

## RE-CREATING LOCAL BUILDING TECHNOLOGY AS A WAY FOR CONSERVING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

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### ABSTRACT

Historic built environments have been produced by the dominant activity of local builders. Traditional building technology is the product of the builder's knowledge and creativity in using local building materials, handling environmental features and the needs of local people. The experience and the knowledge of local builders, expressed itself in the building technology, have been transmitted from generation to generation in a master-apprentice relationship, guaranteeing the transmission process of cultural expressions in the local building tradition for centuries. This tradition has also provided identity, continuity and harmony in the architectural language of environments. Today, together with the interruption in using local building ways, various conservation problems related to the sustainability of building culture have emerged in traditional fabrics. This study mainly discusses to re-create local building technologies both as a way for their documentation and conservation as intangible cultural heritage today.

Traditional craftsmanship embodied on the architecture of historic environments and the activity of local builders as the creators of local building technologies represents one aspect of the intangible heritage as identified in the UNESCO 2003 Convention. UNESCO Living Human Treasures System was designed for organizing the bearers of intangible heritage and transmitting their knowledge and skills to next generations. Critically explaining the national living human treasures systems of different countries, the study tries to conclude the appropriate principles for the conservation of the activity of local builders in the national living human treasures system of Turkey and to seek for organizing local builders and documenting their knowledge and providing their transmission for future generations.

**Keywords:** Traditional Craftsmanship, Local Building Technology, Master-Apprentice Relations, Transmission, Conservation

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Local building technologies constitute a significant aspect of the identity of historic environments with its defining quality over architectural language. Besides being subject of conservation related to their effect over physical characteristics, they are also worth conserving as a part of “intangible cultural heritage”, specifically as building practices and traditional craftsmanship, as pointed in the UNESCO 2003 Convention<sup>2</sup>. Local building technologies in traditional environments are completely the products of the master builder’s knowledge and creativity in using local building materials and handling environmental features. In this regard, their conservation and continuation in modern building technologies is directly related to the sustainability of the activity of masters in historic environments, which has mainly based on master-apprentice relationships for centuries.

To understand and develop the ways for the conservation of local building technologies, the studies related to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage carried out by UNESCO can be investigated thoroughly. The UNESCO 2003 Convention defines “intangible cultural heritage” 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”<sup>3</sup>. One of the domains to be conserved, on which intangible heritage reflect, is traditional craftsmanship. The discussions on intangible cultural heritage, which started to define and make inventory nearly ten years ago, especially after the UNESCO 2003 Convention, have mainly focused on the measures of its conservation. While the conservation process of tangible heritage includes documentation, analysis and preservation measures, the conservation of intangible cultural heritage is intimately linked with its practice and its transmission for new generations<sup>4</sup>, besides their documentation. With regard to the documentation and inventory of intangible cultural heritage, the UNESCO committee prepares specific lists of intangible cultural heritage in need of urgent safeguarding and the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity<sup>5</sup>. The UNESCO Committee meets annually to evaluate nominations proposed by States Parties according to the 2003 Convention; and decide whether or not to inscribe those cultural practices and expressions as intangible heritage on the Convention’s Lists. To provide the appropriate conditions of “transmission” pointed as one of the safeguarding measures of intangible heritage, in Article 2 in the

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<sup>2</sup> *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the General Conference. September 29- October 17. Paris. Retrieved December 23, 2004, from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540e.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See Article 2 in the UNESCO 2003 Convention.

<sup>4</sup> On the UNESCO website, “safeguarding” of intangible cultural heritage is explained in four titles as “involvement of communities, inventorying intangible heritage, transmission, legislation”. (See <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00012>).

<sup>5</sup> The Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (see criteria) is made up of those intangible heritage practices and expressions help demonstrate the diversity of this heritage and raise awareness about its importance. The Committee incorporated 90 elements in 2008 (items formerly proclaimed Masterpieces) and inscribed 76 elements in 2009 and 47 elements in 2010. In 2011, 19 new elements have been added to the list.

Convention, UNESCO established “Living Human Treasures System”<sup>6</sup> for conserving craftsmanship, organizing craftsmen and transmitting their knowledge to new generations and encourages state countries to establish their national system. Collaterally evaluating intangible heritage lists and the national Living Human Treasures System of different countries, the dominancy of social practices and performing arts can clearly be seen in the lists in the worldwide over the examples of traditional craftsmanship expressed on different building cultures, which are only 6 from the 259 heritage items listed<sup>7</sup>. Unfortunately, in the inventories prepared in Turkey for several years, there is no traditional craftsmanship yet, in spite of the diversity of the vernacular architecture. Therefore, this study critically examines the “living human treasures system” prepared by UNESCO, especially, focusing on local building techniques and local builders throughout the world and in Turkey. It also makes certain proposals and the applicable measures for the development of this system in national contexts to revitalize local building technologies as a safeguarding measure of intangible heritage.

