Just Public Mausoleums? Museums and Intangible Heritage: A Case-study of the National Museum of Ireland - Country Life

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Abstract: *Following an expansion of international conceptions of heritage to include the intangible, it has also been questioned what role museums have to play regarding our living cultural heritage. Using the National Museum of Ireland - Country Life / Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann - Saol na Tuaithe (NMI-CL) as a case-study, this research explores why intangible heritage should be incorporated into a national folklife museum, the extent to which this is already being done, and analyses some of the related difficulties. This paper shows that although the museum values and involves intangible heritage, it is treated as secondary to tangible culture and supplementary to the tangible collection, which limits its use in the museum. This paper suggests that engaging intangible heritage in its exhibitions and programming can serve as a one tool to help museums become more engaging and lively institutions. It outlines a story-focussed exhibition and programming approach that would allow tangible and intangible material to be treated as equals, and enable the museum to more closely interweave its many different activities.*

Keywords: intangible heritage; Irish museums; museum theory; museum practice

By expanding on its traditional role, adopting a more holistic view of heritage and pursuing a story-focused approach in its exhibitions and programming, the museum could involve the intangible more successfully and equally, rendering it a more exciting, hybrid and living institution.

Introduction

> All the galleries, the museums
> Here's your ticket, welcome to the tombs
> They're just public mausoleums
> The living dead fill every room
> But the most special are the most lonely
> God, I pity the violins
> In glass coffins they keep coughing
> They've forgotten, forgotten how to sing
>
> (Regina Spektor, 'All the Rowboats')

This song by the artist Regina Spektor (2012) revives the metaphor coined by Adorno (1955) of the museum as a mausoleum, a sterile, lifeless, boring place, a morbid show-case of dead objects resting in glass caskets. However, over the last half-century, museums have worked hard to move away from this classical perception, trying to become more engaging, open and lively institutions. Following an expansion of the international conceptions of heritage to include the intangible, the ongoing debate has also focused on the role museums have to play regarding our living cultural heritage. Yet how can something that is constantly evolving and changing, 'occup[y] the fluid, slippery space between people and things' (Harrison and Rose, 2010, p.240)? How can this be incorporated into the rather static environment of a museum, and what difficulties does this create?

Using the National Museum of Ireland - Country Life / Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann - Saol na Tuaithe (NMI-CL) as a case-study, this research explores why intangible heritage should be incorporated into a national folklife museum, the extent to which this is already being done and the difficulties pertaining to this. This paper shows that although the museum values and involves intangible heritage, it is treated as secondary to tangible culture and supplementary to the tangible collection. This paper argues that a more holistic view of heritage should be adopted by museums. By changing the focus on the story to be explored, rather than the tan-

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gible collection, museums could include the tangible and the intangible as equals. Finally, the paper addresses the question of what role the museum ought to play in safe-guarding intangible heritage practices, arguing that it is neither within a national folklife museum's possibilities nor remit to ensure the survival of intangible traditions.

The literature surrounding intangible heritage has focused largely on, for lack of a better term, non-Western settings and the heritage practices of indigenous tribes or so-called 'first nations', such as aboriginal communities in Australia. By conducting a case-study on the NMI-CL, this paper addresses a gap in research and literature. A range of different methodologies were employed for the case study. Interviews were carried out in 2012 with a total of seven museum staff in the NMI-CL from the curatorial and education department, as well as the manager-keeper of the museum. Additionally three museum workshop facilitators who are involved in intangible heritage traditions (such as traditional music) were interviewed. Observation of museum events such as workshops and tours was carried out and the museum's strategic plans and policies, as well as its exhibitions, were analysed. To add a comparative dimension to the research, interviews were carried out with two curators at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum (UFTM), Cultra Northern Ireland, who have experience in dealing with intangible heritage. The UFTM, which is part of National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI), has a long-standing tradition of dealing with intangibles, such as dialects, music, story-telling and narrative, especially in the area of collecting.

Defining Intangible Heritage

While the term 'intangible heritage' is quite a new one, the concept itself is not. It builds on 'historically familiar' terms such as folklore, traditional culture, oral heritage and popular culture (Kurin, 2007). The most used definition of intangible heritage is that set by UNESCO at the 2003 convention:

> The 'intangible cultural heritage' means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history […] (UNESCO, 2003, p.2)

Intangible heritage is seen to manifest itself in oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe and traditional craftsmanship (UNESCO, 2003, p.2).

