

Past and Future Presencing in Museums

Four Cases of Engaging with Intangible Heritage from the Netherlands

Museums in a rapidly changing world

In the context of the various rapid transformations taking place in the world today, the roles of museums are being rethought, resulting in urgent requests for engagement as regards the current questions and challenges facing human societies. Museums are being required to reflect upon those challenges, to be a forum for discussions and negotiations, and to take up an activist approach towards the future, as highlighted forcefully by diverse scholars and museum experts such as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett or Fiona Cameron.¹ Concepts like the 'post-museum', the 'network museum', the 'disruptive museum', or the 'liquid museum', that all, more or less, describe museums as self-reflexive democratic institutions operating in complex interconnected networks and embracing different world views are getting more and more attention in museum practice.² The in 2019 highly debated proposal of a new museum definition of the International Council of Museums, that calls for moving from a 'passive observer' to a more activist role in society, is also an example of this. This rethinking corresponds to the postulation that museums should become participative, actively engaging people as cultural participants and not as passive consumers, and co-creating together with individuals and communities.

At the same time that ideas about various highly needed reconceptualizations of museums are being brought forward, the awareness of the concept of 'intangible cultural heritage' is growing significantly. The concept of intangible cultural heritage, as it has been essentially established and put into operation by the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, describes the radical contemporary character of living cultural heritage, stresses the central role of the practitioners (heritage

- 1 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett at SIEF2019 closing event, available via: <https://vimeo.com/362078953>; F. Cameron, 'The Liquid Museum: New Institutional Ontologies for a Complex, Uncertain World', in: A. Witcomb, and K. Message (eds.), *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theories*. New Jersey, 2015, p. 345-361.
- 2 For example, Cameron, *The Liquid Museum*; A. Odding, *Het disruptieve museum*. The Hague, 2011; N. Simon, *The participatory museum*. Santa Cruz, 2010; E. Hooper-Greenhill, 'Culture and meaning in the museum', in: E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*. New York, 2005 (2000), p. 1-22.

communities) who are highly engaged with their heritage, claims bottom-up, participative approaches, and focuses on the dynamic safeguarding of the heritage – which is constantly evolving and changing – towards the future.³

This coincidence, which is not by chance, but has to do with attempts to democratize and decolonize, and approach culture inclusively, encourages the intangible cultural heritage sector to stimulate museums to actively engage with intangible cultural heritage and its practitioners and include the approaches of the intangible heritage paradigm in their work in general.⁴ To get there, intangible heritage brokers⁵ provide museum professionals with inspirational and pragmatic methodological tools emphasizing the “great potential [of intangible cultural heritage] to address pressing issues in today’s world in innovative ways, and to contribute to the identification and implementation of sustainable solutions” for the future.⁶

My argument, however, is that in the museum sector broader time alignments are critical when engaging with intangible cultural heritage. The multidirectional relationships between the past, present and future that museums create and use when working with intangible cultural heritage will have to be taken into account more profoundly in the discourse about building bridges across, and collaborating between, the sectors.

Four cases of engaging with intangible heritage from the Netherlands

Which choices do museums in the Netherlands make when they decide to work with intangible cultural heritage and collaborate with its bearers? Which ambitions concerning the museums’ contribution to knowledge about the past, their interpretation of the present, and the shaping of the future form the basis for the engagement? To try and answer this, I will analyze the approaches of four museums in more detail: an open-air museum, a city museum, a museum of religious culture, and a regional museum.

3 *Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention> (26/07/2020).

4 This is supported by the demands and advice of the cultural policy framework of both UNESCO and ICOM, see: T. Nikolić Đerić e.a. (eds.), *Museums and Intangible Cultural Heritage: Towards a Third Space in the Heritage Sector. A Companion to Discover Transformative Heritage Practices for the 21st Century*. Bruges, 2020, p. 110-111.

