

# Surveying Technical and Vocational Education and Training Institutions for Intangible Cultural Heritage in Central Asia

## An Insider's View: Aijarkyn Kojobekova

### Role in the project

Dr. Kojobekova is an Associate Professor at the American University of Central Asia in the Department of Sociology working on the topics of nationalism and memory studies in addition to ICH and education. She served as **the Key Coordinator** for the Central Asian survey of TVET institutions for UNESCO and was responsible for developing the project's questionnaire, analyzing the data submitted by the national coordinators in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, and drafting the final report.

### Do educators have the freedom to integrate ICH into TVET curricula?

"Generally in all sections or levels of education...they have their own curricula, and the majority of this curriculum is fixed and is usually approved by the Minister of Education because they develop educational standards, and all those things are fixed. But there is **one part of this curriculum...which provides freedom for teachers and administration to decide which courses to offer or which topics to integrate**. So, there is a kind of freedom for teachers and administration. It is not as much as we would like to have. In my personal dream, it would be good if all universities would have their autonomy. They would be able to compete on a free basis, thinking of their own curricula... But it is not that type of situation. So as I know teachers at, for example, elementary schools, they are able to integrate some topics from ICH as an extra curricular section, or they usually do it in some subjects as separate topics....Some schools are trying to do it, but not many of them because it depends on their access to financial and technical resources...So it depends upon the capability of the institution itself. So there is some kind of freedom, which can be exploited."

### What were some opportunities for building upon what's already been done to integrate ICH in TVET Institutions?

"I think for TVET institutions, it's easier to integrate ICH [compared to other formal educational institutions]....Some of these institutions already do it. They have some specialties or majors, which are in some sense more or less connected with ICH. So we could see some institutions purely and fully connected with ICH, some of them with just a certain set of majors offered to students, and some of them have majors which are not directly connected with ICH but have some kind of [indirect] connections. So, we can say that generally the institutions which we interviewed at least understand that they can use these technologies and skills from cultural heritage in order to connect it with the market because TVET institutions are fully integrated into the labor market....They fully understand that

they can take advantage of the knowledge and skills, which their cultures have and they're trying to as much as possible and as effectively and efficiently as they can.

"Some of these TVET institutions are more successful because they have **good connections with local communities**. For example, they can invite practitioners to do some classes or to offer some courses, and they have internships for students who can go to the field and to work alongside with these practitioners. It is not very well proliferated, but some institutions practice this type of work."

### TVET's orientation toward the market: Opportunity and challenge

"And here, I think is **the key challenge**, since [TVET institutions] are oriented toward the labor market, they have to think about what exactly is popular in the market. What is interesting to the local inhabitants? What is interesting to the tourists? And here we see that they are most oriented toward tourism. So here, one of the risks which we found was that **we could face a kind of over-commercialization of ICH** if they do it without thinking of the details.

"We see how many things are changing under the influence of the desires of tourists because they say, 'Oh could you do this carpet, but not in this shape, but this one, because it's more adaptable for us; maybe use other colors...' and so forth. And so a lot of things potentially change, and you don't know if it's just a style thing or if it's something coming from the culture."

### What were some of the project's other challenges?

"Not all TVET institutions [in the project's four countries] have a website, for example, or other online facilities, so all these things were taken into consideration in order to make the questionnaire suitable for us. Then, the country coordinators had to translate the questionnaires into local languages...and prepare their reports in Russian and English...**it was quite complicated work**...and, in an organizational sense, it was [further] complicated because the field research, unfortunately, happened in summer time when all educational institutions are usually on vacation, so it was a bit difficult to reach out our respondents.

"We can't say that the outcomes and findings of this research can be...generalized to the whole region and to all institutions, because this was just the first initiative, and we were very much limited in sense of time, in number of institutions which we interviewed and sent out questionnaires. So in this sense, **this is just the very preliminary survey**...So, I would be very careful to say that all TVET institutions in Central Asia have the same challenges and have the same outcomes. We can't extrapolate information to all institutions because as you can see from the reports, just 49 institutions were involved...but I think that for the first report and the first survey, it was really good to see that the hypotheses that we had developed were proved, and we could see that our understanding, our vision of the situation, is pretty much correct."

### Balancing the need to build capacity without over-formalizing ICH

"The problem is that teachers of these institutions teach ICH, but they don't consider it as ICH. They teach it as kind of technology to produce something. So

we see this is one of the limitations....Although they don't call it ICH, they don't use the [language of the] Convention, but they transmit the knowledge and skills exactly in the way that the Convention talks about it. Obviously, this is a very paradoxical situation. If you look through their curricula, you wouldn't find any terms such as ICH, but the way they work is actually quite consistent with the Convention. So, I think it's **very good to keep this type of balance**, when people are not overusing the term ICH and they still work in this field and transmit this ICH through the education.

“So it's very important to have this balance in this integration: when we just enrich the knowledge of educators, we extend their possibilities to show how exactly we can provide students, for example, with this transmission of the cultural experience, and knowledge and skills. But at the same time, we don't do it like a big manifesto or motto, because I think due to a lot of reformations, people are quite skeptical of new programs and new concepts...But if we give them good examples of how exactly TVET institutions work all over the world, and how they use limited resources...then I think for teachers in TVET institutions **this would be good food for thought.**”

### The need for national or regional networks

“Just recently we had a seminar with representatives of educational institutions where we presented this report, and there were also some principals of schools and some leaders of NGOs working in the fields of ICH. And they all emphasized that it would be **good to have a network among all the institutions which are involved in the field of ICH in education.** This network doesn't exist yet in our region, and this is one of the key deficiencies. A lot of institutions do not know how other institutions [integrate ICH]...So, we do not have very coordinated work among them; if we had such a network it would be very helpful.”