

# INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

## Examples of the implementation of the UNESCO 2003 Convention in selected countries under comparison

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The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted at the UNESCO General Conference in 2003. 161 states are now parties to the convention. In Finland the convention was ratified in May 2013.

The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture has assigned the responsibility for implementing the convention to the National Board of Antiquities, which is currently drafting a model for its execution in Finland. CUPORE – The Finnish Foundation for Cultural Policy Research is collaborating in this work in the context of research. Based on the conducted research and hearing of stakeholder groups, the National Board of Antiquities will draft a proposal in May 2015 for the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture on how the convention will be realized in practice in Finland.

The aim of this comparative study is to provide background information on how the convention has been implemented in different countries. Another objective is to find interesting examples of the elements inscribed on the intangible cultural heritage lists, with the purpose of creating a roadmap for a Finnish model for implementing the convention and fostering intangible cultural heritage more generally as well.

13 European countries were selected for closer study: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, France, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, and Turkey. Two countries were also included from outside Europe: The Republic of Korea and Mexico. The study examined what kind of measures the selected countries have carried out to implement the convention and who the central actors in the process have been.

The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage gives each of the state parties the freedom to discover their own means of responding to its obligations. The comparative study revealed that there is a large amount of variation in how the different countries have interpreted the convention nationally. In most of the studied countries the ministry responsible for culture is in charge of the implementation of the convention. The choice of where the responsibility is assigned undoubtedly influences the emphases in the implementation. The work of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is however always carried out in cooperation among various organizations and citizens.

The study also examines how intangible cultural heritage has been listed in the different countries, with what kind of criteria and to what extent. Here national practices vary to a great extent.

The greatest differences in the practices have to do with whether the lists have been prepared by smaller expert groups or are open, web-based lists made by communities.

UNESCO has three lists connected to the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The proposed candidates are assessed and reviewed by the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage. The degree to which elements have been nominated as candidates or inscribed on the lists has varied in the different countries under study.

The comparative study takes into account various domains of intangible cultural heritage which, according to UNESCO, include e.g. oral tradition; performing arts; social practices; rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship. There is also a chapter on the UNESCO register of best safeguarding practices. The comparative study examines more closely the elements under each category of the UNESCO lists. Attention is paid to what kind of selection criteria have been applied, through what kind of processes the inscriptions have made it to the lists and what kind of communities and interest groups have taken part in the processes. Finally, conclusions are made on what Finland can learn from these examples to facilitate the planning of its own roadmap for intangible cultural heritage.

The study has used the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage website as its central source. Other materials have been derived from the websites of the respective countries, other reports and strategy papers. Part of the information was gathered by email from various instances responsible for intangible cultural heritage in the countries under study.