5 M. Jacobs, ‘Cultural Brokerage, Addressing Boundaries and the New Paradigm of Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage. Folklore Studies, Transdisciplinary Perspectives and UNESCO’, *Volkskunde. Tijdschrift over de cultuur van het dagelijks leven* 115:3, 2014, p. 265-291 [Special issue - Cultural Brokerage].

6 *Declaration on the dynamic engagement between a multiplicity of actors from the fields of museums and intangible cultural heritage*, <https://www.ichandmuseums.eu/en/toolbox/imp-declaration> (26/07/2020); see also: *A Toolkit for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage together with Museums*, <https://www.ichandmuseums.eu/en/imp-toolkit> (30/05/2020).

Dutch Open Air Museum

The Dutch Open Air Museum (Arnhem) positions itself explicitly as a museum focusing on the history of everyday life in the Netherlands. Next to the outdoor museum, that shows many historical ways of living and working in rural and urban contexts, there is also an indoor museum, which opened its doors in 2017, that displays the 'Canon of Dutch History'. In fifty topics (or 'windows'), the most important events, individuals, and objects of Dutch history are presented, including a topic about slavery between the 17th and the 19th centuries – a topic which was neglected in Dutch society for a long time.

Corresponding with this 'window' of slavery, the museum retraces (the history of) slavery through a collaboration with storytellers performing Afro-Caribbean stories. Through the slavery trade, the stories have been transferred from West-Africa to the Dutch colonies Suriname and the Antilles where they became part of the living oral tradition. With the arrival of many citizens from Suriname and the Antilles after the Second World War, the stories entered the Netherlands and can be described as vibrant living heritage today. One of the central storylines is about a human-like spider called Anansi.

Several times per week the museum gives Anansi storytellers and performers the floor in the outdoor museum. The museum also supports trainings for new storytellers, mostly with Antillian or Surinamese roots.⁷

The tradition of Anansi storytelling is inextricably linked with the history of the slave trade. In addition to the live performance of the stories, a film is shown in which people from Ghana, the Caribbean, and the Netherlands speak about their relationship with, and their memories from slavery. The Anansi storytellers are also available to talk to the museum's visitors and answer questions about the transatlantic slave trade.⁸

Museum Catharijneconvent

Museum Catharijneconvent (Catherine's Convent) in Utrecht tells the history of Christianity in the Netherlands. It preserves a rich collection of religious heritage, including precious objects relating to the city of Utrecht's patron Sint-Maarten (Saint Martin) and his veneration from the 15th to the middle of the 20th century. Since 2016 the museum has been actively involved in the current Saint Martin's festival in Utrecht. Based on the legend of Saint Martin, the festival propagates ideals of togetherness, sharing and justice in the diverse secular urban society. In 2011 a Saint Martin parade was instigated that has become a recurring annual event taking place in November during which a large procession of people holding self-made light-sculptures, preceded by

7 At the same time as the museum was creating a space where Anansi tales could be shared and the tradition of Anansi storytelling could be passed on to future generations through workshops, the culture of Anansi storytelling was recognized and listed by the Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Netherlands. This Inventory is part of the implementation of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage which the Netherlands ratified in 2012.

8 S. Elpers e.a. (eds.) 'Special issue - Immaterieel erfgoed en musea', *Museumpeil* 49, 2018, p. 18-19.



Figure 1. Anansi Story Telling in the Dutch Open Air Museum. Photo: Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage.



Figure 2. Staff from Museum Catharijneconvent places shrine with Saint Martin relic along the path of the parade. Photo: Billie-Jo Krul-4443.

a large light-sculpture of Saint Martin, makes its way through the city. The procession attracts thousands of participants every year.⁹

For several years, the procession would end at the inner court of the museum, after which the museum would open its doors to everyone, free of charge. As the tradition grew to high levels of popularity, the end point had to be relocated. Since 2019, the museum has actually been going to the procession: in 2019, a central item from the museum's Saint Martin collection, a reliquary (20th century) with a piece of the saint's skull, was placed along the route of the procession. The employees of the museum have also constructed some light-sculptures together with the residents of an asylum seekers' center, sculptures that were then carried by participants during the procession itself. After the

9 In 2012, the Saint Martin celebration was placed on the Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Netherlands.

procession, the most beautiful light-sculptures were displayed in Utrecht Cathedral, an initiative that was organized by the Museum Catharijneconvent.

