

## Urgent Inventory & Documentation of the elements of the ICH of Alexandria

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### Abstract

Science and technology have brought many undiscovered frontiers into cultural heritage, such as time-consuming, gaining sustainable documentation, introducing the heritage through multiple interpretation methods, and data accessibility. That reflects the saving of cultural heritage especially for the living heritage. Documentation is important to safeguard the heritage among its practitioners. This paper explains the process that has been conducted to preserve and document 51 Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) elements in Alexandria, through inventorying and monitoring systems by using technology. These efforts are a result of the collaborative iHERITAGE project Research Agreement between the Raquda Foundation for Art and Heritage and the Confederation of Egyptian European Business Associations (CEEBA). The iHERITAGE project is co-financed by the European Union under the European Neighbourhood Instrument cross-border cooperation program "Mediterranean Sea Basin" 2014-2020 (ENI CBC MED).

**Keywords:** Inventorying; Monitoring; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Documentation; Alexandria.

## Disclaimer

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The iHERITAGE project is a strategic initiative, 90% co-financed by the ENI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme of the European Union, with a total budget of €3,874,287.06. It has been recognized as one of the most strategically important projects among 198 proposals in the Mediterranean basin. iHERITAGE aims to support the creative industry and innovative startups in six Mediterranean countries, including Egypt, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Portugal, and Spain. This support involved funding to create new augmented and virtual content in the leading sectors of culture and tourism, as well as engagement with local communities through the Living Labs Program. The project spans 37 months, from September 2020 to November 2023.

The 2014-2020 ENI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme is a multilateral Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) initiative funded by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). The Programme objective is to foster fair, equitable and sustainable economic, social and territorial development, which may advance cross-border integration and valorise participating countries' territories and values. The Managing Authority (MA) is the Autonomous Region of Sardinia (Italy). Official Programme languages are Arabic, English and French. For more information, please visit: [www.enicbcmed.eu](http://www.enicbcmed.eu)

*The European Union is made up of 27 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of 50 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.*



## Introduction

Alexandria has a rich living heritage because of its coastal location, cosmopolitan culture, and intellectual pluralism, where many diverse communities from the Mediterranean basin came to, settled, and inhabited it, and then each community left an imprint of its customs and traditions that are still practiced today. Thus, it is a symbol of intellectual pluralism and cosmopolitanism. However, for many and varied reasons, some of these elements are threatened with extinction and need urgent preservation, documentation, and safeguarding. One of the most important goals of the Raquda Foundation is to preserve and safeguard the intangible cultural heritage. The Raquda Foundation is working on documenting the ICH elements and developing them in a way that serves the communities sustainably. The five domains of intangible cultural heritage can be found in Alexandria, in the areas of El-Manshia, Moharam Bek, Bahry, and El-Max. These domains include oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices including rituals and festive events, knowledge, and traditional craftsmanship according to the UNESCO Convention of 2003 which defines the ICH as:

*“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. This 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”* (Akyol, n.d.)

The project gained the results from academic research (El Desouky et al., 2022) and inventory which had been achieved through interviews with the local communities, photography, and interpretation.

## Objectives

- Monitoring and inventorying 51 ICH elements of Alexandria.
- Documenting these elements in writing, geography, and photographs.
- Using technology in monitoring, inventory, and documentation.
- Urgent safeguarding of endangered intangible cultural heritage elements.
- Participation and cooperation in the documentation and safeguarding of ICH.
- Presenting the ICH of Alexandria in a way that demonstrates its value as a cosmopolitan city.

## Methodology

- Designing inventory and interview forms.
- Studying the urban planning of the ICH elements in their heritage incubators.
- Using technology in documentation, such as digital inventorying and archives.
- photographing the ICH elements.
- Risk Identification for the ICH elements.
- Assessment system as quality control for the documentation processes and results.

The documented elements are recorded, translated, and analyzed by a team of surveyors, archivists, and researchers. The visual documentation was achieved by capturing different photos of the elements, the practicing ways, and the traditions of the local communities, after obtaining approvals from local communities transparently and clearly.



*Figure 1 Fieldwork of inventorying and monitoring.*

## Documentation of the elements of the ICH of Alexandria

The fieldwork was implemented by monitoring and inventorying; monitoring in general the intangible cultural heritage geographically in the areas of El-Manshia, Moharam Bek, Bahry, and El-Max, helps in setting a time plan for documenting the elements, as some of them are practiced on a seasonal basis and others daily, then the inventorying which adopted a qualitative approach in which open-ended interviews were conducted. Interviews were conducted with diverse craftsmen and individuals concerned with intangible cultural heritage of Alexandria (El Desouky et al., 2022).



*Figure 2 recording the interviews.*

## Results and Discussion

Working on documenting intangible cultural heritage showed a lot of challenges. The biggest challenge was the lack of sources that could be used as a reference in getting accurate information and in diverse cases, the ICH is preserved among the old generation. For example, there is not any published paper, research, or articles documenting the Alexandria Window Biscuits “Kahk Shababek” despite its fame among Alexandrians. Another problem is that although ICH in Alexandria is influenced by the Mediterranean communities that lived in Alexandria such as Greek and Italian communities not all of this heritage is documented (Abdelnaby, 2017) such as the traditional craftsmanship of Rubabikia sellers, originating from "Roba Vecchia," meaning "old stuff" in the Italian language.

