INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF UZBEKISTAN

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Safeguarding System and Policy

After Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991, significant measures were taken in the sphere of safeguarding ICH, aimed at revival of its social and cultural importance in the society. Through years of realisation programmes for safeguarding ICH there was a project on reflection of the rich new and diversity of cultural traditions of Uzbekistan.

In 13 December 2007 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was ratified by the National Parliament of Uzbekistan. Ratification letter was submitted to the UNESCO on 29 January 2008 and, respectively, Uzbekistan became State Party of the 2003 Convention starting from 29 April 2008.

It is worth to outline that the National Parliament of Uzbekistan initiated several activities:

1. Lower House of the National Parliament of Uzbekistan (Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis) organized several expert meetings during September-December 2008 with the purpose of elaboration of appropriate amendments into the Law on “Safeguarding and Utilization of Cultural Objects of Uzbekistan”. The amended Law was adopted by Legislative Chamber in January 2009 and, according to local legal procedure, the document was transferred to the Senate for final approval.

2. Upper House of the National Parliament of Uzbekistan (Senate of the Oliy Majlis) organized several expert meetings in December 2008 – May 2009 with purpose of elaboration on new State Programme on Cultural Heritage which covers issues on safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, main subject of which is inventory-making studies. Moreover, Senate initiated the process of revision of all legal acts of Uzbekistan, where term “cultural heritage” is exists. The decision of the Senate (No. 598-1 of 30 December 2008) stipulates that all regional municipalities should elaborate local action plans to be reflected in the national plan of actions safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage.

3. Ministry of Culture and Sports of Uzbekistan prepared he provisional Inventory List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The Inventory List was submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan for approval.

Relevant organizations

There are many nation-wide local non-government organizations which are involved in the process of safeguarding of the ICH, such “Makhalla” (Community) Foundation, “Oltin Meros” (Golden Heritage) Foundation, “Forum of Culture and Arts of Uzbekistan” Foundation, “Kamolot” Youth Social Movement of Uzbekistan, “Hunarmand” (Artisan) Association, Union of Composers, “Uzbekraqs” (Uzbek Dance) Association, and many others.
The Republican Scientific Center of Folklore under the Ministry of Culture and Sports of Uzbekistan organized various festival-contests in order to support and promote diverse cultural forms and expressions in the field of ICH, such as: Triennial Exhibition of Young Artisans, Triennial Festival-Contest of Story Tellers (Epic Bearers), Biennial Festival-Contest of Folk-Ethnographic Community Ensembles, Biennial Festival of Traditional Circuses and Askıya (Folk Humor Bearers), Triennial Festival-Contest of Lapar and Ulan Dance and Music Performers, Triennial Festival-Contest of Performances on Ancient Musical Instruments, Triennial Festival-Contests of Maqom, Katta Ashula (Great Song) and Alla (Cradle Song) Music Performances, Triennial Festival-Contest on Traditional Theatre and Puppet Theatre, Triennial Festival-Contest of Family-Based Folk Ensembles.


In the field of traditional knowledge with application in handicrafts, in accordance with Decree of the President of Uzbekistan, all artisans have tax immunities for their activities. Such decision provided great support for revitalization of famous artisan schools and indigenous knowledge bearers. Meantime, handicrafts schools in towns and villages were reestablished and developed (Samarkand, , Khiva, Urgut, Nurota, Tashkent, Shakhrisiyabz, Qoqon, Margilon, Boysun and many others).

There are 5200 clubs on ICH are functioning within the structure of the Ministry of Public Education of Uzbekistan (2008-2009) as non-formal learning centers. As result, annual “Kids’ Folklore Festival” and “Kids’ Traditional Games Festival” is organized annually by the Ministry of Public Education of Uzbekistan. In addition, within formal curriculum, there are state standards on “Arts Education” in all general secondary schools.

Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan is also contributed to the policy on promotion of ICH among youth by organizing annual folk festivals among students.

Most of the important feature of the ICH preservation in Uzbekistan is activities of local communities (makhallas). There are 8449 makallas in Uzbekistan, covering all country. Every region of Uzbekistan organizes the festival-contest among makallas on various forms of ICH. Governmental (through branches of central ministries and local municipalities) and non-governmental organizations (for example, Women’s Committee) are actively participating in actions in makallas. There is partnership concept paper “Family-Makhalla-School” adopted in 1994.

**Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory**

Scientific studies on ICH inventory-making implemented by several organizations, such as Navoi Institute of Literature and Language of Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, Institute of Fine Arts of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, Tashkent State Institute of Culture, Uzbekistan State Institute of Arts, Uzbekistan State Conservatoire and special faculties of the universities.

The working group of experts, established by the Ministry of Culture and Sports of Uzbekistan carried out interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary academic studies (archive
and desk studies, field trips to local communities) for the purpose of identification of the ICH in Uzbekistan.

