Intangible Cultural Heritage Presentation and Preservation – Challenges and Opportunities for Museum Specialists

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Abstract. Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is a term invented to represent living practices, representations, expressions, skills and knowledge that communities, groups and individuals recognize as distinct but important aspects of identity. The safeguarding of ICH has become a topic of international concern primarily through the work of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) (UNESCO, 2018). Digital technologies and the internet bring unprecedented opportunities to present and preserve cultural assets globally and from a long-term perspective. The use of new technologies in the preservation and transmission of intangible heritage imposes urgent and significant changes in the museum specialists' competency matrix. The paper presents the main results from research conducted within the scope of the international project DigiCult in four European countries, aiming to identify the main gaps and constraints regarding the active inclusion of museum professionals in the ICH digital presentation and safeguarding processes.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), ICH Digitisation, Safeguarding, Museum Specialists' Competencies.

1   Introduction

The documentation of ICH in digital form is only one aspect of safeguarding, it represents an important step in the transition from the intangible expression to digital cultural heritage (Hennessy, 2013). Apart from documentation "safeguarding" comprises different measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage such as the identification, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement and transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage (UNESCO, 2018). According to the UNESCO Convention for the Safe-guarding of the Intangible Heritage (Chapter III Ar-

ticle 12) each State Party of the Convention has enough versatility regarding the preparation of the ICH inventories. Moreover, the national governments, cultural organizations and practising communities in the State Parties are responsible for the transmission of these cultural assets to the next generations. The ICH assets must be well defined in the inventories in order to facilitate the implementation of adequate safeguarding mechanisms (Dochev, Pavlov, Paneva-Marinova, & Pavlova, 2019). From a technological point of view, the safeguarding of the ICH assets includes the following types of activities (Maria Teresa Artese, 2015): (i) identification of an ICH asset; (ii) evaluation of the risk of disappearing; (iii) cataloguing the object and its ingredients in local or national inventories; (iv) spreading the knowledge on the web.

More of the activities listed above require special ICT-based methods and tools to be used, which outlines the urgent necessity for the professionals involved in the culture sector (the museum specialists including) to be equipped with the necessary knowledge and to develop corresponding digital competencies. Safeguarding activities vary according to local and national contexts (Monova-Zheleva, Zhelev, & Stewart, 2019). Interestingly, although modern technologies are often identified as a threat to traditional expressions, it is these technological innovations that frequently play a key part in the preservation and dissemination of ICH (Alivizatou-Barakou, Kitsikidis, Tsalakanidou, Dimitropoulos, & Giannis, 2019).

Cataloguing intangible cultural heritage is a complex activity that requires skills and competences from different domains. Also, in order to ensure global access to an intangible cultural heritage object, its ingredients such as images, videos and other multimedia should be easily available to users through the web. One big challenge in this regard is that the progress of cataloguing is different from country to country, as well as the tools and methods (European Commission, 2016). In order to cope with this challenge the EUROPEANA - European CH portal for exploring the digital resources of Europe's museums, libraries, archives and audio-visual collections was launched, thus offering direct access to millions of books, manuscripts, paintings, films, museum objects and archival records that have been digitised throughout Europe.

The Digital Agenda of the Europe 2020 Strategy (European Commission, 2010) set as its main objective the development of a digital single market. The cultural heritage digitization turns Europe's cultural resources into an important building block for the digital economy and provides Europe's Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) with a competitive edge. The pace of innovation, the changing nature of the sector, and the importance of culture to the European economy require the employed in the CCIs to have relevant digital skills and competences.

The European Commission published a report assessing the overall progress in the implementation of the Commission's Recommendation on digitisation and online accessibility and digital preservation of cultural material. According to this evaluation, an increasing number of countries are supporting open cultural heritage data and promoting its reuse. Nevertheless, there are still great differences across Member States, and cultural heritage digitisation remains widely dependent on cultural institutions' initiatives and funding. (European Commission, 2016). The next sections of the paper present briefly the scope and methodology as well as the main results of research conducted in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, and Latvia in the DigiCult project framework.