Although UNESCO separates heritage into three different sections (tangible, natural and intangible), there is increasing awareness that these categories are arbitrary and interconnected (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 2006). The definition reinforces the fact that the tangible and the intangible are linked. Or as Matsuzono states: 'the tangible is always embedded in the intangible' (2004, p.13).

The definition makes explicit reference to the 'aliveness' of intangible heritage in the sense that it is seen as constantly evolving and changing. Yoshida (2004, p.109) warns that ignoring this would mean the denial of what intangible heritage is about. As Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (2004, p.53) explains, the conception of intangible heritage has changed greatly over the last twenty years. Whereas the earlier models supported scholars and the documentation of folklore, the most recent model seeks to sustain 'a living, if endangered, tradition by supporting the conditions necessary for cultural reproduction' (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 2004, p.53). The new conception recognises the key role of the transmitters, artisans and practitioners of a tradition and intangible heritage is seen as inherently connected to communities and people. To simply collect and document 'intangible heritage artefacts' is therefore no longer sufficient

(Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 2004, p.53).

The efforts by UNESCO to protect the intangible are a reaction to a fear of losing the world's diverse national, regional and local traditions and culture due to the homogenising effects of globalisation (Kurin, 2007). This implies that intangible heritage is vital but vulnerable, because of its intangibility. However, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett questions this notion, pointing out that if something 'is truly vital, it does not need safeguarding; if it is almost dead, safeguarding will not help' (2004, p.56). There is also a difference between disappearance and evanescence. Everything intangible is by its nature evanescent, yet that does not mean it has necessarily disappeared. Taking conversations as an example, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett explains: 'conversations are intangible and evanescent, but that does not make the phenomenon of conversation vulnerable to disappearance' (2004, p.60).

There have been some criticisms of the UNESCO definition of intangible heritage, one being that defined in this way intangible heritage tends to become all-encompassing and synonymous with culture at large. Harrison and Rose (2010) pose the question that since the definition allows for the re-invention of practices and forms, would not everything become heritage? This is, of course, a general issue with heritage definitions. As Cooke points out, the difficulties in containing heritage begin with the 'elusive nature of the thing itself' (2003, p. 4-5).

A West without Intangible Heritage?

The UNESCO convention on intangible heritage has been seen as a response to the dominance of the West in world heritage policy, and lobbying for the convention has come from a variety of non-western countries, in particular Japan. However, the notion that intangible heritage is something 'non-western' appears to be reciprocated by the West, not least by Britain and Ireland. On a national level, there has arguably been little recognition of intangible heritage in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Neither of the countries has ratified the convention (UNESCO, 2003), and the Heritage Acts of both nations focus mainly on the tangible aspects of heritage, such as monuments, landscapes, buildings or objects.

Conducting interviews with staff working in the heritage sector in the UK, researchers Smith and Waterton (2008) encountered deep suspicion and reservations about the concept of intangible heritage. One interviewee even claimed that the UK did not have any intangible heritage. As Smith and Waterton show, underpinning such opinions is an understanding of material culture 'to not only symbolise, but actually "embody", heritage and cultural values' (2008, p.290). If the tangible object is seen as being heritage, then intangible heritage of course creates a problem. Yet, to borrow Kirschenblatt-Gimblett's term, is not all heritage in fact 'metacultural production' (2004, p.55)? Smith and Waterton argue that heritage itself is indeed intangible and created through the process of selection and ascription of value and significance to a certain place or object (2008, p.292). Heritage is not inherent in any tangible object, but it is the 'performance and negotiation of identity, values and a sense of place' (Smith and Waterton, 2008, p.292). This links into long-standing sociological and anthropological discussions on value creation and the politics of value. German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel (1907), for instance, defines value as a judgment made about objects by humans, rather than an inherent property of any object. Based on this, Appadurai's (1986) discussion of commodities examines the various ways in which objects hold value for individuals and groups and how this value is constantly in flux.

Museums and Intangible Heritage

After the UNESCO convention, the International Council of Museums immediately expressed

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its support by holding a conference entitled 'Museums and Intangible Heritage' in 2004. Many saw museums as having a part to play in safeguarding intangible heritage (Kreps, 2009; Kurin, 2004; Matsuzono, 2004; Shouyong, 2008; Van Huy, 2006).

