Intangible Heritage: Literature review and stakeholder interviews

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It could be said that intangible heritage is the Cinderella of heritage. The stakeholders interviewed for this report suggested that there is considerable ambivalence towards, if not discomfort around, intangible heritage within the heritage sector. But, as the Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF) recent research shows, it is intangible heritage that people most profoundly identify with and which carries the greatest meaning for them. This finding is not new, and was reflected over a decade ago in HLF's consultation with community leaders in preparation of its second strategic plan.

Many of the stakeholders interviewed for the present research welcomed HLF's serious consideration of intangible heritage as a way of opening up the discussion or "debate" about intangible heritage. HLF is perceived as well placed to raise the profile of intangible heritage and play a leading role in locating it centre stage within the discourses around developing policies related to culture, communities and place.

This was the context within which HLF commissioned Pomegranate to undertake a literature review and stakeholder consultation into the nature and impact of its support for intangible heritage across the UK, to inform HLF future strategic priorities. A parallel research project, undertaken by Museums Galleries Scotland, provides a review of the impact, lessons learned and challenges of intangible heritage projects that HLF has already supported.

The literature review considered the English-language academic and policy-related grey literature generated over the past decade. Its purpose was to identify what could be learned about the nature, extent, awareness and impact of intangible heritage work in the UK and elsewhere that might, potentially, inform the development of HLF's strategic priorities. The review also sought to draw out any specific observations about HLF's implicit attitudes to intangible heritage from a number of reports that it had recently commissioned.

Interviews were conducted with stakeholders drawn from government agencies, organisations and academics engaged in heritage, culture and communities in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. As such, they drew on views and perspectives of policy makers and practitioners across all HLF's heritage sectors. A significant aspect of HLF's engagement with intangible heritage is that it crosses both the historic and natural environment.