## **2. LOCAL BUILDING TECHNOLOGIES AND THE ACTIVITY OF MASTERS IN HISTORIC ENVIRONMENTS**

Historic environments have been produced by the handling style of builders’ of the local specifics, which are created by the mutual interrelations between environmental factors and cultural practices and expressions<sup>8</sup>. The diversity of local building cultures has been generated by the traditional knowledge and the skills of builders transmitted by the master-apprentice relationship from generation to generation. Besides the functional aspects of the activity of builders, like bringing building materials to construction sites, and after processing, putting into their place in the building, techniques and tools particular to this process (Bingöl, 2004; 22; Blagg, 1976; 154; Marchand, 2007; 182), there are also expressive aspects, like the reflection of the cultural values, values judgments and the worldview of builder and society and the individual diversities and creativities (Aran, 2000; 122) to be considered. In historic environments, cultural expressions observed in the buildings have been transmitted to the present time especially by the information flow between master craftsman and apprentice (*usta- çırak*). Hubka (1979, p.28) investigates the methods of study of folk builders in the production process of traditional buildings, which are carried exclusively in the mind of builders and continued by tradition- the handing down of information by word of mouth, observation, replication and apprenticeship. Certainly, the transmission of the knowledge of masters to their apprentices assures the continuation of the local building tradition.

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00061&lg=EN>

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00011>

<sup>8</sup> The production and transformation processes of historic environments are deeply analyzed by Karakul (2011a), specifically focusing on tangible and intangible values.

Anatolia has a long building tradition, which has continued for many years and embodied on the variety of the traditional buildings in historic environments. Turkey's historic environments embody the variety of local building materials and cultural expressions on their physical characteristics. Especially the excessive use of stone and timber, besides other local building materials, like, mud-brick, brick, tiles, has created the various building types with the labor of master builders specialized especially on stone and timber craftsmanship. The skilled use of local building materials by master builders has created various masterpieces of architecture, as observed both in a monumental scale, like in Divriği Great Mosque; and in a vernacular scale, like in Ürgüp, Mardin, Ahlat.



**Figure 1-2.** The ornate portals of Divriği Great Mosque

Unfortunately, because the conservation and inventory studies in historic environments in Turkey are tangible-led and have generally carried out by the physical concerns, the local building practices and cultural expressions hidden in the physical have been overlooked or ignored completely. But, an accurate conservation approach needs to guarantee the viability of the practice of local building technologies and traditions besides the physical entity of the buildings.





Figure 3-4-5. Stone carved ornaments on the facades of vernacular buildings in İbrahimpaşa, Ürgüp

### 3. “LIVING HUMAN TREASURES SYSTEM” AS A CONSERVATION APPROACH FOR TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIPS

#### 3.1 UNESCO’s Living Human Treasures System

On the UNESCO’s official website, the decline in the numbers of the practitioners of traditional craftsmanship is recognized as one of the biggest threats to the viability of intangible cultural heritage<sup>9</sup>. In this regard, Article 2.3 of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage places “transmission” among the safeguarding measures aiming at ensuring the viability of this heritage. Because the conservation of intangible cultural heritage necessitates the continuous practice and the transmission of the knowledge to next generations, living practitioners need to be identified and the appropriate ways for practicing need to be provided. Therefore, “Living Human Treasures System” was established by UNESCO for facilitating the transmission of knowledge and skills of talented tradition bearers and practitioners to new generations in international and national contexts. Within this system, masters possessing high degree knowledge and skills have been selected as a testimony to living cultural traditions and to the creative genius of communities (Karakul, 2011b).

After drawing up the general rules of this system, UNESCO also encourages States to establish the national systems of “Living Human Treasures” and formulates the specific “guidelines for the establishment of national Living Human Treasures System”<sup>10</sup> to be followed by States. Within these guidelines, a preliminary measure for safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage is to ensure its identification by drawing up national inventories<sup>11</sup>. But, after this identification stage, it is significant to guarantee that the bearers of heritage, like master craftsmen, develop their knowledge and skills and transmit them to younger generations. In national contexts, these measures necessitate finding and organizing living builders, some of whom

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/?pg=00061>

<sup>10</sup> [www.unesco.org/culture/doc/src/00031-EN.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/culture/doc/src/00031-EN.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> See Article 12 in the UNESCO 2003 Convention

will be given official recognition, creating appropriate conditions and institutions for practicing master-apprentice relationships and documenting their knowledge and integrating these practices and documentation into the conservation practices.

