

Research Article

Cultural Sustainability and Heritage Management

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Abstract

The concept of cultural sustainability has been receiving increasing attention as an emerging pillar of sustainable development along with the social, economic, and environmental pillars. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015–2030), an international action plan addressing global issues recognizes that culture can contribute to and is a crucial enabler of sustainable development. However, the concept of cultural sustainability has not been fully integrated into the Agenda due to the insufficient level of understanding among policy-makers, development practitioners and stakeholders. To address this issue, this paper analyses its conceptual development through a case study on safeguarding the cultural sustainability of the Nubian heritage and culture in Egypt and how these efforts have been linked to sustainable development through UNESCO's normative frameworks adopted in the 21st century such as the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Keywords: UNESCO, international campaign to save the monuments of Nubia, intangible cultural heritage, cultural sustainability, sustainable development, 2030 agenda for sustainable development

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يحظى مفهوم الاستدامة الثقافية باهتمام متزايد باعتباره ركيزة ناشئة للتنمية المستدامة إلى جانب الركائز الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والبيئية. تعترف خطة التنمية المستدامة لعام 2030 (2015–2030)، وهي خطة عمل دولية تعالج القضايا العالمية، بأن الثقافة يمكن أن تساهم في تحقيق التنمية المستدامة وأنها عامل تمكيني حاسم لها. ومع ذلك، لم يتم دمج مفهوم الاستدامة الثقافية بشكل كامل في جدول الأعمال بسبب عدم كفاية مستوى الفهم بين صانعي السياسات وممارسي التنمية وأصحاب المصلحة. ولمعالجة هذه القضية، تحلل هذه الورقة تطورها المفاهيمي من خلال دراسة حالة حول الحفاظ على الاستدامة الثقافية للتراث وثقافة النوبيين في مصر وكيف تم ربط هذه الجهود بالتنمية المستدامة من خلال الأطر المعيارية لليونسكو المعتمدة في القرن الحادي والعشرين مثل اتفاقية حماية التراث الثقافي غير المادي لعام 2003.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اليونسكو، الحملة الدولية لإنقاذ آثار النوبة، التراث الثقافي غير المادي، الاستدامة الثقافية، التنمية المستدامة، خطة التنمية المستدامة 2030

1. Introduction

UNESCO was established as the UN Specialized Agency on 16 November 1945 by adopting the Constitution, declaring in its Preamble that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed” [1]. Working closely with its member states, UNESCO promotes international cooperation in education, the sciences, culture, and communication. UNESCO has a unique mandate on culture. UNESCO Convention, Recommendations,

and Declarations in the field of culture with two pillars of Heritage and Creativity play a pivotal role in setting the principles and providing the guidelines for public actions and policy development at all levels, serving as a platform for international co-operation [2].

The UNESCO Conventions adopted in the 20th century primarily focus on the protection of tangible heritage or historical monuments and sites, as well as movable cultural properties and their repositories like museums and archives.

1954 Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its Protocols (1954 and 1999).

1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage.

2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

2022 MONDIACULT Declaration on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development.

FIGURE 1: Key UNESCO Culture Conventions and Declaration.

The Cultural Diversity Declaration adopted in 2001, however, made a significant shift in the scope of heritage and the concept of human rights by recognizing that cultural diversity is an essential component and an integral part of human rights. The Declaration elevates cultural diversity to the rank of the common heritage of humanity in the 21st century while paving the way for the adoption of the subsequent Conventions, namely, the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions Cultural Diversity Convention.

2. Safeguarding the Nubian Heritage (1960–1980)

The International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia (1960–1980)

On 8 March 1960, at the request of the Egyptian and Sudanese authorities, UNESCO launched the International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia, a

region along the Nile River covering parts of southern Egypt and northern Sudan. The objective of the Nubia Campaign was to rescue the archaeological sites and monuments that were under threat of being submerged by the construction of the Aswan High Dam [3]. The international appeal mobilized the member states' governments, cultural professionals, and people around the world, resulting in the rescue of 22 monuments and sites in Nubia. One of the most well-known operations is the spectacular relocation of Abu Simbel [5].

