

MEDLIHER - Mediterranean Living Heritage

Contribution to implementing the Convention for the
Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
in Mediterranean partner countries

EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS OF THE STATE OF SAFEGUARDING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

(MEDLIHER Project – Phase I)

- I. Introduction
- II. Syrian Arab Republic
- III. Republic of Lebanon
- IV. Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
- V. Arab Republic of Egypt
- VI. Recommendations
- VII. Proposals for national and multinational projects
 - Syrian Arab Republic
 - Republic of Lebanon
 - Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
 - Arab Republic of Egypt

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I. Introduction

Introduction

The civilizations of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria belong to the Middle East region, which was one of the cradles of humanity. Impressive layers of cultural material have accumulated ever since the times of ancient Mesopotamia. Over thousands of years, an abundant and varied tangible and intangible cultural heritage has emerged which, over a long period of time, has experienced slow and occasionally sudden developments, including invasions and natural disasters. The history of recent decades, however, suggests imminent threats to all or part of this heritage. The gap between urban and rural areas, mass urbanization, market globalization and the introduction of new technologies entail dramatic changes: some items of this heritage are disappearing or will disappear, while others are evolving so rapidly – as a result of the prevailing modernization trend – that their form and meaning are undergoing radical change.

In the same way as other developing countries, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria realized the value of their tangible cultural heritage as their modern nation-states emerged. The safeguarding of archaeological sites and the establishment of museums to present the masterpieces of their glorious past illustrate the will to promote both the unity and the diversity of the collective memory of their peoples. Indeed, symbolic landmarks are necessary to strengthen the modern state: places, objects, highly memorable events – real or mythical – are founding principles of people's creativity and sustainability.

In contrast, awareness of the existence of the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is very recent. This form of heritage is nonetheless as important as the tangible cultural heritage to the extent that it reflects lifestyle and ways of thinking and acting in the cultural and natural environment. In many regions of the world, there is evidence that its disappearance results in the decline of the society or group which holds it.

Few countries have clearly recognized this issue and prepared a rigorous method, based on scientific studies, to ensure the protection of this invisible heritage. A visible sign of this deficiency is the ambiguity of the concepts used – which remain variable and inaccurate – to designate the impalpable components of ICH. The relationship between the various aspects of the tangible and intangible heritage, between form and content and between cultural expression and tangible or social environment partly explains the remarkable conceptual fluidity of ICH. From one country to another, the terminology remains to be defined, particularly since the different languages assign different meanings to words that are undeniably semantically complex. Lastly, investigation methods need to be harmonized with a view to conducting proper assessments based on the criteria of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and on scientific rigour, since the safeguarding of ICH is an ambitious and complex venture.

II. Syrian Arab Republic

1. The national assessment of ICH provided by the Syrian authorities shows that, before ratifying the UNESCO Convention, Syria already possessed a variety of structures and experience in the transmission, awareness-raising and promotion of the intangible cultural items. The inventory prepared in the context of the report produced a very exhaustive list of persons, groups, communities and institutions that maintain traditional musical and choreographic practices (scholarly and popular), oral traditions, craft skills, customary sports practices, and so on. The inventory also included Syrian State organizations involved in education and the transmission of different forms of ICH, and various documentation and

research centres involving researchers and academics. Lastly, it included regional cultural centres under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and the private project of the Rawafed Foundation, which, under the high patronage of the First Lady of Syria and in cooperation with cultural operators and decision-makers, provides an opportunity for citizens to enhance their creative potential and to participate, directly or indirectly, in safeguarding part of the country's ICH.

2. This report nevertheless shows that the above experiences are the prerogative of operators working outside the context of the requirements of the Convention, involving significantly contrasting, dispersed practices without any national coordination. Stakeholders operate on an individual, dispersed, militant and improvised social basis. They lack the legal, administrative, legislative, philosophical, scientific and financial framework established by the Convention to ensure effective safeguarding of ICH.

3. The report has shortcomings that its authors explicitly or implicitly acknowledge. The assessment was nonetheless carried out in the first phase of implementation of the Convention. It is the first time that such extensive work, involving so many people and institutions, is conducted at the national level in Syria. It is also the first time that a document assesses the country's safeguarding potential and capacity. Furthermore, it is the first time that the shortcomings in this area are noted and that essential and appropriate measures are taken to contribute to fully implementing this national and international project.

4. This initial assessment phase should, logically, be complemented and enhanced subsequently through a targeted assessment of each operator that contributes to safeguarding Syria's ICH. Drawing up a list of stakeholders and structures involved in this area is not sufficient, since the various items are clearly not of equal value, depending on the initiatives undertaken, or even the same quality of rigour and method. While the quality of the great tradition bearers and major artistic genres renowned both inside and outside Syria is unquestionable, the benefits of the voluntary sector contribution – both multiple and eclectic, provided by the country's various organizations and associations, including "l'ensemble de la jeunesse de Latakiah" [the Latakiah youth association] – need to be demonstrated. In accordance with the requirements of the Convention and, as sometimes recommended by the rapporteurs, each contribution should be assessed soundly, through the preparation of a detailed activity report by experts, so as to determine the purpose and capacity of each operator in the performance of activities to safeguard ICH and the resulting outcomes. According to the Convention, the safeguarding programme should take into account the ICH items of historical, artistic or scientific value that face extinction in the short or medium term.