Remnants of the procession can also be found in the museum. In addition to the historic artefacts that tell about the history of the veneration of Saint Martin, a light-sculpture from the procession, created by the residents of Utrecht, is displayed, and a video clip about the procession is shown. The museum also offers workshops a few weeks prior to the procession in which residents of Utrecht can make their own processional light-sculptures.¹⁰

Zeeuws Museum

The next case is a regional museum engaging with crafts as intangible cultural heritage. The museum of the province of Zeeland, *Zeeuws museum* (Middelburg) preserves a large variety of arts and crafts, fashion and regional costumes. In the *HANDWERK* (handicraft) project (2013-2017), the museum traced the various ways in which the traditional clothes of the region were made as they tracked down and filmed the few people left that know how to fold items using traditional techniques. The knowledge and skills that go into making these clothes are on the verge of being lost, and documenting this expertise is therefore of great importance for the museum.

The museum also brought the local craftsmen and vocational students and designers together. The aim was to pass on the knowledge and skills connected with the making of the clothes to students and designers so that they could use them as inspiration for new (fashion) products.

The museum has had a permanent arts and crafts area for several years now. It is a place where demonstrations and workshops are held on the production of traditional clothing. Visitors can create something for themselves and can get



Figure 3. Zeeuws Museum: Mrs. Vos teaches students traditional folding techniques. Photo: Urbi et orbi filmstill.

10 Interview with Dimphy Schreurs, conservator Museum Catharijneconvent, in April 2020; Elpers, *Special issue - Immaterieel erfgoed*, p. 17-18, 23.

guidance from instructional videos and volunteers with know-how. The arts and crafts area is also a place where visitors can share their own experiences and knowledge on traditional clothing.

Keeping the heritage alive and transferring the know-how to future generations is supported by the museum shop that sells patterns, fabrics, buttons, and bead material.¹¹

Museum Rotterdam

The last case of engagement with intangible cultural heritage is the so-called 'Active Collection Centre' of the museum of the superdiverse city of Rotterdam. Rotterdam's superdiverse cultural composition – the residents' roots lie in over 170 countries – is one of the city's main challenges today.¹²

The museum manages the collection of historical objects from the city of Rotterdam. However, central to today's policies of the former Historic Museum of Rotterdam are the contemporary stories and heritage of the diverse inhabitants of the city. Within the 'Active Collection Centre'/'Authentic Rotterdam Heritage collection' of the museum, residents are invited to explore the contemporary heritage of the city. They are invited to join the museum in a council and identify or rather label as heritage: "Rotterdammers whose activities are informed by improving or changing the city", "heritage traditions that are continued or renewed by Rotterdam's communities", and "artistic cultural activities that connect Rotterdammers."¹³ Whereas the criteria at the beginning of the project in 2017 still involved a relationship to a historical development or object, in 2019 the criteria prescribed that: the heritage is from Rotterdam, it is topical, it is actively working for others and/or the city, it is open to connection, it adds something to the city.¹⁴

After the decision regarding a new item of heritage has been taken, the participant or activity is added to the list of 'Authentic Rotterdam Heritage' – both online and in the museum.¹⁵ In the first years of the project, the museum also linked a historical predecessor (which might be an object and/or a story) to the new heritage. However, the focus of the museum is now on bringing the contemporary heritage bearers and their activities into contact with each other and to stimulate future collaboration in order to shape the city in an inclusive way. Here the museum prefers the concept of an 'encounter' to that of an 'exhibition'.¹⁶

At the end of 2019, the 'Authentic Rotterdam Heritage' collection had eighty items and I would like to name three examples here: (1) The Humanitas

11 Interview with Marjan Ruiter, director Zeeuws Museum, in April 2020; Elpers, *Special issue - Immaterieel erfgoed*, 2018, p. 26.

