24

# PAD

# FUTURE

# HERITAGES

**002**

## IV. BIOGRAPHIES

III

# DIGITAL ARCHIVES
## NEW MATERIALITY
## AND INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

# Preserving Memory, Safeguarding Heritage
## Designing the Digital Library of Living Traditions of Jordanian Handicraft

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## Abstract
The research addresses the valorisation of Jordanian intangible cultural heritage (ICH), developing the concept of a *Digital Library of Living Traditions*, a web-based tool to document the Jordanian cultural landscape through its handicraft production. The research aim is to extend the understanding of the collections exhibited at the Folklore and Popular Traditions Museums, part of the Roman theatre archaeological site. This work reports on creating a research and dissemination tool, the DL, to include in the valorisation process of the living culture and folklore of Jordan about objects, places, and techniques beyond the physical collections displayed at the museums.

The first part of the paper envisions the role of storytelling and audiovisual archives in the realm of design for ICH, ideating, producing, and representing digital memories with and on digital media, including different genres and formats. The second part describes the DL, which is a multimedia archive that will make accessible a digital repository in which curators and scholars can get visual documentation and information about techniques, raw materials, and fabrication tools for the leading traditional Jordanian handicrafts.

The contents will be partially accessible within the museums, enhancing the on-site experience and creating interactive touchpoints for a broad audience. The project also promotes workshop activities and capacity building on digital heritage and multimedia communication strategy.

# 1. Enhancing Intangible Cultural Heritage through Storytelling and Audiovisual Repositories

During the 20th century, the concept of cultural heritage developed from a tangible manifestation of the past to a representation of the cultural landscape (Amoruso & Salerno, 2019) and cultural values that can interact with memory. In this sense, memory has to be considered the pivotal point on which the community's identity is built (Amoruso, 2017). As well expressed by Marilena Vecco (2010, p. 324), this conceptual development has led people and international institutions to gradually concentrate on "the capacity of the object to arouse certain values that led the society in question to consider it as heritage". In this framework, the need to protect intangible cultural elements as an expression of human memory and identity is of primary importance.

In 2003, UNESCO released the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (henceforth Convention), feeling the urgency to protect oral traditions and living heritage given their intrinsic intangible heritage elements. Indeed, given the rapid speed of contemporary life, technological and economic advancement, and globalisation, the world's cultural expression – as portrayed through traditions, rituals, and events – is in danger (Alivizatou, 2011; Podara et al., 2021).

*Living heritage* is defined as "performing arts, oral expressions, social practices, rituals, festive events and traditional knowledge", a crucial aspect of human existence "handed down from parents to children, from masters to apprentices,

from teachers to pupils, it is safeguarded through transmission" (UNESCO, 2020, p. v). Article 14 of the Convention states that *education, awareness-raising and capacity-building* are necessary to guarantee the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) within societies and at the international level (UNESCO, 2020, p. 10). Multiple researchers have observed and demonstrated how storytelling is an inherent skill in human beings. For this reason, storytelling has been recognised as having a dual function. On the one hand, storytelling makes it possible to shape and share life experiences (Reinsborough & Canning, 2010), forming the collective sentiment of society. On the other hand, storytelling is an actual cognition act (Salerno, 2014) since this is how human beings process information (Fisher, 1989).

*Narrating heritage* can be the real challenge for ICH. The challenge is understanding how to promote the development of narrative content and story-based processes to preserve and share memories through people's personal stories and experiences, giving a voice to a living culture that should not die or disappear (Salerno, 2014). Stories that can be transmitted in different forms and linked to processes, objects, and real-life stories can represent the tradition of a culture. Using storytelling for cultural promotion allows an emotional connection between cultural institutions and people, making cultural heritage attractive (Bonacini & Marangon, 2020). Moreover, improving access to content through digital media and digital storytelling can contribute to the further pluralisation and democratisation of historical narratives and dialogues (Bonacini & Marangon, 2020; Ibrus & Ojamaa, 2020).

177

The research is grounded on the idea that narrative can be the driving force for audience engagement, and digital media can be a straightforward but effective instrument for archiving and building a repository of cultural artefacts and testimonies for the transmission of memories (Podara et al., 2021). The archive is a space that contains elements of the past that can be reinserted into the given society. In this sense, audiovisual storytelling expressions have played an essential role within the media and cultural field since the nineteenth century (Harrison, 1997). The ability of audiovisual language to document physical, social, and cultural reality, generate awareness, and provide alternative ways of knowing has led to its rising prominence in transmission processes. As a result, audiovisual storytelling and digital archives have become an efficient and effective way to document, preserve, and enhance ICH.