5. This initial assessment probably misses an important aspect of the Convention: no mention is made of cultural and ethnic diversity, a significant source of wealth for the country (the number of ethnic groups, languages, and so on). This provisional shortcoming should not be regarded as failure to implement the Convention because, as it stands, the report does not contain all the ICH items. All the country's majority and minority oral traditions that may be at risk must nevertheless be referred to in subsequent reports. Not only are world cultures threatened with globalized uniformity, but regional cultures and languages are also subject to pressures and may be endangered. The report tells us that the stakeholders of this programme have not yet received all the information requested of the groups, communities and authorities to enable the project to be completed. The information gathered so far confirms the existence of a substantial number of local and regional initiatives to safeguard ICH, taken by individuals, groups and communities throughout Syria.

6. Since the ICH Convention was signed by Syria, considerable work has been done by the political and administrative authorities, under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, to complete this necessary preparatory phase required under the Convention. Institutional, legal, structural and economic measures, *inter alia*, have been taken with a view to full participation in and compliance with the spirit of the MEDLIHER project.

First, a set of legal provisions are being developed by Syria to promote ICH. A bill on the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage will soon be (or currently is) under discussion in Parliament. Second, all the national and regional institutions under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture (including all its departments) are committed to this national project, such as cultural centres, conservatories, documentation and research centres, museums, professional communities, musical and choreographic ensembles, festivals and various events linked to expressions of oral tradition. The Ministry of Culture has thus set up “popular cultural heritage committees” within each regional cultural department in order to register and collect exhaustive documentation on ICH. A national MEDLIHER committee responsible for following up, monitoring and coordinating all national initiatives is under consideration. Lastly, the commitment to including in the success of this national project the largest possible number of individuals, communities and groups directly or indirectly involved in the intangible heritage is already being demonstrated. Several private and public organizations are helping to raise awareness and to provide information and education on the importance and challenge of the intangible cultural legacy, through a variety of publications and the organization of conferences, symposia and exhibitions. The abundance of festivals and fairs also contributes to this effort to promote and raise awareness of the subject among the Syrian people.

All the work done so far and to be done in the coming months is evidence of Syria’s significant commitment to the issue, in accordance with the requirements of the Convention. The outcome of the remaining planned activities has to be awaited in order to appreciate the results of years of efforts undertaken in that regard. In addition, it is difficult to judge – on the sole basis of this report – the quality of the work already done, namely the value of publications, artistic and scientific events, activities carried out by the various operators, surveys, documents collected, and so on. An expert assessment therefore needs to be performed by UNESCO to examine in detail the huge task undertaken by Syria to save its ICH.

Pursuant to the objectives of the UNESCO Convention, Syria has provided us with a progress report showing that the whole country has initiated important activities in the right direction. The work remaining to be done to overcome gaps and weaknesses (the promulgation of a safeguarding Act by Parliament, the allocation of financial resources, an appraisal of the scientific quality of the initiatives undertaken and an assessment to be carried out by Syrian experts in cooperation with experts from UNESCO will contribute effectively to laying the necessary foundations for implementation of the Convention.

6. The case study in this report concerns a Sufi expression: the *dhikr* of the *zāwiya* al-Qadiriya of Aleppo. In Islam, Sufism has developed a variety of musical configurations: from commemorating the name of God (*dhikr*) to designating a trance (*hadra* or *wajd*), many dances and a whole series of vocal and melodic forms were created to contribute to the quest for God. For over a thousand years, each culture, community and *zāwiya* has cultivated a broad repertoire of poetry and sacred music. *Dhikr* sessions are musical – and sometimes dance – performances drawing on the modes of scholarly and popular local music. There is generally extraordinary fluidity of sound between genres, although the singularity of the Sufi order is that it often expresses itself through Sufi and mystic poetry and the invocation of God.

The study suitably describes the *dhikr* of al-Qadiriya, in accordance with the criteria of the Convention. Social and cultural functions are relatively well depicted. Zāwiyas certainly once performed much more significant social, cultural and religious functions than they do today. They provided a forum for meeting, mutual help and transmission of Sufi teachings.

The zāwiya al-Qadiriya is an association of lay people in search of spirituality, which currently plays no social role. Its long existence illustrates perfectly that its practices are deeply rooted in cities. The report states that the *dhikr* is in constant decline. Syria's modernization, over a few decades, has led to a drop in the number of zāwiyas and their members. Even though the zāwiyas still attract a significant number of *murids* (disciples of Sufism), the *dhikr* may disappear if Syria fails to establish a safeguarding plan soon.

No definitive steps have been taken towards implementing the plan. Preliminary steps, however, have been achieved by promoting recognition of the need to safeguard this item, raising awareness among the experts in this field and identifying the areas that make up ICH. Major documentary research has been undertaken and a sociological and anthropological review is now required with a view to implementation of a safeguarding plan, in the form of an in-depth study of the zāwiya al-Qadiriya of Aleppo, of its partnership with other zāwiyas in Syria and in the Arab-Muslim world, and of the components of the zāwiyas, which ensure their viability: places, individuals and their hierarchy, poems, melodies and musical modes, instruments, events organized inside and outside the zāwiya, forms of subsistence, transmission and management modes, ancillary functions (mosques, madrassas, libraries, and so on). Moreover, the active participation of the communities concerned must be encouraged. Lastly, a competent body should be designated in Aleppo, in cooperation with the community, responsible for managing and safeguarding the heritage and for determining essential costs for its safeguarding and methods for managing expenditure on this ICH which is known and recognized abroad.