12 Nikolić Đerić, *Museums*, p. 55.

13 N. Van Dijk, *Authentic Rotterdam Heritage, Part 2. The approach to new heritage*. Rotterdam, 2019, p. 21.

14 Van Dijk, *Authentic Rotterdam Heritage*, p. 11.

15 The concerned person or community receives a certificate with an 'Authentic Rotterdam Heritage' stamp – which symbolizes that heritage making means labelling things as heritage – and a registration number in the collection.

16 N. Van Dijk e.a. (eds.), *Authentic Rotterdam Heritage, Part 1. 55 go-getters, doers and connectors*. Rotterdam, 2018, p. 7.



Figure 4. Museum Rotterdam brings diverse heritage communities together, here during the book presentation of *Authentic Rotterdam Heritage, part 2*. Photo: Museum Rotterdam.

Foundation takes care of the Rotterdam region's most vulnerable people, from ages zero to one hundred+. When it received the label 'heritage', the museum linked it to the object of a gable stone from 1609 which originally decorated one of the five Rotterdam shelters for poor people. (2) Another heritage item is the Fred Kulturu Shop which promotes the spiritual values of the Winti culture. Here customers from different backgrounds can get advice on life's big and small questions. (3) The museum also labels individuals and their activities as heritage. An example of this is party organizer Ted Langenbach who mixes new musical forms and styles with other art disciplines for a very diverse audience.

Time Alignments

I will now take a closer look at the aims of the four cases, specifically focusing on the time alignments that are important to the museums and that they try to achieve through the integration of intangible cultural heritage.

I see four approaches or issues that play a central role: the historical collection as a fulcrum and focal point, the relationship between historical tangible objects and intangible cultural heritage, intangible cultural heritage experience, and contemporary challenges and social relevance.

The collection as a fulcrum and focal point

All four of the described ways of engagement with intangible cultural heritage have more or less strong relationships with the existing collections of the museums. The case of Museum Catharijneconvent illustrates the issue of the collection as a fulcrum and focal point most aptly. The aim of the museum is to draw attention to the meanings of the celebration in the present and then, in a next step, to make people curious about the celebration and worship

of Saint Martin in the past.¹⁷ This is done both through the participation of the museum in the parade and its preparations, as well as through the fact that the museum has incorporated a contemporary light sculpture into the exhibition. People keep looking for the familiar. From the perspective of the present, attention is thus generated for the historical objects in the collection. But even more so: departing from popular, vernacular culture today, makes the collection that mainly consists of priceless works of art – and which might be described as exclusive or privileged heritage – more inclusive since the scope is now extended to a greater public to which the heritage matters.¹⁸

When included in their collections, museums usually remove objects from circulation and they become detached from their common (daily) usage. Disconnected from their original dynamic contexts, the objects change their function in the museum and become static. But by placing the shrine with a Saint Martin relic along the path of the current parade, the object is momentarily returned to use. Being again applied in practice has added new layers of significance to the cultural biography of the object.¹⁹ The message behind this might be to show that although part of the Christian culture in Utrecht has been consigned to a museum, there is still a community for which the items of the collection matters outside the museum. In this way the museum can build stronger ties with this community.

And finally, adding a contemporary light sculpture to its collection and exhibition – which is part of the intangible cultural heritage and gives insight into it at this particular point in time²⁰ – has a renewing potential for the museum in terms of remembering the past in the future.²¹

In summary, three ways can be observed as to how the museum has tried to draw attention to its historical collection through engagement with intangible cultural heritage: 1) by connecting the collection with the new contemporary context, 2) by temporarily turning the collection into a more ‘hands on’ collection, and 3) by adding a new contemporary item to the collection.

Tangible objects and intangible cultural heritage

The approach of connecting tangible objects and intangible cultural heritage is – next to the case of Museum Catharijneconvent – most visible in the case of the Zeeuws Museum.