However, museums have traditionally devoted themselves wholly to objects and collections, and as Kurin (2004) argues, because of this they may be poorly equipped for the inclusion of intangible heritage. According to Sheila Watson (2007), there has been a shift away from an inward focus on collections and the maintenance thereof, to an outward focus on the public and the museum's communities. Concepts such as Hooper-Greenhill's (2000) 'post-museum' advocate an institution that is alive, open, responsive and shares power, that no longer subscribes to the top-down approach of disseminating knowledge. Such a museum does not tell a cohesive story, but becomes a museum of 'many voices and many perspectives' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p.152). Intangible heritage, due to its connection to local communities and people, could offer the museum an opportunity to become just that.

As has already been addressed, the tangible and the intangible are always linked. Museums collect objects because of the intangible traditions surrounding them. As O'Dowd, curator at the NMI-CL, writes: 'the value of every individual object acquired is only as good as the information pertaining to it - the object's spoken word. It is that information which gives the object life and meaning' (2007, p.232). Cooke identifies an opportunity for museums to become 'hybrid institutions,' where the tangible and the intangible 'can be woven together' to create a 'culturally challenging and enriching whole' (2005, p.41).

There are numerous studies on the integration of intangible heritage into the museum and the issues pertaining to this (Golding, 2007; Hart Robertson, 2006; Māhina-Tuai, 2006; Van Huy, 2006). Yet most of them tend to focus either on smaller community or eco-museums, which by their very nature serve a defined community, or larger museums of world cultures in places where a source community is relatively easy to identify, such as the Maori in New Zealand, or the Aborigines in Australia. There appear to be few such studies in Britain and indeed none in Ireland.

Smith's (2009) account of the National Museum of Rural Life in England highlights some of the issues for museums dealing with intangible heritage in a Western context. As Smith shows, it would be futile for a national museum in a multicultural society such as Britain or Ireland to attempt to identify a 'first nation', and this could 'actually serve to further marginalise already socially excluded voices' (2009, p.19-21). This author also highlights that in Britain, intangible heritage traditions and crafts are no longer passed down from generation to generation as envisaged in the UNESCO definition, but maintaining them is part of a lifestyle choice by an individual or group, and traditions are often actively revived. For these reasons, national museums frequently have to rely on existing heritage or preservation groups and movements, when engaging with intangible heritage.

Stefano's (2009) study of six museums in the North East of England identifies some key obstacles to the inclusion of intangible heritage for museums: the exclusion of intangible heritage from policy statements, the limitations inherent in documentation, and inadequate resources to manage intangible heritage. Stefano (2009) shows that underpinning these issues is the notion that the intangible is secondary to material culture. It is viewed 'as an accompaniment, or background resource, to tangible heritage,' which creates an obstacle to its inclusion because 'it fosters a narrow view of its nature, as well as of the role museums can play in safeguarding it' (Stefano, 2009, p. 121).

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The National Museum of Ireland - Country Life (NMI-CL)

The NMI-CL forms the fourth and newest site of the National Museum of Ireland / Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann (NMI). Located on the grounds of Turlough Park House, Castlebar, County Mayo, the museum opened to the public in 2001. While the museum is very young, it was the culmination of decades of work. The Folklife division was established within the National Museum in 1974, yet the collecting of folklife objects has been happening since the early days of the NMI (O'Dowd, 2012). Renewed interest in Irish culture after the establishment of the Free State in 1922 led to the development of a Folklife section. The first major exhibition of folklife material took place in 1937. Yet, while material was continually added to the collection, it spent the majority of its time since then in storage.

The formal purpose of the NMI, as in many other museums, clearly focuses on tangible heritage. The museum's mission, as declared in its Statement of Strategy, is 'to collect, preserve, promote and exhibit all examples of Ireland's portable material heritage and natural history' (National Museum of Ireland, 2008). A secondary focus on people is allowed for in the role the NMI has in making the collections 'accessible to audiences at home and abroad' (National Museum of Ireland, 2008).

