

Impact and Challenges of Disseminating Ideas on Environmental Consciousness through Intangible Cultural Heritage Educational Programmes in Greece

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the challenges associated with implementing and designing educational programmes on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) concerning environmental consciousness. These include (1) students being disconnected from the context of the ICH elements of the programmes; (2) teachers lacking adequate ICH training in designing and implementing the programmes; and (3) a Kafkaesque bureaucracy and incommensurability between actors. These programmes relate to a trend derived from UNESCO and European Union interests in transmitting ICH through education. Some of these challenges are surpassed by 'avocational individuals' who go beyond their job descriptions to enhance student learning. The article demonstrates how such programmes redefine human-environment relationships and make practical suggestions. Although the ethnographic examples are from Greece, the findings are arguably relevant to other places with a similar educational and social context.

KEYWORDS

avocational individuals, course design, educational policies and programmes, environmental consciousness, 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage

This article examines how Greek educational programmes on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) promote environmental consciousness. This focus arose when I explored how ICH-related educational programmes discuss the nature of climate change and realised that the issue itself is not often addressed directly. I continued to study the phenomenon of a precursor (environmental consciousness) to foci on climate change. My analysis pinpoints the limitations of such approaches and suggests how to surpass them to reach a point in the future where ICH educational programmes can holistically address climate change and sustainability. First, I examine two cases:



educational programmes created by teachers and the Hellenic (Greek) Ministry of Culture and Sports (MoC), and programmes designed by academics. Then, I discuss the teacher training on ICH and the bureaucratic challenges present from the conception until the implementation of the programmes. Although I discuss examples from Greece, the findings are relevant for other places that share a similar social and educational context.

The concept of ICH was introduced to Greece when the Greek Parliament ratified the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereafter: the Convention) in December 2006. The institution responsible for the implementation of the Convention in Greece is the MoC. Still, as I have discussed elsewhere, the concept had only begun its dissemination in 2012 when the Directorate of Modern Cultural Heritage (DMCH) actively initiated the implementation of the Convention, creating the Greek National Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory (see Karampampas 2021).

This article is based on ethnographic research that has been ongoing since February 2017 at the DMCH, with different cultural associations (non-governmental organisations) and heritage actors. Moreover, since September 2024, I have expanded my fieldwork to two primary schools, where I work as a colleague with their teachers on a daily basis. It focusses on research participants who designed and/or implemented educational programmes related to ICH and the environment. For ethical reasons, I have not interacted with the students who participated in these programmes. However, I found my pre-anthropological training and experience in formal and non-formal education valuable, allowing me to have a better understanding of my research participants, the relevant educational policies and the educational bureaucracy. Moreover, in order to reduce the inequality and hierarchies produced in ethnographic fieldwork and in trying to achieve a more ethical approach, I used collaborative research methods. More specifically, four of my research participants (introduced below) read this article and had the opportunity to comment and contribute to it with their own analyses (albeit to different degrees, depending on their level of engagement).¹ This method also ensured that their ideas were not misinterpreted. Some participants requested to use their real names (e.g. Kaliopi Stara), and others held unique positions with a public presence and could therefore not be anonymised (e.g. Elena Bazini). I also used pseudonyms as in the case of ‘Alikí’ and ‘Vivi’.

Accidental Meetings and ICH Educational Programmes

The creation of educational programmes on ICH coincides with UNESCO plans to promote ICH in technical and vocational education and training, or TVET, in 2018 (Karampampas and De Regt 2019). Additionally, as part of the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage, UNESCO and the European Union created pilot initiatives for the years 2019, 2020 and 2021 for the transmission of ICH through formal and non-formal education in several countries including Greece (UNESCO 2021). Furthermore, State Parties of the Convention were to submit a periodic report to the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereafter: the Committee) every six years. The Greek periodic report of 2021² included five extensive sections related to education (based on the instructions of the Secretariat of the Convention) highlighting the increasing importance of education in the Convention.

