

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE MANAGEMENT OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF GEORGIA

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Abstract

During the past decades the concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage has been established in Georgia. The state takes care of safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage of Georgia and other peoples on the territory of Georgia, as well as the intangible cultural heritage bearing the Georgian sign beyond Georgia. Georgia acceded to the UNESCO Convention in the early 2008. In 2007-2012 Georgia submitted the nomination “Ancient Georgian traditional Qvevri wine-making method”; the mechanism of registration of elements of intangible cultural heritage was developed and approved; pilot inventories were carried out, etc. For the purpose of identification, inventory, protection, preservation and in some cases restoration of intangible cultural heritage of Georgia it is highly important to establish a decentralized management system and to bring it into compliance with administrative, legislative, managerial, financial, informational, human resources, material-technical resources. In addition to that, it is critical to ensure involvement of state, private and non-governmental structures and local communities; diversification of funding sources; information support at the local, national and international level. Moreover, it is necessary to ensure the protective system of the sector with respective human resources, involvement of the museum network, cultural-educational institutions in the process of searching, recording and restoration of elements of intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords: Georgian, intangible, cultural, heritage

On the basis of analysis of the conducted theoretical and practical work, as well as considering international recommendations, we consider that for full-fledged protection of intangible cultural heritage of Georgia it is required to carry out a number of actions such as: Law “On Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Georgia” and a package of recommendations for making amendments to adjacent laws; State strategy for development of the sector; Long-term program of the sector development; Unified Electronic Registration System of ICH of Georgia; Cooperation with the local communities; Facilitation of scientific-research activity and etc.

The term “Intangible cultural heritage” was established among the international, as well as Georgian political and scientific community only in the early 21st century. Despite this fact, the term quickly gained recognition and the reason for that is undoubtedly the context implied by this term. Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) covers “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage”. The Convention for the Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted by UNESCO in 2003 covers five main areas: oral traditions and expressions; performing arts; social practices; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship. According to the Convention, the state should take care of safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage of Georgia and other peoples on the

territory of Georgia, as well as the intangible cultural heritage bearing the Georgian sign beyond Georgia.

Each member state of the Convention, governs the issues related to safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage on its own, considering its political, economic, cultural-political peculiarities, as well as in accordance with the requirements of the Convention. At the same time, approach to the issue of safeguarding is special in each separate case.

Many countries of the world peculiarly cared about maintaining of traditions and knowledge of people at different stages of development over centuries. Apart from state institutions, public figures, scientists or separate activists were often involved in this activity. From the mid-19th century, this process became more or less normalized. Public figures, social organizations (“Committee for Revival of the Georgian Chant”, “Society for Spreading Literacy among Georgians”, “Philharmonic Society”, “Ethnographic Society” etc.) persistently studied, recorded, taught separate examples and entire directions of intangible cultural heritage and protected them from disappearance and metamorphosis. The information maintained by scarce technical means existing by that time (including wax rims), primarily by description or sketches, later moved to private museum or scientific-research institute archives and depositories and reached us by goal-oriented activities of state institutions from 1940s. However, due to the fragile, sensitive nature of intangible cultural heritage and considering the fact that the law had not protected intangible cultural heritage in the state for many years, many examples have simply disappeared, or scattered or simply undergone transformation.

Despite this fact, intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity (UNESCO, Convention for the Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003).

Currently, 154 countries have acceded to the Convention. Considering the recommendations of the Convention, each of them creates a respective managerial structure, protection mechanism, action plan, information resources and other significant components which facilitate carrying out a goal-oriented policy in the sector; moreover, the Convention allows the member states to define which segment of safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage they should give an advantage to on their own, what and how they should safeguard, as appropriate. For example, in Belgium, the Decree on Protection of National Values is in force; in Bolivia – the Law on protection of centers of traditional medicine; in Peru – the Law on National Languages, Dialects and Intangible Cultural Heritage; in Latvia, Armenia, Ukraine, Moldova and several other countries – the Law “On Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage”. It is noteworthy that the honorary title “Bearer of the Living Thesaurus of Humanity” introduced in the Moldovan law is conferred to a person, family, creative team or social group recognized as a bearer of special heritage, skills by the society or scientific community. Experience of Japan (the first decree was created in 1871 – “Decree on Safeguarding of the Ancient Artifacts and Antiquity”, adoption of legislative acts of 1919, 1929, 1950 and following years was significant), China (Law “On Protection of Cultural Values, 1950, Law on “Intangible Cultural Heritage”, 2003), Vietnam (the Law regulates the full-fledged participation of intangible heritage of a large ethnic group of the state in the economic development of the country), Algeria (Law “On Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage”) and several other countries is different. Administration of the sphere of activity is also different: In Hungary, the Ministry of Intangible Cultural Heritage manages the legislative, managerial, HR activities of the sector (issues decrees, elaborates national programs etc.); 10-year state program of the sector development is carried out in Uzbekistan, Belorussia, Ukraine, some republics of the Russian Federation, and various administrative

units (including scientific institutions, council, agency etc.) are responsible for its implementation.