In the museum's Acquisitions & Disposals Policy, it is stated that 'collections are at the core of the National Museum of Ireland's purpose' (2008, p.3). The only part of the policy that alludes to intangible heritage is the description of the Folklife collection, which is said to be 'complemented by extensive archive documentation' (2008, p.24). In comparison, the description of the UFTM folklife collection in the Acquisition & Disposal Policy (2009) of NMNI makes more frequent mentions of intangible heritage. Almost all sections of the folklife collection, even the ones listed under 'material culture', are described to include audio, visual or oral material. Indeed from the beginning, there appears to have been a focus by the UFTM on both tangible as well as intangible heritage. In the museum's first Annual Report, it is stressed that a folk museum's collection 'does not consist merely of physical objects' but also includes 'records of non-material aspects of folklife' (1960, p.9) and in 1975, the UFTM established a department of 'non-material culture'. However, this department no longer exists today.

Similar to the findings of Stefano's study, the rare mentions of intangible heritage in the NMI's museum's policies solely relate to how it supports tangible heritage (2009, p.116 & 117). It is therefore not surprising that staff at the NMI-CL show low awareness of the UNESCO concept of intangible heritage. Out of the seven museum staff interviewed, only two, Deirdre Power, education and outreach officer and Tony Candon, manager-keeper, showed awareness of the UNESCO definition.[1]

However, this does not mean that there is no understanding among staff of what intangible heritage is. As Candon (2012) affirmed: 'There is an awareness of the importance of [...] intangible heritage, not using that term.' Overall, intangible heritage is mainly understood as folklore. The examples mentioned first in most interviews conducted for this study relate to such things as beliefs, stories, spoken word, customs and also music and dance. Crafts and skills are usually mentioned later, or after the interviewer has explained the definition of intangible heritage.

This focus on folklore and oral traditions may foster a narrow view of what intangible heritage is. Linda Ballard (2012), former curator of folklife at the UFTM, pointed out that one of the benefits of the UNESCO definition is that it lets different intangibles, such as belief systems, performances, and narratives, be understood together, which is important 'because [...] the boundaries between those are porous and they interact.'

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Although the formal focus lies on material culture, the importance of intangible heritage is recognised by staff in the NMI-CL. There is an awareness that the intangible and tangible are linked. As curator Brenda Malone (2012) put it: 'The object becomes entirely useless if it doesn't have its story surrounding it.' Candon similarly stressed that intangible and tangible cultures are 'of a piece' and cannot be divided. Curators emphasised that objects are not collected for their own sake, but because of the people behind them. Despite acknowledging this, for curators the tangible objects remain most important and they understand intangible heritage mainly in its relation to these objects. When asked why the museum should include the intangible, curator Dr. Séamas Mac Philib (2012) stated that it should be done because it 'enhances the object' and adds a 'further dimension.'

There is, however, also a sense that the combination of intangible and tangible heritage is stronger than either individually. This links into the opportunity of museums to become hybrid institutions, as highlighted by Cooke (2005). Education staff emphasised that having the object in combination with the intangible heritage enables a deeper engagement and understanding on the side of the visitor. Lorna Elms, education assistant, explained that including the intangible enables visitors to engage with objects in a 'much more meaningful way' because it 'relates to their own experience' (2012). Intangible heritage is valued by education staff, as it brings in the human dimension. Power (2012) stated that since the museum should not only focus on collections but also on people, including the intangible is important, as it is 'a way of including more people and giving ownership to more people.'

Although intangible heritage is not a priority in museum policy, it is clearly recognised and valued by museum staff. Yet how does this inform the museum's activities? A look at the museum's galleries and its public programme highlight certain problems the museum faces when trying to include intangible heritage.

Exhibitions

The museum's exhibitions are on display in a spacious, purpose-built exhibition complex. Exhibition themes include customs and festivals, farming and fishing, trades and crafts, and domestic life. One of the most interesting uses of intangible heritage is featured right at the beginning of the permanent exhibitions: one of four introductory panels explains the difference between 'folklife', the tangible heritage, and 'folklore', which is concerned with the intangible. The panel establishes the link between the two and highlights the importance of both. To illustrate this, an iron tongs is on display along with a listening station, where the visitor can hear an oral history account of folklore relating to the tongs. The panel on the right of the display emphasises, much as the curators did, that the museum focuses more on the people behind the objects, rather than the objects per se. However, apart from the tongs' audio installation there is only one more point in the galleries, the Forces of Change video, where the voices of real people can be heard. Other oral recordings, such as a school teacher administering a lesson, are performed by professional actors. Otherwise, oral history is included in its most static representation, scattered around on panels and flipbooks as written quotations. Even the highly intangible topic of seasonal customs is largely represented through tangible artefacts. The exhibit includes traditional music played out of loudspeakers as well as a recording of a wailing woman. Both the music and the recording serve to create an atmosphere for and underline the displayed objects.

