

Swedish implementation of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2011 - 2017

Background

UNESCO conventions are elaborated in collaboration between Member States and experts and reflect areas where there is need for global agreements on concepts and priorities. They are adopted by UNESCO's highest decision-making body the General Conference.

A UNESCO Member State which ratifies a convention becomes a Signature State bound to implement the convention through national legislation. Each Signature State reports, on average every five years, to UNESCO on their implementation of the convention. Sweden delivered its first implementation report on the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage to UNESCO in November 2017. For each convention a committee is set up with Signature States who follow the implementation of the convention.

Summary

The Institute for Language and Folklore (ILF) is a Swedish government agency financed by the Ministry of Culture with focus on dialects, language policy, language planning, names and folklore. ILF coordinates Swedish implementation of the Convention. (www.sprakochfolkminnen.se).

ILF has set up 'nodes' for the areas of the Convention where each node has a central agency and representatives of several non-governmental organizations plus a central steering group for the follow-up.

An inventory of intangible cultural heritage in Sweden was launched in September 2015. The general structure of the inventory relates to the domains as defined by the Convention. Non-profit associations, private individuals and institutions can submit a proposal for the inventory but representatives of commercial interests and political organizations cannot.

Two Swedish NGO:s are accredited to the Convention; one for music and one for story-telling.

In 2011 a national strategy was adopted for digitization, digital preservation and making cultural heritage material and information digitally accessible with a national coordination secretariat. Representatives from archives, libraries, museums and the heritage management sector take part in that work

In May 2017 the Swedish Parliament passed the Bill Kulturarvspolitik (prop.2016/17:116) where the Swedish government took a holistic approach to the cultural heritage sphere, making it – for the first time - a separate policy field. Through the Bill a new state grant of at least 8 MSEK annually is established for non-profit cultural projects with the aim to stimulate participation in cultural heritage work.

Swedish framework for the Convention

Swedish administration is decentralized so state obligations are implemented by state agencies located outside of the Government Offices but centrally financed. Therefore, the

respective Swedish Ministries are relatively small and each Ministry has a number of state agencies for the implementation.

Sweden ratified this UNESCO Convention in January 2011 and since then the Institute for Language and Folklore has an assignment from the Swedish government to be the coordinating state agency responsible for its implementation.

The Institute for Language and Folklore is a Swedish government agency with focus on dialects, language policy, language planning, names and folklore. The Institute conducts research, gives lectures, provides advice, and produces a range of publications. (www.sprakochfolkminnen.se)

For the implementation of this Convention the Institute has developed an organization with a central coordinating authority and a range of stakeholders in four “nodes” (oral traditions and rituals; handicraft; music and performances; and nature). The node authorities are the centrally responsible actors. Each have its own network of various stakeholders within their domains. The Sami parliament/sámediigi/Sametinget has formed a special Sami working group for the Convention.

A central steering group has been set up by the Institute to support the implementation of the Convention. Non- governmental organizations play an important role in implementing the Convention.

Cultural rights are constitutionally protected in Sweden. The instrument of government (Regeringsformen 1974:152) declares that *‘The personal, economic and cultural welfare of the individual shall be fundamental aims of public activity’* (RF 1:2) and that *‘The opportunities of the Sami people and ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities to preserve and develop a cultural and social life of their own shall be promoted’*.

Documentation

Swedish intangible cultural heritage has been documented for a long time: systematic collection began at the end of the 19th century through institutions with state, regional or municipal financing. Documentation is done at almost all museums, archives, cultural heritage institutions and organizations involved in work with the Convention. These organizations also work to ensure access to cultural heritage documentation, through web sites and databases - it is a constitutional right to have access, free of charge, to public archives.

Inventory

During 2012 guidelines were drawn up to establish an inventory of intangible cultural heritage in Sweden, and it was launched in September 2015.

The general structure of the inventory relates to the domains of intangible cultural heritage as defined by the Convention: performances, narrative, celebrations, music and dance, social practices, craft, food traditions, knowledge of nature and the universe and it gives methodological examples. The territorial principle is national. Visitors can select different domains as well as a special item when browsing the web-site.

In accordance with the Convention the inventory is a tool to identify, describe and communicate knowledge about the different elements of intangible cultural heritage. It includes widespread traditions and knowledge as well as elements which are only practiced by a small group of people.

The elements inserted must be consistent with human rights and mutual respect among different communities and with sustainable development. It must be recognized as part of the cultural heritage of communities, groups or Individuals and must be transmitted and still practiced (revived traditions are not inscribed).