7. In this report, Syria has effectively identified the national needs and priorities for safeguarding ICH. The preliminary work done consisted in laying essential foundations for the future management of this heritage, the conception of a holistic vision of Syrian cultural diversity and the development of a multidisciplinary method for the "scientific" conduct of the assessment. This undertaking therefore effectively reflects the commitment of the Syrian Government.

7.1 Syria wishes to comply with the UNESCO Convention by putting in place priority legal, technical, administrative and financial resources. A bill for the safeguarding of ICH is under discussion in Parliament.

The report further recommends:

7.2 The establishment of an effective safeguarding body for managing and coordinating all the national activities. Its administrative structure might include local committees managing information and documentation and a national, executive and consultative committee responsible for preparing, monitoring and evaluating the national assessment. There would be experts from various fields in all the organizations involved in the safeguarding of ICH. The report nevertheless fails to give specific information on the training and level of expertise of the stakeholders involved at present (or in the future) in these bodies, or the resources put in place for their operation.

7.3 The participation of civil society individuals or communities involved in ICH, as required under the Convention. Each heritage item must involve knowledge- and tradition-bearers.

- 7.4 The establishment of a research and documentation centre on ICH that will be the centre of information, publication and dissemination of skills and of the intangible elements of the heritage.
- 7.5 The establishment of a specialized higher institution for the training of future officials, researchers and experts in the safeguarding of the heritage.
- 7.6 The development of a rigorous scientific method for the preparation of the future ICH assessment and semantic clarification of concepts before they are used.
- 7.7 Awareness-raising of ICH safeguarding as part of the higher education provision.
- 7.8 The inclusion of reflection on ICH in museum activities.
- 7.9 The broadcasting of programmes on the subject on radio and television.
- 7.10 The allocation of substantial national budget resources to managing the safeguarding of ICH.
- 7.11 The organization of regular events to raise social awareness of the heritage, including exhibitions and festivals.
- 7.12 Acknowledgement of sustainable development.
- 7.13 Ensuring equitable representation of ethnic and cultural diversity.

III. Republic of Lebanon

Lebanon has a very rich civilization, based on its dual Arab and Mediterranean heritage and its considerable diversity. This is added to by a social and cultural composite mosaic reflecting extraordinary regional, religious and ethnic diversity. The country has long experienced profound changes resulting from the rapid modernization of its tangible and intangible cultural heritage. It has also suffered the disastrous consequences – for people, property and culture – of a devastating civil war.

The report provided by the Lebanese authorities, conducted during the first phase of the MEDLIHER project, meets UNESCO's specific expectations. The report provided an opportunity to initiate a major assessment of ICH and to evaluate the safeguarding and use of the national heritage resources. It also facilitated the inclusion of ICH items in danger, the identification of existing structures and experiences in safeguarding and the adoption of legal, administrative and financial measures to provide favourable conditions for managing the safeguarding of ICH and to meet UNESCO's requirements.

1. First observation: no assessment of ICH had been carried out before this report. A highly informative sociological survey was conducted by a research team on the intangible cultural heritage available in urban and rural areas. It revealed the existence of many different public and private, local, national and international stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Social Affairs, international, national and local NGOs and various associations – all directly involved in safeguarding and exploiting some parts of this heritage. It also revealed that, before the implementation of the above-mentioned measures, State institutions were ill-organized and ill-prepared for these programmes, and that there was no holistic approach to, or determined overall interest in, specific national goals. Each structure developed its own projects in relation to its own objectives.

In addition, ICH was the subject of a variety of publications written by research centres attached to universities and by cultural associations committed to this field. Many publications have not yet been listed.

2. Second observation: Lebanon lacked adequate infrastructure to meet the Convention criteria or a general ICH safeguarding and promotion policy. There was a need for reform and for the restructuring of ministries involved in this area – particularly the Ministry of Culture, which has been attached to various services operating under several other ministries, and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Fine Arts, which through this reform process became a general Department. It is within this general Department that provision has been made for a section to be devoted exclusively to ICH matters. The Minister of Social Affairs has also set new goals to protect the skills and improve the living conditions of craftspeople. This Ministry has set up a national committee for rural craftspeople, the *Maison de l'Artisan Libanais*, and development service centres to assess, review and improve the living conditions of craftspeople and to help them to become an inherent part of their national heritage, and also to contribute to safeguarding the heritage. Indeed, the assessment showed that the intangible cultural heritage of rural communities is worst affected, weakened by rural-urban migration, forced displacements and rural decay.

3. Of these institutional measures, the establishment of an ICH section would appear to be the most significant. However, because of the considerable assignments and duties this section must assume, neither its financial and human resources nor the expertise of its staff are adequate for this new structure.

4. Carried out under the MEDLIHER project, the study permitted an inventory and overview of community participation and the report contained some interesting findings. A close examination of 353 local and national organizations was carried out in order to determine where their activities are based, their specificities and their areas of ICH involvement. While the collected data are indeed a rich source of information, the results do not assess the quality of each organization's work and do not permit the effectiveness of their practices or their methods of ICH preservation to be evaluated.

5. As yet, Lebanon lacks a comprehensive ICH promotion, dissemination, awareness-raising and education policy. A few educational institutions, such as schools and universities, offer classes on ICH; however, each institution designs its own programmes which are, on the whole, disparate and unequal.

