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Intangible Heritage and Local Development the Case of the Casbah of Algiers

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Abstract

Intangible heritage occupies a central place in society as a witness to the traditions and customs handed down by previous generations. Beyond its cultural dimension, it is an essential means of reinforcing a sense of belonging, sustaining human creativity and revitalizing socio-cultural groups. However, its importance is not limited to simply passing it on to future generations. This heritage also plays a fundamental role in the sustainable development of the tourism sector and, consequently, the national economy. It is therefore imperative to explore innovative strategies to enhance this heritage while preserving the cultural integrity of communities. The Casbah of Algiers was chosen as an exemplary case study. In-depth surveys were carried out with visitors, cultural associations and tourism agencies. In addition, we adopted an economic analysis methodology known as the "contingent valuation method", which enabled us to assess the economic value of the intangible heritage of the Casbah of Algiers. Based on these results, we are able to propose strategic recommendations for intensifying the conservation of intangible cultural heritage and encouraging sustainable tourism. These recommendations could include awareness-raising actions, training initiatives, collaboration with local stakeholders and targeted marketing campaigns. By promoting intangible heritage, we foster economic prosperity while preserving the unique cultural identity of the Casbah of Algiers.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage; Local development; Contingent valuation method; Evaluation.

1. Introduction

The growing importance of intangible heritage in academic and political discourse has asserted itself over the decades, recognizing its indispensable role in preserving cultural diversity and renewing traditions (Smith, A. 2009). International legal frameworks, such as the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage [Giliberto, F., & Labadi, S. 2022]. have catalyzed a paradigm shift, highlighting the need for an integrated approach that values these living traditions as essential components of cultural identity (Johnson, 2020). This article looks at the dynamic between intangible heritage and economic development, exploring how cities can harmonize the conservation of their cultural heritage with the imperatives of sustainable tourism (Giliberto, F., & Labadi, S. 2022; Amen, 2021; Amen et al., 2023; Sansen et al., 2021; Ülker et al., 2021; Yilmaz, 2021), Through a rigorous methodology involving surveys of key stakeholders and the application of the contingent valuation method (Meissner, M. 2021), this research assesses the economic value of intangible heritage, using the Casbah of Algiers as a case study. Preliminary results reveal a significant economic impact, highlighting the strategic importance of preserving intangible heritage in the current economic context (Fernandez, A. 2022), Based on these findings, the article proposes recommendations for developing effective preservation policies and tourism development strategies that respect and value cultural wealth (UNESCO.2003).

Legislative framework

1.1 International conventions: Recognition of intangible cultural heritage emerged recently with the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 2003 (ICCCROM 2022). This convention defines cultural heritage by focusing on its intangible dimension, i.e. the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and know-how that communities, groups and, where applicable, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. The main objectives of this convention are :

- Ensure the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, respecting the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned.
- Raise local, national and international awareness of the importance of intangible cultural heritage and its reciprocity.
- Encourage international cooperation and assistance for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

The Faro Convention, adopted in 2005 by the Council of Europe, (Missoum, S. 2003.), has also contributed to the recognition of intangible cultural heritage, defining it as "a set of resources inherited from the past which communities today consider to be the trace and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions". This convention underlines the importance of active participation by communities and groups, as well as the question of the economic viability of intangible cultural heritage.

The Nara Declaration, adopted from October 19 to 23, 2004, played a key role in the recognition and preservation of intangible cultural heritage. This document emphasized several key elements (Gould, P. G. 2020):

-Harmonization of definitions and terminologies: It was important to unify the understanding and use of concepts related to cultural heritage, whether tangible or intangible, in order to facilitate exchanges and collaboration between experts in the field. (Gould, P. G. 2020)), :

-The interconnection between tangible and intangible heritage: The declaration stressed that these two aspects of cultural heritage are intimately linked within communities and groups, and that it is essential to understand them in an integrated way. :

-The need for coherent, integrated approaches: To effectively preserve cultural heritage in all its complexity, it is necessary to develop strategies that take into account the interdependence and specificities of tangible and intangible elements.:

-The importance of community participation: The declaration emphasized the need to actively involve heritage-holding communities and groups in the preservation process. This ensures respect for cultural integrity and the economic viability of these practices.