## 2. The Digital Library of Living Traditions

According to the *Faro Convention* (Council of Europe, 2005), cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past that people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge, and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time. Folklore and popular traditions are living heritage and should be shared with and accessible to young generations through the regeneration and practice of memory. Connecting communities to heritage and designing storytelling strategies for intangible heritage understanding is valuable. In a society where learning is the new trend, knowledge is a new form of capital, and experiential design is a new form of economy.

The *Digital Library of Living Traditions* (henceforth DL) is a knowledge-based repository and digital platform for collecting, preserving, and sharing cultural practices and promoting traditional Jordanian handicrafts as part of the country's intangible heritage. The enhancement strategy produces advanced visualisations, informative multimedia, and multiscale modelling, privileging immersive value, direct comparison, and interaction as well as creating new methodologies of simulation and imagination through technologies.

Precisely, the DL visualises handicrafts and objects crafted by artisans and Bedouins as well as describes rituals and symbolism, home environments, local habits, and tent-building techniques to provide new (ways of) interaction between the visitor and the experience of visiting the museum, supported by audiovisual storytelling contents. The lives of the artisans, their techniques and tools, and practices and glossaries are documented by audiovisual storytelling, experimenting with languages and format, bringing oral history (OH) to life and making it accessible.

Thus, the DL has a twofold aim. On one side, it should enhance and preserve, in a digital dimension, the collections of the Folklore and Popular Traditions Museums, clustering them accordingly to different categories related to the various types of heritage they represent. On the other side, the DL should help connect and highlight where and by whom cultural products and goods are crafted to create links among territory, artisans, and cultural practices. For this purpose, the DL comprises three clusters: rituals, traditional dresses, and

Bedouin tents. The contents are delivered according to the formula "Products, Techniques, and Stories from Artisans and Bedouin Communities."

Moreover, the DL will be accessible through a phygital experience (Ballina et al., 2019), not addressed by this contribution. Ideally, specific digital content will be physically displayed on site without compromising the visitors' experience while helping them imagine and approach the lived experiences of the original artefact's users so that they can comprehend their meaning in its provenance (Chu & Mazalek, 2019). For example, the multimedia content will be available through the new installations under design for the two museums: the Digital Library of Living Traditions (online), the Digital Tent (Folklore Museum), and the *Dress Studio* (Popular Traditions Museum). These installations will be the places of interaction to experience liveable stories directly from the women and the men that regenerate this outstanding everyday knowledge. Furthermore, being a product strongly linked to the cultural tourism sector, the DL can be regarded as an additional digital attractor, thus capable of intriguing visitors with the magic and mystery of the people's stories.

## 2.1. Dataset and Repository Layout

As previously stated, the first function of the DL is to archive a part of Jordan's cultural heritage digitally. Through the application of digital technologies, the archive is transformed from a mechanism of addressability into a generative, algorithmic, protocol-like, and programmatic *arché* (Ernst, 2004), thus providing personalisation and contextualisation of the

information delivered to the users, laying out advantages such as a personalised way of learning (Danks et al., 2007).

The archive will be accessible from the platform's homepage, from which the users can also reach an *About* section, where the project and its mission, vision, and values are described, with a section highlighting the network of actors involved in the project. Once the users have accessed the archive section, they can freely browse the list of products included or filter the results according to several parameters: the types of products they fall under, the territories in which they are made, the clusters to which they refer, the museums in which the products are exhibited, and, finally, the techniques by which they were made.

After selecting the search parameters, users can access the product sheets, where each artefact is described. The description provides the following:

1.  The ID by which it is catalogued in the museum
2.  The museum where it can be found
3.  The cluster
4.  The name in the Jordanian language
5.  The reference concepts from a list proposed by UNESCO regarding cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2020)
6.  The reference production sites
7.  The techniques, tools, and materials used to make it, with a list of similar products
8.  A list of artisans in the area who make similar products
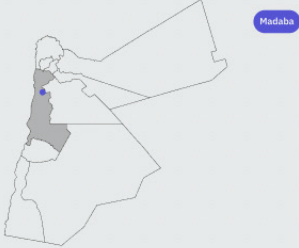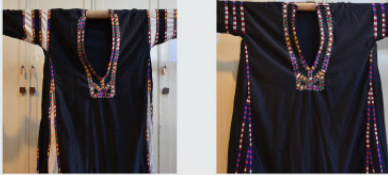
**Figure 1.** Alessandro Ianniello, *Digital Library of Living Traditions*, Sheet dedicated to artisans or craft associations, 2022.

