-Windsor © Dale Jarvis

HFNL is also engaged in initiatives to enhance community-level technical skills for digital preservation. One food-related example of this was a workshop series called "Nan's Cookbook in the Digital Age." This was a series of instructional classes in partnership with the Association of NL Archives, which taught participants how to create and preserve digital copies of family and community recipe books to archival standards. Often, family recipe books are heavily annotated, and contain vernacular information on personal approaches, variations, or techniques that go beyond the printed recipes and which have generally not been archived or preserved in an organized fashion.

Celebration

The second pillar of the ICH Strategy is Celebration, which involves raising the discourse around selected traditions, and promoting greater understanding of the importance, challenges, and threats to those traditions.

When HFNL surveyed community groups in the capitol region, there was a concern about the loss of agricultural knowledge and practices due to increasing urbanization. HFNL conducted research on the historical background of agriculture, and the contemporary practices active in the region. This research culminated in a 2011 folklife festival entitled "Seeds to Supper," which included a Farm Field Day, a farmer's market, workshops on food production; a presentation on local edible plants; an edible plant hike; a networking workshop for tourism and hospitality professionals on food, folklore, and tourism; "how-to" composting classes; an art garden in partnership with a local gallery; the creation of an interactive root cellar map; and an on-stage oral history interview with Century Farmers, local farmers whose families who had been farming on the same property for over a century. The festival also resulted in various publications on the use of traditional semi-subterranean root cellars for food preservation (see Braye), and on the history of vernacular farming structures called "hay barracks" (see Jarvis).

While a folklife festival is a good way to draw attention to a particular region or tradition, and allows face-to-face exchange, it is by necessity focused in place and is available to a specific sub-section of the population. HFNL has enhanced its celebratory work by also using social media, to widely share stories and information about food traditions and to encourage people to share their own food memories.

A typical root cellar used for storing vegetables over winter, French's Cove © Dale Jarvis

In January 2019, HFNL launched the Foodways Friday campaign on Twitter. Working together with Esther Martin-Ullrich, a graduate food studies student based out of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Intangible Cultural Heritage Office administers a Twitter account called @ FoodwaysFriday. The account is focused on posting and retweeting global food-related folklore each Friday and encourages people to use the hashtag #FoodwaysFriday to share their foodways, food studies, and food history. This work developed out of a series of blog posts posted from 2017 to 2018 that focused on a different Newfoundland food tradition from our work around the province, and the wealth of the material placed on the ICH inventory as part of Memorial University's Digital Archives Initiative (see collections.mun.ca).

Transmission

Intangible cultural heritage is kept alive and relevant to a culture if it is regularly practiced and shared among groups and between generations. It is not static, but ever changing, and constantly evolving. An important part of HFNL's safeguarding measures has been to encourage discussion to identify ways to keep these evolving cultural practices relevant and to create opportunities to pass inherited skills on to succeeding generations.

Tea buns hold great nostalgic value in the province, with many mothers and grandmothers handing down recipes to their children and grandchildren. In 2017, HFNL organized a tea bun workshop with baker/folklorist/archivist Alanna Wicks of The Rolling Pin Bakery, who learned her great-grandmother's recipe from her father,

> Although in Newfoundland, biscuits, or tea buns as they are usually known, are a popular staple in many kitchens, in my family they are considered special. Not only are they delicious, they are integral to the tapestry of my father's family. They embody some of my father's childhood memories and because, in turn, he made the buns for me, they now are tied to my own memories of growing up and of belonging to our family. (Wicks para 2)

Young participants learn to make traditional Newfoundland tea buns in St. John's © Terra Barrett

Wicks instructed students in the basics of tea bun baking, passing along her recipes, and even sharing her family's secret ingredient. HFNL organized the rental of a commercial kitchen, created a press release, and promoted the workshop on social media including the blog, Facebook, and Twitter. HFNL charged a nominal fee to cover the cost of ingredients, room rental, and an honorarium. The event sold out in two days, and a dozen people came out to learn a new skill.

Inspired by foodways workshops such as this, other smaller NGOs in the province are now offering their own sessions. The Pasadena Heritage Society has offered a variety of food workshops, including jam and bread making, along with sessions teaching locals how to prepare and preserve wild moose meat. The Torbay Folk Arts Society recently organized its own bread making

classes while the Bay Roberts Cultural Foundation regularly runs events where locals and tourists alike can experience the making (and tasting) of toutons—a delicious traditional fried bread dough often served with butter and molasses.