In 2017, DMCH created four courses to introduce students in primary and secondary education to ICH. The Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (MoE), the institution responsible for the school curriculum and teaching staff, approved them as add-ons to the national curriculum. ‘In Greek primary and secondary education, ICH does not constitute an independent subject. In both Primary and Secondary Education textbooks no nominal reference is made to the term ‘intangible cultural heritage’ or its derivatives. However, occasional information about various aspects of ICH or opportunities for further discussion can be found in textbooks of several disciplines [subjects]’ (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports 2022: 52). In other words, ICH topics are taught in various subjects in decontextualised form as folk poems, songs and dances.

Two of the DMCH courses focus on the environment. The first focusses on the ethnographic film *Traditional Water Management among Stromi Village People, Gkiona Mountain, Greece*.³ The second is centred on the element ‘Tinian marble craftsmanship’,⁴ which has been inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List⁵ and indirectly relates to environmental issues. However, these courses are not the only starting point for teachers when introducing their students to environmental issues through ICH. Vivi and Elena happened to meet again many years after graduating together from university. Vivi was teaching at a junior high school (students are 13–15 years old) in Piraeus. She studied history and archaeology (BA) and holds a PhD in ancient

history and has taught for more than twenty-two years in secondary education. Elena studied archaeology (BA) and anthropology (MA) and, for the past six years, has worked at DMCH. She is the central figure in the design and implementation of ICH-related educational programmes, and supports teachers in their implementation of these programmes. During their meeting, Vivi was motivated to engage her students in the field of ICH.

Vivi and two colleagues designed and put into action in October 2018 their programme ‘Cultural Heritage: People, Places, Culture’, holding a weekly meeting with the students as one of its after-school extracurricular activities. One of those colleagues was Aliko, a Greek language and literature teacher (BA), with twenty-six years of experience in secondary education and an MEd in school management and development. The programme introduced the students to various performative heritage elements, while the issue of the environment focussed urban heritage. As Aliko explained to me, interestingly, the teachers first mentioned the term ICH in class only in February after some discussions with Elena. Elena also encouraged them to check the DMCH website, which provides definitions of the basic concepts and the Convention in Greek, which helped them to fathom what ICH is; they did not, however, read the Convention. Aliko, on the other hand, was able to use in class her first-hand experience from growing up in Tinos, talking about ‘Tinian marble craftsmanship’.

All of the activities during the year prepared the students for an unexpected fieldtrip: ‘The rural landscape as cultural heritage’, a pilot programme designed by the DMCH. Elena and two other DMCH officials led the three-day visit to Dimitsana and surrounding areas. As Aliko explained, ‘the rural landscape was the programme’s highlight. Many children had no contact with the rural environment. They had not known nor seen what a harrow was. We tasted local delicacies to see how gastronomy is a matter of culture’.⁶

The visit to Dimitsana was not planned when the programme was initiated by the teachers. It was an idea that DMCH staff derived from their interest in agro-food heritage and from their long-term engagement with the area, which would allow them easy access to facilities and the locals. It would also be a great opportunity to test their ideas in practice. Central to the visit was also the Open-Air Hydrokinesis [Waterpower] Museum. It is an interactive museum with water-powered mechanisms (flour mill, gunpowder mill, etc.), pictures and videos depicting how locals used water in their lives. As Aliko informed me, their visit to the museum triggered discussions on ‘sustainable

development during the field trip and [they] considered the possibilities of utilising the elements of nature in their lives’.

Reflecting on the programme together with the teachers, we found a central issue – the students did not have enough prior experience and stimuli in order to build an environmental consciousness. Even those with families or holiday cottages in rural areas of Greece spent most of their time on their smartphones instead of seeing the farming or pastoral activities of family members and neighbours. Aliki noted a huge success: ‘In a student evaluation of their trip they [the students] said: “For three days, we stopped constantly checking our mobiles, smelt [new things], listened, and we came closer to nature”’. For students, teachers and DMCH staff, the programme was a success and achieved its aims since the students enhanced their relationship with the environment and their understanding of it. Nevertheless, the connection between ICH and the environment never became explicitly clear for the students.