This important text has provided an essential conceptual and operational framework to guide efforts to safeguard the world's intangible cultural heritage.

1.2. Intangible heritage in Algeria : Algerian Law 98-04

Algerian law no. 98-04 of June 15, 1998 on the protection of cultural heritage was a major turning point in the recognition and promotion of intangible cultural heritage in Algeria. This law made it possible to take important steps towards the preservation and transmission of this ancestral heritage, which bears witness to the age-old traditions and know-how of the Algerian nation. First and foremost, the law recognizes intangible cultural assets as an integral part of the nation's cultural heritage. This has given a legal basis and legitimacy to these heritage elements, which were often previously ignored or underestimated. The definition of intangible cultural assets as "the products of social manifestations and individual and collective creations expressed since time immemorial" has contributed to a better understanding of their singular nature and their deep roots in Algerian cultural identity. (Algeria.law 98)

The law also provides for the establishment of a general inventory of cultural property, including intangible heritage. This essential tool makes it possible to identify, document and promote this heritage, which has all too often remained in the shadows. Finally, measures have been taken for the scientific publication and dissemination of knowledge relating to intangible cultural heritage, thus promoting its understanding and transmission to future generations.

Categories of intangible heritage :

In Algeria, intangible cultural heritage is classified according to the following categories:

Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity :

- L'Ahellil du Gourara: social practices, rituals and festive events in the Adrar region (inscribed in 2008)
- The rites and crafts associated with the Tlemcen bridal costume tradition: traditional crafts (inscribed in 2012).
- -The annual pilgrimage to the mausoleum of Sidi 'Abd el-Qader Ben Mohammed known as "Sidi Cheikh": social practices, rituals and festive events at El Abiodh Sidi Cheikh (registered in 2013).
- Imzad-related practices and knowledge of Touareg communities in Algeria, Mali and Niger (element shared with Mali and Niger, registered in 2013).
- Sebeïba ritual and ceremonies in the Djanet oasis, Algeria: social practices, rituals and festive events in Djanet (registered in 2014).
- The sbuâ, annual pilgrimage to the Sidi El Hadj Belkacem zawiya, Gourara: social practices, rituals and festive events in Adrar (registered in 2015).
- Knowledge, know-how and practices related to the production and consumption of couscous (shared with Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia, registered in 2020).
- Arabic calligraphy: knowledge, skills and practices (shared with several countries, registered in 2021).
- Rai, popular Algerian song: performing arts (registered in 2022).
- Arts, skills and practices associated with metal engraving (gold, silver and copper) (shared with several countries, inscribed in 2023).
- The knowledge and skills of the water measurers of the foggaras or aiguadiers of Touat-Tidikelt (registered in 2018).

2. Case study: casbah of Algiers:

The casbah of Algiers, the historic and emblematic heart of the Algerian capital, occupies a central and strategic position. Nestled in the south-western part of the Bay of Algiers, on the eminence of the Bouzerriah hill, it is bordered by Bâb El Oued to the north, Isly (the center of Algiers) to the south, El Biar (and more precisely Oued Kouraich) to the west, and opens onto the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea to the east. Built on a 118-metre slope, the Casbah takes its name from the fortress that dominates it. Historically, the term "Casbah" referred to the fortified summit of the medina in Zirid times, surrounded by protective walls.