UNESCO Living Human Treasures programme aims at encouraging Member States to grant official recognition to talented tradition bearers and practitioners, thus contributing to the transmission of their knowledge and skills to the younger generations<sup>12</sup>. The different systems of countries put forward the different organizing methods, which are developed through a re-synthesis of UNESCO's Living Human Treasures systems within the specifics of their local contexts. For instance, the France's Living Human Treasures system<sup>13</sup> brings about certain criteria for the selection of "masters of art" with regard to the period of practice, possessing a rare or exceptional know-how, demonstrating excellence; acceptance to transmit this rare know-how to an apprentice. Once selected, the "Master of Art starts to transmit his know-how to an apprentice in the Master's workshop over a period of three years. This transmission system is mainly based on two agreements: one between the Master of Art and the Ministry of Culture and Communication which provides a yearly allocation, the amount of which is fixed by the Minister; and another one between the Master of Art and the apprentice. In Republic of Korea, the term "holders of important intangible cultural properties" is defined within the cultural properties protection act to express the "Living Human Treasures"; and their selection process is explained in certain steps composed of "application for designation, investigation for designation, examination for the designation, notice for designation, deliberation for designation and announcement of the designation"<sup>14</sup>. Besides the steps for the designation, rights and obligations of the holders and safeguarding activities are also comprehensively explained to be evaluated as example by forming national human treasures systems. Republic of Korea explains safeguarding activities for the designated Intangible Cultural Properties in three parts: "education, support to performances and exhibitions and documentation activities". All these conservation measures recognized in the studies of France and Republic of Korea need to be critically evaluated within the local specifics of the countries during the preparation of national living human treasures systems.

### 3.2 Turkey's National Living Human Treasures Systems

In Turkey, the awareness for the conservation of intangible cultural heritage, which has developed with the studies of UNESCO; and directed towards the holistic

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<sup>12</sup> On the website of UNESCO, it is stated that the establishment of a national Living Human Treasures system may also involve: adopting legal or regulatory provisions; identifying and including in one or more inventories the selected ICH elements as well as the names of their bearers; creating a commission of experts responsible for selecting candidates and for monitoring the implementation of the system, especially with regard to the transmission of knowledge and skills. See: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00061>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/?cp=FR&lg=en&pg=00311&topic=lht>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/?cp=KR&lg=en&pg=00311&topic=lht>

conservatory framework of tangible and intangible values recently<sup>15</sup>, has not been accurately reflected to the national legal instruments yet. Although Turkey ratified the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006<sup>16</sup>, the national legal instruments in the area of conservation have not been still regulated according to it yet. In contrast, there are no implications of intangible cultural heritage in the definitions in the legal documents in the area of conservation. The conservation of intangible cultural heritage is carried out separately from tangible heritage with the limited inventory studies with a point of view of folklore by the Ministry of Culture.

By ratifying the UNESCO 2003 Convention Turkey has undertaken the mission for compiling and updating a national inventory of intangible cultural heritage. In this regard, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism started to do the studies on National Inventory of Living Human Treasures in 2008. The studies on the national conservation system of intangible cultural heritage in Turkey are basically carried out in two areas: the studies on the national inventory of the intangible cultural heritage of Turkey and the national living human treasures systems. The criteria used for forming national inventory of intangible cultural heritage are the value as the evidence of human creativity, being rooted in cultural and social traditions, the representation quality of the determined society or group and the risk of disappearance<sup>17</sup>. In Turkey, the nationalizing process of this system, the common studies of Ministry of Culture and Turkish National Commission for UNESCO are continued to document and make inventory of Turkey's intangible cultural heritage and finding living craftsmen and bearers of intangible heritage. For the Turkey's national inventory of intangible cultural heritage, the data coming from the different cities are evaluated within the regional meetings carried out the research and education directory of Ministry of Culture; and, then, specific files are prepared to be presented for the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding of UNESCO. Until today, from Turkey, The Arts of the Meddah, Public storytellers, The Mevlevi Sema Ceremony in 2008; Aşıklik Tradition, Karagöz and Nevruz in 2009; Kırkpınar oil wrestling festival, Semah, Alevi-Bektaşî ritual, Traditional Sohbet meetings in 2010 and Ceremonial Keşkek tradition in 2011 have been listed in the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity prepared by UNESCO<sup>18</sup>. To be in the lists, for the elements of intangible cultural heritage,

