



FRAMEWORK CONVENTION
ON THE VALUE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE
FOR SOCIETY

LA CONVENTION-CADRE
SUR LA VALEUR DU PATRIMOINE CULTUREL
POUR LA SOCIÉTÉ



Local knowledge as research tool to save Cultural Heritage

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The opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe.

Cultural heritage, in all its components, is a valuable, if not vital, factor for the re-organisation of our societies on the basis of dialogue between cultures, respect for identities and a feeling of belonging to a community of values. The transdisciplinary research project "BreadTime" (2015-2017, founded by BMWWF Austria) focuses on the cultural sustainability and the manifold agricultural and manual practices of the cultivation and processing of grains and the production of bread in the rural region Lesachtal/ Austria. An inter- and transdisciplinary setting (university, local schools, local registered societies, media partners, Austrian Commission for UNESCO) enables to analysis, protection and documentation the local knowledge and practice related to the intangible cultural heritage of "Lesachtal Bread" which is part of the intangible cultural heritage list of the Austrian UNESCO. The collaboration with the schools allows the intergenerational transfer of know-how and direct inclusion of students in traditional practices concerning bread.

Living traditions change in quotidian action, integrating the new and the foreign, altering with living situations – these traditions are thereby shaped anew again and again. This dynamic process of transfer and application of local knowledge and practice, as well as the meaning of these living traditions for the local community, lies at the center of the research focus. The reflection of intergenerational encounters with local cultural heritage requires a manifold process of communication and interaction; it culminates in the individual and collective learning experiences of the participants. In order to treat the tradition of the "Lesachtal Bread" culture in a contemporary and future-oriented way, suitable means of communication and performance are being developed and realized in collaboration with local activists. Citizens can participate in narrative dialogue groups as an open communicative space to collect and discuss local knowledge or write down and send their experiences to the collection of biographical records. Furthermore, students from Secondary lower and upper schools were