The folklore and folklife panel mentioned above establishes craftsmanship as part of folklife not folklore. Interestingly, intangible heritage is most strongly represented in the parts of the exhibition dealing with traditional crafts and not in areas dealing with "typical" folklore topics.

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At the time of visit in 2012, there were 16 working videos depicting different craftsmen at work.

An effort has undeniably been made to include intangible heritage in the exhibitions through sound and visual recordings. There are those who see the use of recordings as problematic as they are yet 'another tangible piece of evidence of an event' (Stefano 2009, p.121). Naturally, the recording of an intangible heritage performance is not the same as the performance itself. Yet, while a performance may allow for a more immediate and richer experience of intangible heritage, it also has to end at some point, resulting in only a limited number of visitors being able to enjoy it. This discussion links into to the question of the museum's purpose in incorporating intangible heritage, whether it is to represent the tradition or to safeguard it. This is discussed later in the paper.

There is always a danger, as Cooke points out, of 'the intangible turning into the impalpable' (2005, p.32). However, from the way intangible heritage is used in the NMI-CL exhibitions it becomes apparent that it is in the background, its main role being to support the objects. Mac Philib (2012) agreed that the use of intangible heritage in the galleries is 'very much supplementary.' He explains that because the collection had been in storage for such a long time, the emphasis when planning the galleries was 'to get the objects out.' Mac Philib acknowledged that there is a 'certain reluctance' to delve into the 'complexities' of planning an exhibition with a focus on the intangible. Both he and Folklife curator Rosa Meehan described it as easier to put objects on display. Underlying this attitude appears to be a fear to deviate from the perceived norm, as Mac Philib further mentioned that seeing objects is what people expect when going to the museum. However Robbie Hannan, head of agriculture and folklife at the UFTM, disagreed with this view. He recounted that the main 'objects' of his first exhibition, called *They Love Music Mightily,* were recordings of traditional musicians. Hannan explained that it was possibly the first time they put an exhibition of music 'per se' on display that was not 'forty flutes on the wall [...] or ten accordions in cases' and the exhibition proved very successful (2012).

The fact that intangible heritage is treated as supplementary and secondary to material culture may mean that it is not paid the same amount of curatorial consideration. Ballard (2012), taking story-telling as an example, stressed that 'it's every bit as important to get the narrative right as it is to get the type of chair right.'

One of the first reasons mentioned by staff at NMI-CL on why intangible heritage is not being included more is a lack of resources. As Elms (2012) explained, the permanent exhibitions were originally designed to be changed after ten or fifteen years, yet the museum will now not be in a position to do so until more funding becomes available. There is, of course, no guarantee that should more money become available that it would be spent on the integration of intangible heritage.

Furthermore, while there appears to have been some activity in recording intangible heritage in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the area of craftsmanship, there is almost no museum fieldwork happening today. This is, to some extent, due to financial and technical limitations, but mainly it has to do with vision. As Mac Philib (2012) explained, doing field-work is not encouraged. There is no strategic approach within the museum regarding the recording of intangible heritage, even relating to objects that have been collected. All of the NMI-CL curators emphasised that the collection of intangible heritage is not within the museum's remit, but that this is done by other bodies, such as the National Folklore Collection in University College Dublin. Yet, there appears to be no formal agreement between the two institutions, but rather an informal arrangement based on personal relationships.

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Public Programme

The permanent exhibitions are by no means the only activity of the NMI-CL. The museum has, ever since it opened its doors in 2001, operated an active education programme, for which it has won numerous awards.[2] As both Candon and Mac Philib (2012) point out, including intangible heritage is generally seen as the task of the education department. Power stated that with the education programme they aim to include 'not just the recordings of [...] the tradition as it manifested in the past, but also to have some element of the tradition as it is now' (2012).

As can be gleaned from its calendar of events, the museum has been very active hosting events involving intangible heritage. In 2010, it hosted thirty crafts events on skills, such as basket-making, wood-turning or felt-making. The museum also hosted twenty-four events involving performing arts, like traditional music, dancing or storytelling and others involving such activities as traditional cooking or customs.