Suggestions that are not in line with the purpose of the Convention or with national legislation or that are incomplete are not included, nor are suggestions that are not recognized as part of the cultural heritage of communities, groups or individuals.

Non-profit associations, private individuals and institutions can submit a proposal but representatives of commercial interests and political organizations cannot. Decisions on the inventory are made based on the Institute's overall competence in the case of intangible cultural heritage and cultural research, legislation, consultations within the framework of the national intangible cultural heritage organization and in some cases consultation with other authorities.

Special consideration is given to highlighting intangible cultural heritage as living and evolving, to stress the importance of intangible cultural heritage of underrepresented groups, to search for previously undocumented intangible cultural heritage, avoid stereotyping and cementation and underline the importance of methodical examples.

The inventory is an online, living document constantly updated and it develops as the inventory work proceeds.

Special consideration is given to achieving recognition among practitioners, broad representation and to reflect diversity amongst groups, providing perspectives and nuanced descriptions.

In 2017 the Institute started a new project as part of Sweden's national strategy for Roma inclusion with the aim of making the Roma intangible cultural heritage visible and spreading information about the Convention among Roma groups. The project is a pilot study, and if successful it will be applied to other national minorities as well.

Legislation

In May 2017 the Swedish Parliament passed the Bill Kulturarvspolitik (prop.2016/17:116) where the Swedish government took a holistic approach to the cultural heritage sphere, making it – for the first time - a separate policy field.

The Bill deals with the structure, collections and cultural objects of the museum sector, heritage policy and the ecclesiastical cultural heritage, state administration of valuable historic buildings and digitization, archives and libraries.

A separate article is devoted to work on this UNESCO Convention. The aim is to make the cultural heritage a concern for everyone. One way to achieve this is to promote co-creation and involvement. It stresses that the premise for the application of the Convention in Sweden should be *'to promote and strengthen civil society's own potential to preserve, pass on and develop the intangible cultural heritage'*.

Through the Bill a new state grant of at least 8 MSEK annually is established for non-profit cultural projects with the aim to stimulate participation in cultural heritage work.

As for the national inventory, the Government states that Sweden should continue to give priority to it since it gives unique opportunities for non-profit involvement.

If the intangible cultural heritage is to survive and continue to be vibrant, there must be

practitioners who preserve, pass on and develop knowledge and skills, chiefly non-profit players and individuals. The Convention emphasizes that the process of identifying and defining intangible cultural heritage must take place in consultation with local communities, groups and concerned non-government organizations.

The government stresses that special support should be given to promote work on intangible cultural heritage. The organizations of the Sami people and the national minorities are to be encouraged to utilize the grant against the background of the special state responsibility to promote the cultures and heritage of Sami and other national minorities.

Education and training

School curricula and steering documents for education state that knowledge about the intangible cultural heritage is an integral part of the school system. Preschool has the task to *'pass on a cultural heritage – values, traditions and history, language and knowledge'*. The curriculum for compulsory school emphasizes that *'Awareness of one's own cultural origins and sharing in a common cultural heritage provides a secure identity which it is important to develop, together with the ability to understand and empathize with the values and conditions of others'*.

Special focus on music is given at the country's colleges of music, and specialized craft programs are given at university level. The folk high schools and study associations organize adult education which includes various aspects of intangible cultural heritage.

Organizations and institutions (museums, libraries, archives, educational institutions, voluntary organizations and NGO:s including those accredited to the convention) are involved in training, safeguarding and documenting intangible cultural heritage in Sweden.

The cultural heritage of the five national minorities is safeguarded by organizations and associations which represent the Finnish, Meänkieli, Sami, Roma and Jewish minorities.

There are a number of courses in ethnology and anthropology at higher education institutions (HEI:s); some related to the intangible cultural heritage. At present there are no university courses specifically dedicated to the Convention in Sweden.

Research

The last decade has seen an increasing focus on research in cultural heritage. Research is on-going at several HEI:s in e.g. ethnology, history, culture studies, cultural conservation, musicology and anthropology. Advanced research in the cultural heritage field also takes place at museums.

Each year the National Heritage Board allocates funding for research in the field of cultural heritage and a priority area for 2017–2021 is cultural heritage and sustainable development. Sweden's research foundations allocate funding.

Methods for passing on knowledge are being developed at Swedish universities, at folk high schools and at vocational colleges.

Digitization of cultural heritage

Digitizing material gives greater potential for accessibility and interaction.