6. Cooperation with some international organizations and embassies is carried out to fund specific ICH items. However, as with the other countries concerned, there is a general lack of regional policies on particular ICH projects and no coordination among institutional networks and groups involved in related activities which would allow multinational collaboration on national and regional programmes.

7. The report's case study – identification and description of folk tales in Lebanon today – pertinently reflects the imperatives for implementing the Convention. Conducted by a group of experts, the fairly exhaustive study accurately depicts the social and cultural functions of Lebanese folk tales and illustrates the relevance of such a choice. This item clearly falls within ICH as defined by the Convention. The study evaluated its viability as well as the risks posed by increasing modernization. In addition, the study described the various efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Culture and by a number of institutions to preserve Lebanese folk tales and to implement the safeguarding plan. While the study admirably illustrated the participation of communities, groups and individuals in association with public and private bodies to contribute to the success of the safeguarding plan, this part remains succinct and would benefit from the inclusion of supplementary information. The gathering of folk tales is itself a prerequisite for this programme; therefore further elaboration is needed of the

methods intended to establish or preserve these tales within the social fabric. A detailed outline of fund-raising to guarantee the success of this project would also be welcomed.

8. The study does not contain detailed descriptions of all competent bodies involved in this project. The Ministry of Culture (presumably its newly established ICH section more specifically) will no doubt coordinate this wide-ranging project. But how and with what means?

9. The report clearly identifies the problems, needs and possible solutions for introducing favourable ICH management conditions. It also identifies priority measures requiring urgent action, which are described and justified in the report's other chapters. For the first phase, the report also sets out a provisional list for which, with the exception of the item described in the case study required by the Convention, no supporting argumentation is provided. The choice of items on the list is haphazard. Those chosen reflect very broad themes that will need to be recast in line with the Convention criteria; in addition to which the selection principles and objectives should be defined, and whether or not the items require urgent safeguarding should be specified.

IV. Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Situated between the Fertile Crescent and the Arabian Desert, Jordan has seen such outstanding civilizations on its soil as those of the Akkadians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, as well as Pharaonic Egypt and also the Hasmonean dynasty of the Maccabees. The Ammonites, Edomites and Moabites all built their capitals there. Mediterranean powers such as the Macedonians, the Romans, the Byzantines and the Ottomans also occupied this territory. As from the seventh century, this area was integrated into the Arab-Muslim sphere with two brief interludes during the Crusader kingdoms from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries and during the British mandate. This succession of cultures has left many a mark, both tangible and intangible, on the modern country which is now the Kingdom of Jordan.

1. The instructions provided for assessing the state of ICH were followed point by point in the report compiled by the Jordanian authorities.

2. As regards institutional safeguarding capacities, the report contains comprehensive information on the six required points. The investigation provides clear information on the strengths and weaknesses and on the positive and negative features of all ICH matters in Jordan.

The report reveals that, since the State's foundation, action has indeed been undertaken by the Government and a host of establishments and public and private bodies engaged directly and indirectly in ICH safeguarding. Experiments dealing with heritage preservation have been conducted and university institutions, research centres, ministries, NGOs and libraries have been involved to varying degrees in documentation work, archiving, research and analysis, publication and promotion, education and training on heritage issues. But these activities, which were limited in scale, numerous and disparate, were conducted neither within any comprehensive legislative, philosophical or scientific framework nor under any national heritage policy. Each activity rested upon its own principles and pursued its own goals. Notably, this report clarified the State's shortcomings and capacities to improve the management of its heritage in line with the UNESCO Convention.

3. One of the first measures taken by the Jordanian Government was to correct deficiencies in this system and to ensure compliance with the Convention. The Government must markedly improve current legislation for the sake of better ICH protection and must enact legislation for its safeguarding. Vital structural and functional changes must be made to

State institutions; and ICH activities, spread across the country, must be coordinated. All cultural diversity criteria, significant tradition-bearer participation, civil society and a respect for human rights must all be involved.

After ratifying the Convention, the Jordanian Government established a national ICH committee, headed by the Minister of Culture, and an official agency that will act as the central ICH safeguarding body. Reporting to the Ministry of Culture, this body will handle ICH administration, setting clear assignments and objectives. To launch new programmes under this phase, the Government will appoint a mobile team of experts to organize countrywide workshops devoted to documenting and promoting the intangible cultural heritage. Staff working on the documentation of the intangible cultural legacy will be served by the knowledge and experience of these experts, who will train them in research and information collection methods and raise their awareness of the importance of heritage preservation.

In Jordan, there are many sites collecting documents and both paper and multimedia archives on ICH. They are, however, scattered and not interconnected. To remedy this shortcoming, the authorities intend to set up a specialized ICH library with all requisite financial and human resources.

4. The report outlines the strengths and weaknesses with regard to the objectives of the Convention. Firstly, Jordan has a vast number of heritage resources to the preservation of which the institutions in question would like to contribute to varying degrees. The most important strengths for the implementation of this project include royal directives, government plans, State approval of a significant number of international conventions on culture, interest on the part of civil society, legislative, administrative and institutional reforms to ICH management, the incorporation of heritage issues in public and private higher education, and the role of national media in publicizing and promoting public awareness of ICH safeguarding. Nevertheless, the following obstacles may prove a hindrance: the failure to include ICH preservation in national priorities; the want of a framework programme; the shortage of funds; the lack of qualified staff, clear legislation or a national body devoted to ICH; the dearth of societal awareness of heritage and the limited role played by the media in sensitizing and educating the public to heritage issues.