Similarly and through the selection of the same parameters, the sheets dedicated to artisans or craft associations will also be searchable, highlighting the following (Fig. 1):

1. The types of products made
2. The clusters they belong to
3. The UNESCO concepts they refer to
4. The techniques, tools, and materials used to make the different products
5. The regions in which the artisans (or associations) reside and work
6. A list of other products made by them

Furthermore, from each sheet, one can access multimedia contents (videos). One of the aims of the platform is to create a user experience that is intuitive and that allows users to obtain a series of information about Jordanian cultural heritage. As pointed out by UNESCO, intangible heritage is a constellation of interconnection, and for a proper understanding of its complexity, it is important to dive into it. Having this purpose in mind, the DL project also includes a data visualisation section to return a graphic overview of the existing relationships among all the data in the archive, inspired by the so-called *UNESCO Constellation*. It will also be possible to use visualisation as a filtering system to select the information of interest, returning the search result in the listing section. Finally, the users can access the glossary section both from the product sheets and from those related to artisans, in which the various Jordanian terms used in the archive are listed, providing their definitions or explanations of the terms.

This section is helpful for non-Jordanian users who can, in this way, further deepen their knowledge of the nation's cultural heritage.

As of writing this contribution, the platform's development is in the prototyping stage regarding the archive and glossary sections. At the same time, the data visualisation system is currently being optimised to be embedded in the platform and to make it responsive and usable as an additional filtering system for the information in the archive.

## 2.2. Bringing Oral History Alive: Audiovisual Interviews for Documenting Stories and Practices

As previously introduced, the DL is designed as a multimedia archive to preserve and transmit knowledge about traditional Jordanian handicrafts and Bedouin cultural practices. This paragraph focuses on the involvement of audiovisual storytelling practice in documenting the collective historical memory of the Jordanian communities, collecting, recording, and producing content starting from the personal and cultural memories of members of heritage communities (Salerno, 2014).

Alongside the digital documentation of the physical objects displayed in the two museums, the traditional artefacts and the handicrafts practices for producing them are documented using audiovisual storytelling and the experience of stories, practices, and techniques. As stated by the UNESCO guidelines (2020), on traditional handicrafts, both the object itself and the world around it need to be preserved and enhanced.

In light of such premises, the short movies are thought to be a tool for enhancing the intangible cultural practices of Jordanian heritage, such as the people and the communities who participate in the intangible heritage.

These preliminary reflections on handicrafts lead the idea that the artisans' role in Jordanian society must be highlighted through some central topics in the interviews:

- The meaning (functional and symbolic) of the object produced for society in which artisans perform their work
- The traditional production processes
- The relationships among the selected raw materials, the object produced, the social context in which it will be used, and the surroundings
- The knowledge transmission from generation to generation

Starting from the idea that oral histories (OHs), "as primary sources of information, are used as evidences of the past and inculcate human memory" (Yap & Barsaga, 2018), the project deals with local community engagement and the people who have made and used these objects since the beginning of the process. Artisans are not just the main characters of the stories; they also have an essential role in defining what to tell and how, what to show, and, most importantly, the main memories that help to regenerate their identity.

Different Jordanian towns and districts were chosen for the interviews to collect information from different Jordanian contexts and create the occasion to highlight and enhance cul-

tural diversity positively. We selected six topics following the parameters of the digital archive, starting from the literature review and the case study analysis. After this preliminary research, the priority products selected for the interviews were derived from a participatory workshop with the communities.

After the presentation of the whole project, people were asked to select the objects that, according to them, better symbolised their traditional lifestyle. This step was fundamental to break the ice and create a connection with the people, make them comfortable with the team, and, above all, include them and make them the protagonists of the enhancement process. The role of the network promoted by the Department of Antiquities in Jordan and the mediation of the local cooperatives and village people were relevant for selecting the groups to be interviewed. They all worked with our team to mediate the relationships among all the stakeholders (researchers, practitioners, and artisans/Bedouins).