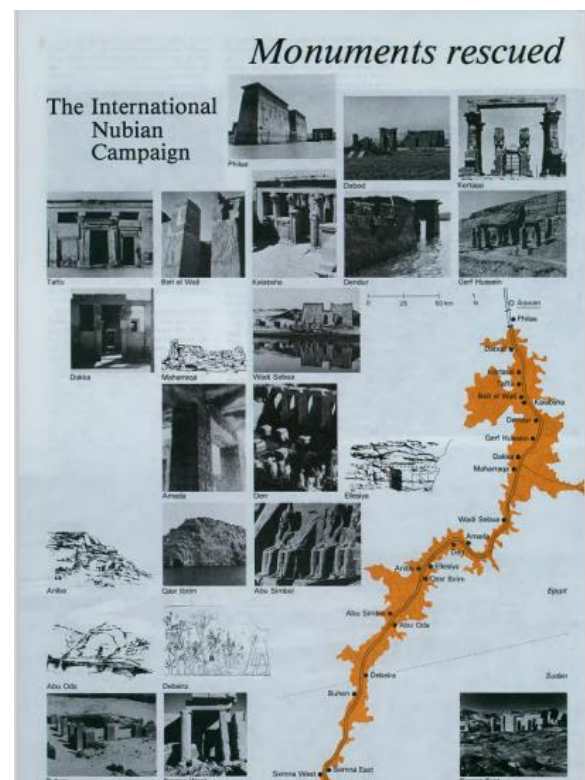


FIGURE 1: Map of monuments rescued [4].

As part of the International Nubia Campaign, the Antiquities Department of Egypt commissioned several surveys. These surveys included the Egypt Exploration Society's Nubian Survey. Capitalizing on the archaeological mapping of Egyptian Nubia initiated by Reisner and Firth (1907–

1911) and carried on by Emery and Kirwan (1931–1935), the survey was conducted to record all sites of archaeological importance for the history of Nubia and report on sites considered to merit further exploration before they were inundated by the waters of the new High Dam [6]. Additionally, numerous salvage excavations were carried out by multiple countries and organizations by overcoming logistical and technical challenges [7,8].

The International Nubia Campaign not only saved the invaluable monuments but also contributed to the development of the heritage of humanity concept, leading to the adoption of the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (known as the World Heritage Convention).

The World Heritage Convention aims to identify, protect, and preserve the cultural and natural heritage with Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) for present and future generations. The World Heritage Convention established international cooperation mechanisms such as the World Heritage Committee, the World Heritage List and the List in Danger, and the World Heritage Fund.

Subsequently, “Nubian Monuments from Abu Simbel to Philae” rescued under the Nubia Campaign were inscribed on the World Heritage List at the 3rd session of the World Heritage Committee held in Cairo and Luxor in Egypt from 22 to 26 October 1979. The site is a serial property of 10 components of various temples and archaeological sites (Abu Simbel, Amada, Wadi Sebu, Kalabsha, Philae (Island of Agilkia), Old and Middle Kingdom Tombs, Ruins of Town of Elephantine, Stone Quarries and Obelisk, and Monastery of St. Simion, Islamic Cemetery).

Currently, the Egyptian national authorities through the Supreme Council of Antiquities of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) are in charge of the protection and management of the heritage sites including the World Heritage sites in Egypt. At the same time, like the other World Heritage properties, the site in Nubia is under the watch of the international community through the World Heritage Committee. As a state party, Egyptian authorities submit a report on the site’s conservation and management status to the World Heritage Committee regularly.

The Nubia Ethnological Survey (NES) (1961–1964)

The construction of the Aswan High Dam affected not only the archaeological sites but also the Nubian community which is among indigenous people in Egypt along with the Bedouin, nomadic, and semi-nomadic people in Sinai and the Amazigh (Berber) in North Africa, particularly Siwa Oases in Matrouh Governorate in the country.

In response to this large-scale infrastructure project that was needed for the country’s economic development, the government of the United Arab Republic (UAR) at that time planned the resettlement of around fifty thousand Nubian population in the region of Kom Ombo, north of Aswan beginning in 1963. The Ministry of Social Affairs undertook several research projects on specific issues, while the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance sent artists and folklorists to the region to record the traditional Nubian culture. The scholarly community in anthropology and social sciences in the US and Europe responded to the call and conducted ethnological field surveys of the Nubian region.

