

## THE INTERDEPENDENCY OF THE TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

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#### Introduction

Over the past thirty years, the **concept of cultural heritage** has been continually broadened. The Venice Charter (1964) made reference to “**monuments and sites**” and dealt with architectural heritage. The question rapidly expanded to cover **groups of buildings, vernacular architecture, and industrial and 20th century built heritage**. Over and above the study of historic gardens, the **concept of “cultural landscape”** highlighted the interpenetration of culture and nature.

Today an **anthropological approach** to heritage leads us to consider it as a **social ensemble of many different, complex and interdependent manifestations**. This is now reflecting the diversity of cultural manifestations.

The quest for the “**message**” of cultural properties has become more important. It requires us to identify the **ethical values, social customs, beliefs or myths of which intangible heritage is the sign and expression**. The significance of architectural or urban constructions and the transformation of natural landscapes through human intervention are more and more **connected to questions of identity**.

It is out of these reflections that a more comprehensive approach was developed during the past decade to give a better appreciation of the **intangible heritage** as a source of cultural identity, creativity and diversity. Intangible heritage includes **customs and oral traditions, music, languages, poetry, dance, festivities, religious ceremonies as well as systems of healing, traditional knowledge systems and skills connected with the material aspects of culture**, such as tools and the habitat.

#### I. UNESCO's activities for tangible heritage and intangible heritage

For three decades, UNESCO's **normative standard-setting activities focused on the protection of tangible heritage** by creating: the **Convention for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954)**, the **Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Export, Import and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970)**, the **Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972)**, and the **Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001)**.

#### II. UNESCO's action on intangible heritage

As a consequence, the safeguarding of **intangible heritage** remained for a long time rather **neglected**, although a first step in this direction was made in **1973**, when the Permanent Delegation of Bolivia proposed that a **Protocol be added to the Universal Copyright Convention in order to protect folklore**. This proposal was not successful but it helped to raise awareness of the need to recognize and include intangible aspects within the area of cultural heritage.

However, it was only in 1982 that UNESCO set up a “**Committee of Experts on the Safeguarding of Folklore**” and created a special “**Section for the Non-Tangible Heritage**”, resulting in the **Recommendation on the Protection of Traditional Culture and Folklore**, adopted in 1989. This Recommendation set an important precedent for recognizing “**traditional culture and folklore**”. It also encouraged international collaboration, and considered measures to be taken for its identification, preservation, dissemination and protection.

Since 1989, several regional assessments on the impact of this Recommendation have been made. They culminated in the **Washington International Conference** in June 1999 organized jointly by UNESCO and the Smithsonian Institution. Experts taking part in this conference concluded that a **new or revised legal instrument would be required** to address questions of terminology and the breadth of the subject matter more adequately. The Conference underlined the need to place emphasis on tradition-bearers rather than scholars. It also highlighted the need to be more inclusive, encompassing not only *artistic* products such as tales, songs and so forth, but also *knowledge and values* enabling their production, the *creative processes* that bring the products into existence and the *modes of interaction* by which these products are received and acknowledged.

The increasing importance of intangible cultural heritage within UNESCO is also highlighted by two programmes: the **Living Human Treasures system** (launched in 1993) and the **Proclamation of Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity** (launched in 1998).

**Nineteen forms of cultural spaces or expression were proclaimed as "Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage" by UNESCO's Director-General in May 2001.** This proclamation provides a useful indication of the type of intangible heritage that different Member States wish to safeguard.

The experience gained through these programmes made it clear that **a new normative instrument for the protection of intangible heritage would be needed.**

One means of safeguarding intangible heritage which I have not mentioned yet and which might be regarded as the basic requirement for better international recognition of this task is **normative action in this field.** UNESCO having commissioned several studies in the 1990s on the advisability and feasibility of adopting a new normative instrument for this purpose, the **General Conference concluded that a new Convention would ensure the most appropriate protection. In 1999, the process of drafting this new instrument began,** with the aim of identifying the most appropriate approach to the specific protection needs of the intangible heritage.