The topics and Jordanian artisans and Bedouin communities selected are the following:

- Tent weaving, making, and transportation; rugs: Udhruh, Wadi Rum, Mukaver
- Textile production: Udhruh and Ghor Safi (Petra), Bani Hamida (Madaba)
- Food and drink: Udhruh (Petra), Mukaver
- Music instruments: Udhruh (Petra)
- Embroidery: Mary al Hamam (Amman), Jerash
- Jewellery: Jerash

The Bedouin tent is the type of dwelling typical of the desertic nomadic lifestyle because of its adaptation to the habitat and the materials it is made of (Amoruso & Conte, 2022). Rugs and carpets are part of the tent environment and are produced by weaving hairs directly available from their animals (such as goats, sheep, and camels). Food and drink consumption as well as music and storytelling are part of the hospitality rituals of the Bedouin culture, in which nomadism and the harsh climatic condition of the desert constantly guide the people's choices and habits. Finally, embroidery and jewellery are the primary expressions of the women's identity in the community (Jabbur et al., 1995).



**Figure 2.** Eloisa Casadei, *Digital Library of Living Traditions*, Set for the interview with the Rababa maker inside the Bedouin tent for the ceremonies, Udhruh community, 2022.

As of writing this contribution, the interviews have been done thanks to the involvement of a local video maker (to overcome the language barrier) (Fig. 2).

The average length of the footage collected for each topic is between 2 and 3 hours of recording. According to the preliminary reflections mentioned above, each interview focuses on the personal *biography* of the artisan or the Bedouin and the *technique* (Fig. 3), mapping the interaction between tangible and intangible culture. The local video maker is now in the editing phase of audiovisual artefacts that should be inserted in the DL and into the museums.



**Figure 3.** Eloisa Casadei, *Digital Library of Living Traditions*, Set for the interview with the Rababa maker inside the Bedouin tent for the ceremonies, Udhruh community, 2022.

## 2.3. Workshop: *A Portrait of the Living Human Treasures* – A Dialogue with/between People and the Intangible Knowledge

The workshop presents a process for designing compelling stories for empowering communication. From audiovisual storytelling to defining the promise and values as drivers for constructing content, the workshop aims to convey the fundamental skills for enhancing communication through narrative

skills. The workshop intends to explore digital and audiovisual storytelling in the ICH's design, ideating, producing, and representing narratives with and on digital media, including different genres and formats. We propose a workshop-based methodology, relying on the digital storytelling practice (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009; Lambert & Hessler, 2018) to support the cultural expression of people through the creation and dissemination of personal autobiographical stories (i.e. non-fiction) (Venditti, 2017).

The expected outcomes of the workshop have two main perspectives. From the point of view of the content produced, the outputs are a group of digital stories about traditional craftsmanship and intangible knowledge, which embed short narratives from personal experiences and digital archive material. From the point of view of knowledge sharing, the aim is to empower people in the design of digital stories, strategically exploiting the potentialities of storytelling.

The workshop has a hybrid form and is structured as follows:

1. A series of four online lectures aimed at giving the participant the foundations of ICH, narrative, and audiovisual storytelling
2. A two-day workshop on site for designing story-based content which follows a three-phase process of *collecting*, *crafting*, and *reframing* (Ciancia et al., 2021) supported by narrative tools developed and tested through didactic and research experiences (Ciancia et al., 2018; Mariani & Ciancia, 2019; Piredda et al., 2015)

The online lectures introduce the contemporary use of audio-visual storytelling within the realm of design for ICH. In doing so, the four lectures will tackle the following: (1) the fundamentals of narrative (concepts, glossary, and practice); (2) the processes and tools to design audiovisual content; and (3) examples of narrative strategies to preserve and promote oral tradition and ICH. The 40-minute lectures are designed to be experienced synchronously, with a final Q&A portion.

During a two-day workshop held on site, the participants will be asked to collect stories, testimonies, and memories from the past about traditional craftsmanship, starting from personal archive material. They will translate them into story-based content as tools for giving a voice to and amplifying the dissemination and understanding of the specific expression of the Jordan ICH.

After the online theoretical lectures, the participants will be involved in a preliminary activity covering the first phase of the three-step process adopted. The *collecting* phase involves the collection of fragments, gathered individually, to produce an archive of raw material and begin the creation of narrative artefacts. During this hands-on activity, the participants are asked to collect stories, testimonies, and memories from the past about traditional craftsmanship, starting from personal archive material. This activity aims at collecting visual documentation, audiovisual content, and OHs to create a repository of stories according to three main clusters: rituals (rites and ceremonies), clothing and jewellery (personal ornaments), and house environments and decoration. They will then trans-

late them into story-based content during the *Crafting Stories* and *Reframing Fragments* phases held on site in Jordan.