At the first stage, before the ratification of the Convention, the National Commission of Uzbekistan for UNESCO (according to the List of the UNESCO) coordinated the elaboration of the Tentative List of ICH of Uzbekistan which consisted of seven cultural forms (Cultural space of Boysun, Shashmaqom music, Katta Ashula, Navruz, Lapar, Bakhshi and Askya). Two of them (Cultural space of Boysun, Shashmaqom music) were proclaimed by UNESCO as Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001 and 2003 respectively.

After ratification of the Convention, the nomination documents of two other cultural forms of ICH (Katta Ashula and Navruz) were prepared by the working group of experts and included by the consideration of the 4th session of the Intergovernmental Committee on ICH (28 September – 2 October 2009, Abu Dhabi, UAE) into the UNESCO Representative List of ICH of Humanity.

In addition, the project on preservation of “Katta Ashula” was received the 2009 ACCU Prize of the Second Contest for Better Practices Community’s ICH Revitalization.

The working group of experts, established by the Ministry of Culture and Sports of Uzbekistan, already prepared new draft comprehensive inventory of ICH, which is subject for approval by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan (Prime Minister’s Office). New preliminary ICH inventory contains 267 cultural forms.

For example, UNESCO was associated with celebration of 1000th anniversary of Alpomish Epics in 1999. Alpomish is a folk epics based on ancient myths and legends of Uzbekistan and Central Asia. The Alpomish epos is widely spread in Central Asia and it has been performed by bahshis (story tellers) for centuries. It was handed down from generation to generation by orator-artists known as ‘bahshis’. The main idea of the epos is protection of motherland from invaders. The main character of the epos is Alpomish – hero, who fought against the enemies. This heroic epic is of very considerable importance both to the people of Uzbekistan and to the whole region. It is sung in towns and villages, where it still arouses enthusiasm, and recounts the rich cultural past of the countries of Central Asia. The epos presenting lifestyle and traditions, values and world perception of local people starting from the very ancient times.

**Traditional Ceremonies** - Alla is cradle song, based on life stories and legends. Every single baby in any part of the world soaks the tune of his mother’s lullaby in any language. Lullaby of Uzbekistan has its peculiarities, in unique way of croon singer usually tells stories, poems about history of motherland, prominent people of the past, legends and epics, such as Alpomish, Tomariss and others. Moreover, very often, Alla song considered as protection ritual of the child from “evil eyes”. “Alla” is a tender voice of mother’s heart.

**Traditional holiday** - Navruz is celebrated on 21st of March, which is considered as New Year holiday and the beginning of Spring. There are various ceremonies, rituals, and cultural events held within every family and community. It enjoys traditional games, special cuisines, respect for nature, performances in ic and dances, oral expressions and literature, handicrafts and painting masterpieces (in particular miniature arts). Values of peace and solidarity, reconciliation and neighborhood, cultural diversity and tolerance, healthy life-style and renewal of living environment are promoted and transmitted from generation to generation during this cultural event. Women play a major role in the cultural event, by managing the ceremonies and dissemination the traditional knowledge to the youth. It is a part of and strengthens the cultural identity of the countries of Central/western and South Asia.
**Traditional Handicrafts** - Wood carving is one of the unique artisan arts of Uzbekistan. Many historical architectural monuments have beautifully carved wooden structures (columns, doors, windows frames). The design of wood carving is based on local motives, such as nature (local plants, flowers) and sacred symbols. Every ornament has its own philosophical meaning corresponding to the architectural monument. Wood carving is one of the most widely spread types of applied arts in Uzbekistan. This type of decorative art existed in Uzbekistan from the ancient times of development of urban culture. It is widely used in architecture and housing. Wood carving used in production of such elements of architecture as door, gates, columns, tables, window-frames as well as for daily use things (pencil-box, book-support, plates and others).

According to the archaeological studies, wood carving technique was developed in Uzbekistan more than 1500 years ago.

**Traditional Performing Art** - Tanovar is exclusive dance performance of Uzbek people, originated from early settlement culture. In contrast with other dance performances, Tanovar is unique expression of women’s role and women’s characters. Tanovar – is a specific form of women’s performance. Present form of Tanovar was revitalized in the beginning of XX century by famous dancer Mukarrama Turgunboeva. The essence and philosophy of the dance could be understood through analysis of its movements. Tanovar is a dream of expressing the love to the lover. It is not only a dance, but also a choreographical epos.

Tanovar dance types of Fergana region are rich in internal feelings and experiences, courage and energy. Bukhara region dances differ with their gratitude and passion. Another distinctive future of this dance is a specific way of moving hands and flexing the body. Courage, wonderful movements of hands and fast movement of the body present in Khorezm dance type.