2 Scope and Methodology of the Research

The research methodology is based on a survey method. The questionnaire was answered by a total of 174 respondents from over 30 museums and cultural organisations in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, and Latvia. The questionnaire had been designed to cover the following aspects of the sample: General personal data; Experience in digitisation of culture heritage (tangible and intangible); Skills/competences needed in digitization of culture sector; Previous training in digitization of ICH/museum; Expectations from a course for digitization of ICH.

27 questions in the questionnaire are multiple choice questions, with 2 of them allowing more than one answer, and 8 are open questions.

According to the data processed almost half of the respondents from Latvia hold a Master's degree (48%), over half of the respondents from Bulgaria and Greece hold a Master's degree (55,60% and 70,83% respectively), while the dominant group of respondents from Italy hold a Bachelor's degree (51%) (Fig.1 a).
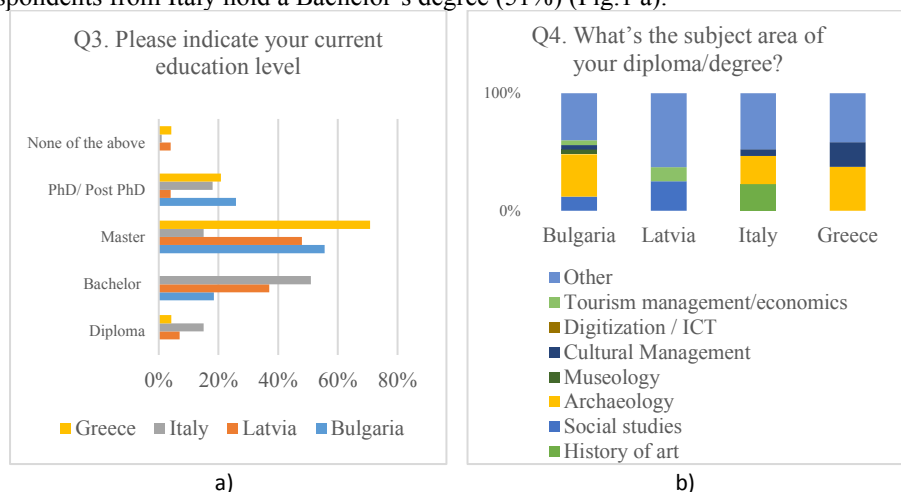
Fig.1. Education level of respondents.

As to the subject area of the participant's diplomas (Fig.1 b), it is noteworthy that people with specializations other than the ones suggested in the questionnaire, took priority in each of the project partner countries. The prevalent topics of specialization are: archaeology (32%), social studies (12%), history (8%) and ethnology (8%) for participants from Bulgaria; social sciences (25 %) and tourism management (12%) for participants from Latvia; archaeology (23,9%), history of arts (22,7%) and museology (5,7%) for participants from Italy; and archaeology (37,5%) and cultural management (20,83%) for participants from Greece.

The data reveals that the priority groups of respondents from each partner-country are people who work in museums (100%, 93%, 60% and 54,17% for Bulgaria, Latvia, Italy and Greece, respectively), i.e. 124 of all 174 respondents (Fig. 2).
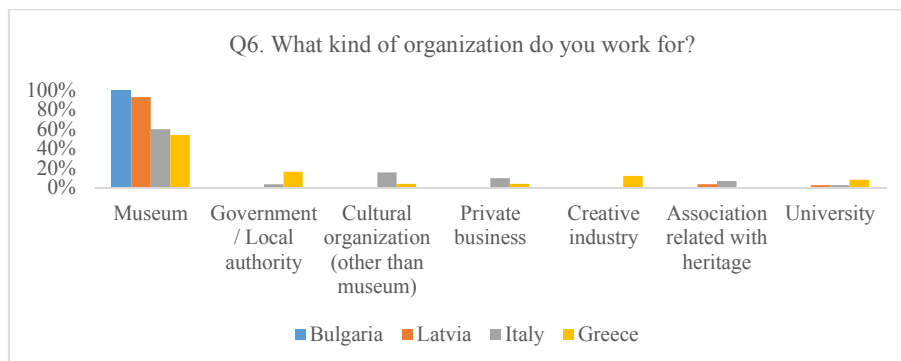
Fig. 2. Respondents' affiliations.