The plan of the Nubia Ethnological Survey (NES) was elaborated by Dr. Robert Fernea (USA) to record the key aspects of the Nubian culture such as place names, way of life, and languages before relocation, track the transfer, provide advice to the government authorities, and offer a baseline for future research [9]. With funding from the Ford Foundation, NES was conducted by the Social Research Centre (SRC) of the American University in Cairo (AUC) under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs. NES was a collaborative project implemented by international experts in cooperation with Egyptian anthropologists, such as Dr. Hussein Fahim (Egypt) with researchers from Egyptian universities. The findings of the survey explored the social life and customs of the Nubian people and provided an in-depth look at how the Nubian culture persisted despite significant challenges of resettlement [10,11].

From Europe, Countess Anna Hohenwart-Gerlachstein (Austria) played a key role in the anthropological survey in Nubia. She had previous experience in research on the Bedouin people in Egypt. In her article, she informed that she was first approached by Professor Alfred Metaux, a Swiss anthropologist and ethnologist, a professor at the University of Paris, and worked for UNESCO. He reminded her of the need for the research on people that was needed as much as for the archaeological sites in Nubia [9]. Dr. Hohenwart-Gerlachstein made numerous audio recordings of music and songs of various Nubian villages during her field research in 1962 and 1963 before the relocation of the Nubian community. She continued to follow her study on the Nubian culture until her last trip to New Nubia in 1988 which was carried out under a contract with UNESCO

for safeguarding nonphysical (or intangible) heritage concerning Nubian Music.

Nubian Survey by Hassan Fathy (1962)

Another pioneering work for safeguarding the Nubian culture and its vernacular architecture was undertaken by Hassan Fathy (1900–1989), an Egyptian architect. At the request of the Ministry of Culture and working with ethnographers, Architect Fathy undertook the task of surveying the Nubian houses in the Nubia region in 1962. He found the value in the Nubian vernacular architecture constructed by the Nubian master builders with locally available materials as low-cost and environmentally friendly alternatives to modern architecture which need imported materials and technologies to build. He was especially fascinated by the mud brick vaulted structure built by the Nubian builders without any supporting beams or columns and documented their knowledge and skills during his survey. He selected some of the Nubian buildings as a possible open-air museum. Later, he proposed the creation of the International Institute for Appropriate Technology and developed the Mud Brick Manual: Vault and Dome Construction [12].

Additionally, the Sudan Research Unit of the University of Khartoum implemented the project to document the Nubian house decoration in Wadi Halfa. The project's publication provided not only a detailed description of the Nubian decorative motifs but also the role of craftspeople and families in their creation and maintenance, as well as their symbolic meaning or intangible aspect of the Nubian culture [13].



FIGURE 3: Photo of a Nubian house from the 2013 ICH nomination file submitted by BA/CULTNAT.

International Campaign for the Establishment of the Nubia Museum in Aswan and the National Museum for Egyptian Civilization (1980–present)

As the International Nubia Campaign works entered the ending phase, the UNESCO General Conference in 1978 discussed the possibility of its future. Based on Resolution 4/11 on Museums in Aswan and Cairo adopted at the UNESCO General Conference in 1980, UNESCO launched the follow-up International Campaign for the Establishment of the Nubia Museum in Aswan and the National Museum for Egyptian Civilization in Cairo. The Resolution also authorized to establishment of the Executive Committee composed of 15 elected member states to manage the new phase of international cooperation.

The Egyptian authorities invested in the construction of the building of the Nubia Museum in Aswan to preserve and promote the Nubian heritage including the archaeological objects recovered through the salvage excavation during the Nubia Campaign.

The Nubia Museum was inaugurated in 1997. The museum preserves a rich collection of archaeological and ethnographic

items in Nubia and showcases the Nubian ways of life on display. The Nubian traditional houses were built in outdoor space.



FIGURE 4: The Nubia Museum was built with the help and supervision of UNESCO, using elements from Nubian cultural heritage in its design©Nubia Museum [14].

UNESCO has been assisting in the institutional development of the museum and the capacity building of its staff in conservation, collection management, and outreach/educational activities. The Documentation Centre of the Nubia Museum preserves the important documentary heritage of the International Nubia Campaign along with the Centre of Documentation and Studies of Ancient Egypt under the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) in Cairo.