5. The report shows that the participation of Jordanian citizens in heritage matters is guaranteed by a range of conventions and rules. To build the capacity of civil society, Jordan has strengthened its role by fostering a culture of democracy, human rights, pluralism and diversity. Communities and groups can themselves identify and protect items of their intangible cultural heritage, and thus determine the mechanisms and methods for transmitting ICH to future generations.

6. The report also describes a number of bilateral cooperation projects between Jordan and Arab countries and other countries as well.

7. The case study deals with Jordan's first experience with ICH safeguarding, namely the inclusion of the Cultural Space of the Bedu in Petra and Wadi Rum in the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. The action plan, the project phase of which began in 2007 and concluded in 2008, was designed to protect and develop a "cultural space of the Bedu in Petra and Wadi Rum" based on local initiatives. A number of experts, associations and public and private institutions worked together with tradition bearers to ensure the success of the project.

The case study meets the guidelines set out in the reference document. The item concerns a region and its social and cultural practices under threat of extinction, with a relatively fragile nomadic society up against modernization and its attendant pressures to settle down and adapt to the contemporary way of life. The implemented safeguarding plan is clear. It details

all the procedures adopted and efforts made to promote and support the item, as well as the community's explicit involvement. Nevertheless, the anthropological study is rather too brief and could do with an in-depth analysis of relations between the land, the social structure and the social functions of this region, as well as an examination of current changes. What was needed, in short, was a clear monographic study also presenting, even summarily, the financial resources mobilized for this operation.

8. "Identification of Priorities and Needs" is the most detailed section in the Jordanian report. It clearly identifies the State's specific needs and broad priorities in implementing the Convention. This whole identification has been mentioned above.

This section also sets out the priority measures that need to be taken and a very long list of policy, administrative, structural, functional, political, financial and cultural shortcomings which should be addressed before a solid and consistent basis can be laid for this project. Provided in the report are two lists of items ranked by priority; the first list comprises five items requiring urgent attention, the second lists possible items for safeguarding. Although the selection may be pertinent, such lists require further development justifying the selection and ranking of items. The report nevertheless mentions a number of instructions for compiling a national inventory, particularly guidelines on the selection of items and the criteria for their inclusion in the List based on the Convention's principles.

V. Arab Republic of Egypt

Egypt's history stretches back thousands of years. At the crossroads of Asia and Africa, the Mediterranean West and the Arab-Muslim East, this country has endowed the world with priceless works. Pharaonic, Hellenistic, Christian and Arab-Islamic, Egypt has a rich culture and diverse and varied traditions that are the indelible mark of a strong identity and a relatively stable society, founded on the banks of the Nile. Yet modernization and globalization are bringing about unprecedented changes to Egypt's inestimable tangible and intangible heritage.

1. The Egyptian report endeavours to follow the criteria outlined in the reference document by complying more or less with the objectives of the Convention.

The first section provides a highly interesting description of the institutions and public and private organizations, such as cultural centres, libraries, museums and study centres, involved to varying degrees in ICH safeguarding. The assignments and objectives of many of these establishments are disparate and probably not consistent with the criteria of the Convention. To this end, CULTNAT held a specialized workshop to present the Convention's content and to explain its provisions on the preservation of the intangible heritage. This meeting allowed participants individually to recount their experiences dealing with the intangible heritage and, above all, the financial difficulties that they face in carrying out their assignments and the lack of coordination among organizations. The workshop ended with recommendations on a redefinition and realignment of the various organizations' activities with the objectives of the Convention. This section, while very interesting, lacks detail on the evaluation of the work of each institution or organization.

2. Sections A.1 and A.2, "Institutional capacities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage" and "Legal, technical, administrative and financial capacities and measures available", of the Egyptian report are perfunctory. The report does not identify which reforms were carried out after ratification of the Convention, or whether the Egyptian Government is moving in the right direction, and how. Is legislation in place that meets the requirements of the Convention? Is there an organizational chart for the administration and management of ICH safeguarding? Is there a government agency or a private foundation that will be fully responsible for coordinating ICH issues, and if so, what financial and human resources can it

draw on? Are there institutions offering training in ICH management and transmission of this heritage? Are there qualified personnel within the country to deal with the various aspects of this field? These sections were largely left incomplete.

3. No ICH inventory is mentioned in the report. No organizations or institutions involved submitted a list, with the exception of the Intangible Heritage Department at the Centre for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage, which recommended four items for inclusion, namely the Ramadan lantern, the *arghul* (a bamboo clarinet), the art of *waw* (a type of poetry found in Upper Egypt and the *angareeb* (a bed made of stripped branches on a wooden structure held together with leather). The approach used when collecting information on items likely to be included in the Egyptian national inventory is well described in the report. Nevertheless, a number of methodological shortcomings remain, such as the selection and ranking criteria, the consideration of viability, the absence of an official agency in charge of inventorying ICH, the lack of information regarding the regularity of updates to the list, and how communities will be associated with this investigation.