Private Initiatives and Running on ‘Passion’

In addition to public initiatives, there are also private ones. One example is Kaliopi and her team’s creation of an activity package on environmental education entitled ‘The Centuries-Old Trees, Their Values and Their Importance for the Conservation of Biodiversity’, drawing material from the results of the research programme ‘Conservation through Religion: The Sacred Groves of Epirus’ (2012–2015) and from ‘The Sacred Forests⁷ of the Villages of Zagori and Konitsa’ (2014). Kaliopi had initially studied psychology (BA) and biology (BSc), but soon her interest turned to ethnobiology (MSc and PhD), and she participated in various research projects. She taught in university biology departments and, more recently, in history and archaeology ones. The educational materials include the book for the students, ‘Ancient Trees, Their Values and Importance for Biodiversity Conservation’ (Stara and Vokou 2015), and other support material for students and teachers. It is mainly aimed at children aged 10–12, but teachers can modify the text for other populations. The programme received the approval of the MoE, and copies were distributed to all primary schools of the Ioannina region and to various associations and institutions in Greece (Stara forthcoming). The material is designed in such a way as to instil engaged practical knowledge about the environment, redefine student relationships with nature and enhance their environmental conscience.

Although the programme was carefully designed, and the material reached schools in Ioannina for its implementation, the degree to which it was used and its success remains unknown. As Kaliopi explained to me, ‘the officials [of the MoE] who were responsible never sent us the feedback of the evaluation of the project that was implemented by teachers on a voluntary basis’ (personal communication, 25 July 2023). This fits in with Michael Herzfeld’s (1992) description of bureaucratic indifference, and in the case of programme evaluation this could be an act of simple indifference or could be part of a larger strategy of displaying indifference to hide personal or political motives. Nevertheless, the motives were never identified, and Kaliopi directed her efforts through alternative pathways (such as environmental education centres and cultural associations). The material also became available online.

In the first presentations, in 2015, where the material was presented by invitation of local institutions, the participation of teachers was small, but gradually, and especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, the numbers of participants increased more than tenfold, for example, in two recent seminars with attendances of 500 teachers (10 May 2022 in Attica) and 700 teachers (6 February 2022 in the Kordelio area of Thessaloniki), respectively. One reason for the success of the second seminar was that the Environmental Education Centre of Eleftherio Kordelio had ‘been coordinating a large tree-related programme for the past few years, so our material was very useful for their programme’ (personal communication, 25 July 2023). Moreover, Kaliopi explained that in both cases the people who are in key positions are driven by their ‘passion’ and ‘knowledge’ and that ‘two [of these people] are in Thessaloniki and are old colleagues and my friends. We share many passions, and they say that “I want to do this job because I like it, and I don’t care about the money I get paid or that I will work extra”’ (personal communication, 17 May 2023).

Reflecting on my research participants’ experiences, it seems that in all cases educational programmes on ICH work best in a voluntary capacity, especially when the individuals involved are motivated and proactive. To describe these actors, I want to introduce here a new concept, namely that of ‘avocational individuals’, an expanded version of ‘vocational bureaucrats’, a term that I used in the past. Vocational bureaucrats are defined as administrative staff who, regardless of their background, are commonly driven by a belief in the value of heritage as a tool for improving lives and who ‘use creative expedients to open

up new administrative possibilities within the scope of accepted rules' (Bortolotto et al. 2020: 68). This also applies to my research participants who, instead of centring on the 'belief in the value of heritage', are motivated by their 'passion' as educators wanting to offer the most knowledge and wisdom to students and as 'avocational individuals' who go beyond their job descriptions to enhance student learning and are essential to produce change at various scales.

When the Chain Is Broken: Who Is Motivated and Trained to Teach ICH?

The teachers mentioned in the first section have not received any specialised training in ICH. The same applies to the 32 and 24 teachers in the schools that I work. This is not completely surprising, as the Convention is still relatively new, and in Greece it was actively implemented even more recently in 2012. This also mirrors the interest of Greek-speaking academia, as only in the last years have academics begun looking at the concept of ICH (i.e. Karampampas 2023; Nitsiakos et al. 2022). ICH is not included in undergraduate courses for the training of future teachers,⁸ with some recent exceptions where ICH is mentioned but is not elaborated upon. However, the biggest problem is what Kaliopi highlighted: '[Undergraduate] students understand the connection between environment and culture (usually biologists and archaeologists), but very few will end up teaching in schools'. Currently, the newly employed teachers are those who had graduated more than a decade ago (it is out of the scope of this article to discuss the selection criteria for new teachers in public schools), which means that it is unknown when newly graduated teachers will have the opportunity to teach ICH in schools.