In 2000, UNESCO began drafting a new international convention for the safeguarding of intangible heritage, similar to the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The draft of this new **Convention was submitted to the 32<sup>nd</sup> session of the General Conference and adopted by a large majority in October 2003.**

This initiative demonstrates that the **need to protect intangible heritage not only by operational activities but also by normative instruments is increasingly recognized by Member States.**

### III. How are tangible and intangible heritage interrelated?

Cultural heritage is a **synchronized relationship involving society** (that is, systems of interactions connecting people), *norms* and *values* (that is, ideas, for instance, belief systems that attribute relative importance). Symbols, technologies and objects are tangible evidence of underlying norms and values. Thus they establish a **symbiotic relationship between the tangible and the intangible.** The **intangible heritage should be regarded as the larger framework within which tangible heritage takes on shape and significance.**

The **Istanbul Declaration**, adopted at a round table of 71 Ministers of Culture, organized by UNESCO in Istanbul in September 2002, stresses that **"an all-encompassing approach to cultural heritage should prevail, taking into account the dynamic link between the tangible and intangible heritage and their close interaction."**

This Declaration is an eminently limpid statement to the effect that **intangible heritage only attains its true significance when it sheds light on its underlying values. Conversely, intangible heritage should be made incarnate in tangible manifestations, i.e. in visible signs, if it is to be conserved** (which is only one form of safeguarding it).

**This dialectic may prove particularly fruitful in providing greater representation for those cultures of the world that attach more importance to the oral tradition than to the written one.** The regions that might particularly benefit from this concept are Africa, Asia and Oceania whose heritage consists of an unparalleled richness in oral traditions and cultural practices, a heritage that the **"monumentalist" approach has for too long neglected.** Yet the contribution made by these cultures is a significant part of the global heritage catalogue.

Examples from the 1972 Convention

*I will now give three examples of sites which have been inscribed as **World Cultural and Natural Heritage under the 1972 Convention**, with particular reference to criterion (vi) of the **Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the Convention. According to criterion (vi), sites, which are "directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas or with beliefs, or with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance" can be inscribed on the World Heritage List. In recent years, however, an intensive debate has developed as to whether this criterion should be used in conjunction with others or is sufficient to justify an inscription on its own. The following three examples show how more and more intangible elements are being included in the 1972 World Heritage List. They also show how difficult this process of recognition often is.***

#### 1. Uluru - Kata Tjuta National Park, Australia

In 1994, the World Heritage Committee made a landmark decision for the recognition of outstanding intangible and tangible cultural heritage values by inscribing Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park under cultural criterion (vi). The site had already been inscribed on the basis of its natural values in 1987 and was now nominated on the basis of cultural criteria too. This park, formerly called Uluru (or Ayers Rock - Mount Olga) National Park, features spectacular geological formations that dominate the vast red sandy plain of central Australia. Uluru, an immense monolith, and Kata Tjuta, the rock domes located west of Uluru, form part of the traditional belief system of one of the most ancient human societies in the world, the Anangu Aboriginal people. The "double inscription" of this site can be seen as another attempt to include symbolic values to the World Heritage.

## 2. Robben Island, South Africa

Robben Island, best known as a political prison for leaders of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, became a natural and cultural world heritage site in 1999. It was inscribed on the basis of cultural criteria (iii) and (vi), even though the primary justification was criterion (vi), the site being a "symbol of the triumph of the human spirit, of freedom and of democracy over oppression".

However, Robben Island could not seek inscription solely under criterion (vi) as the regulations set out in the Operational Guidelines had been tightened up in 1996, to the effect that criterion (vi) "should justify inclusion in the List *only in exceptional circumstances and in conjunction with other criteria cultural or natural*". The World Heritage Committee's motivation for ratifying the inscription of Robben Island, a traditionally non-aesthetic site symbolizing a very recent conflict, related primarily to the positive symbolism of the democratic transition in South Africa, and availed of the opportunity to challenge the restrictions in criterion (vi).

The move towards re-evaluating the restrictions in criterion (vi) arose out of broader discussions over "intangible" heritage and authenticity in the inscription of indigenous sites in Africa and Australia. These regions, where natural sites frequently have important symbolic significance for the indigenous population, began to challenge the notion of a heritage as being exclusively tangible in nature.