Figure 1 .View of the city of Algiers by Charles Rumker (1788 - 1862), source: <https://www.gettyimages.fr/>



Figure 2.. Drawing of the medina of Algiers by a Spanish captive in 1563 Source:-Sakina Missoum Page 23)

2.1. Artisans in Algiers during the Ottoman period:

According to Aicha Ghetta's study "Les métiers et les artisans de la ville d'Alger", Algiers had 61 artisans. (Missoum, S. (2003)

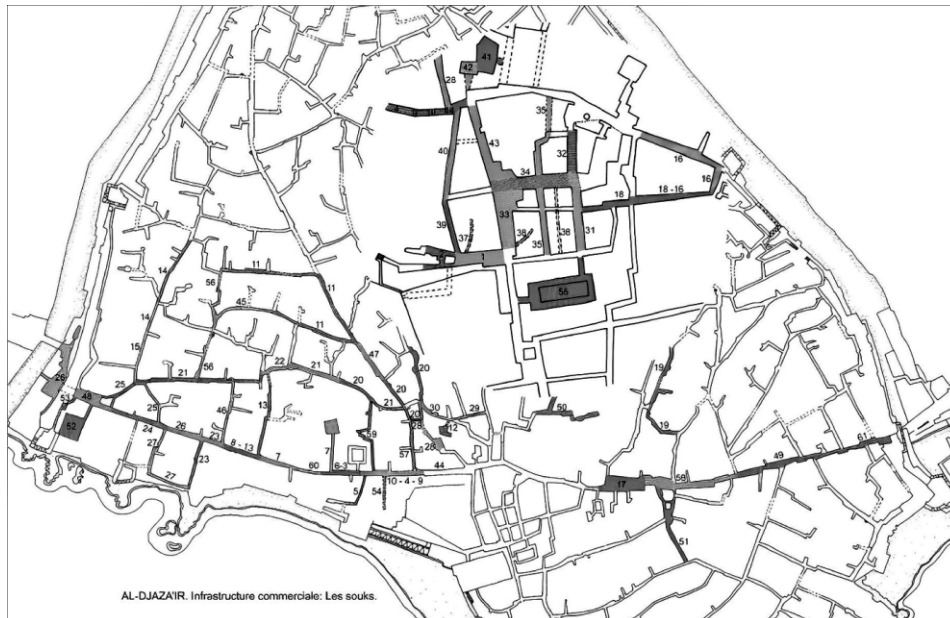


Figure 3 . Map showing the commercial infrastructure during the Ottoman period: the souks Source: Algiers, Ottoman period by Sakina Missoum



Figure 4. Distribution of craft activities and know-how. Source: PPSMVA

2.2. Artisans during Colonial period:

The first phase of colonization led to major destruction in the lower Kasbah, including the demolition of several markets surrounding Algiers' historic mosques to make way for the Place du Gouvernement, also known as Place d'Armes. Socio-economic changes have profoundly altered the urban structure of Algiers. The decline of the craft industry led to the disappearance of the phenomenon of specialization that characterized the city.

2.3. Current state of the Kasbah's intangible heritage: know-how and craftsmanship

The majority of craftsmen still working are concentrated in the upper part of the Casbah, notably in the Rue Sidi Driss Hamidouche and near the Sidi Ramdane mosque. These are prime locations, as the buildings are relatively well preserved and the alleyways offer greater security. The population of artisans in Algiers has declined considerably. This downward trend can be explained by changing lifestyles, where industrialization and urbanization have made traditional craft skills less relevant in the face of mass-produced goods. In addition, the intergenerational transmission of craft skills has been interrupted, as younger generations have turned away from these trades. Craft products have also suffered from economic competition with cheaper mass-produced goods, which has reduced demand for artisan creations. Independent craftsmen faced economic fragility, with unstable incomes due to seasonal demand and general economic instability. Finally, the lack of government support and adequate infrastructure have contributed to the weakening of traditional crafts, jeopardizing a key element of Algiers' cultural heritage.