The MoC actively attempts to train teachers to understand ICH and to use it in their classes (regardless of whether they will use the DMCH material). A recent example is the hybrid seminar 'Teaching the Intangible Cultural Heritage with the Intangible Cultural Heritage'⁹ conducted on 18 March 2023 in collaboration with the MoE. It aimed to raise the awareness of 'teachers of member schools of the UNESCO Associated Schools Network' (ASPnet)¹⁰ and officials of the MoE. Fifty people participated in-person and 228 watched the video (13 August 2023) that is available online, but still this number constitutes a minority of teachers, since the event invited the staff of

about 150 schools of the Greek ASPnet out of 4,402 primary schools and 2,680 secondary schools.¹¹

Another critical factor to be considered is the personnel conducting the training. During the hybrid seminar, one of the speakers presented the toolkit created by UNESCO to help teachers incorporate ICH into their classes. This person was presented as an ‘educator, [and] UNESCO-certified trainer for the integration of intangible cultural heritage in education’, and she had also participated in the pilot study and the creation of the toolkit. As she mentioned during the seminar: ‘I have nothing to do with anthropology or culture, [...] I designed my courses completely intuitively’ (3:37:40). Thus, if the ‘certified trainers’ have nothing to do with the so-called ‘culture’, how can they train others on these topics? Additionally, during the seminar, no distinction was made by speakers and attendees between pre-heritage practices (or traditions) and ‘metacultural production’ (Tauschek 2011). Thus, ICH was and currently is used non-reflexively as another term for traditions and customs in Greece, even amongst heritage experts (Karampampas 2021), and this holds true in other regions (Kuutma 2015: 51).

Finally, another notable limitation is the broken link between different ministries, their agendas and the perspectives of their staff. During the same seminar, officials from both ministries thanked each other for their strong collaboration and for working together towards the same aims. However, during the question-and-answer session, it was revealed that in the new school curriculum for the school year 2023–2024 the concept of ICH had been introduced for the first time in some subjects. Nevertheless, nobody knew what this included and how ICH should be presented and used (with the exceptions of the primary school subject ‘environmental studies – *meléti periválontos*’, which includes topics on ICH and sustainability based on the statement of the person who designed it and was present at the seminar). The staff of the MoE designed the curriculum without consulting their colleagues from the MoC or any ICH specialists for that matter. The material is not currently available to the public (July 2023). Yet if the only trained (English literature) teacher and ‘UNESCO-certified trainer for the integration of intangible cultural heritage in education’ of the MoE designs courses based on personal ‘intuition’, how might untrained teachers, who designed the new national curriculum, critically incorporate ICH into their programmes?

Discussion: Challenges, Limitations and Looking to the Future

Discussing the national initiatives in the first section, I have highlighted the fact that the introduction of ICH into Greek education is part of an international initiative. The beginning of this article focussed on the ICH programmes that promote environmental consciousness, in which the major limitation is that most students have inadequate knowledge about the environment (in addition to having not been introduced to the concept of ICH before). As one of my research participants told me, semi-jokingly, some students ‘don’t know if watermelons grow on trees’. As highlighted in the first section, if students have not seen a harrow – or know what it is – how can they understand traditional farming techniques and the importance (or not) of safeguarding them? Similarly, in the second section, I explained how they had to experience a ‘sacred forest’ and understand how trees can protect a village from floods and landslides. This is one of the reasons that the programmes do not try to address the issue of climate change: basic knowledge of the environment is a prerequisite.

