

## Committee: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural

### Issue: Proposing strategies against the loss of intangible cultural heritage in the era of globalization

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## Introduction

One of the most important aspects of our everyday lives is culture, as it not only concerns each person individually, but also several groups of people as well, either large or small. Culture plays a role in shaping a person's character. However, culture is not just big monuments and artifacts of historical importance· it is also the tradition behind a civilization, which carves people's identity. The monuments, the objects, the places are described as Tangible Cultural Heritage. The practices and the traditions are described as Intangible Cultural Heritage and sometimes include objects etc. that are part of the Tangible Cultural Heritage.

To understand the importance of preserving the Intangible Cultural Heritage we have to comprehend exactly what it is. Intangible Cultural Heritage is a term that describes anything considered by UNESCO as a part of a nation's cultural heritage and tradition. It includes any practice that is considered by the people as part of their cultural heritage and it includes any Tangible Cultural Heritage, meaning objects, places, etc. that are associated with such practices. In 2001,

UNESCO made an effort to define Intangible Cultural Heritage and in 2003, the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (CSICH) was drafted by NGOs and UNESCO member states for the protection and the promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Intangible Cultural Heritage is defined by the 2<sup>nd</sup> article of the aforementioned Convention as *"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, and provides them with a*



Figure 1 - The Hat Mon festival at the Hat Mon temple in Vietnam

*sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.”<sup>1</sup> Intangible Cultural Heritage is important because it shapes the lifestyle of people and defines their identity.*

## Definition of Key-Terms

### Intangible Cultural Heritage

According to UNESCO, Intangible Cultural Heritage includes oral traditions, performing arts, rituals etc. and is part of the general category of cultural heritage. More specifically, Intangible Cultural Heritage is *“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, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.”<sup>2</sup>*

### Tangible Cultural Heritage

Tangible Cultural Heritage is a term, which falls under the general category of cultural heritage and according to UNESCO has three (3) subcategories: movable cultural heritage, which includes paintings, sculptures, manuscripts, artifacts, coins and everything that can be moved without being physically altered. Immovable cultural heritage, which includes archaeological sites, monuments, temples etc. meaning everything that cannot be moved without being altered to a point where its nature changes. Finally, there is underwater cultural heritage which includes shipwrecks, ruins, cities and generally everything that is underwater and related to culture.<sup>3</sup>

### Globalization

Globalization is increasing interaction and integration between people, governments and businesses worldwide. It is a situation where everything is headed towards being more global and accessible rather than local. For example, products can

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<sup>1</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=17716&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=17716&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>2</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=17716&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=17716&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>3</sup> [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

be acquired even if they are coming from the other side of the globe. Nowadays, one of the greatest dangers of the globalization is the alienation of different cultures.

## Background Information

The importance of Intangible Cultural Heritage depends upon each individual and the way he perceives and values it. There are many people worldwide that undervalue or do not pay the necessary attention to their cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, but there is also a significant number of people who consider their cultural identity and heritage to be of extreme value and have, as such, made it an integral part of their character and lifestyle. Thus, cultural heritage, and especially Intangible Cultural Heritage, which cannot be physically protected with glass walls, by security personnel or simply be placed in a vault, should be kept intact through any means possible, as it is priceless for everyone. Having said that, there are four (4) main characteristics of Intangible Cultural Heritage according to UNESCO. **First, it is traditional, contemporary and living** at the same time, meaning that it is not just a long-lived tradition that has started dozens of generations ago but also includes everyday practices of people that are not necessarily old but are present in their lives. **Second, it is inclusive**, meaning it has no barriers, as it is not a closed ceremony or practice of certain people but an open procedure, which does not aim at dividing them and showing them how different they are, but uniting them and showing them how identical they can be, as culture constantly evolves and may be passed on from one civilization to another. Many different cultures have similar origins. Intangible Cultural Heritage may bring groups of people together contributing to social cohesion. **Third, it is representative**, which means that it is a point of reference for both communities and individuals. **Fourth, it is community-based** because it starts from the community, acts within it and can be ended by the community itself because its overall value derives from it.



*Figure 2 - Mibu no Hana Taue, ritual of transplanting rice in Hiroshima, Japan*

Intangible Cultural Heritage helps maintain diversity in a period of globalization, meaning that the unique practices of each community, group etc. are preserved and do not “die out”. This is not only important for the communities that keep their traditions,

practices and rituals alive but also for the relations between different people, because it promotes understanding and respect for foreign cultures, which is the backbone of peace and good relations between culturally different people.

Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage is an issue of major importance to the UNESCO. There have been several attempts at it and even a database has been created, where all intangible cultural heritage happenings are listed and explained. There have also been attempts within UN organs as well as through treaties, memos and documents that try to define and explain Intangible Cultural Heritage.

