

The Feast of Sant'Efizio

A Living Heritage

Also this year our community is preparing to honour the fulfilment of the perpetual vow made to Sant'Efizio on 11th July 1652 to avert the spreading of the plague that was threatening the town, Sin then the Municipality of Cagliari has honoured the promise also during the most critical historical occurrences, such as the air raids of 1943.

Over the centuries this collective ritual has changed and enriched. Today, almost four centuries later, the solemn Feast in honour of Sant'Efizio is a religious and cultural event among the most important in the Mediterranean basin with the participation of thousands of people, many of whom come from all over Sardinia and from dozens of countries around the world.

The importance and religious significance of this Feast is clear to all, but now, besides the spiritual aspect, also the cultural one must be added. For this reason, the Municipality of Cagliari, the Archdiocese and the Municipalities of Pula, Villa San Pietro, Sarroch and Capoterra, have started the process for the nomination of the Ritual Perpetual Vow Fulfilment and the Feast of Sant'Efizio to the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, as per the principles established by UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

The meaning of such nomination is to guarantee a greater visibility and consciousness about cultural heritage and its preservation, as well as to raise awareness towards the importance of the collective goods and cultural resources for the social, economic and democratic progress of our community.

Since its taking office, the Municipality is strongly committed in the implementation of initiatives for safeguarding the entire cultural heritage, but the citizens of Cagliari above all are the ones who must contribute actively and concretely to the safeguard and valorisation of our riches and values.

For this reason I ask you to support the nomination of the Ritual Perpetual Vow Fulfilment and the Feast of Sant'Efizio to the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, through actions, also at individual level, for the safeguard of our cultural heritage which is not only limited to the monuments or works of art, but also includes the traditions inherited from our ancestors.

Traditions which we have the duty to safeguard and to pass on to our children.

The Mayor

Massimo Zedda

What is the Cultural Intangible Heritage?

There are resources that we have an obligation to pass on to the future generations: a pristine environment; an equitable, democratic, free and inclusive society; the cultural heritage.

Some of these goods will be important for the economy and quality of life of our descendants, other will guarantee to future generations a sense of belonging to their community, the tools to develop a shared vision of the future and the capability to make progress.



Among these resources, there is the cultural heritage which, in its modern definition, not only indicates the monumental, archaeological and artistic resources, but also includes the traditions, the knowledge inherited from our ancestors and all those cultural expressions that we create in response to our needs.

In particular, the **intangible cultural heritage** is the set of all those cultural expressions we learn simply by a word, a gesture, a song, by the participation in a ritual or a feast, from the imitation of a dance step, and which, in the same way, we pass on to younger generations.

The importance of such heritage is so substantial that a United Nations body - **UNESCO** - has even promoted a Convention for its safeguarding; an agreement among nations, thanks to which, today, billions of people around the world recognize and engage in safeguarding all of these particular cultural resources.

The Convention adopted by the General Assembly in 2003, is the first international treaty meant to provide a juridical, administrative and financial framework for safeguarding this heritage.

At national level the Convention foresees both the safeguarding of the intangible heritage present on the territory of the State and the measures to be adopted to identify and define such heritage and the safeguarding measures together with the participation of the communities, groups and non governmental organizations.

The Convention has also created the Representative List with the aim of ensuring visibility and awareness of the meaning of the living goods, of encouraging the dialogue among people and nations starting from the reflection about the common richness represented by cultural diversity and human creativity

As per this Convention each form of **cleverness, creativity and human cultural expression** is important as such. Because it allows us to make progress it cannot be considered a minor resource, residual or devoid of dignity for the mere fact of being linked to daily life, to labour or to religious rituals.

Salvaging Cultural Intangible Heritage

The cultural intangible heritage of Italy and, above all, of Sardinia, is indisputable and must be safeguarded and recognized in order to remain alive and continue to fulfil its function.

Society is continually evolving and also culture changes over time. Some traditions die out while others are created and all this happens, since ever, in response to the changes that characterize our world.

For some time, however, many cultural expressions, which could still respond very well to our needs, are in danger of disappearing as a result of globalization, cultural homologation and life styles and commodification of culture.

However, to safeguard intangible cultural heritage we cannot use the tools we use to preserve monuments and art works.

To safeguard these resources we need to keep them alive, recognised as important and transmitted among people and to the younger generations.

Often, this heritage cannot be transmitted through written texts, which is why it is important that safeguarding activities are implemented with the participation of those people, often elders, who guard such knowledge and skills that constitute the real essence of this heritage.

Every safeguarding activity must always involve the communities, the groups and the individuals who guard such heritage and who create and transmit it each and every time there is an opportunity.

To know, to safeguard and to transmit this heritage to future generations strengthens it, increases it and keeps it alive, even through change and along its path towards its adaptation to new needs and new life styles.

But how can we safeguard a heritage that is in continuous evolution without freezing or trivializing it?

The secret is to transfer the knowledge but also the meaning of these resources.

In other words, one must focus on the safeguard of both the meanings and the phenomena involved in the processes of transmission of the intangible cultural heritage between people and from generation to generation.

All this has implications on the social level and the cultural policies with a highly innovative impact, as it passes from the protection of cultural expressions to that of the environmental and social contexts that generated those cultural events and which allow their occurrence and transmission.

Initiatives important for the safeguard of intangible cultural heritage are those relating to the identification and documentation of such resources and scientific research in the field of anthropology.

The safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage is also an important source of economic development, not only in the area of tourism, which in some cases can damage this, but above all as "raw material" and a source of inspiration for the cultural and creative industry.

The Ritual Perpetual Vow Fulfilment and the Feast of Sant'Efigio are fully expressions of the intangible cultural heritage of Cagliari and of the ecclesiastical Province of Cagliari, but they are also of Sardinia, Italy and the whole humanity.

The vow and the feast are as well expressions of our history, of our identity and of the capacity of the community of Cagliari to make common front also against threats even more terrible, like the plague of the mid '600.

This is why we have to protect this and why we propose to the community to nominate the Ritual Perpetual Vow Fulfilment and Feast of Sant'Efizio to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

In order to support this nomination it is necessary that all Cagliari citizens, but not only, participate actively in the ritual and feast, revitalizing the traditions that in each family characterize those days of feast.

With the purpose of collecting the testimonies of those wanting to send their contributions, the Municipality has set up a dedicated email: santefisio@comune.cagliari.it to which besides the support to the nomination of the Ritual Perpetual Vow Fulfilment and Feast of Sant'Efizio to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, also suggestions, photos, memories on how you live the feast of Sant'Efizio can be sent.