

Safeguarding Programme for Bearers of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Dominican Republic

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Introduction

The knowledge and techniques acquired by the bearers of traditions of the Dominican intangible cultural heritage are in danger of disappearance. This problem is due to multi-causal factors such as the decrease in the number of communities, groups and individuals that create and recreate them, the lack of resources to ensure their sustainability, among others. For this reason, they merit the formulation and implementation of proposals for the identification and protection of elements that they produce.

This serves as a strategy to guarantee its safeguarding, valorization, and promotion, as well as to ensure the systematization of procedures aimed at its implementation. Additionally, it aims to provide financial assistance to its custodians to facilitate the permanent transmission of their knowledge over time. According to the 2020-2024 Government Program:⁵²

Culture also comprises identity, sense of belonging, and is one of the foundations for mutual trust between citizens to build a collective project. Culture is one of the sources of social cohesiveness (...) it is a dimension of development and is part of the social foundation for the progress: but also (...) development and economy are part of the peoples' culture. In this sense, our objective is to change the perspective from assigning culture a purely instrumental role to give it a constructive, constitutive and creative role, so that development policies consider culture and its growth. All this considering as a basic principle respect for all cultures whose values are tolerant with other people, a positive attitude towards different ways of life, which subscribe to the rules of global ethics.

51 Ministry of Culture of the Dominican Republic.

52 General guidelines from the 2020-2024 Change Government Program of the Modern Revolutionary Party. (Version from December 2019). Document for discussion. Version 13.1.

The cultural policies of this Program scope in different areas. Among them are the tangible and intangible heritage, with the following objectives: strengthen an investigative process on new manifestations and for recognition and support to them; incorporate these cultural expressions, in the tourism development plans, and disseminate to the population the knowledge about these cultural expressions.

Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

The Dominican Republic ratified the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006.⁵³ In order to ensure the safeguarding, development and valuation of the intangible cultural heritage in its territory, as a Convention signatory country, it must:

- a) identify and define the various elements of the intangible cultural heritage (...), with the participation of communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations;
- b) take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage (...); adopt a general policy aimed at promoting the function of the intangible cultural heritage in society, and at integrating the safeguarding of such heritage into programs;
- c) ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management; and
- d) foster scientific, technical, and artistic studies, as well as research methodologies, with a view to effective safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage, in particular the intangible cultural heritage in danger.

Background of the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in the Dominican Republic

In the end of the 20th century, the National government and the Presidential Council on Culture from the Dominican Republic held a “Participative Diagnosis on the Cultural Sector 1997-1998”. The event was sponsored by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Cultural Reform Project,⁵⁴ that incorporated the “Human Heritage” category in the national inventory.

⁵³ http://www.unesco.org/eri/la/conventions_by_country.asp?language=S&typeconv=1&contr=DO

⁵⁴ DOM 97/006.

This category was named according to knowledges and abilities from the persons and groups investigated: musicians, poets, writers, photographers, *decimeros* (people who write decimals), artisans, folklorists, masters, scientists, singers, dancers, intellectuals, painters, comedians, sculptors, historians, maestros, guitarists, storytellers, among others, along with manifestations from the intangible cultural heritage categorized as “Oral literature” (stories, prayers, riddles, etc.); “Musical heritage” (traditional dances and parties, religious songs, etc.); and “other cultural manifestations” (peregrinations, funerary rites, traditions and habits, among others).

After this diagnosis, in 2000 the State Department for Culture was created by Law number 41-00. In its article 1, item 2, incorporated for the first time in the definition of the country’s cultural heritage intangible elements and manifestations.

The country’s cultural heritage comprises all tangible and intangible assets, values and cultural symbols that are the expression of the Dominican nation, such as traditions, customs and habits (...) that are material and immaterial, movable and immovable, of special historical, artistic, aesthetic, plastic, (...) linguistic, sound, musical, (...) testimonial, documentary, (...) museographic, anthropological interest and the manifestations, products and representations of the popular culture.

Likewise, Law 41-00 on Article 5 established as a fundamental goal of the institution the “preservation of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the nation as a fundamental element of the national identity.”

Since its creation, the Ministry of Culture from the Dominican Republic (2000) has acknowledged, individually, persons who stand out in different areas of the national cultural work. Including bearers of traditions from the Dominican intangible cultural heritage.

Motivated by the State secretary, in 2006 the National Culture Council approved a proposal for recognition of personalities from Dominican culture.⁵⁵ During this session, the project “Cultural Assets” was presented, proposing placing badges in houses of personalities considered of “Cultural Value”.

Subsequently, a commission was established to develop a regulation with the new profile of declarable individuals, which was approved. Also, the project “Living Human Treasures System” was presented to the Council.⁵⁶

Between 2007 and 2012, the National Culture Council validated and ratified other recognitions that were then granted to different Dominican personalities who stand out in multiple areas of the cultural work.

55 Ministry of Culture. (2014). National Culture Council. Actas de las Sesiones Ordinarias X-XXII. Editora Nacional. Minute of the 12th Ordinary Session from the National Culture Council, held on December 6, 2006, at Sala de Arte Ramón Oviedo, p. 24.

56 Idem, Minute of the 13th Ordinary Session, held on January 31, 2007, p. 31.

In 2008, the deputy secretary of Cultural Diversity and Intangible Heritage from the Dominican Ministry of Culture proposed the creation of a program for protection to bearers of cultural expressions. This project was supported by the State Department of Public Health and the National Housing Institute.⁵⁷ Within the framework of this program, the Culture secretary informed about pensions and retirements of 54 people in “Popular Culture” – among them several *bachata* musicians and an accordionist.