## 3. Tombs of the Bugunda Kings at Kasubi, Uganda

The Tombs of the Bugunda Kings at Kasubi gained status as a World Heritage Site in 2001 because of its symbolic associative value. The site embraces almost 30 ha of hillside in the district of Kampala. Most of the site is agricultural, farmed by traditional methods. At its core on the hilltop is the former palace of the Kabakas of Buganda, built in 1882 and converted into the royal burial ground in 1884. Four royal tombs now lie within the Muzibu Azaala Mpanga, the main building, which is circular and surmounted by a dome. It is a major example of an architectural achievement in organic materials, principally wood, thatch, reed, wattle and daub. The site's main significance lies, however, in its intangible values of belief, spirituality, continuity and identity.

The site was inscribed on the basis of criteria (i), (iii) and (iv) proclaiming it as a "masterpiece of human creativity both in its conception and its execution which bears eloquent witness to the living cultural traditions of the Baganda. The spatial organization of the Kasubi Tombs site is the finest extant example of a Baganda palace/architectural ensemble.

Built in the authentic traditions of Ganda architecture and palace design, it reflects technical achievements developed over many centuries." But the most important value associated with the Kasubi Tombs site is its potent link with the intangible heritage. With regard to criterion (vi), the Committee stated that "the built and natural elements of the site which is an outstanding example of traditional Ganda architecture and palace design are charged with historical, traditional and spiritual values. It is a major spiritual centre for the Baganda and is the most active religious place in the kingdom."

## IV. Tangible and intangible heritage: towards an integrated approach

**The Shanghai Charter, adopted at the 7<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Regional Assembly of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Shanghai in October 2002, recommends that museums "establish interdisciplinary and cross-sectorial approaches that bring together movable and immovable, tangible and intangible, natural and cultural heritage" and "develop documentation tools and standards in establishing holistic museum and heritage practices".**

Now, what is meant by these "holistic approaches for the tangible heritage and intangible heritage", and how can they be put into practice? **The tangible cultural heritage**, be it a monument, a historic city or a landscape, is easy to catalogue, and **its protection consists mainly of conservation and restoration measures. Intangible heritage, on the other hand, consists of processes and practices** and accordingly requires a different **safeguarding approach** and methodology to the tangible heritage. It is **fragile** by its very nature and **therefore much more vulnerable** than other forms of heritage because it hinges on actors and social and environmental conditions that are not subject to rapid change.

**Safeguarding the intangible heritage involves the collection, documentation and archiving of cultural property and the protection and support of its bearers.**

While the tangible cultural heritage is designed to outlive those who produce or commission it, the fate of the intangible heritage is far more intimately related to its creators as it depends in most cases on oral transmission. **Therefore, the legal and administrative measures traditionally taken to protect material elements of cultural heritage are in most cases inappropriate for safeguarding a heritage** whose most significant elements relate to particular systems of knowledge and value and a specific social and cultural context.

The *conservation* of monuments, cities or landscapes, on the one hand, and the *safeguarding* and *transmission* of cultural practices and traditional knowledge, on the other, therefore call for a **threefold approach**:

**(1) Putting tangible heritage in its wider context**

A holistic heritage approach would mean putting tangible heritage in its wider context, particularly in the case of religious monuments and sites, and relating it more closely to the communities concerned in order to afford greater weight to its spiritual, political and social values.

**(2) Translating intangible heritage into "materiality"**

Safeguarding intangible heritage calls for its "translation" from oral form into some form of materiality, e.g. archives, inventories, museums and audio or film records. Although this could be regarded as "freezing" intangible heritage in the form of documents, it should be clear that this is only one aspect of safeguarding and that great thoughtfulness and care should be given to choosing the most appropriate methods and materials for the task.

**(3) Supporting practitioners and the transmission of skills and knowledge**

One worthwhile model could be Japan's policy for the protection of "Living National Treasures", i.e. masters who possess a certain traditional knowledge and skills. UNESCO began to work with a similar concept in 1993: the "Living Human Treasures" system is designed to enable tradition holders to pass their know-how on to future generations. When artists, craftspeople and other "living libraries" are given official recognition and support, better care can be taken to ensure the transfer of their skills and techniques to others.

**Examples from the Proclamation of Masterpieces**

There follow **three examples** of cultural spaces or expressions that are closely linked to a certain site, landscape or building, thereby illustrating the interdependency of tangible and intangible heritage. These three examples were **proclaimed as "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity"** by UNESCO in May 2001.