4. The case study deals with the Ramadan lantern – an item transmitting social practices linked to celebrations for the month of Ramadan. The lantern is produced in a variety of shapes and sizes using glass sheet and coloured tin and lit from within by a candle, or by a light bulb in the case of larger lanterns. The lantern is symbolically associated with the children who follow the lantern bearer through the streets and lanes while singing traditional songs for the occasion. Lanterns are now also being used for decoration and street lighting during the nights of Ramadan. There has, however, been a significant decline in the manufacture of these lanterns because of modernization and, more significantly, because of the “invasion” of less expensive lanterns made in China which, though completely lacking in aesthetic value, tend to be preferred.

The Ramadan lantern case study is handled relatively well. The item falls squarely under the definition of heritage and meets the five criteria outlined in section B.1, the item’s “social and cultural functions”. It would have been preferable to include information regarding the craftworkers, their production methods and the organization of this industry. It would have also been judicious to include some statistics on the decline of the industry in recent decades in order to assess its current viability. Finally, it would have been useful to be presented with the current or future plan for its safeguarding.

Moreover, among all of Egypt’s cultural assets, are there not other more important items whose viability is at risk?

5. No list either of needs or of priorities has been drawn up in response to this point in the assessment. In order to complete the report, it would be desirable to make some proposals.

5.1 Egypt must comply with the UNESCO Convention by introducing legal, technical, administrative and financial priority measures.

5.2 An ICH protection law must be promulgated.

5.3 The introduction of an official, effective safeguarding service under a ministry, with the task of managing and coordinating all activities throughout the territory, is a necessity. A general organizational structure might be clarified, made up of local, public and private committees which would work entirely on ICH management, information and documentation. Experts specializing in various aspects of the heritage and qualified staff should be present in all bodies responsible for ICH protection.

5.4 The participation of civil society individuals and communities concerned by ICH is an obligation under the Convention. Every item of heritage must include bearers of knowledge and traditions.

5.5 A national research and documentation centre on ICH should be established; it would be the centre for information, publication and dissemination of the intangible skills and assets of the heritage.

5.6 A higher institute specializing in training future managers, researchers and experts in the preservation of this heritage should be established.

5.7 A rigorous scientific method must be developed for the future establishment of the ICH inventory and semantic clarification before using concepts.

The following are also required:

5.8 Including training courses in higher education to raise awareness of the safeguarding of ICH.

5.9 Taking into account reflection on ICH in museum activities.

5.10 Broadcasting television and radio programmes on the subject.

5.11 Establishing a substantial national budget to ensure management of this safeguarding.

5.12 Holding regular events to raise society's awareness of its heritage: exhibitions, festivals, and so on.

5.13 Taking into account sustainable development.

5.14 Ensuring equitable representation of ethnic and cultural diversity.

VI. Recommendations

According to the objectives of this initial phase, each of the four countries must learn how to gain knowledge of its intangible cultural heritage; they should also estimate its sociocultural and financial capacities and strengths and weaknesses so as to prepare conditions conducive to the future preservation of ICH as provided for in the Convention. We should recall that the project's purpose is to effectively safeguard items of the heritage with historical, artistic or scientific value and in danger of imminent extinction.

In order to do so, every country should lay the foundations of a national preservation policy, based on a protection programme and methods of action according to a timetable setting objectives over a period of 10 or so years in several intermediary stages.

I. Protection programme

1. Each government should make a clear, strong commitment, together with civil society in its multiplicity and diversity and with individuals and/or groups bearing the cultural feature, to developing this policy by preparing the general framework for it and facilitating the implementation of the UNESCO Convention for the coordination of activities such as detailed surveys in the field and control over all operations contributing to safeguarding.

It is also responsible for:

2. Promulgating effective domestic legislation to protect its ICH, based on laws defending the right and duty of every citizen to take part in such activity, protecting the bearers of knowledge and their successors, supporting bodies working on safeguarding, and determining the selection criteria for the establishment of an objective inventory.

3. Setting up an umbrella organization of all stakeholders or an organizational structure so as to coordinate activities relating to ICH; the designation or establishment of a structure working solely on this task and with the appropriate financial means, possibly under the Ministry of Culture, and managed by trained, competent staff, is a prerequisite in regard to this point.

4. Establishing research and documentation bodies linked to universities, higher institutes, research centres, and so on, responsible for documentation, surveys, analyses, publications and the training of managers in the field of ICH safeguarding. It would be in the context of these bodies that an expert committee might be set up to be involved in drawing up the inventories (see point 2).

5. Setting up a consultation method by creating regional committees and establishing a national multidisciplinary commission of experts to evaluate and monitor the work done in the different regions of the national territory; the national commission will work under the auspices of the Minister of Culture or his/her representative.

6. Establishing or augmenting a national budget for ICH preservation and ensuring its equitable distribution among all the regions whose heritage is in a critical situation. It must be emphasized that the subsidies allocated in this field represent at the moment an insignificant percentage with regard to the considerable work ahead; hence the share allocated to ICH must be included clearly in both the national budget and the regional budgets.

II. Preservation methods and activities

The following are recommended:

1. Drawing up of a national charter setting out selection criteria for ICH items and identifying bearers of technical and artistic skills.

2. Nomination of individuals or groups excelling in the production, creation or performance of an ICH item so as to improve their social status and financial situation through activities to be carried out on a case-by-case basis for the improved transmission and integration of the heritage as a whole in the social fabric.