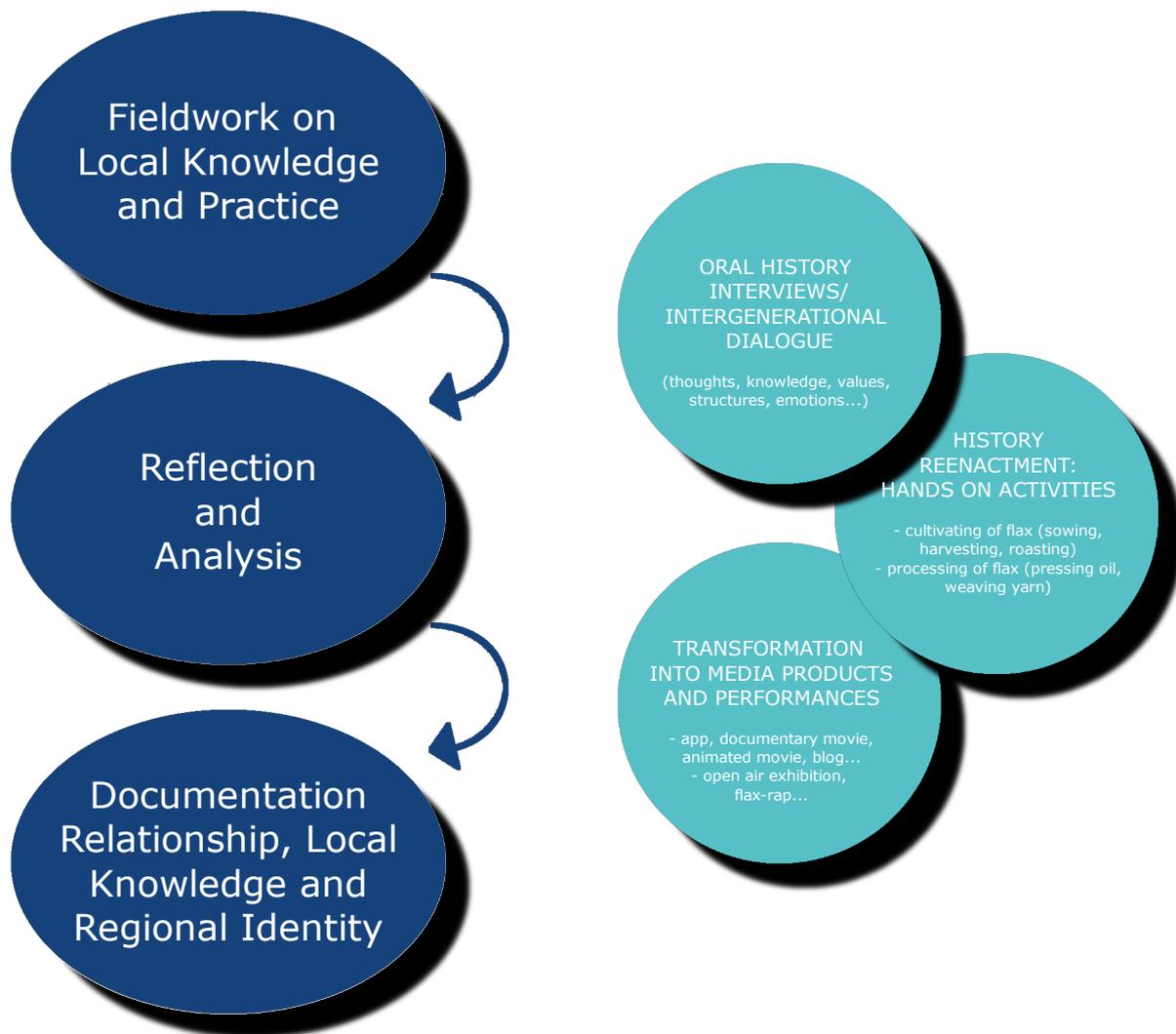


Figure 1: Participative project process to save and transform local knowledge

instructed in the method of oral history and interviewed elder locals about the traditional cultivation and its significance in their daily rural life. By this way oral history interviews not only served as a tool of communication and mutual learning, but also as empirical basis for several research products, such as a documentary of local narratives and local practices related to bread. Using this method of intergenerational communication, it could access and secure the local narratives and traditional knowledge, and communicate interest and curiosity between the youngsters of the valley and elders of the community. This form of intergenerational oral history brings together people of different generations in a socially integrating way, with mutual interest and also emotional bonds. As opposed to passive learning, oral history is very engaging and hands-on, not only collecting stories but

also creating social bridges between generations. By this way local knowledge, in all its components, is a valuable, vital factor for the re-organisation of our societies in the basis of dialogue between generations, respect for identities and a feeling of belonging to a community of values / public spirit.

Local knowledge is based on experience, often tested over centuries of use, adapted to the local culture and environment, embedded in community practices, institutions, relationships and rituals, held by individuals or communities. It is always dynamic and changing. It refers to human experience in a limited space with assignable borders, while space can mean either a restricted geographic area or a specific functional space within a broader area. Local knowledge is shared knowledge. It expresses the implicit or explicit consensus of the people