As 71% of the respondents in the sample work in museums, the study has outlined their profile as: women (72%), most of whom aged 40-50 (38%), holding a Master's degree (71%) primarily in the field of archaeology.

3 Experience in Digitisation of Culture Heritage

Regarding previous experience in digitisation, according to the data gathered, nearly half of the respondents from Bulgaria, Latvia and Italy have dealt with tangible heritage, while nearly half of the respondents from Greece do not have any previous experience in digitisation at all (Fig. 3 a).
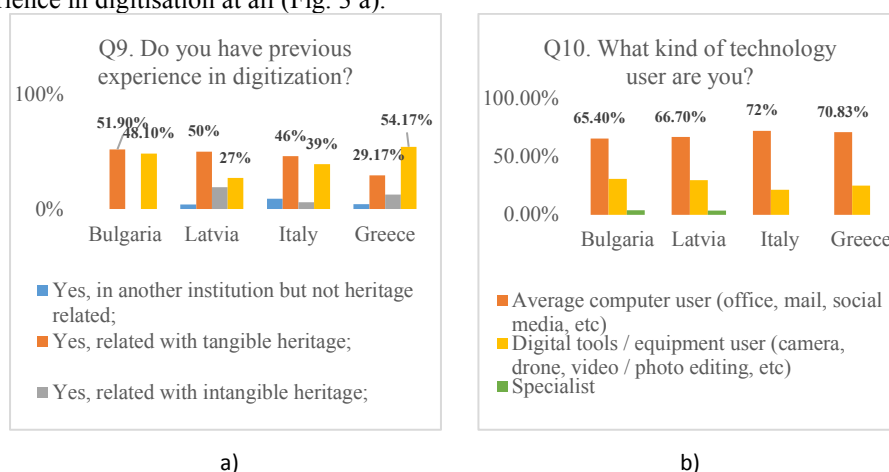

a)

b)

**Fig. 3.** Previous experience in digitization (a), kind of technology user (b)

With regards to the types of technological tools used, the study outlined a dominant group of participants for each partner-country as average computer users with standard skills in Office, Mail and Social Media use (Figure 3 b). The next main group consists

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of digital tool/equipment users with such basic instruments used, such as camera, drone, video/photo editing.