17 Interview with Dimphy Schreurs, conservator Museum Catharijneconvent.

18 V.T. Hafstein, ‘Cultural Heritage’, in: R. Bendix and F. Galit Hasan-Rokem (eds.), *A Companion to Folklore*. Oxford, 2012, p. 505.

19 L. Meijer-van Mensch, ‘The ‘liquid’ museum’, in: T. Nikolić Đerić e.a. (eds.), *Museums and Intangible Cultural Heritage: Towards a Third Space in the Heritage Sector. A Companion to Discover Transformative Heritage Practices for the 21st Century*. Bruges, 2020, p. 70.

20 M. Jacobs, ‘As well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith’, T. Nikolić Đerić e.a. (eds.), *Museums and Intangible Cultural Heritage: Towards a Third Space in the Heritage Sector. A Companion to Discover Transformative Heritage Practices for the 21st Century*. Bruges, 2020, p. 47-49.

21 M. Alivizatou, ‘Contextualising Intangible Cultural Heritage in Heritage Studies and Museology’, *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 3, 2008, p. 48.

Against the backdrop of a “salvage mode”,²² and in order to re-forge links with a past that appears to be lost in today’s changing world, the museum collected the knowledge and skills of the making of traditional clothes and added it to the collection of historical objects. This made the collection more complete because, until then, only the clothing had been collected, and not the immaterial aspects of it as well. Only through this addition can the objects – which, conversely, also act as a tangible representation of intangible cultural heritage and even can be described as a part of intangible cultural heritage²³ – be understood.

What is remarkable here is that the cultural practice of the making of traditional clothes is placed by the museum in both the – rapidly passing – present and also in the recent past and thus used as a smooth bridge between the past and the present.

In addition, the historical objects are made accessible by another aspect, namely through the personal story which is attached as a result of the intangible cultural heritage approach. The HANDWERK project emphasizes the fact that the traditional regional clothes are inextricably linked to real persons,²⁴ not only to the persons who actually wore the clothes, but also to the people who made, and still make, them. The people-oriented approach results in a re-enchantment of the historical objects in the collections.²⁵

At the same time, the museum’s emphasis on the active experience of the visitors (who literally get ‘in touch’ with the materials) in the crafts area contributes to transcending the boundaries between present and past.

In summary, a shift can be observed from a preoccupation with the historical object itself to an increased interest in the persons, knowledge and skills that make the past more accessible. At the same times the museum focuses attention on the vulnerability of the intangible cultural heritage concerned and stimulates dynamic transmission towards the future.

Intangible heritage experience

The visitors’ activities in the crafts area of the Zeeuws Museum where one can participate in and practice the techniques of traditional clothing making, evoke sensory and emotional heritage experiences. Visitors are asked to identify rather than to position themselves as distanced subjects. They become – even if it is only for a short moment – part of the heritage community which, on the one hand inspires interest in the past and, on the other hand, might even lead to safeguarding activities in the future. The exercises also might revive possible personal experiences with the particular heritage in the past and evoke memories which the visitors can share.

22 J. Clifford, ‘Museums as Contact Zones’, in: J. Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, 1997, p. 211.

23 *Make your own museum of the intangible: a toolkit. The Museum of English Rural Life.* <https://merl.reading.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2019/03/IntangibleMuseumToolkit-002.pdf> (30/05/2020), 10; Jacobs, *As well as the instruments*.

24 B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production’, *Museum International* 56:1-2, 2004, p. 60.

25 Alivizatou, *Contextualising Intangible Cultural Heritage*, p. 52.

The case of the Netherlands Open Air Museum where Anansi stories are told, performed and listened to is another – strong – example of how and why a museum invests in intangible heritage experiences. Listening to the stories and looking at the performances, the visitors have a more passive than active experience. However, the experience might still be intense and moving since the visitor takes part in what intangible heritage scholars Tone Erlien and Egil Bakka call an “event of practice”.²⁶ It concerns events where practitioners of intangible cultural heritage continue their practice in their own way (with strong emotions involved²⁷) in a museum, which distinguishes them from the established concepts of exhibitions and museum performances.