Living Traditions in Sustainable Communities

The fourth pillar of HFNL's ICH Strategy is sustainable community development. To build familiarity with the concept of sustainable development as it relates to ICH, HFNL has organized a series of events and programs to promote the link between traditional food and local business.

One example of this was the St. John's Farmers Market podcast series, a series of audio podcasts showcasing the people and stories of the St. John's Farmer's Market, from farmers to food vendors. This was coordinated with the market, in partnership with the Conservation Corp of NL, a youth-employment NGO working in the field of ecological and cultural conservation. The series was part of HFNL's ongoing *Living Heritage* radio show and podcast, itself a partnership with CHMR Campus Radio at Memorial University. *Living Heritage* is a show developed by HFNL about people who are engaged in the heritage and culture sector, from museum professionals and archivists to tradition bearers and craftspeople—all those who keep heritage alive at the community level. Through the Conservation Corp, a community radio intern was hired to assist with planning, organizing, recording, promoting, and archiving podcast episodes. The student worked on the podcast, interviewing vendors and readying the episodes for broadcast. Each episode included background information on the vendors themselves as well as practical advice to other potential food entrepreneurs and discussions of local food-related issues.

One major issue currently addressing sustainable communities in the province is food security. This is especially true for the island portion of the province and for its northernmost mainland communities that are inaccessible by road and can often be shut off from commercial shipping by winter and spring ice conditions. The preservation of traditional foods through salting, smoking, pickling, canning, and bottling has a long history in the region. The changing factors described earlier, however, coupled with the greater availability of commercially prepared foodstuffs since the 1950s has seen the decline of many of these traditional skills amongst the younger generations. Addressing this knowledge loss is one aspect of increasing local food security.

Community health depends on more than just food security and economic development. Communities must be livable by for increasingly diverse populations. Immigrant culture is an important part of Canadian society, and as the international community continues to grow, issues around immigration, bigotry, and the treatment of refugees are often front-page news.

HFNL has seen an opportunity to address these issues through workshops that promote the concept of "gastrodiplomacy," which recognizes that "positive interpersonal communication between individuals of different cultures can have large scale effects in reducing discrimination and promoting cooperation" (Roberts para 4). As Rahn (31) puts it,

> Tradition creates distinctiveness, but it also promotes connectedness. I am fond of saying about festivals, that if we eat other people's food and listen to their music, we start to realize how much we have in common rather than only focusing on what divides us. That might be stating the obvious, but it is not always obvious to those who contract our services.

When most people think about the food culture of Newfoundland and Labrador, they think about dishes such as the aforementioned toutons and tea buns but rarely do they think about ethnic dishes such as pierogies, pernicky, or baklava. HFNL uses food workshops to celebrate the variety of traditions and cultures that are a part of the changing Canadian culture. These allow participants to better understand the differences (and similarities) of each other and to engage in positive ways with newcomers.

Abir Zain is a refugee and recent immigrant to the province. She has perfected her rosewater cream cheese filled baklava recipe since her move to Canada. In 2017, Zain was engaged by HFNL to teach workshop participants how to make this sweet Turkish pastry, popular in the Middle East. True to the nature of ICH being in a constant state of evolution and changing to fit the needs of the local environment, her recipe has been tweaked since her family's move:

> Abir Zain, a teacher from Syria who immigrated to Newfoundland recently with her family, had to learn how to make her husband's favorite dessert, and now she is sharing her baklava with others. Zain, a mother of five, said no one in Syria makes their own baklava. The popular dessert, which is usually consumed at weddings, graduations and births, is sold all over the Middle East in stores and bakeries. But when Zain and her family immigrated to Newfoundland, she could no longer find the tasty treat. So she did what any of us would: she called her mother and asked her for her best recipe. (Antle para 1)