The exhibit on the Nubian culture is also put on display at the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC) in Cairo opened in April 2022.

Nubian Heritage Society (1980–present)

Toward the end of the Nubia Campaign, the Nubian Heritage Society was formed in 1980 under the leadership of the first President Mohamed al-Shurbji, a well-known writer and scriptwriter, together with a group of Nubian experts. The 2nd President was the prominent writer and researcher Mohi el-Din Sherif, and the

third President was Dr. Mokhtar Khalil Kabara, the esteemed linguist. The primary aim of the society is to preserve Nubian culture, language, and heritage. Their activities such as educational workshops, cultural events, and research initiatives significantly contributed to raising awareness about Nubian heritage both locally and internationally.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Dr. Peter Geiser at the American University in Cairo (AUC) conducted research into various aspects of Nubian life, including family structures, traditions, and social norms, and analyzed the sociocultural impact of relocation on their cultures. His works contributed to an enhanced understanding of the resilience and cultural sustainability of the Nubian people in the face of significant social and environmental changes [15].

Currently, supported by the Ministry of Culture, the Nubian Heritage Association has been actively engaged in safeguarding and promoting the Nubian culture through a wide range of activities such as public lectures and awareness-raising events, the celebration of the Nubian Heritage Day and Nubian Women's Day, crafts exhibition and workshop, training of field researchers, preparation of publications and videos on the Nubian heritage, etc.



FIGURE 5: Logo of Nubian Heritage Society.

A Heritage in the 21st Century

Despite the above-mentioned early efforts supported by the visionary scholarly community as well as the Nubian people themselves, the intangible culture of the Nubian people received far less attention than those devoted to the tangible heritage for a long time.

In this regard, the adoption of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in 2003 was a milestone event to upscale the support to the cultural sustainability of the Nubian people.

The 2003 ICH Convention was elaborated through extensive consultations at both expert and governmental levels. For the first time among the UNESCO Conventions in culture, the ICH Convention mentions the term “sustainable development” twice: first in the Preamble stating, “the intangible cultural heritage as a mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development”, and second in Article 2 stating “The Convention deals only with ICH that complies with the requirements of human rights and sustainable development”.

The purposes of the ICH Convention are defined by the Convention, which are to safeguard our living heritage that provides a sense of identity and continuity, ensure respect for it and its community, and raise awareness of its importance and mutual appreciation.

The ICH Convention emphasizes equality among diverse cultural expressions and practices across the world.

In the context of the Convention, the concept of safeguarding is understood not to conserve or freeze traditional cultural expressions and practices as they are but to

allow them to evolve based on a decision made by ICH bearers, practitioners, and communities concerned by themselves rather than external persons and entities.

States Parties to the Convention must fulfill their obligations under Articles 11 and 12 (or “shall” clauses). These responsibilities assumed by state parties include the development of cultural policies and measures for establishing inventories with the participation of communities. UNESCO has developed an extensive capacity-building program for the Convention’s implementation, in particular, the community-based ICH inventorying based on “free, Prior and Informed Consent”.

As a platform for international cooperation, the ICH Convention provides international cooperation opportunities and assistance through mechanisms such as the ICH Committee, Representative List of ICH of Humanity, ICH Urgent Safeguarding List, and the Register of Best Practice Programme, Project, and Activity.

Implementation of the ICH Convention in Egypt

Egypt joined the ICH Convention in 2005. As a state party, Egypt has been developing the National Systems for the implementation of the Convention along the spirit of the Convention and as guided by the Constitution of Egypt (Article 50) on the protection and maintenance of the heritage and its diversity. The preservation of the Nubian culture and traditions has increasingly been addressed through the lens of the ICH safeguarding [16].

Under the coordination of the Ministry of Culture (MoC), community-based ICH inventorying has been underway in cooperation with specialized agencies such as Bibliotheca Alexandrina/CULTNAT and

civil society organizations. Several projects have been carried out while a corps of ICH national facilitators has been developed with UNESCO support. The High Committee for ICH was established in 2021 as an interministerial and multi-stakeholder platform for coordination at the national level.

At present, eight ICH elements (national and multinational), which are inscribed on the lists, and eight NGOs in Egypt are accredited under the ICH Convention. The Nubian Heritage Society was granted this accreditation in 2020.