It is important to note, that most of the respondents have knowledge (answered "Yes") of the legal framework for cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) in their country. (Please, see Figure 4).
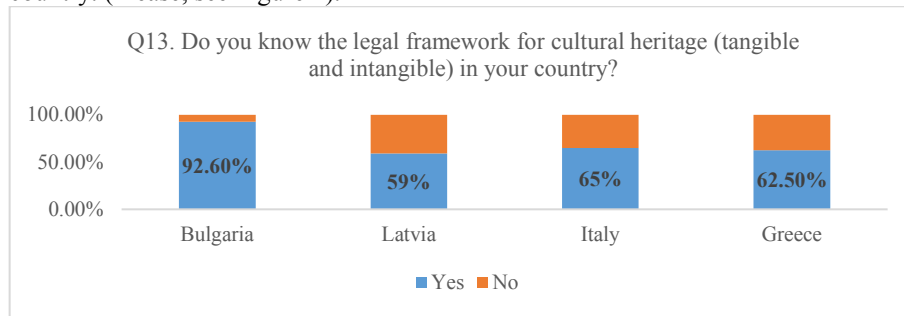
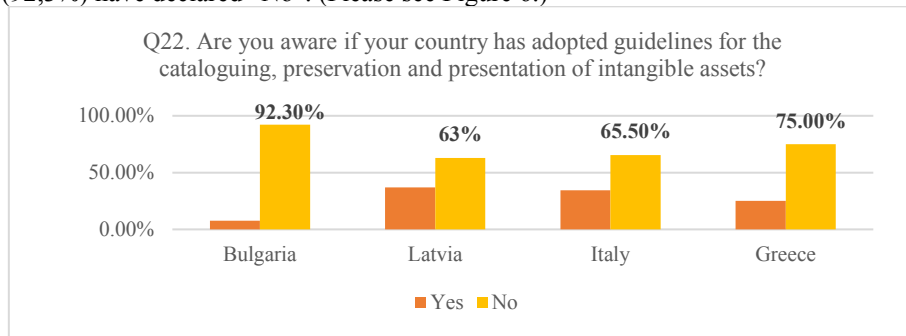**Fig. 4.** Knowledge of the legal framework for cultural heritage (tangible and intangible)
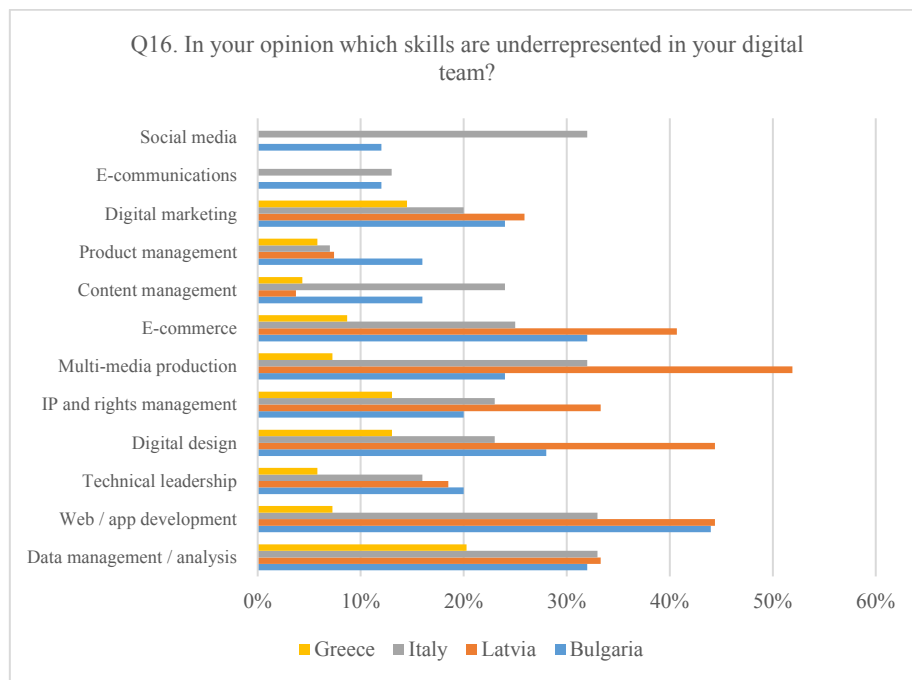
Fig. 5. Underrepresented skills in digital teams

Diagram (Fig. 5) displays web/app development as the most deficient skill for respondents from Bulgaria (44%), multi-media production for respondents from Latvia (51,90%), data management/analysis and web/app development for respondents from

Italy (with equal percentage 33%), data management / analysis for respondents from Greece (20,29%).
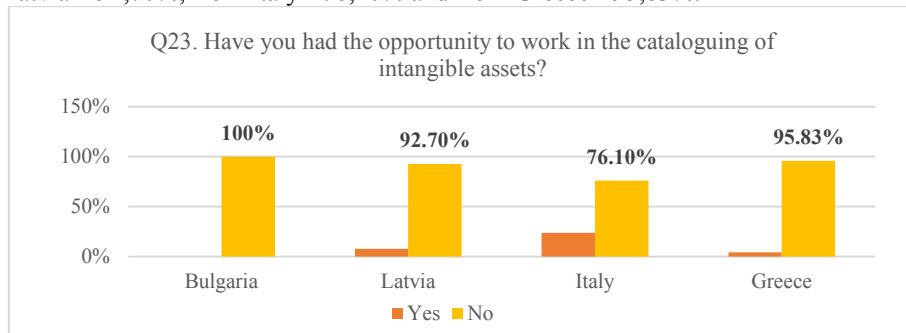
The second classified group of underrepresented skills includes data management/analysis and e-commerce for respondents from Bulgaria, web / app development and digital design for respondents from Latvia, multi-media production for respondents from Italy, digital marketing for respondents from Greece.