In 2009, the minister of Culture submitted to the National Culture Council a list of personalities that will be recognized in different areas of cultural work with the denominations of “National Glory of...”, “Glory of...” and “Cultural Asset of the Nation”. Among these recognitions a “Master of the Dominican Gastronomic Culture” was included.⁵⁸

Other recognitions with equal denominations were approved by the National Culture Council in 2010. Furthermore, new recognitions were added, such as “great Dominican carnival songwriter” and “great artistic value”.⁵⁹

Last year, the reform to the Dominican Constitution incorporated cultural rights, establishing that: “the cultural heritage of the nation, material and immaterial, is under safeguarding of the State, which will ensure its protection, enrichment, conservation, restoration and valuation” and that the State will:

Establish policies that promote and foster (...) different manifestations and expressions (...) popular to the Dominican culture, as well as foster and support the efforts from individuals, institutions and communities that develop or finance cultural plans and activities;”

Recognize the value of the cultural, individual and collective identity, its importance for the full and sustainable development, the economic growth, innovation and human well-being, through support and promotion of scientific research and cultural production. It will protect the dignity and integrity of culture workers.”⁶⁰

Between 2011 and 2012, three sessions of the National Culture Council approved new recognitions and distinctions with the denominations “Cultural Asset of the Nation”, “National Glory”, “Dominican Cultural Value” and “Glory of...”⁶¹

57 Idem, Minute of the 15th Ordinary Session, held on August 6, 2008, pp. 44-45.

58 Idem, Minute of the 17th Ordinary Session, held on August 12, 2009, p. 81.

59 Idem, Minute of the 18th Ordinary Session, held on January 20, 2010, p. 93.

60 Section III. On cultural and sports rights. Article 64, items 1, 3 and 4.

61 Idem, Minutes of the 19th Ordinary Session, held on January 19, 2011; 20th Ordinary Session, held on August 30, 2011; and 21st Ordinary Session, held on February 21, 2012, pp. 112, 130 and 146, respectively.

Likewise, other Dominican government institutions have granted recognitions and assigned different denominations to prominent Dominican personalities, living and deceased. It also included bearers of elements from the national intangible cultural heritage.

With the objective of ensuring their protection, several cultural elements and manifestations have been declared Dominican intangible cultural heritage, by decision of the National Congress and through a sentence of the Constitutional Court. In this way, the Ministry of Culture was in charge of implementing legislation with the purpose of taking the necessary actions to protect, conserve, safeguard and promote the intangible cultural heritage of the nation. This, through the implementation of general support programs and “participating in the organization and development, together with the organizers, participants, sectors and state entities that intervene in its celebration.”⁶²

None of these declarations followed the guidelines of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage from UNESCO⁶³ accepted by the National Congress through Resolution number 309-06 from 2006.⁶⁴

Previously, UNESCO had incorporated the Cultural Space of the Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit of the Villa Mella (2001) and the Cocolo Dance Drama Tradition (2005), in the list of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. This international distinction was created before the Representative List (LR) established by the 2003 Convention.

In 2006, by Resolution number 309-06, the National Congress accepted the 2003 UNESCO's Convention. In the framework of this new instrument, other elements from the Dominican Republic were included in the Representative List: the Dominican merengue music and dance (2016) and the Dominican bachata music and dance (2019).

Guidelines for creation of the Program for the Safeguarding of Bearers of Elements and/or Manifestations from the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Dominican Republic

UNESCO Member States were recommended to create national systems of “Living Human Treasures,” through the guidelines established by this program.⁶⁵ For this purpose, the definition and implementation of legal or administrative provisions had to be considered, with the aim of ensuring the safeguarding of the elements of intangible cultural heritage in all its stages. In this sense, the following themes were suggested in the creation of the new programs:

62 Law number 526-14 that declares the Cocolo Dance Drama Tradition. Art. 3. Responsibilities from the Ministry of Culture.

63 Approved by Resolution number 309-06 from the National Congress and promulgated on July 17, 2006.

64 Official Gazette issue 10372 from July 17, 2006.

65 Guidelines for the establishment of national “Living Human Treasures” systems on <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/00031-ES.pdf>

- 1.1 Legal framework.
- 1.2 Areas of the intangible cultural heritage to safeguard.
- 1.3 Administrative organization.
- 1.4 Criteria and procedures for selection of bearers.
- 1.5 Rights and obligations of bearers.
- 1.6 Measures for the safeguarding of elements.
- 1.7 Other possible measures.

Equally, this program highlighted the importance of these provisions. Emphasizing that they must have the active participation and consultation of the communities, groups and individuals who bear the traditions. Through the execution, representation or reproduction of the elements of exceptional value that they produce and that are considered as relevant and significant for their bearers and for the communities they represent.

The specific objectives of the program aim to:

- a) The definition of the procedures and criteria for public recognition of people and groups with knowledge and practices about certain elements of the Dominican intangible cultural heritage:
- b) The safeguarding knowledge and significant practices of the manifestations of the Dominican intangible cultural heritage;
- c) The implementation of permanent assistance for the sustainability of recognized bearers of elements from the Dominican intangible cultural heritage; and The creation of strategic alliances with other public and private institutions for the safeguarding of manifestations from the Dominican intangible cultural heritage and for recognition of their bearers.

The areas of Dominican intangible cultural heritage to be safeguarded are the knowledge and practices of people or groups that bear manifestations of intangible cultural heritage. These areas are in accordance with what was established in the UNESCO 2003 Convention.

The Intangible Cultural Heritage Commission will be chaired by the Vice Ministry of Cultural Heritage. It will invite and convene the members of the Commission to meetings deemed necessary in order to select the individuals, groups and communities to be recognized. Among its functions, the Commission must review and approve the regulations for the implementation of the program and periodically monitor the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage incorporated into the system.

References

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