The project "The Map of Folk Legends" is run by the Institute for Language and Folklore. Visitors to its website can click on the map of Sweden and find old legends told and recorded

at a specific place. The map has a selection of more than 5,000 records and will be expanded with legends from Norway and dialect recordings and information about cultural heritage related to food, drink and meals.

Through a web presentation The Centre for Swedish Folk Music and Jazz Research and Swedish Performing Arts Agency gives access to a large volume of music recordings and music books. It is free of charge to browse through the whole original material - about 45,000 pages.

Platser ("places") is a website at The National Heritage Board for stories and memories. Anyone can become a member and insert their memories etc.

In 2011 a national strategy was adopted for digitization, digital preservation and making cultural heritage material and information digitally accessible. A national coordination secretariat was established with representatives from archives, libraries, museums and the heritage management sector.

Measures to ensure recognition of, respect for and enhancement of intangible cultural heritage

Several organizations have the task of documenting, safeguarding and communicating knowledge to local communities: local museums, local heritage associations and archives and organizations for dance, music, theatre and storytelling.

The Swedish museums of working life (run by various non-profit associations) convey knowledge about working life, social conditions and adult education. There is a large number of smaller museums run on a non-profit basis, with folkloristic, ethnographic, maritime or technological focus. They have unique collections and are centers for research and passing on local traditions. The Association of Swedish Museums works to safeguard and further the interests of the museum sector (www.sverigesmuseer.se).

The Swedish Local Heritage Federation consists of non-profit associations whose members pursue activities on local history, environment and social life. The humanistic and democratic values, its independence from party politics and religion makes the local associations a natural meeting place (www.hembygd.se).

Transmission of the national minorities' cultural heritage is made by organizations and associations representing them. Among the institutions for this work are the Ájtte Museum, the Finnish Culture Centre and the Jewish Museum. The Forum for Living History makes minorities' history visible and the Sameslöjdstiftelsen/Sami Duodji promote Sámi handicraft. The Sami Parliament is a state authority working actively to pass on the Sami cultural heritage.

The Institute for Language and Folklore informs through the website "Living traditions" which is an information and knowledge portal for intangible cultural heritage aimed at experts and the interested general public (www.sprakochfolkminnen.se/om-oss/levande-traditioner-immateriella-kulturarv-/forteckningen.html).

There are several study associations all over Sweden with local branches, financed by state subsidies. Many of these run evening classes on intangible cultural heritage.

There are voluntary organizations active in different fields linked to the intangible cultural heritage, but their numbers are unknown since Swedish non-governmental Organizations do not have to register with the state or local authorities.

Since the 1930s the non-profit Swedish Folklore Association has administered the “Zorn Badge”, an award bestowed on deserving performers of traditional music. (www.folkdansringen.se).

The Erik Sahlström Institute and the Storytelling Net Kronoberg, are accredited NGOs to the Convention. The Sahlström Institute works to strengthen, develop and expose folk music and dance (esitobo.org). The Storytelling Net Kronoberg spreads knowledge about folktales and legends. (www.sagobygden.se). They have marked about 80 “magical destinations” to which they organize “legend tours” with guides and organize geocaching and the development of applications, “apps” for mobile devices which show the way to tales and legends.

The Storytelling Net has been nominated by Sweden to become an example of best practices for the implementation of this Convention.

Sweden has a large number of open-air museums which contribute to the preservation of endangered species, breeds and natural sites as well as places of memory.

International cooperation

Authorities and NGOs involved with the Convention cooperate internationally to develop joint projects and interdisciplinary collaboration among them:

The National Swedish Handicraft Council has the task of planning, coordinating and promoting handicraft by strengthening the development of handicraft.

The Swedish Performing Arts Agency/Centre for Swedish Folk Music and Jazz Research works to promote the internationalization of music life.

The National Heritage Board is the authority responsible for matters concerning cultural heritage. Annually from 2017 the Board will allocate grants for special measures intended to document and pass on cultural heritage and to strengthen NGOs.

The Nordic Museum Since the 1870s the museum has documented intangible cultural heritage and cooperates with other cultural heritage institutions nationally and internationally.

The Sami Parliament has a special reference group which works with the intangible cultural heritage and they cooperate with a number of organizations all over Sápmi.

The Institute for Language and Folklore has the task of working on a scholarly foundation to increase and disseminate living knowledge about language, dialects, folklore, names and other intangible cultural heritage in Sweden and cooperates internationally etc.

In 2015 a foundation was laid for Nordic cooperation as part of the work with this Convention. The project “Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Nordic Region” aims at establishing a digital communication platform with a list of good practices and facilitate communication.