The ‘event of practice’ of Anansi storytelling provides an inclusive, person-oriented way of comprehending and interacting with the past. The intangible heritage points to the fact that the past exists in living people, in their bodies and minds, through memory, oral transmission and performances.²⁸ The long silence about slavery in the Netherlands still leads to uncertainties, discussions and conflicts about how to remember slavery, how to articulate it in narratives, and how to represent it in the public memory.²⁹ In this context, the Anansi storytelling in the Open Air Museum provides a contribution to an inclusive understanding of the past, an understanding which focusses on “other histories”³⁰ and perceptions beyond the mainstream perceptions which embrace the fact that aspects of the colonial past live on in the present, that this past is dealt with and can be negotiated through intangible cultural heritage and that it will be transmitted to, and adopted by, future generations.

Contemporary challenges and social relevance

All four museums consciously deal with urgent contemporary issues through their engagement with intangible cultural heritage: the search of social cohesion and identity in a diverse secular society with religious roots (Catharijneconvent), the call for the revival of traditional handicrafts in order to shape a sustainable future (Zeeuws Museum), the question of how to remember slavery in a postcolonial society (Open Air Museum), and the challenge to shape a shared and sustainable future in a superdiverse city (Museum Rotterdam).

Unlike the other cases, Museum Rotterdam most radically focuses on the present while the view of the past and the historical collection of the museum is increasingly abandoned. The activities centre on making new heritage: on

26 T. Erlien and E. Bakka, ‘Museums, Dance, and the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage: “Events of Practice” – A New Strategy for Museums?’, *Satander Art and Culture Law Review* 3, 2017:2, p. 142.

27 These events can also be described as “sensational forms” (B. Meyer, *Religious Sensations. Why Media, Aesthetics and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion*. Amsterdam, 2006, p. 9), practices that involve and affect the practitioners sensorially and emotionally. These practices might appeal to the senses and emotions of passive participants as well.

28 Alivizatou, *Contextualising Intangible Cultural Heritage*, p. 48.

29 M. Balkenhol, *Tracing Slavery. An ethnography of diaspora, affect, and cultural heritage in Amsterdam*. (Dissertation, VU University Amsterdam, 2014), p. 11-49.

30 K. Hastrup, *Other Histories*. London, 1992.

labeling people and activities as heritage so that those people get a reflexive relationship with their own practices (with reference to other practices labelled as heritage) and feel empowered.³¹ In a second step, the museum makes an effort to connect people in order to stimulate and generate new processes. These activities and efforts have transformed the museum into a cultural centre which is active beyond the museum walls. One might even describe the museum as an agent of social engineering with strong intentions towards shaping the future (heritage) of the city and towards urban development.³²

The connections which at the beginning of the project were made between the contemporary heritage and (museum objects representing) the past of the city of Rotterdam, seem to mainly serve as technology to strengthen and empower the heritage communities in the present and intensify their identification with the city. With the side effect that through the engagement with intangible cultural heritage, the museum could treat and present the historical collection as *someone's* heritage. We can observe this same effect in the Zeeuws Museum and Museum Catharijneconvent.

Past and future presencing – conclusion

The four museums that I have looked at shape diverse multidirectional relationships between the past, present and future, significantly supported by their engagement with intangible cultural heritage.³³ The most striking relationships built between the past, present, and future are as follows:

Through the Anansi storytelling, the Open Air Museum draws attention to how past worlds still exist and work in the present – in the practices, bodies and minds of people. The museum gives these people a floor. The Museum Catharijneconvent has another main approach. Heritage experiences in the present are used to point to the past. In the Zeeuws Museum, knowledge about and from the past is used to create new experiences in the present and to transmit these towards the future. At the same time, objects of the past are supplemented and enriched with contemporary knowledge, skills and experiences. Finally, Museum Rotterdam uses contemporary heritage dynamics in order to shape the future, the past being used in order to empower the current heritage communities.