3. Taking into account in preservation of the relationship between intangible culture and its physical and natural context. For instance, the preservation of a building, neighbourhood, public spaces and natural environments may be a fully-fledged part of a policy for the safeguarding of ICH and sustainable development.

All forms of raising awareness of ICH safeguarding, and in particular:

4. Establishing a national celebration or national day dedicated to ICH.

5. Designing and staging exhibitions, seminars and conferences, screening films on the subject, working to ensure that society realizes the value of its ICH and the need to preserve it.

6. Encouraging scientific research, specialist publications and popularization, and the production of documentary films for television broadcasting, and so on.

VII. Proposals for national and multinational projects

There are undoubtedly many projects to be proposed for these four countries; the list of intangible cultural heritage items in decline or in danger of extinction is long. Modernization and the accompanying mindset are interrupting the traditional means of transmission and shifting social behaviour towards new models. Thus all the registers of traditional oral culture, cultures said to be classical or folk, risk a slow or rapid disappearance if nothing is done in the coming years. Nevertheless, priorities must be determined among the detailed studies to be conducted on the viability of each of the items proposed on the inventory list.

Syrian Arab Republic

Syria has not yet drawn up an inventory but offers an intuitive list that is not without interest and should be defended.

In addition to the seven proposals by the State (the *samāh* dances of Aleppo; stories (*al-hakawātī*); the shadow puppet theatre of *karaköz*; the Damascus *'arada*; the *debkeh* dance; the *qudūd* of Aleppo (*al-qudūd al-halabiyya*), and the production of traditional silk brocade) can be added a whole range of classical musical expressions that are not covered by the curricula in public music schools – the number of high-level performers of these expressions, previously high in Aleppo and Damascus, is dwindling dangerously, and Bedouin songs, mountain songs, the vocal expression associated with the liturgies of various Christian rites, in particular Aramaic, and the songs of the Kurdish, Druze and other minorities.

Music and songs of classical Arab music: *waṣla*, *muwashshah*, *qasida*, *ghazal*, and so on (joint project)

These forms of classical music fall within the scope of *waṣla*, a series of sophisticated songs preceded and interrupted by composed or improvised instrumental sections (*taqsim*). They are accompanied by the *takht*, a group with at most five instrumentalists, and a choir of two or three singers. The singer improvises on classical poems according to an age-old vocal technique enriched by a timeless musical aesthetics and the melismas of sacred singing. The random vocalizing is accompanied by one or more instruments either with no backing rhythm or according to a rhythmic cycle with the backing of a repetitive bass line (*ostinato*).

Among the songs, the most famous are the *muwashshah*, a sung musical form that is quite short, with fixed form, of five or seven stanzas with varying rhymes, which follow each other in a single suite so as to amplify the volume and enrich them. This genre, created in the ninth century in al-Andalus by Ibn Mu'afa al-Qabrī, is one of the most notable Syrian traditions. We should also refer to the *qasida*, a poem with a single rhyme and single metre of two hemistichs of equal length dealing with a single subject developed to a conclusion; the *qasida* is often a panegyric written and sung in praise of the tribe or lauding a powerful individual (it is then called a *madīh*). There is also the *ghazal*, an often courtly love song with a sometimes mystical resonance.

This increasingly neglected element may be found in Syria as well as in Lebanon and Egypt, and I therefore suggest considering a regional cooperation project to cover it.

Bedouin songs (joint project)

These songs are the province of musicians, poets and storytellers, some of them nomads, living in the four countries. They recount the exploits of ancient Bedouin tribes and include several genres:

Long poems sung by a *shā'ir* who improvises rhythm and melody: *'atāba* (the word expresses the idea of a friendly reproach, it is the expression of a pain and grief whose causes remain unknown) and *shurūqī* (this style refers to its region of origin, the steppe (*bādiya*) of eastern Jordan) in which the *shā'ir* accompanies himself on the *rabāb* (a string instrument with a single string bow); *mawwāl* (type of melismatic singing), accompanied by the *derbake* (drum) and by *sahja* (hand-clapping) or *debkeh* (foot-tapping).

Syllabic songs sung a cappella or accompanied by the *rabāb* and related to a given activity: *huda* (songs of horsemen and camel drivers); *hjejni* (songs of camel drivers), and *dahiya* or *sahja* (hand-clapping), *halaba* (refrain) and *samer* (evening conversation) and *debkeh*, the men's dance sometimes sung by women.

Zajal

These poems of Arab-Andalusian origin are performed by folk groups and accompanied by the flute *shabbaba* or *nāy*.

Ughniya

These are series of folk songs accompanied by the *simsimiyya* lyre and performed in cities and by the fishing community of Aqaba. They cover *simsimiyya* repertoires echoing those of the Red Sea and Sinai desert.

Republic of Lebanon

Lebanon offers a provisional list with four themes: tales, legends and myths; knowledge of plants and their uses; skills and customs relating to fishing; traditional crafts skills (cutlery, glass, silk weaving, bell manufacture, weaving, and so on). However, the report provides for further studies before an accurate and objective inventory can be drawn up.

Some other items in danger of extinction may be proposed as of now:

Zajal, public poetic jousting led by four poet-singers under the auspices of a founding master. During the duel, the poets compete with each other to conjure up original poetic images while observing the constraints of the rhyme.

