

“It is not possible to inherit culture. The culture of ancestors can evaporate in the glance of an eye, if the next generations fail to acquire it again and again.”

/Zoltán Kodály/

According to the Hungarian Constitution the preparation for joining an international agreement has to be done by the ministry responsible. Consequently, the preparation of Hungary's joining the UNESCO agreement on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage fell within the competence of the Ministry of Education and Culture, namely the Department of Community Culture.

Besides completing state administrative tasks prescribed by law we have conducted a wide range of conciliatory consultations with well known anthropologists, ethnographers, the representatives of cultural institutes and NGOs on the understanding of the professional content of the convention, on the possibilities of its adoption in Hungary and naming state tasks arising from its ratification. The professional circles supported our joining of the convention.

On 17 March 2006 the Hungarian Parliament (the sixth European country to do so) ratified the Convention enacting it by Act XXXVII of 2006.

In Hungary prior to this act there have already been laws, Act CXL of 1997 on the protection of cultural goods, museum institutions, public library services and community culture which determined the tasks of the state, local governments and professional institutions belonging to these, among others, in order to preserve the traditional values of intangible cultural heritage.

The present day practise, presentation on festivals, the research, the digitalisation, and the teaching at different educational levels of certain elements of the intangible cultural heritage is significant, for example, in the area of craftsmanship, folk music, and folkdance. In these professional areas there is a significant cooperation among cultural and educational institutions, academic research institutes, folk-artists and civil communities.

Three types of highly esteemed awards were established to acknowledge the valuable work of folk artists: “The Master of Folk Art” awards are given by the Government. (7/year). “Young Master of Folk Art” awards are given by the Minister of Culture. (15/year). “Tree of Life Award”- are also given by the Minister of Culture (3/year).

In Hungary there are 2 special institutes supported by the state. Heritage House: the main goals of this cultural institute are (among others) preserving and caring for Hungarian intangible heritage, collecting and publishing various forms of traditional culture with the use of the most up-to-date technologies. The European Folklore Institute (EFI) was founded by the Ministry of Culture with the support of UNESCO. Initial discussions of the need for a European centre of folklore arose during the Cultural Forum held in Budapest in 1986. The actual suggestion for establishing it in Hungary came from the Spanish delegation. The institute focuses on the core areas of identification, documentation, conservation, preservation, dissemination and protection of European traditional cultures. The EFI offers its assistance and services to all nations, groups and individuals in Europe.

I think I do not have more time to present the situation in Hungary. I would only like to make one more comment. Besides the already mentioned positive aspects which, as I mentioned earlier, still only involve certain areas, we have a lot of tasks in order to discover and preserve the intangible cultural heritage.

Allow me to present you my thoughts in connection with the questions raised by the organizers.

Who is the suitable and capable body for drawing ICH inventories?

The settlements for the most part need different levels of social bodies to be formed, in the interests of compiling lists of the local intangible cultural heritage. On the basis of the Hungarian state administration system the following structure can be imagined

- Small dwellings (numbering 3 100), the representatives of local communities (local intellectuals, representatives of local institutions, members of NGOs, others) have a general inventory of intangible cultural heritage

- Small settlements (numbering 168) to which there are already existing nominated bodies, in which there is the local areas intangible cultural heritage (the larger institutions can be found in the local areas centres: libraries, museums, archives, higher education institutions, civil associations).

- Regions (numbering 7). Everywhere within the seven regions universities, academies of research and other such places can be found. In the regions forming bodies decide on matters of intangible cultural heritage as well as, similar to the previously mentioned levels, firstly decide on the given level of cultural heritage, then compile for these inventories the elements which are recommended to be included in a higher level inventory from this area of public administration.

- The national inventory shall be compiled once a national committee (patterned after the World Heritage's Hungarian National Committee) has been brought into existence. The body besides compiling the Hungarian national inventory shall also be preparing proposals towards Paris. In this high level team of scientists, university faculties, cultural centre institutions leaders and the leading representatives of the Ministry of Education and Culture shall take part.

Should the process be arranged top down or bottom up?

According to the previous things described, I think that it is better to build from bottom up. Yet, at the same time, although I hold the influence of the local activities as more than capable of making competent suggestions, the National Committee, being the chief decision maker on the Hungarian intangible cultural heritage, should also have its say in such matters. I am glad to say that when considering making agreements on these matters, we have always been open through newspaper articles, on the radio, and it has been our experience that these have often produced intensive enquiries from members of the public giving expertise, sending in their suggestions, and so on. I also note with certainty that the strength of both local and national identity are excellent tools for this agreement. There already exist such settlements, in which an inventory has been assembled to a certain extent by local knowledgeable societies even without the UNESCO aim. There are some counties in which experts of

the county library, cooperating along with students and civilians, have collected those cultural items of interest which belong to the county intangible cultural heritage.

What is the relation between national and local inventories?

The local inventories will contain such items of interest which will not form part of the next, consequently, small dwellings inventory and, so continuing upwards, which, in the end, will not form part of the national inventory yet will still be important to a given society.

We should try to imagine an inverse triangle, where the local inventory will be at the top and the national inventory at the bottom. What this suggests is small dwellings may have more items on their inventory than would be considered by the national inventory. Rather, such items may be more important for their own local identity. And the further we go down the triangle, the more specific items on the inventory become. For example, the Easter sprinkling where we sprinkle water on our women. The Sprinkling itself is a national custom but each region, small settlement, small dwelling will have its own custom for this.

How to secure community involvement?

In Hungary, in accordance with our cultural historical traditions the civil society is very strong. Besides the so called 'umbrella' organisations with a national sphere of competence, over a thousand smaller associations operate all over the country. Their activities are aided by the competition resources of the National Civil Foundation (State budgetary found). Obviously, the social activities of the self organising communities have to be aided by local institutions and by the local intellectuals. Besides the various forms of motivations e.g. establishing competitions, publicity, the mass media can also have a particularly important role.

What is the role of individuals and human factor in general?

Community culture is not simply the unification of the individuals' activities. Every person sees culture according to his/her place in the community. I could bring up as an example the relationship between minority and majority culture. Bipolarity is very important, culture should address everybody.

With the help of tools provided by the educational system and the cultural institutions there are significant opportunities to do away with unequal and disadvantageous situations. At the same time it is the joint possession of intangible cultural heritage which can strengthen the feeling of belonging to a community.

How to resolve the contradiction of particularities and universalities on local, national and international levels?

We think of culture in a broad sense. It is not only the high arts that belong to it but also the way of life, the culture of behavior, etc. The particularities are interesting within the general. At the same time, if we examine the individualistic, we can never disregard the general existing behind it. We view culture as a life strategy. All elements of culture are necessary in order to live a livable everyday life. Allow me to cite a not strictly speaking cultural example, although, cultural customs are related to it in many aspects. It is grape production, which is very important in Hungary. This is

the general element. It, on the other hand, has several particular elements which are, e.g. in connection with grape picking, community activities striking root in various settlements of the country and practiced today, sometimes similar to each other but at other times differing. In respect of the intangible Hungarian cultural heritage these customs, inherited through generations and hardly changing, are very significant.

We all have something – indeed, quite a lot! – to share, but also quite a lot to learn from each other. Another kind of opportunity – in fact the only opportunity if we really wish to derive the best from the declaration – is that of establishing, deepening and expanding modes of teamwork, because safeguarding the heritage also needs the broadest *co-operation nation-, region- and world-wide*.

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