As previously mentioned, in a period of globalization there are great dangers for culture and especially for Intangible Cultural Heritage, since it is not something that can be put aside. If the traditions and behaviors of the people are forgotten and put aside, they will cease to exist and it will be really hard for them to be reborn, even if they are recorded in a list or a database.

Another important aspect of Intangible Cultural Heritage, of which a lot of people are currently unaware, is the fact that only a few communities preserve and continue old and unique traditions and that is happening because of globalization. Of



*Figure 3 - Larung Gar in China, a town full of Tibetan Monks which has traditional houses built in the hillside, the Chinese Government ordered the destruction of some of these historical houses in 2016*



course, it would be foolish on our part to believe that we can stop globalization, but it is totally logical to aim at safeguarding and keeping alive old and unique traditions. Since Intangible Cultural Heritage is community-based, its roots are within the community.

Therefore, the “life” of these practices, rituals, traditions etc. depends on the community, which has the ability to keep these cultural elements alive.

Oral traditions and orally spread culture, such as songs, or even a language, can “decay” over time, as the civilization and culture connected to them slowly go extinct as they are absorbed by a more global culture.

However, Intangible Cultural Heritage is not just rituals, practices and procedures. Intangible Cultural Heritage **may indeed** relate to the physical objects that complete it. As such, most of the times, the loss of Intangible Cultural Heritage may be caused by the destruction of some of its symbols and objects that are used to complete it. If, for example, a temple, which is connected to a certain religious practice, is destroyed, then the related religious practice is going to weaken over the years. Therefore, Intangible Cultural Heritage is not just the practices, the traditions, the festivals and all that stuff, it is also the symbols, the artifacts and the monuments that accompany and keep it alive.

Even though Intangible Cultural Heritage is (and must be) connected to tangible aspects of culture, it certainly distances itself from Tangible Cultural Heritage. As its expressions, practices, interpretations, skills, knowledge etc. become older then it becomes distinct and can often be separated by any Tangible Counterparts. To be more explicit, Intangible Cultural Heritage is still Cultural Heritage even without its tangible aspect, which is not something embedded into it but rather plays a supportive role.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

The issue has global dimensions and numerous countries are affected. As previously mentioned, Intangible Cultural Heritage is strongly connected to physical symbols which are commonly part of Tangible Cultural Heritage· thus, the countries are initially affected in the sector of Tangible Cultural Heritage, which, in turn, causes damage in the sector of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Moreover, the current trend of Globalization plays a catalytic role in the destruction of Cultural Heritage since the newer generations differentiate themselves from their older counterparts through adopting trends and adhering to standards dictated by Globalization, a phenomenon, which, in its current form, causes tremendous damage to Cultural Heritage, especially to Intangible Cultural Heritage. UNESCO and its subsidiaries are mostly involved in the protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

### UNESCO

UNESCO stands for “United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization” and is a UN organ established on 16 November 1945. Its aim is not only to rebuild schools in war-torn areas and to provide books for children who cannot afford them, but also to build a peaceful world through culture and education. It promotes understanding and dialogue between different cultures, which, in turn, leads to respect for each other’s culture and, ultimately, to “cultural” peace, while at the same time it is attempting to preserve the uniqueness of each and every different culture. Concerning



Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO has created a list with happenings that are related to Intangible Cultural Heritage in each country providing assistance to states that adopt plans to preserve the aforementioned cultural elements. It also played a leading role in drafting the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (CSICH) and contributed to the United Nations' General Assembly, where it participates actively and regularly in relevant discussions advocating the protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

### TICHT

TICHT is the Tehran Intangible Cultural Heritage Center, which is responsible for safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in West and Central Asia. Attempts to create such a center started at 2010 and it officially opened in 2011 after the Iranian government approved it. Its members are Afghanistan, Armenia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Lebanon, Pakistan, Palestine, Tajikistan and Turkey.

### CRESPIAF

CRESPIAF is the Regional Centre for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Africa and it is located in Algeria. It serves a purpose similar to that of TICHT but it pertains to Africa.

### CRIHAP

CRIHAP is the International Training Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region and it is located in China. Its members are Afghanistan, Nauru, Australia, Nepal, Bangladesh, New Zealand, Bhutan, Niue, Brunei Darussalam, Pakistan, Cambodia, Palau, China, Papua New Guinea, Cook Islands, Republic of The Philippines, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, Fiji, Russian Federation, India, Samoa, Indonesia, Singapore, Islamic Republic of Iran, Solomon Islands, Japan, Sri Lanka, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kiribati, Thailand, Kyrgyzstan, Timor-Leste, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Tonga, Malaysia, Turkey, Maldives, Turkmenistan, Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, Micronesia (Federated States of), Uzbekistan, Mongolia, Vanuatu, Myanmar and Viet Nam. It was established in 2012 in Beijing, China.