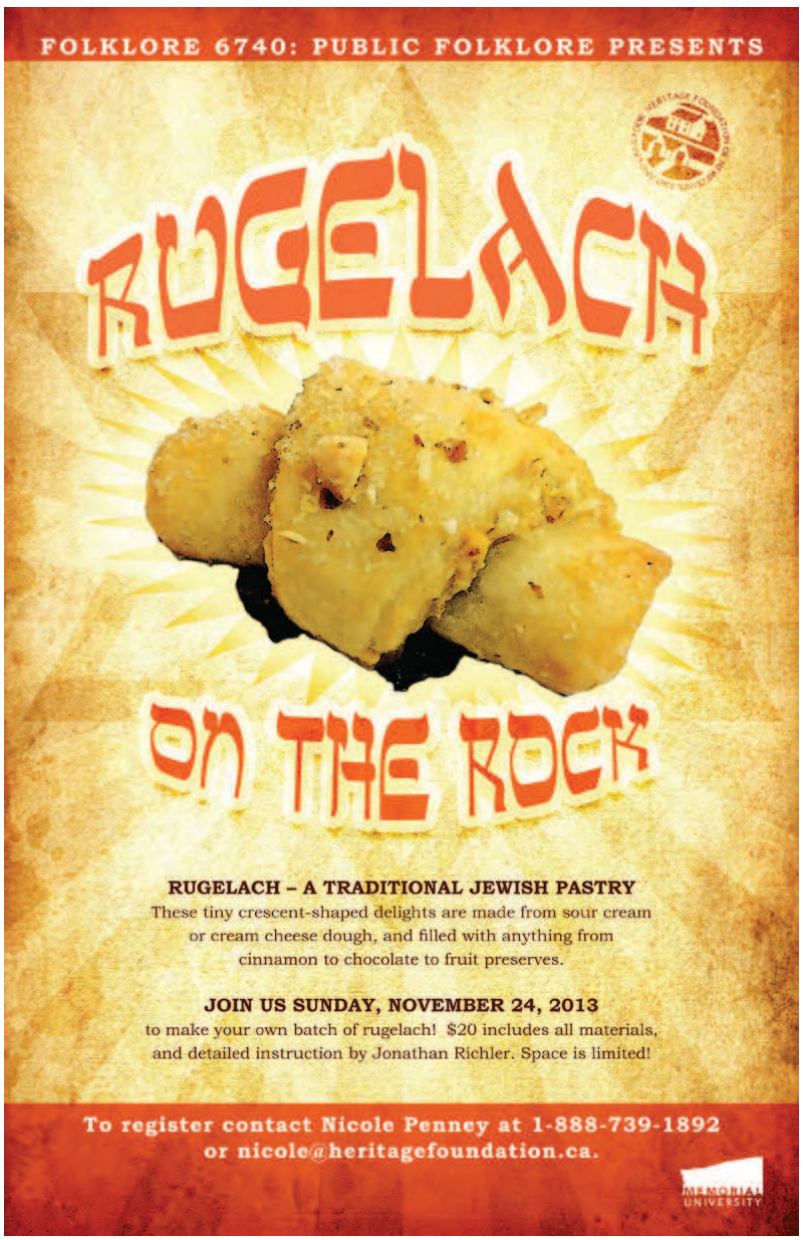
Workshops like this allow citizens to meet refugees and learn more about other cultures. It also allows refugees like Zain to make contacts outside of the refugee community, which can help with integration and provide opportunities for entrepreneurialism. Zain, as an example, has been approached since the first workshop to offer other classes. She was also hired to provide catering for events such as HFNL's 2018 ICH forum, where her story was profiled.

Baklava made during Abir Zain's workshop
© courtesy of Heritage NL

Other gastrodiplomatic food workshops organized by HFNL have included sessions on traditional Czech pernicky (gingerbread) decoration with entrepreneur Jindra Maskova, and making Ukrainian pierogi (potato dumplings) with folklorist Dr. Mariya Lesiv. These workshops allowed participants to make their own dishes alongside a cultural tradition bearer and were facilitated by trained folklorists who would guide discussion and question the tradition bearer about the stories behind the recipes as the workshop unfolded. This process allows participants to better appreciate the cultural context of the tradition and to understand how those traditions have adapted and shifted over time.

Jindra Maskova (center) teaching gingerbread decoration
© courtesy of Heritage NL

In 2013, HFNL facilitated a workshop called "Rugelach on the Rock" where participants learned to roll, prepare, shape, and bake this traditional Jewish crescent-shaped treat under the guidance of Jonathan Richler of The Jewish Deli. The workshop was organized in part by the students of Folklore 6740: Public Folklore, a graduate-level course at Memorial University of Newfoundland. This model engages the public in foodways traditions while teaching students practical and varied skills in facilitation, group work, community outreach, and project planning, thus training the next generation of cultural workers on how to organize ICH safeguarding initiatives.