The first day will be devoted to the *Crafting Stories* step. The crafting phase represents the moment in which the participants work on building stories. They will build story-based content, starting with identifying the narratological element by putting into practice the notions learned during the online lectures. The definition of the object(s), character(s), place(s), and action(s) will then be translated into a narrative form. The output will be scripts and storyboards delivered in a free form (such as analogical sketches or digital video(s)). Finally, the second and last day of the workshop will be devoted to the production of audiovisual content. The output will be short video content, between 30 seconds and 1 minute, feeding the digital archive of stories and practices.

The intended audiences for this workshop are practitioners, academics, and students interested in designing digital stories for promotion and communication. Moreover, the workshop – conducted in a hybrid form, online and on site – aims to involve local facilitators, produce a dialogue between field experts and citizens, and promote a more profound knowledge of the living heritage spread in the Jordanian landscape.

## 3. Final Reflection: Preserving Memory, Safeguarding Heritage (Digital Memory and Digital Traces)

*Narrating heritage* is a real challenge for ICH, and stories can drive audience engagement. For this purpose, digital media can be a straightforward but effective tool for preserving and transmitting memories.

The DL has been designed as a knowledge-based repository for gathering (workshop), maintaining (digital platform), and disseminating (augmented experience on site) the knowledge of the artisans and promoting Jordanian traditional handicraft as a component of national intangible heritage. Specifically, it was designed to recreate a narrative experience in the paths of memory and target its regeneration among young people. The digital platform represents the *fabula*, the chronological order of events, meant as organisational memory to store data preserved for future transmission (Ernst, 2004).

Moreover, collecting the untold and personal stories of people/artisans, bonding objects, and physical traces with OHs overcomes "the silence of discrete archival files" (Ernst, 2004, p. 48). The DL is designed as a digital toolkit where handicraft activities are described accurately through documentation and surveys about traditional Jordanian handicrafts, based on the 2002 national regulation for the protection of handicrafts made in Jordan and the involvement of local facilitators. Artisans' lives, their handicraft techniques, and knowledge transmission are documented by interviews addressing the habitat, the domestic and folklore dimension, and the personal background of people, villagers, and Bedouin communities.

Thus, the design of an augmented experience on site (ongoing) represents the narrative discourse and the organisation of the temporary (and spatial) experience provoking reflections, entertainment, and learning at every level of engagement. Critical issues are related to the technical review of contents for specific thematic areas (dresses, jewellery, Bedouins, folk-

lore) and particularly for glossaries and transliteration from the Arabic language and local dialect.

Finally, while the DL is a way to preserve memory, workshop activity aims at empowering people in digital and audiovisual storytelling, promoting capacity building for the generation of knowledge and the activation of new meanings in the ongoing interaction between the representation of memories and their interpretation within society. This research also aims to produce a more vital awareness of the items exposed in the two museums and the link between them and the Jordanian landscape. As a virtuous circle, the final goal of the DL is to generate continuous development of awareness of Jordan's immense living heritage.

## Acknowledgements

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IV

BIOGRAPHIES

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In 2018, she discussed a PhD at Università degli Studi di Roma La Sapienza about the economy and handicrafts of Ancient Mesopotamia. Since 2009 she has conducted researches and field campaigns in Jordan and Iraq, aiming at the reconstruction of the cultural landscape of past societies. She collaborated with several international projects conducted by the British Museum, the University of Cambridge, the Penn University Museum (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), the Ludwig Maximilians Universität in Munich, and the American School of Oriental Research.
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Her teaching and research activity focuses on knitwear and textile design, mainly on the convergence of traditional techniques with advanced technologies, the evolution of the digital representation of textile products and the enhancement of sustainable design, processes and products.
She has been a visiting researcher and teacher at Birmingham City University, at the Swedish School of Textile and the Faculty of Architecture in Lisbon, and taught in several other international workshops.
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exposed in Pitti Filati in June 2019. During the last year of the Master, she attended one semester in Rovaniemi, Finland, where she focused on weaving textiles and learned more about artic design.
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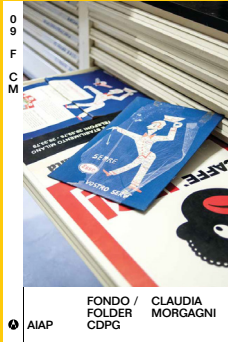yi.zhang@polimi.it

275

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