Keeping the variety in programming high can be a challenge. This is also a result of financial restrictions, as some courses, such as black-smithing, are more costly to host than others. Due to staffing and financial limitations the number and variety of events the museum hosts has decreased in recent years. However, the museum has found other, low-cost ways to programme intangible heritage traditions. The Knitting Group and Music Circle meet at the museum twice a month, the Knitters to share patterns and up-skill in their craft, and the Music Circle to jam together and practice traditional music. The museum offers them the facility for free and brings in the occasional professional to work with them. In return, the groups are open to visitors and occasionally help the museum out by facilitating a workshop or participating in museum projects. This symbiotic relationship is a way for the museum to actively involve intangible heritage while incurring almost no cost. Paralleling Smith's (2009) findings at the National Museum of Rural Life in Britain, the NMI-CL frequently cooperates with existing preservation groups, such as the Seed Savers Association, the Connacht Textile Crafters or the Mayo Road Bowlers Association in its programming of intangible heritage. This, however, is done as a conscious effort to involve the museum's community.

The education department also organises longer-term projects. One such project, Common Threads, was run by the NMI-CL in conjunction with Mayo Intercultural Action (MIA) in 2008 and 2009. The project, which aimed to deepen museum engagement with new communities living in Ireland, involved eight women from different cultural backgrounds, such as Burma, Nigeria or Poland. The women undertook weekly visits to the museum over two months in 2008 to work on their textile craft pieces, using methods traditional to their country of origin. The finished pieces were subsequently put on display alongside the permanent exhibitions.

Projects such as this demonstrate that intangible heritage offers the museum an opportunity to remain relevant and engage with contemporary society, despite its collections focusing on the past. There is no strategy within the education department concerning intangible heritage and the inclusion of it is not formally encouraged by the institution. Power (2012) stressed that despite this, the involvement of intangible heritage is not ad-hoc, but embedded in the education department's ethos as part of an effort to involve the museum's communities and bring the collections alive. As Elms (2012) explained, the department has been 'doing it without putting a name on it.'

One of the concerns raised by curator Clodagh Doyle with regard to programming intangible heritage activities is authenticity. Doyle (2012) explained that heritage traditions, like traditional music, are handed down from 'generation to generation, from knee to knee'. By having a traditional music performance at the museum it becomes removed from 'where the tradition

was based.' Ballard (2012) argued along the same lines when she stated that staging intangible heritage in a museum setting can be achieved very well, but 'it can never be quite the same thing' as intangible heritage living in the community. This may well be true, however, the question is: does it have to be? As traditional musician Emer Mayock pointed out in the interview (2012), traditional music is no longer handed down in the same way:

> If I had lived a hundred years ago, I probably wouldn't have moved out of my locality, so I would have learned from a local musician [...]. But the way I learned was from being brought to musicians, […] or [from] buying records and listening to traditional music. So [...] I'm kind of widely influenced like all musicians are nowadays.

As highlighted by Smith (2009), taking up and maintaining an intangible heritage tradition in our Western world is often a lifestyle choice people make and not necessarily something they were taught by their ancestors.

Power (2012) regarded finding a more holistic exhibition approach to include the museum's many activities as the more pressing issue. The museum has to explore how to include an intangible heritage event so it is no longer just 'a piece of programming that gets added on after a particular exhibition has been done and dusted'. O'Neill notes that in many national museums and galleries, the work by education departments is seen as an 'additional, subordinate and usually almost entirely separate function to the core tasks of collection, preservation research and display' (2006, p.99).

As has been shown, the museum involves intangible heritage both in its galleries and its public programming. This is not, however, guided by any agreed strategy or policy. As there is no formal recognition of intangible heritage within the museum, the inclusion thereof is voluntary, and, as Power put it, sometimes even has to go 'slightly under the radar' (2012). As Candon (2012) observed, the museum's traditional role as a repository for objects may not change, but it is a 'question of developing and expanding that role […] so that it enlarges upon that rather narrow definition.'

To achieve this, a new perception of what an exhibition is, or can be, would be required. As both Candon and Power suggest, instead of building an exhibition around its tangible collection, the museum could make the story it wants to explore the new starting point. The elements of this story, which will most likely include objects, but may also include recordings, film, performance, events etc., could then be defined. Candon (2012) explained that by exploring the story in this way, building the exhibition, adding tangible and intangible elements, the intangible 'is not an add-on, but integral to the exploration of the subject.' In this story-focussed approach the inclusion of intangible heritage is not tokenism. It is a holistic, interdisciplinary approach including all the museums activities of collection, exhibition, research and programming. For a story-focused exhibition, a full programme of collecting is not necessary, but what is needed is meaningful collaboration with the people, communities and institutions involved. As Meehan (2012) stressed on more than one occasion, the museum 'can't be all things,' and collaboration with other institutions is vital.