Georgia acceded to the UNESCO Convention in the early 2008 and it was preconditioned by recognition of the “Georgian Polyphony” in the first list of world masterpieces elaborated by UNESCO in 2001. An amendment was made to the Law “On Cultural Heritage” and explanation of the essence and areas of ICH was included in it in 2007. Later, in 2011-2012, when management of the sector fell within the competence of the National Agency of Cultural Heritage Preservation, the state took more effective steps: the nomination “Ancient Georgian traditional Qvevri wine-making method” was submitted for inclusion in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the mechanism of registration of elements of intangible cultural heritage (state register, registration card form) was developed and approved, pilot inventories (sectoral “Georgian Textile and regional “Ateni Valley”) were carried out, as well as activities which facilitated awareness and involvement of various groups, including scientific, youth, local communities, non-governmental and governmental organizations in recording of the heritage, raising their awareness regarding the problems of the sector. However, considering the peculiarities of intangible cultural heritage, the above activities are not sufficient as social-economic threats, including: inadequacy of state protection mechanisms; globalization process; cultural standardization tendencies; armed conflicts; population migration; lack of human and financial resources; excessive commercialization (including for tourism or other purposes); any kind of artificial interference (including, prohibition, accommodation, placement etc.) and physical threats: termination of continuity of transfer of ICH from generation to generation; lack of protection mechanisms of bearer of ICH; destruction of generic memory of social groups and social environment of ICH, is incomplete list of threats which permanently affect the cultural heritage. Under such circumstances, it is rather important to apply state protection mechanisms in the sector.

The Convention provides recommendations for formation of state protection mechanisms in legislative, administrative, informational, economic and other directions. A long-term state policy for protection of ICH, conducted considering the above recommendations, is the guarantee of its viability.

We consider that for the purpose of identification, inventory, protection, preservation and in some cases restoration of intangible cultural heritage of Georgia, particular significance is attached to formation of decentralized management system and bringing it into compliance with administrative, legislative, managerial, financial, informational, HR, material-technical resources. In this respect, elaboration of national legislation harmonized with legislative acts on the basis of international experience is of primary importance which will comprehensively regulate the protection issues in cooperation with adjacent sectors, including: agriculture, education, local self-governance, copyright, etc.

In the course of formation of flexible management system it is critical to ensure involvement of state, private and non-governmental structures and more importantly, local communities; diversification of funding sources; information support at the local, national and international level. Significant attention should be paid to provision of the protective system of the sector with respective human resources which implies educational, material support of the workers of culture, their teaching, professional development, trainings, master classes, workshops, facilitation of attraction of the youth to the sector.

Apart from cultural-political mechanisms, institutional involvement of the museum network, cultural-educational institutions (library, club, center of culture, center of folklore, etc.) in the process of searching, recording, restoration of elements of ICH is a pressing issue.

By this time, on the basis of analysis of the theoretical and practical work conducted by us, as well as considering international recommendations, we consider that combination of the following successive actions is required for full-fledged protection of intangible cultural heritage of Georgia:

- Law “On Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Georgia” and a package of recommendations for making amendments to adjacent laws; state strategy for development of the sector;
- Long-term program of the sector development;
- Permanent inventory of elements of ICH;
- Unified Electronic Registration System of ICH of Georgia;
- Institutional support of restoration and preservation of outstanding elements by close cooperation with local communities;
- Facilitation of teaching practice to a special bearer of an element of ICH;
- Informational support;
- Facilitation of scientific-research activity;
- Ensuring education and training of personnel in the sector;
- Active cooperation with international organizations.

Conclusion:

Implementation of the above actions is a scheduled process. Decisive significance for timely implementation of reforms is attached to the will of the state, as well as financial resources of the state. Implementation of the Convention will be accelerated and further facilitated by enhancement of cooperation with UNESCO; moreover, new nominations are being developed for nomination for the Representative List of UNESCO: “Georgian Wrestling”, “Georgian Feast”, “Georgian Cuisine”. The process will also become irreversible by implementation of UNESCO “Convention on Cultural Diversity” (2005) if Georgia makes a decision to become a full-fledged member-state of the above Convention.

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