ICH elements (national and multinational) inscribed on the Representative List of Humanity (RL) and the Urgent Safeguarding List (USL) established by the ICH Convention

2023: Art, skills, and practices associated with engraving on metals (gold, silver, and copper) (RL)

2022: Festivals related to the Journey of the Holy Family in Egypt (RL)

2022: Date palm, knowledge, skills, traditions, and practices (RL) (Multinational)

2021: Arabic calligraphy: knowledge, skills, and practices (RL) (Multinational)

2020: Handmade weaving in Upper Egypt (Sa’eed) (USL)

2018: Traditional hand puppetry (USL)

2016: Tahteeb, stick game (RL)

2008: Al-Sirah Al-Hilaliyyah epic (RL)

NGOs in Egypt accredited under the ICH Convention

2023: Association of Upper Egypt for Education and Development

2023: Raquda Foundation for Art and Heritage

2022: Karama Foundation for Social and Cultural Development

2020: Nubian Heritage Society

2012: Egyptian Society for Folk Traditions (ESFT)

FIGURE 6: ICH on the list and NGOs in Egypt.

It is worth mentioning that Bibliotheca Alexandrina/CULTNAT preserves an im-

portant Nubian archive. In 2013, they submitted the nomination file on “Documentation of Egypt’s Nubian Intangible Heritage” for inscription on the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices. The ICH Committee met in Baku, Azerbaijan, in 2015, examined the nomination file and decided not to select for inscription in the Register because the nomination file failed to provide convincing information on the efficacy of the safeguarding measures to strengthen the viability of the Nubian ICH beyond documentation.

The author of this paper interviewed the representative of the society in Cairo in January 2024. He informed the society’s intention to follow up on the previous attempt and nominate some Nubian ICH elements in the near future. He has been invited to attend annual ICH Committee sessions in recent years, which enabled him to have a better understanding of the nomination process, criteria, decision-making mechanisms, and availability of international assistance under the ICH Fund for national initiatives and projects.

3. Culture and International Development Agenda

The UN Brundtland Committee in 1987 introduced the concept of sustainability into the international development agenda. Sustainability is defined by the Committee as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Environmental sustainability is the ability of natural systems to maintain themselves and support life, while social sustainability is the ability of a society to provide for the basic needs of its citizens, such as food, water, shelter, and healthcare. The concept of sustainability became the key principle of

the development agenda in the 21st century.



FIGURE 7: Nubian woman holding string, from the 2013 nomination file submitted by BA/CULTNAT.

In 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015–2030) was adopted to replace the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an international action plan addressing global issues and has 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Under the 2030 Agenda, Culture is recognized as an enabler and contributor to sustainable development, making a cross-cutting contribution to the achievement of SDGs.

Capitalizing on the achievements during 50 years of cooperation under the World Heritage Convention and 20 years of cooperation under the ICH Convention, cultural sustainability is being recognized as the ability of people to survive and thrive and protect and promote their heritage and cultural expressions as integral parts of cultural rights.

With this as background, the MONDIAULT Declaration on Cultural Policy and Sustainable Development adopted in 2022 emphasizes the need to embrace cultural heritage—both tangible and intangible—as a means of building trust and social cohe-

sion in a multicultural society. The text affirms culture as a global public good and reiterates the important role of cultural policy. Finally, the Declaration is the call for a stand-alone goal on Arts, Culture, and Community in the post-2030 agenda for sustainable development.

3. Conclusion

The case study on the Nubian heritage sheds light on the early efforts in safeguarding Nubian tangible heritage, and, although on a lesser scale, intangible heritage. These efforts were made by the national authorities, the scholarly community in Egypt and beyond, and UNESCO. It should be noted that the International Campaign to Save the Monument of Nubia (1960–1980) not only saved the tangible heritage in Nubia but also paved the way for the formation of the Nubian Heritage Society.

The paper highlighted how these early efforts have been sustained and scaled up by the 1972 World Heritage Convention and the 2003 ICH Convention inherently linked to sustainable development. It is hoped that these instruments will continue to be implemented effectively and utilized creatively to enhance the protection and promotion of the diversity of heritage and cultural expressions for a sustainable future in Egypt and beyond.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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