



CULTURAL HERITAGE – A CHALLENGE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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Starting with 1973, the intangible cultural heritage theme went international, UNESCO organising several reunions where this was debated.

The then Bolivia's initiative regarded, mostly, the folklore, three years later being issued a special law in Tunisia, that was taken over by the UNESCO's and WIPO's experts as a possible model. The same initiators have spread an orientation material, concerning the protection of folklore, against the pollution factors, preceding the adoption, in 1989, of the Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore. Several regional seminars and international conferences (the Conference on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture held in Washington D.C., 27 – 30 June 1999, in co-operation with the Smithsonian Institution, during the famous Smithsonian Folklife Festival) brought clearing ups and definitions. The World Forum on the Protection of Folklore, held in Phuket, Thailand, April 1997) have, also, recorded clear progress.

Thus, the evaluation criteria, the concepts' content, the identification, promotion, conservation, preservation, juridical protection and encouragement means for the humanity's intangible heritage have been, gradual, clarified.

However, the elaboration of an international normative tool became a stringent necessity, vigorously determined by globalisation, as a constructive use of the information technology, in order to safeguard and sustain the intangible heritage.

The new approach, that is proposing as objectives the conservation of the human works that are threatened to disappear, but also, their promotion to a world level, the underlying of identities, the cooperation and the guarantee of the historic continuity, alongside with encouraging the creative diversity and

the access to values, is more objective and realist (see the UNESCO document CL/3597 / 3 august 2001, *Preparation of a new international standard-setting instrument for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage*).

The numerous definitions and their area have, gradually, excluded, starting with 1999, the word "folklore", replacing it with the more elaborated "intangible cultural heritage", that – for the Turin group of experts, meant: knowledge, competences, creativity and durability, accompanying and inspiring to the communities the sentiment of continuity in the context of diversity.

In 2001, as an effect of the UNESCO recommendation (CL 3603 / 15th October 2001) to create national organs for the protection of the intangible cultural heritage, the museums in Romania have also initiated special programmes. The "Astra" National Museum Complex, from Sibiu, is ahead them, with the model programme *Living human treasures*. On the 18th of May 2001, UNESCO has proclaimed, for the first time, a list of 19 masterpieces of the intangible heritage of humanity.

After long and scholarly debates, UNESCO has clearly defined, as intangible cultural heritage, a category of cultural values that are belonging to the long durations, precisely designating the specificity and the uniqueness of certain representations of human creativity. The intangible heritage is content in the norms of tradition and is expressed in the most perishable forms. It comprised knowledge, practices and experiences inherited and transmitted to each generations a certain brand of identity. Modernity and the contemporary technologies are threatening by an aggressive process of globalisation, exactly the specific expressions that are singling out, today, the groups and communities, offering them spiritual

cohesion. An ancient language, a certain way of living, of building and of crafting, but, also, of celebrating a feast or a custom, a certain way of dancing or singing, of achieving an artistic gift, community religious festivities – everything are rising from ancient customs and from a long tradition and they are filling up the extensive variety of the intangible heritage. This is renewing, completing and reinterpreting by each generation, being, in fact, a huge treasure. All these, the contemporary society have identified as sources of progress; they are contributing, by dialog and learning, to understanding amongst people, being engines of renovation and respect, of tolerance and peace.

Considering the intangible heritage, Romania is a significant guide mark, as – because of the lagging behind in industrial development, but, also, due to a powerful peasantry culture and civilisation – it has numerous specific traits. Many of them, especially in the rural areas, have a remarkable oldness and they are, still, not altered by the *massification* of the aggressive industrial cultures. Some others have enjoyed the competent support of some prestigious museums and research institutes, being unanimously appreciated by the large public. In their not altered forms, the true cultural relics are, still, able to designate our national cultural personality. There, where they have not been too *museumised* or offensively taken over by mass media, where the commercial factor did not modify their essence, the communities and the groups are claiming them, with a deserved proud.

Without any doubt, special roles in enhancing the intangible heritage have museums, which are generating and cultivating the authenticity and the originality. Similarly, the Church looks to be a vital supporter for the Christian tradition. The real specialists, in the academic institutes and in universities, together with other ministers of authentic

culture, in the centres for emphasizing of folk traditions, are joining them.

We could bring as examples the artisans or the ceremonies of Christmas (like those from Sighetu Marmăției) or Easter, or those brought about by the dedication days (as St. Mary and St. Parascheva). In these cases, the authentic and elevated cultural content are elements of high experience and of attractiveness, generating new economic resources for the communities.

Similarly, a folk dance as *Călușul* – that was observed by UNESCO for its unique quality and significance – marks a part of the Romanian intangible treasure. Romania's participation at prestigious international events (as Smithsonian Folklife Festival, in 1999, Donaifest, starting with 2000) occasioned a welcomed opportunity for presenting the valuable "offer" of this kind: a complex treasure, where "the others" are to be found, together with the *majoritarians*, with their ethnic and religious specificity. Such components (19, in fact) were proclaimed – by the UNESCO's decision of 18th of May 2001 – masterpieces of the intangible heritage of the humanity. Moreover, in 2003, UNESCO has initiated a draft of an international convention for safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage (see the document 32C/18 July 2003), that was adopted by the 32nd session of the General Conference. Thus, the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs is preparing a bill to protect, in Romania, also, the intangible heritage.

For contemporary Romania, supporting the intangible heritage is representing a part of the cultural promotion policies and strategies. Using, as a symbolic brand, folk creation, folklore, crafts and authentic traditions, we have the certitude of a specific contribution to the dowry of the human creativity and, in the same time, we are providing an important factor for our recognition in the contemporary world.

Translated by Virgil Ștefan Nițulescu