3. Economic valuation of intangible cultural heritage:

The economic valuation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is a complex process that seeks to quantify not only the financial but also the social and cultural value of practices and traditions that are not tangible. This valuation can include aspects such as the income generated by cultural tourism, performing arts, crafts, and the creative industries that draw on ICH valuation methods can vary, but they tend to include (Gould, P. G. 2020)

- Direct income valuation (ICCRUM. (2022)) : Measurement of the financial flows generated by ICH-related activities, such as festivals, craft markets, and performances.
- Contingent valuation: Estimation of the value individuals attribute to ICH in terms of their willingness to pay for its preservation or their willingness to accept compensation for its loss

- Cost-benefit analysis (Merciu, F.-C., Petrișor, A.-I., & Merciu, G.-L. 2021) : Comparison of the costs of preserving ICH with the expected benefits, including indirect economic advantages such as tourist attraction and strengthened cultural identity.

- Economic impact analysis: Study of the multiplier effect of ICH on the local economy, taking into account job creation and the stimulation of local businesses. However, it is important to note that the economic evaluation of ICH should not be limited to monetary measures. ICH also contributes to social cohesion, education and cultural diversity, aspects which have an intrinsic value that is difficult to quantify but essential to the well-being of communities.

3.1. Choice of method (contingent valuation method):

The assessment of the economic value attributed to the intangible cultural heritage of the Kasbah of Algiers was based on users' willingness to pay for access to its services. The study explored the emotional bond of the Casbah's inhabitants with their intangible heritage and confirmed their willingness to contribute financially to its improvement. Survey participants were asked to express their willingness to pay defined amounts, including 500 DA, 1000 DA, 1500 DA, 2000 DA and 2500 DA, reflecting their economic preferences for heritage preservation. Another proposed formula for enhancing the intangible heritage of the Casbah concerned their willingness to carry out voluntary work, underlining a participatory, community-based approach to heritage preservation (Merciu, F.-C., Petrișor, A.-I., & Merciu, G.-L. 2021) .

4. Results:

1. Interestingly, the majority of respondents (53.1%) are under the age of 25. A further 34.4% are in the 26-35 age bracket, and 10.9% are between 36 and 45. These figures show that the Kasbah of Algiers is of particular interest to young people, with the majority of visitors under the age of 25. This may indicate that this historical and cultural heritage is becoming more attractive to younger generations, which is a positive trend for its preservation and enhancement.

2. The results indicate that the vast majority of respondents (74.2%) are very concerned about the development of the intangible heritage of the Kasbah of Algiers. A further 24.2% were somewhat concerned, while only 3.9% were not really concerned. These figures reflect a high level of interest and concern among visitors regarding the preservation and promotion of the intangible heritage of the Casbah of Algiers. This awareness of the importance of cultural heritage and its role in preserving the Casbah's identity and memory is encouraging for its long-term survival. Remarkably, the vast majority of respondents (96.9%) agreed to contribute to the enhancement of the intangible heritage of the Casbah of Algiers. Only a small percentage (3.9%) refused to contribute.

3. The results show that 62.5% of respondents agreed to contribute in the form of voluntary work for a period of 5 years, while 55% agreed to contribute financially to a specific serious fund. Interestingly, the percentages are fairly close, indicating that many visitors are willing to contribute in different ways to the preservation and promotion of the intangible heritage of the Kasbah of Algiers.

4. The responses indicate a variety of amounts to which respondents would be prepared to contribute annually on an individual basis for the enhancement of the intangible heritage of the Kasbah of Algiers:

- 27% would be prepared to pay the sum of 2,500 DA per year.
- 23% would be prepared to pay the sum of 500 DA per year.
- 19% would be prepared to pay the sum of 2,000 DA per year.
- 18% would be prepared to pay the sum of 1,000 DA per year.
- 8% would be prepared to pay the sum of 1,500 DA per year.

In addition, it is interesting to note that some people indicated higher amounts, particularly in the "other" category. For example, some people would be prepared to give up to 10,000 DA a year, one person 20,000 DA, another 1,000,000 DA. These data show a diversity of potential financial commitments, suggesting that visitors have varying financial resources and willingness to contribute to the preservation of the intangible heritage of the Kasbah of Algiers.