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<sup>15</sup> Holistic conservatory framework which is the main aim of this study, has started to be discussed in certain publications and scientific meetings recently. (BOUCHENAKI, M., 2003, "The Interdependency of the Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage" (Paper at ICOMOS 14<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and Scientific Symposium, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, <http://www.international.icomos.org/victoriafalls2003/papers.htm>), (Isar, Y.R., 2004, "Tangible" and "Intangible" Heritage: Are they really Castor and Pollux?", INTACH Vision 2020, New Delhi, November 2-4, 2004)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.unesco.org.tr/kultur.php?gitiid=1> (accessed in 17.12.2009) Law numbered 5448 about the approval of the UNESCO convention 2003 was published in 21.1.2006 in Resmi Gazete (<http://www.resmi-gazete.org/sayi/7599/5448-somut-olmayan-kulturel-miras-in-korunmasi-sozlesmesinin-onaylanmasinin-uygun-bulunduguna-dair-kanun.html>)

<sup>17</sup> See the web site of Ministry of Culture. (<http://www.kultur.gov.tr>)

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00011>

provide better visibility and awareness of their significance. Since the time on which UNESCO Living Human Treasures System started to be implemented in Turkey, until today, in this system, the selected masters are generally related to crafts and musicians and the performers of shadow puppetry<sup>19</sup>. Within these studies, an important lack is related to the representatives and enactors of building culture. Actually, evaluating international developments and national studies, it is concluded that master craftsmen in building culture need to have a significant role in national living human treasures system because of the diversity and richness of local building techniques in Turkey. In Turkey, there are limited numbers of the building masters, who have information fully on the local building techniques and possess skills. Unfortunately, they could not find the appropriate working ground for the transmission of their information to the new generations. Thereby, cultural expressions embodied by these masters in the traditional buildings by builders are forgotten in time in the collective memory.

#### **4. CONCLUSION: IMPLEMENTATION OF LIVING HUMAN TREASURES SYSTEM TO CONSERVE THE DIVERSITY OF LOCAL BUILDING TECHNOLOGIES**

Historic environments have a particular and genuine identity identified by the integrity of the physical and cultural values. Besides local building materials and environmental characteristics as a part of physical features, local building ways and the techniques of masters, defined culturally, have significant roles to be considered for the maintenance of this identity of historic environments in conservation studies. In this respect, besides the prevailing conservation approach to buildings and tangible features, the activities of local builders, local building technologies and cultural expressions concretized on the traditional buildings need to be given essential priority as intangible cultural heritage in conservation studies and restorations.

Conservation needs to transmit the diversity of local building cultures to the next generations. Therefore, certain safeguarding measures for conserving local building ways and local builders need to be integrated in conservation studies. To explain the conservation measures regarding local building technologies, this study critically investigates the UNESCO Living Human Treasures System, the national living human treasures systems of different countries and Turkey; and recognizes their lack of master craftsmanship in building culture. The critical evaluation of these systems especially highlights their deficiencies in conserving local building technologies, mainly related to the documentation and transmission of the knowledge of master builders, the awareness rising of the subject, educative measures, the organization and participation of master builders in conservation practices. To overcome such kind of deficiencies regarding building culture in Turkey's national living human treasures system, several implementations of the internationally accepted conservation approaches to conserve local building technologies need to be

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<sup>19</sup> See the web site of Ministry of Culture. (<http://www.kultur.gov.tr>)



developed. Firstly, the holistic documentation approaches considering cultural expressions of builders and their reflections embodied on architectural features need to be integrated in conservation studies. Besides this holistic documentation approach, the awareness rising about local building technologies in society is significant for introducing the subject and forming the conservation consciousness regarding it; is developed by using the written and visual media and by arranging specific meetings and conferences. The educational and training programmes are significant for the transmission of the knowledge of builders to new generations in an applied way and revitalize the master-apprentice relationship. Finally, the establishment of a national organization model for builders makes easy to exchange of knowledge and skills between masters, apprentices and new generations; and, also develops the intercommunication between conservation architects and local builders; and guarantees the active participation of the masters to building and conservation activities in historic environments.

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