According to the data gathered regarding the awareness of the countries' guidelines for cataloguing, preservation and presentation of assets, the majority of respondents (92,3%) have declared "No". (Please see Figure 6.)

Q22. Are you aware if your country has adopted guidelines for the cataloguing, preservation and presentation of intangible assets?

	Bulgaria	Latvia	Italy	Greece
No	92.30%	63%	65.50%	75.00%

■ Yes ■ No

Fig. 6. The awareness on countries' guidelines for the cataloguing, preservation and presentation assets adoption

As the results show (Fig. 7), the vast majority of respondents have no previous experience in the intangible assets' cataloguing: respondents from Bulgaria – 100%, from Latvia – 92,70%, from Italy - 76,10% and from Greece - 95,83%.

Q23. Have you had the opportunity to work in the cataloguing of intangible assets?

|	Bulgaria	Latvia	Italy	Greece
No	100%	92.70%	76.10%	95.83%

■ Yes ■ No

Fig. 7. Previous experience in cataloguing of intangible assets

One very important recommendation of the Commission to the Member States, published in the Progress report 2013-2015, is to strengthen long-term preservation strategies and implementation plans, via a provision in their legislations for multiple copying and migration of digital cultural material by public institutions for preservation purposes, whilst making arrangements for the deposit of digital-born material to guarantee long-term preservation.

The current state regarding the long-term preservation strategies and action plans at the institutional level is presented below.

Regarding the long-term preservation strategies under way or which are being designed at an institution's level, the results of the diagram in Figure 8 clearly show that in most organisations/institutions, regardless of the partner country, there are no strategies for ICH digital collection, which follows from the fact that the majority of respondents answered "No" to the question „Does your organisation/institution have a written strategy for your ICH digital collection?".
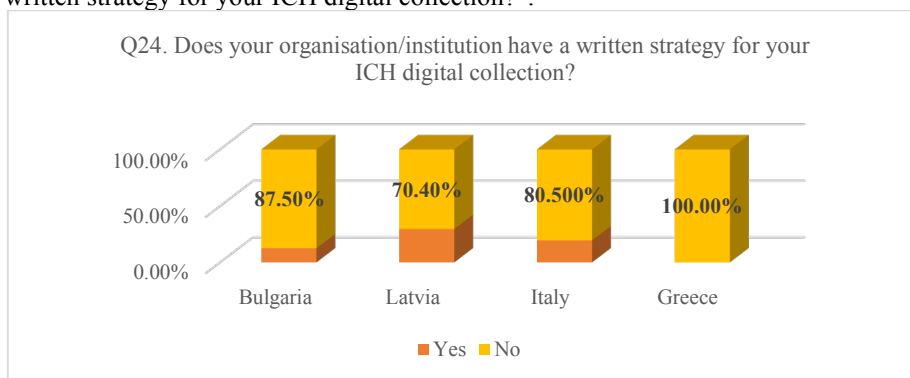
Fig. 8. Existence of organisational/institutional strategy for ICH digital collection

Very few respondents have stated that plans to implement strategies for digital presentation and safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage are already running in their organisations. According to the responses received, the majority of museums and cultural organisations have no clear vision of how the objects which have already been digitized will be preserved and made accessible in the long-term. The problem with long-term storage is mostly related to the significant financial investment involved, which many museums, libraries, archives and other cultural organisations cannot afford.

4   Conclusions

There is a need to build a knowledge base, to enhance the capacity and to strengthen the digital competencies of museum professionals for developing and implementing digitisation strategies for ICH artefacts based on common standards and approaches in order to allow museums to become more accessible and interesting including in a cross-border and European context. The provision of relevant training in ICH digitization will contribute to overcoming common challenges such as the digital shift and the need for encouragement of innovation in the cultural sector. The survey conducted outlined ICH digitisation and online accessibility, as well as development of action plans and long-term safeguarding policy as the main subjects of such training.

Acknowledgements

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