5. Motivations for contributing to the enhancement of the intangible heritage of the Kasbah of Algiers

Respondents' answers highlight several reasons why they would be willing to pay for the enhancement of the intangible heritage of the Casbah of Algiers:

- Commitment to Preservation: 85.2% answered that the main reason was that the heritage should be enhanced, underlining their commitment to the preservation of this cultural heritage.

- Passing on to Future Generations: 29.6% said they would do so so that others could enjoy it in the future, showing their concern for passing on this heritage to future generations.

- Desire to visit in the future: 24.1% said they would do so in order to be able to visit these monuments in the future, underlining their desire to preserve access to these sites.

Financial contribution and voluntary work

By adopting an average willingness-to-pay (WTP) as the amount of contribution to the enhancement of the cultural heritage of the Kasbah of Algiers, the public authorities should collect 985,500 DA as financial contribution and a sum of 2,032,050 DA as an estimate of the monetary value of volunteer days over a five-year period.

The study reveals that a majority of visitors to the Casbah and Algiers residents are willing to participate in heritage enhancement. Whatever the amount proposed, this willingness offers a significant indication in the context of the decision-making process. However, it should be noted that a minority have declined to contribute, arguing that the responsibility for preserving intangible heritage lies with the State and that they do not consider themselves directly involved.

5. Recommendations :

to ensure the preservation and enhancement of Algeria's intangible cultural heritage, the following recommendations are essential:

-Identify and protect historic craft districts:

Work with local authorities and heritage experts to identify and safeguard historic craft quarters. These districts play an essential role in maintaining the traditional presence of artisans.

Document the specific crafts associated with each district through in-depth historical studies. Understanding their unique characteristics is essential to preservation efforts.

-Consult with active artisans and elders:

Gather testimonials from active artisans and elders. Their knowledge of ancestral practices and the location of former workshops is invaluable to heritage documentation.

Draw on their knowledge to identify hidden gems and lesser-known aspects of intangible heritage.

-Rehabilitate artisan stores:

Respect the original architecture of craft stores while modernizing them to meet contemporary needs.

Transform these stores into exhibition spaces where visitors can watch artisans at work and buy craft products.

-Financial support and collaboration:

Seek financial support for the renovation of artisan stores. Public funding and collaboration with cultural or international organizations can facilitate this process.

Encourage public-private partnerships to ensure sustainable funding.

-Integrate new generations and strengthen community ties:

Set up training programs for young people, encouraging them to learn and perpetuate traditional crafts.

Create craftsmen's cooperatives or associations to facilitate the transfer of knowledge between generations.

Organize cultural events that raise awareness of craft heritage and encourage community participation.

-Economic revitalization and heritage preservation:

Reopen and revitalize craft stores to create jobs and attract visitors. Economic benefits contribute to heritage preservation.

Preserve traditional craft skills as part of safeguarding intangible heritage.

Conclusion:

In the second half of the twentieth century, the substantial decline in the artisan population has been attributed to a multiplicity of factors: the advent of industrialization and urbanization led to a relative obsolescence of traditional craft skills, confronted by the predominance of mass production; the erosion of new generations' interest in craft trades interrupted the age-old transmission of know-how; competition from low-cost, rapidly manufactured products has undermined demand for handicrafts; independent craftsmen have suffered the financial repercussions of seasonality and economic instability; and finally, insufficient institutional support and infrastructure have frequently compromised the sustainability of traditional crafts.

Against this backdrop, the Casbah of Algiers, a repository of ancestral traditions and know-how, is emerging as a pillar of intangible cultural heritage whose enhancement is imperative to the region's economic and social dynamism. The regeneration of these endogenous cultural expressions represents not only a mechanism for preserving local identity, but also a catalyst for economic stimulation and strengthening community cohesion. Protecting and enhancing this heritage requires the adoption of a holistic and collaborative strategy, involving synergy between local authorities, experts in the field and civil society players. Such a collective and integrated approach is essential to ensure the sustainable and inclusive development of the Casbah of Algiers.

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