Poetic songs of Mount Lebanon. These songs are based on two main genres, *'atāba* and *mījāna*. There are variations of *'atāba* in Syria, Jordan and Palestine, but in Lebanon it enjoys an exuberance unparalleled elsewhere. The *mījāna* on the other hand is a purely Lebanese tradition. Among the other genres, we should mention the *mu'anna*, the most marked by centuries-old Syriac metre and melody (*mu'anna* means "song" in Syriac) and highly respected by improvisational poets, offering a great variety of forms; *shurūqī*, a traditional Bedouin nostalgic, free and melismatic threnody (Syria and Jordan) performed by a soloist accompanied by the *rabāb*, and the *qarrādi*, a mixture with a Syriac undertone and Arabic influences.

Practices of the whirling dervishes of Tripoli. These dervishes belong to the Qadiriya brotherhood of Tripoli. They claim to follow the teaching of Abed al-Qādir al-Kilānī, like the zaoiyya Qadiriya of Aleppo, but their specific songs and dances are distinctive.

The *debkeh* is the dance that is common to the countryside of all these countries of the Levant. In Lebanon, it is defined by the way the dancers line up in arcs of circles, arms entwined, moving round clockwise, and stamping their feet on the ground. There are several forms of *debkeh* in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, and they differ according to where and why they are performed and who performs them.

Various Christian liturgical songs.

Songs of the various ethnic and religious minorities: Kurds, Druze, and so on.

Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Jordan offers a vast and highly educational provisional inventory. However, a detailed survey of the ICH items mentioned is needed in order to draw up an objective list in accordance with the Convention criteria.

The 14 items selected are:

1. Skills and techniques of traditional Bedouin weaving
2. Traditional Jordanian costume
3. Traditional embroidery
4. Traditional children's games
5. The cultural space of rural life in North Jordan
6. Traditional cuisine
7. Oral heritage and cultural expressions of Circassians and Chechens
8. Cultural space of the Bedouins of north-east Jordan
9. Polyphonic songs of the rural areas in North Jordan
10. Wedding songs
11. Water distributions skills in South Jordan, that is, in Petra and Wadi Musa
12. The profession of amulet healer
13. Peasant songs
14. Traditional dancing.

Arab Republic of Egypt

Egypt is a country of considerable cultural wealth that is endangered and the means required to safeguard it are immense. Establishing a rational method of scientific work to draw up an inventory is essential.

Egypt has not included in its report the ICH items which had actually already been proposed to UNESCO for safeguarding. It is currently proposing four projects that are no less interesting than the dozens of others that have nevertheless been left out. They are the Ramadan lantern, the bamboo clarinet (*al-arghul*), the art of *waw* (type of poetry starting with the conjunction *waw*) and *al-angareeb* (bed made of stripped branches on a wooden structure and attached with leather). A long list can be drawn up, however, of Egyptian cultural traditions in decline.

Al-hakawātī

These are stories told by a storyteller in particular cafés at a specific time of the day or night. The storyteller interacts fully with the audience, who intervene in the telling of the story. The storyteller and the audience are thus both actors in this epic which can go on for weeks, or even months.

Karaköz shadow puppet theatre

This tradition, which appeared in the Arab world in the twelfth century, may already have disappeared. A few years ago, I met one of its last practitioners in Cairo in Hassan Geretly's drama group, al-Warsha. The figurines, in leather or cardboard, were some 20 centimetres high and are supported by stalks stuck horizontally in their joints. They are translucent and painted with natural pigments. This is an emergency project to be organized with neighbouring countries where shadow puppet theatre is in total decline.

Tahtīb stick dance

This traditional practice is difficult to categorize: it is, according to those concerned, a martial art, a dance or a game. It is a group dance and the participants wield sticks: a group of "assailants" attack (with movements more exaggerated than in a real fight) the "attacked", who try in turn to parry, dodge, and land a decisive blow on the adversary. This practice, which takes place in the open air, is accompanied by a group of musicians dominated by the *mizmār* (oboe), generally in groups of three, a kettle-drum known as the *naqrazān* which rests on the player's chest and a *tabla* (chalice-shaped drum). The movements may be preceded or followed by a choreographed dance whose main figure is the *moulinet*.

Music of Nubia

The pentatonic system of these musical expressions has kept them apart from Egyptian musical trends and they are less well known than the artistic traditions of northern Egypt. They often involve drums and lyres accompanying the music and dance performances of Nubian groups. This tradition, which has now been influenced by trends in the renewal of light music singing, is in danger of totally losing its own inspiration, references and identity.

Various lyres (*simsimiyya* and *tanbūra*)

Attested to just about everywhere in Egypt, and in neighbouring countries, they warrant special attention.

Various forms of Islamic Sufi and religious music

Coptic liturgy

Folk music of the Nile

Traditional music of the fishing community

Artistic traditions in the oases of East Egypt

Classical art of the Egyptian renaissance: *dawr*

This was the most important musical form in nineteenth-century Egypt. During the performance, the singer, backed by a choir and an instrumental ensemble, modulates a poetic text either in classical Arabic or in the Egyptian Arabic dialect. The singer is often the author of the poem, which is generally divided into four verses. Musicologists, musicians and music groups outside Egypt are trying to revive this highly sophisticated classical tradition which influenced the greatest Egyptian singers of the twentieth century.

Finally, there is an infinite variety of cultural practices and expression that are dying out in this country and its neighbours. It is essential to identify them, study them and assess their capacity to survive this flood of modernism that devastates identities.