Additionally, all four museums can more or less be seen as actors that attach history to living cultural heritage. By including artefacts of this intangible heritage in the collections, the museums will in the future be able to facilitate access to what then will be history.

31 This reflexive relationship is crucial to the making of heritage in general, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has pointed out. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Intangible Heritage*; see also Hafstein, *Cultural Heritage*, p. 508 and 511.

32 This requires a fundamentally different museological approach and different knowledge, skills and attitudes of the museum staff. Cfr. Alivizatou, *Contextualising Intangible Cultural Heritage*, p. 51.

33 S. Macdonald, 'Presencing Europe's Pasts', in: U. Kockel e.a. (eds.), *A Companion to the Anthropology of Europe*. Oxford, 2012, p. 247.

Last but not least, the diverse ways of collaborating with intangible cultural heritage communities contribute to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, i.e. to the transmission of knowledge and skills towards the future: by making the heritage concerned visible, by teaching new storytellers, by offering a space where light sculptures can be made, by bringing together craftsmen and students and designers, by bringing heritage communities into contact with each other and so forth.³⁴

In the growing market for information and insights into intangible heritage approaches in the wider context of heritage studies, when encouraging museums to work with intangible cultural heritage, most emphasis is – rightly – on the inclusive approaches of intangible heritage, its high significance in the present, and its capabilities for the future. The *Intangible Cultural Heritage & Museums Project* with its conference themes Diversity, Participation, Urbanized Society, Innovation, and Cultural Policies is an example of this. However, the possibilities that museums working with intangible heritage see to build, strengthen and use multidirectional relationships between the past, present and future should not be underestimated, but rather seriously acknowledged and employed in the discourse about building bridges across, and collaborating between, the sectors – the discourse about the “Third Space in the Heritage Sector”,³⁵ borrowed from the postcolonial theory of “third space” of Homi K. Bhabha, a space where different heritage paradigms ‘encounter’ which leads to translation, negotiation, innovation, engagement and mutual respect within the broad heritage field.

Unquestionably, also the time alignments which actually matter for the diverse heritage communities themselves have to be taken into account seriously, acknowledging that time experiences can differ considerably in diverse cultures.

Through museums’ engagement with intangible heritage, the view *on the present* and the view *from the present* on the past and the future are reinforced. Visitors’ perceptions of the past are clearly determined by heritage experiences in the present, and the past can, in principle, no longer even be seen separately from these experiences. This is in fact what heritage scholar Sharon Macdonald describes with her concept “past presencing.”³⁶ Past presencing is concerned with the ways in which the past is experienced, negotiated, reconstructed, and performed in the present. Of course, musealization and museum work as such are already part of past presencing: in museums, the past already is a product of the present that appoints, organizes and represents it. But the engagement with contemporary intangible heritage of diverse heritage communities further strengthens present oriented approaches to history. In how far these approaches make the complexities of history clearer or in how far complexities

34 It would be interesting to examine in how far these collaborations indeed unsettle the tenets of the “authorized heritage discourse” (L. Smith and G. Campbell, ‘The tautology of “Intangible values” and the misrecognition of intangible cultural heritage’, *Heritage and Society* 10:1, 2017, p. 26-44) and find new balances between professional expertise and community knowledge.

35 Nikolić Đerić e.a. (eds.), *Museums*.

36 Macdonald, *Presencing*.

just become more hidden,³⁷ is a very relevant topic for future research. Another topic which still has to be examined closer is in how far museums, as strong agents in the heritage regime, change or even determine the social and cultural memory of heritage communities when they engage with intangible cultural heritage.

In conclusion, what is true for the approach of the past is also true for the approach of the future. Here too, the intangible heritage determines the ways in which the future is imagined and shaped by museums – a form of future presentencing.

37 R. Bendix, 'Heredity, Hybridity and Heritage from One Fin-de-Siècle to the Next', in: P. Anttonen (ed.), *Folklore, Heritage, Politics and Ethnic Diversity*. Botkyra, 2000, p. 38; Hafstein, *Cultural Heritage*.