## Documentation of the elements of the ICH of Alexandria

Moreover, Alexandrian cultural heritage faced the problem of lack of knowledge of the importance of documentation, inventory, monitoring, interviewing, and recordings among the local communities which led to the refusal of some of the practitioners of documenting some of ICH elements to conduct interviews. This needs a long process to build bridges with the communities before conducting the official inventorying.

Also, bad weather conditions, especially during winter and the beginning of the spring, resulted in the inability to perform inventorying, monitoring, and photographing processes within the planned timeline. In addition, some of the inventorying have to take place during the daylight to document the morning activities.

Another issue is the seasonality of the performance of some ICH elements like the celebration of New Year which is still influenced by the Greek attributes of breaking pots, but it is practiced only at the end of the year, which is not in line with the project's work map (El Desouky et al., 2022).

To overcome these challenges, the team of surveyors needed to spend more time and effort, varying the inventorying times between daylight and evening to document the diverse practices and crafts.

Also, one of the solutions was to communicate with different institutions to read their archives to obtain confirmed information, which was fundamental for the academic research aspect.

Translators in that project played an important role in reviewing the translated forms, especially with the existence of many words associated with the practice of the ICH element but do not have a literal translation in dictionaries such as the names of tools used in the crafting, or the daily words used among Alexandrian people. To document the 51 ICH elements, it was required to cooperate with the local community and share awareness among them about their role in preserving their heritage.



*Figure 3 archiving and translating.*

After the completion of the inventory, monitoring, and documentation of the elements of intangible heritage representing Alexandria City the following elements had been documented; fishing by boat with its different sizes as a traditional craft; the craft of boat repairing which is local craftsmanship; the craft of drowning on boats which needs special skills, and differs from the drawer to another and from area to another; the craft of fishing by netting; the fishing with rode; the crab fishing; fishing and selling gear, the practice of fishing and selling Ritsa (Urchin); the practice of collecting and selling Umm El-Khulul (Arca Noae); the practice of selling fish at morning auctions; the craft of transporting fishes with wooden crates; the practice of celebrating El-Sebou (one week newborn) which is a local practice that had roots from Ancient Egyptian era as it curved on the walls of the temples; celebrating of Prophet Mohamed's birthday (Elmowled El-Nabawy) by distributing banana sherbet to passersby on the streets (El Desouky et al., 2022); the celebration of Alexandrian wedding (El-Zaffa); the birthday (El-Mawled) of El-Morsy Abu

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Albbas; The new year celebration(2010, أمل) ; the practice and craft of Alexandria grocery shops; ; the craft of cooking the Alexandria beans; the craft of Higazia biscuits which is a traditional dessert related only to Alexandria; the craft of manufacturing and selling of Fresca waffles as traditional sweet snacks sold on beaches; the craft of making and selling Shbabek (window cake); the practice of cooking eating the Alexandrian Kochari ( yellow kochari); the craft of Alexandria sausage manufacturing; the craft of cooking the liver in the Alexandrian way., the practice of making Pastrami craft; The Alexandrian Falafel; the Alexandrian bread with meat; the craft of cooking Shakshuka; the craft of making Hot oil pie; the practice of liquorice selling; selling sweet potatoes with wooden carts; the craft of manufacturing gold veneer (Gelding metal); the craftsmanship of making the wooden crates; the craft is stagecoaches industry; the metal forming craft; the selling and cutting wood industry; the cooper smelting craft; the oil and soap industry; the cotton upholstery before wedding as practice concerned with nature; Rubabikia seller which is affected by the Italian heritage; riding a stagecoach by the sea(1991, سونيا) ; Alexandria tramway lines; the practice of Racket game; the practice of Cornish marathon in the morning; the practice of washing the floors of houses with salty water to avoid the bad eye; Alexandria literature and philosophy; the superstitions of the old city at the Nabi Daniel street; the legend of the creation of Alexandria(2007, منير) ; the legend of the mermaid.



Figure 4 net repairing.



## Conclusion

Alexandria has a rich intangible cultural heritage considering it is a coastal city. In addition to the diversity of local heritage and its crafts. While some other intangible heritage stems from being a cosmopolitan city. Through observations and inventories, several ICH elements are found to be at risk because of a lack of community practice, a decrease in the number of practitioners, or the high cost of tools to practice whose practitioners have significantly decreased due to the difficulty of providing tools and the hardship of this profession.

Working on documenting the intangible cultural heritage by conducting a inventorying system is one of the most challenging tasks because it is related to dealing with people from diverse cultures and perspectives. To gain a complete understanding of the documentation process and methods used in this paper the process contains 4 main stages, preparation of work, on-site work for inventorying and monitoring, and office work for academic research.

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