### Sofia Centre

The Sofia Centre is the Regional Centre for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe and is located in Sofia, capital of Bulgaria. It was established in 2008.

## **Timeline of Events**

Date	Event
<b>March 2001</b>	International Round Table: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Working Definitions. Drafting of the 2003 Convention
<b>May-June 2001</b>	UNESCO. Executive Board; 161 <sup>st</sup> session; 2001. Drafting of the 2003 Convention
<b>October-November 2001</b>	UNESCO. General Conference; 31 <sup>st</sup> session; 2001. Drafting of the 2003 Convention
<b>January 2002</b>	Expert meeting on “Intangible Cultural Heritage: Priority Domains for an International Convention”
<b>March 2002</b>	First meeting of the select drafting group of a Preliminary International Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage
<b>May 2002</b>	UNESCO. Executive Board; 164 <sup>th</sup> session; 2002
<b>June 2002</b>	Expert meeting on “Intangible Cultural Heritage —Establishment of a Glossary” Second meeting of the select drafting group of a Preliminary International Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage
<b>September 2002</b>	Third Round Table of Ministers of Culture: the Intangible Cultural Heritage, a mirror of cultural diversity. First session of the Intergovernmental Meeting of Experts on the Preliminary Draft Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
<b>February-March 2003</b>	Second session of the Intergovernmental Meeting of Experts on the Preliminary Draft Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
<b>April 2003</b>	Intersessional Working Group of government experts on the Preliminary Draft Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible

	Cultural Heritage
<b>June 2003</b>	Third session of the Intergovernmental Meeting of Experts on the Preliminary Draft Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
<b>September-October 2003</b>	UNESCO. Executive Board; 167 <sup>th</sup> session. General Conference; 32 <sup>nd</sup> session; 2003. Finalization of the drafting and adoption of the Convention
<b>June 2006</b>	First General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention
<b>June 2008</b>	Second General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention
<b>June 2010</b>	Third General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention
<b>June 2012</b>	Fourth General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention
<b>June 2014</b>	Fifth General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention
<b>June 2016</b>	Sixth General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention
<b>June 2018</b>	Seventh General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

There has been great effort by UNESCO and its partners to protect Intangible Cultural Heritage by establishing conferences, research centers and various other research and development activities. The previous attempts, which are mentioned in the timeline as well, include UNESCO General Assembly Meetings with states that participate in the Convention as well as in sessions of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee. These attempts include not only sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee but also other various activities, such as:



- Supporting policy development in the field of Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- Training of personnel as facilitators in Europe.
- Closing workshop for the project “Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage through strengthening national capacities in Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia”.
- Workshop on developing policies in the field of Intangible Cultural Heritage safeguarding.
- Training of personnel as facilitators in the Asia-Pacific Region.
- Final consultation and validation meeting of the multi-year national strategy for the safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- Training of personnel as facilitators in Central Asia.
- Workshop on the implementation of the 2003 Convention for instructors.
- Workshop on the implementation of the 2003 Convention for decision makers, members of the consultative platform and high-level officials.
- Workshop on implementing the Convention at the national level (funded by Sofia category 2 center).
- Training workshop on the implementation of the 2003 Convention.
- Training for Bangladesh on the use of the mechanisms of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- Workshop on the implementation of the 2003 Convention and community-based inventorying in South Sudan.
- Workshop on safeguarding plans for Intangible Cultural Heritage. Information and exchange session on the overall results framework for the Convention.
- Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage with Young People in Kyrgyzstan.
- Second Consultation meeting on the elaboration of a national strategy for Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- Training workshop on Intangible Cultural Heritage and sustainable development.
- Capacity-building Workshop on Preparing Nomination Files and International Assistance Request.

The most common attempts are relevant workshops attended by various important people, such as personalities from the world of culture (religion, movements etc.) as well as employees that work in the sector of culture in each country. In that way, they will be able to put into practice the conventions, action plans and any other set of actions that are designed by UNESCO or member states and aim to help protect Intangible Cultural Heritage. Furthermore, workshops can be used as a means to raise awareness and inform the aforementioned individuals leading up to an important convention or summit where the issue will be discussed.

These are some of the actions taken by UNESCO in 2018. A detailed list with accurate and explicit descriptions can be found here: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/events>.

## Possible Solutions

There has been a lot of research efforts throughout the years and there have also been a lot of workshops, conferences etc., as mentioned above. However, what seems to be missing from these efforts are actual plans to implement the results of these researches. What needs to be done is to intensify the research efforts and support them even more, which will allow them to eventually be of great assistance to the international community. However, the most crucial part is the adequate implementation of the results of these researches on both international and local level.

Another important factor in preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage is embedding it into educational systems. This can be done by incorporating it into the curriculum or promoting extra-curricular activities that involve awareness or anything else that the delegates deem important and expedient in protecting Intangible Cultural Heritage.

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