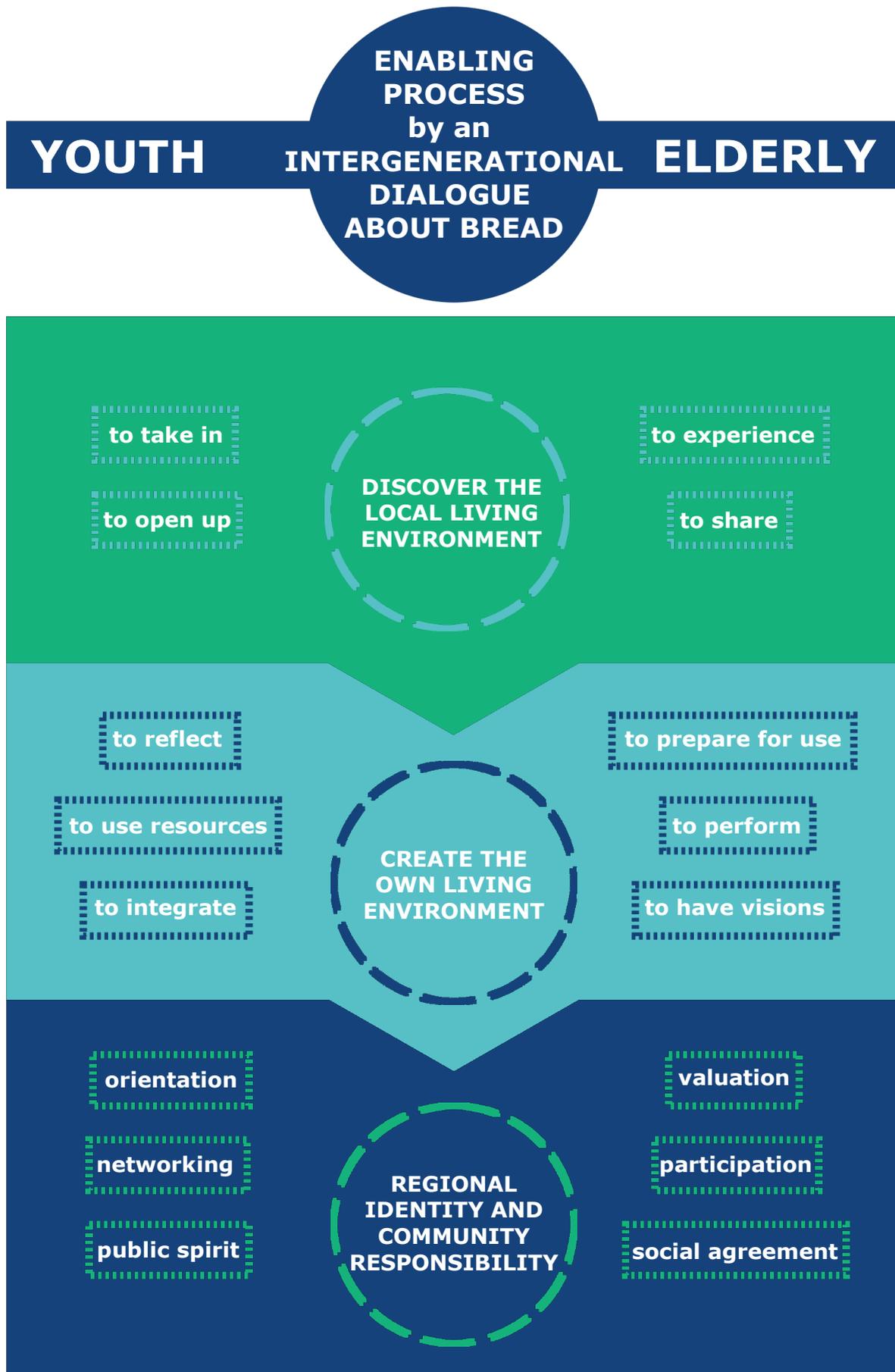


Figure 2: Enabling process by an intergenerational dialog about cultural heritage using the example of the Lesachtaler bread culture

about what constitutes the common range of experience. It has knowledge mental, physical, emotional, aesthetic dimension. Local knowledge orders social life. It is knowledge necessary to participate in the life of a specific group. Therefore, an amount of local knowledge is crucial for social inclusion and for the ability to participate in economic activities within that space. Primarily, local knowledge comes out of life praxis and sharing between people. Therefore, transmission of local knowledge occurs principally in the form of oral

transmission or transmission by acting. Only secondarily is it transmitted by means of formal education. The concept of local knowledge can be useful if it is clearly linked with social inclusion (which also includes sharing experience with others regions). Cultural heritage requires a local approach. Traditional local knowledge (i.e. about natural disasters) has been lost in many places in our globalized world and this process is continuing rapidly. Nevertheless, humans cannot participate in society without local knowledge.

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