Candon (2012) emphasised that the aim of such a 'multi-interpretive' approach must be interrogative instead of didactic: 'If an exhibition is only to tell something, then there's something wrong with that. There must be questions.' Planning an exhibition in this way, he admits, requires a 'lot of willingness to think outside the box'. So at the heart of this matter, a change in the culture and mindset of the museum would be required. Staff and management would have to be convinced 'that there is another way of looking at the world through the museum's eyes.' Yet Candon admits that engaging in critical reflection about the purpose of the museum is not currently encouraged.

A story-focused approach would allow the museum to involve the tangible and the intangible

more equally. Many scholars and professionals advocate that the museum should go a step further and become an active safe-guarder of intangible heritage traditions. Yet, is this truly part of a national museum's remit and should it be? As Ballard points out, the museum's role is one of representation. The museum can be a place for reflection, a 'time suspension,' as facilitator Carmel Balfe (2012) observed, that gives you 'a time in your day that's specifically about your understanding of the world.'

The museum's role regarding intangible heritage can, therefore, be seen as one of observation, representation and facilitation. As Power (2012) explained, the museum should be interested to observe if and how intangible heritage traditions are still alive, but not to be 'artificially propping up anything.' Ballard, reinforcing Kirschenblatt-Gimblett's (2004, p.56) argument, stressed that if heritage traditions still prove relevant to people, they will survive:

> ... if the stories are relevant then they will continue to be re-told and if people find them relevant in the future then they may revive them and re-tell them according to the requirements of that time and to their relationship to them. (2012)

Not only is it questionable whether the museum should attempt to keep intangible heritage alive, but it may also simply not be in a position to do so. As Mayock (2012) pointed out, the museum's audience is of a transient nature and the museum has only 'a short window to grab people.' Meehan (2012) highlighted that the museum's education programme is not aimed at passing on skills, but rather at offering 'tasters'. It often takes years to perfect an intangible heritage skill. Yet, by representing intangible heritage, the museum can spark interest in the traditions and customs, which may lead to people reviving them.

As a facilitator, both the NMI-CL and the UFTM offer their premises to existing craft and heritage groups. As Hannan (2012) highlighted, the museum can offer 'people interested in such traditional crafts and practices [...] a platform,' which, due to the status of the museum, may enable these groups to reach a bigger audience than usual. Of course these actions by the museum may contribute to keeping intangible heritage alive. However, Power (2012) doubted that what the museum does will 'make or break' any craft, skill or tradition. Intangible heritage survives because it has proven and still proves relevant to people and communities.

Conclusion

Despite no formal acknowledgement of intangible heritage within Ireland and at the NMI, staff at the museum nonetheless understand and recognise it, and the museum has been engaging the intangible in many ways, both in its exhibitions as well as its public programming. Possibly due to the exclusion of intangible heritage from formal policy and strategy, it is still treated as secondary and subordinate to the tangible collection, which limits how it is understood and used. As museum staff have pointed out, intangible heritage is one of the main reasons for the collection of objects and provides one of the main ways to make them accessible to audiences. Therefore, the singular focus on material culture by the museum makes little sense. By expanding on its traditional role, adopting a more holistic view of heritage and pursuing a story-focused approach in its exhibitions and programming, the museum could involve the intangible more successfully and equally, rendering it a more exciting, hybrid and living institution. This does not mean that it is the responsibility of a national folklife museum to keep intangible heritage traditions alive. The museum can and has successfully adopted a role of inspiration and facilitation, but ultimately, whether or not traditions survive depends on the people and communities that make use of them.

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NOTES

1. The seven NMI-CL museum staff referred to here do not include the three museum workshop facilitators interviewed.

2. The museum received the Sandford Award for Excellence in Museum Education in both 2004 and 2009, and in 2003 the Education Department in the NMI-CL was awarded the Best Access and Outreach Initiative in the Museum of the Year Awards: National Museum of Ireland/Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann, Annual Reports 2003, 2004, 2009.

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