My second point was that teachers had limited training in ICH and the new cohort have years to go before even getting a chance to do so. And this led me to my third point, which is that the Kafkaesque bureaucracy and incommensurability between ministries and the relevant actors currently precludes the possibility of introducing ICH into the curriculum in any meaningful way. In fact, the attempts to introduce the concept of ICH in education (as well as to the general public) present it as being synonymous with traditions, customs and similar terms when it is not. They fail to detail exactly how ICH differs from the latter. This also means that, since the teachers who implement the programmes do not clearly understand ICH, the students receive a blurry and partial idea of ICH and its significance. There have been some attempts by the MoC to train teachers to use ICH in their classes, but these have been sporadic and are usually attended by people who are already interested in the topic. This inefficiency comes from the administrative and bureaucratic obstacles that have thus far prevented the two ministries from collaborating, thereby creating a ‘broken chain’ between the actors. Ideally, the MoE should train the teaching staff and include ICH in the curriculum, while the MoC should provide the expertise (in collaboration with academics). During my fieldwork, my research participants in the MoC had, on numerous

occasions, expressed the difficulties of collaborating with colleagues from other ministries (be it the Ministry of External Affairs or, in this case, the MoE), which have other priorities, interests and agendas. For this reason, the efforts of the DMCH officials in teacher training have minimal impact, while the MoE officials have begun their efforts without having the know-how. Hopefully, the MoC and the MoE will soon be able to find an efficient way to collaborate and invite experts to cover any missing expertise. In this case, environmental consciousness could be promoted under a coherent national curriculum. Such a curriculum would ideally use ICH (together with other tools and the teaching of practical skills) to inform students about climate change, and would use ICH as a resource for mitigating climate change.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current programmes *do* work and enhance students' environmental consciousness. This goal is achieved because 'avocational individuals' go beyond their minimal duties, work overtime and take on more responsibilities (often facing indifferent colleagues) to design and implement these educational programmes. Additionally, all ethnographic examples demonstrated the significance of personal connections and accidental encounters. However, personal connections and goodwill may not have a far enough reach if the government does not address the above-mentioned three points carefully. For now, suffice it to say that ICH educational programmes related to the environment have become another tool in the repertoire of the teachers, one which is used in combination with others to provide their students 'knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe' (UNESCO 2003). Consequently, while there have been positive changes for heritage actors (and in this case, in the educational context) seventeen years after Greece ratified the Convention (2006) and twenty years after its adoption by UNESCO, there are still significant obstacles to the successful implementation of ICH in the curriculum, the most important of which is the need to transcend the limitations of the Convention.

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Notes

1. Elena Bazini did not provide feedback because she disagreed with my analysis; instead, she plans to reply to the article after its publication (written communication, 29 August 2023).

2. Available in English at <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/download.php?versionID=65319> (accessed 13 August 2023).
3. Film available in Greek with English subtitles: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0XJ7VIdQ2w> (accessed 24/6/2023). Link to the course (available in Greek): <https://ayla.culture.gr/το-παράδειγμα-των-παραδοσιακών-τρόπων/> (accessed 13 August 2023).
4. Inscribed in 2015 (10.COM) on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/tinian-marble-craftsmanship-01103>. Link to the course (available in Greek): <https://ayla.culture.gr/τηνιακή-μαρμαροτεχνία-2/> (accessed 13 August 2023).
5. The Convention establishes two lists and one register: the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, and the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices. For their purposes, see <https://ich.unesco.org/en/purpose-of-the-lists-00807> (accessed 14 June 2023).
6. All the quotes from Aliki derive from our discussion that took place on 4 April 2023.
7. In sacred forests, cutting down or damaging trees is forbidden. The trees are considered to be protected by a saint or deity. Often, the protection extends to the animals living in these areas, and breaking prohibitions can result in supernatural punishments. This is a form of local knowledge about nature since forests protect the area from natural disasters (i.e. avalanches and flooding) as their roots help to hold and steady the ground.
8. On the topic of post-graduate courses, in the academic year 2023–2024, various universities will begin to offer programmes in which ICH will be a central topic, although these programmes will not include any training in the teaching of ICH.
9. Seminar available in Greek: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36YV0motjME> (last accessed 13 August 2023).
10. For more information see the official webpage: <https://www.unesco.org/en/aspnet> and the webpage of Hellenic National Commission for UNESCO: <https://unescogreece.gr/aspnet-σχολεία-συνεργαζόμενα-με-την-unesco/> (accessed 24 June 2023).
11. Data based on the school year 2020–2021, available from the Hellenic Statistical Authority: <https://www.statistics.gr/statistics/pop> (accessed 24 June 2023).

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