Poster for the Rugelach on the Rock workshop © Graham Blair

Conclusion

Food continues to be a way for HFNL to bring people to the table, so to speak. Along the way, we have learned a few lessons in the art of ICH programming. Events must be flexible in design and execution, and adapt to the needs of the community. They must be designed to accurately reflect the traditions themselves, which requires consultation and research beforehand. Ethnographic research is at the heart of what we do, and research is

necessary to best showcase the skills and knowledge of local experts. We also recognized that not all tradition bearers are necessarily good instructors, organizers, or public speakers, so there is an important role to be played by cultural brokers, such as public folklorists, who can function as organizers, conversation instigators, and intermediaries. Finally, the key to engaging people at the local community level is developing good partnerships. The projects and programs that work best are the ones where we have strong community partners who can help us identify both tradition bearers and the audience who wants to learn more about local skills and traditions.

It is our hope that flexible, adaptable safeguarding approaches such as these will help build healthier communities and carry these old traditions forward. As Australian chef Tony Tan (81) writes about his own culinary journeys, "My experiences have led me to believe that not only will food continue to change and adapt, but we must always nurture our past to provide for the future."

Building new local food traditions with Lori McCarthy of Cod Sounds
© courtesy of Lori McCarthy

Résumé

Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador est la province la plus orientale du Canada, située dans la région atlantique du pays. C'est une province avec un riche patrimoine culturel, avec à la fois des populations autochtones et une population de colons d'origine principalement anglaise et irlandaise. Depuis 2008, la Fondation du patrimoine de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador (HFNL) a créé son bureau du patrimoine culturel immatériel. Son rôle est de préserver le patrimoine culturel immatériel de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador pour les générations actuelles et futures et de sauvegarder les connaissances et les coutumes uniques de la province. La fondation est guidée par une stratégie du PCI comportant quatre composantes principales : documentation, célébration, transmission et traditions vivantes dans des communautés durables.

Le déclin de l'accès aux aliments traditionnels, les changements démographiques et la perte de savoir-faire traditionnels sont autant de préoccupations qui ont une incidence sur le travail de HFNL. Au cours de la dernière décennie, HNFL a développé des projets liés à la nourriture en se basant sur sa stratégie en quatre volets.

La documentation des traditions alimentaires nous aide à comprendre la signification de la nourriture à l'échelle de la communauté. Cela inclut des recherches pour étudier les moyens par lesquels la transmission ou le déclin des connaissances traditionnelles se produisent. Le travail de documentation de HFNL comprend également des initiatives visant à améliorer les compétences techniques au niveau communautaire pour la conservation numérique. La célébration, quant à elle, consiste à élever le discours autour de traditions sélectionnées et à promouvoir une meilleure compréhension de l'importance, des défis et des menaces qui pèsent sur ces traditions. HFNL célèbre les traditions culinaires de plusieurs manières, notamment par le biais de festivals et de campagnes de médias sociaux.

Les projets de transmission incluent des possibilités de transmettre aux générations suivantes les compétences acquises. Les ateliers culinaires comprenaient des cours de confiture et de pain ainsi que des séances de préparation et de conservation de la viande d'orignal. Les projets Traditions vivantes dans les collectivités durables ont été axés sur les aliments traditionnels et les entreprises locales, les marchés locaux et la sécurité alimentaire. HFNL a également travaillé sur des événements culturels de « gastro-diplomatie » qui soutiennent des communautés saines et inclusives.

HFNL espère que des approches de sauvegarde flexibles et adaptables aideront à bâtir des communautés plus saines et à poursuivre les traditions ancestrales.

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Living Heritage Series

For the past several decades, UNESCO has been increasingly championing the importance of culture as a driving force for the proliferation of cultural diversity and the sustainable development of a global society. Sustainable development in this sense, however, is not equated to economic growth alone, but also to a means to achieve an equitable intellectual, emotional, and spiritual existence among the global community.

At the same time, societies around the world have been facing challenges in promoting the values of cultural pluralism. As such, UNESCO has been an advocate for promoting culture and intangible cultural heritage in particular since the 1980s with the Decade for Cultural Development and later with the Living Human Treasures program (UNESCO 142EX/18 and 142EX/48). These promotions and programs culminated with the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Both of these instruments recognize the importance of sharing and promoting intangible cultural heritage to enhance understanding and appreciation of the cultural assets of the humanity.

In 2017, ICHCAP, as a UNESCO category 2 center in the cultural heritage field, started the *Living Heritage Series* to promote cultural diversity and the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage In this publication project, ICHCAP teams up with other organizations to share information about heritage beliefs and practices from cultures around the world in the hopes that intangible cultural heritage can be sustained by communities and the broader international society.

93590
9 791196 260286
ISBN 979-11-962602-8-6