**1. Jemaa el-Fna Square, Morocco**

An outstanding example of an urban space of importance for both the tangible and the intangible heritage is the Jemaa el-Fna Square in Marrakech, Morocco. This simple market place at the entry of the Medina, although it includes significant buildings, has from time immemorial been a meeting place and centre of extraordinary creativity where storytellers, musicians, tumblers and jugglers, dancers, glass-eaters and snake charmers ply their arts.

The square is part and parcel of the identity of the city of Marrakech, being both a distinctive *site* thanks to its forms and those of the neighbouring streets and buildings, and a *cultural space* due to its vibrancy as a gathering place.

**2. The Hudhud chants, Philippines**

Another instance of the tangible, in this case a cultural *landscape*, being linked with the intangible, here cultural *practices*, is that of the Hudhud Chants of the Ifugao, Philippines. The hudhud is a narrative chant performed in the unique setting of ancient and extensive highland rice-terraces in the northern Luzon province of Ifugao. It comprises some 200 chants with more than 40 episodes reflecting the central importance of rice cultivation, which is performed over three to four days during harvest, wakes or as part of the *binugwa*, an exhumation and cleansing ritual. The rice terraces were already listed as natural world heritage sites in 1995, and the additional recognition of the hudhud chants as the intangible part of this cultural landscape now acknowledges in addition the musical and poetic traditions connected with wet-rice cultivation.

**3. The Royal Ancestral Rite and Ritual Music of the Jongmyo Shrine, Republic of Korea**

The third example highlights the special relationship between a historic *monument* and an ancient festive *rite* and *performing art* as found in the Royal Ancestral Rite and Ritual Music of the Jongmyo Shrine, Republic of Korea. The Jongmyo, the royal Confucian shrine in Seoul dedicated to the ancestors of the Joseon dynasty, hosts a unique ritual of song, dance and music. This typical Confucian ritual is based on classical Chinese writings on the cult of the ancestors and filial piety and is now practised only once a year, being organized by the descendants of the royal family. A substantial part of the registers of cultural properties around the world is made up of religious sites, buildings or artwork, but most of them are nowadays "devoid" of their original function as sites of living spirituality and sacredness. Thus the Royal Ancestral Rite and Ritual Music of the Jongmyo Shrine is a rare example of a traditional ritual that is still alive and to be safeguarded both in the intangible sense - i.e. its meaning and practice - and in the tangible sense - i.e. costumes, objects, instruments and the shrine itself.

**CONCLUSION**

The very fact that the next **General Assembly of ICOM**, which will be held in Seoul in October 2004, has "Intangible Cultural Heritage" as its theme is in itself clear evidence of the **increasing international recognition of the profound relationship between tangible and intangible heritage**. Even if tangible and intangible heritage are very different, they are two sides of the same coin: both carry meaning and the embedded memory of humanity.

Both the tangible and the intangible heritage rely on each other when it comes to understanding the meaning and importance of each. Specific policies are now essential to allow for the identification and promotion of such forms of “mixed heritage” that are often among the most noble cultural spaces and expressions produced by mankind.

#### Appendix 1

##### **Similarities and differences between two heritage conventions:**

- **The 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, and**
- **The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

In its general structure, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is similar to the successful 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. International cooperation and assistance mechanisms, and notably the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund, the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding have been modelled along the lines of the 1972 Convention. Also, the provisions on educational programmes to strengthen appreciation and respect for the intangible heritage are comparable to similar provisions in the 1972 Convention. The 1972 Convention thus provided a useful model in terms of the general principle of protection as well as of its mechanisms and administrative structures.

Other aspects need to be adapted if they are to be applied to intangible heritage. For example, State Parties are now required to draw up national inventories of their specific intangible heritage. With the establishment of inventories and comprehensive registers, research and documentation of the intangible heritage at national level shall be encouraged and intensified. These registers and inventories shall also contribute to fostering the recognition and protection of the concerned practitioners, establishing more appropriate legislation and mechanisms of protection, and ensuring the dissemination, through education and awareness-raising, of the values and significance of the intangible cultural heritage.

Since the safeguarding of intangible, that is, *living*, heritage relies fundamentally on those who produce and maintain it, the 2003 Convention focuses much more on protecting the resources for creativity and transmission of the concerned communities, groups and practitioners. The notion of *universality* as cited in the new Convention is to be understood as “*universal interest*” in its safeguarding whereby the heritage belongs primarily to local communities and groups. Safeguarding it therefore means giving the holders of this heritage the main control over its use and exploitation.