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# Digital Library of Living Traditions: A Proposal for the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Jordan

## Introduction

This research addresses the valorization of Jordan's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and introduces the concept of a web-based tool for documenting Jordan's cultural landscape through its craft production, the *Digital Library of Living Traditions* (DL). The aim of the research is to increase the understanding of the collections exhibited at the Museum of Folklore and Popular Traditions at the archaeological site of the Roman Theater in ʿAmmān. This paper reports on the creation of a research and dissemination tool, the DL, to include objects, places, and techniques beyond the collections exhibited in museums in the valorization process of Jordan's living heritage.

The first part of the paper focuses on the role of storytelling and audio-visual archives in the field of design for ICH. This involves conceptualizing, producing, and presenting digital memories with and on digital media, including various genres and formats. The second part describes the DL, a multimedia archive that will provide a digital repository where curators and scholars can find visual documentation and information on techniques, raw materials, and manufacturing tools for the leading traditional Jordanian crafts. Some of the content will be accessible in the museums to enhance the on-site experience and create interactive touch points for a wider audience. The project also supports workshop activities and capacity building in digital heritage and multimedia communication strategy.

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entitled "Program for the definition of a strategic plan for the improvement and the enhancement of the Folklore Museum, the Museum of Popular Traditions, and the site of the Roman Theater in 'Ammān".[1]

## Promoting Intangible Cultural Heritage through Visual Repositories

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 (UNESCO 2020). Indeed, given the rapid speed of contemporary life, technological and economic advancement, and globalization, the world's cultural expression, as portrayed through traditions, rituals, and events, is in danger (Alivizatou 2011; Podara *et al*. 2021).

During the twentieth century, the concept of cultural heritage developed from a tangible manifestation of the past to a representation of the cultural landscape (Amoruso and 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: 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.

*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: 5). Article 14 of the Convention states that *education, awareness-raising, and capacity-building* are necessary to guarantee the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage within societies and at the international level (UNESCO 2020: 10). Multiple researchers have observed and demonstrated how storytelling is an inherent skill in human beings. For this reason, storytelling has been recognized as having a dual function. On the one hand, storytelling makes it possible to shape and share life experiences (Reinsborough and 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 and Marangon 2020). Moreover, improving access to content through digital media and digital storytelling can contribute to the further pluralization and democratization of historical narratives and dialogues (Bonacini and Marangon 2020; Ibrus and Ojamaa 2020). 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 artifacts 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, audio-visual storytelling expressions have played an essential role within the media and cultural field since the nineteenth century (Harrison 1997). The increasing importance of audio-visual language in transmission processes can be attributed to its capacity to capture physical, social, and cultural reality, to create consciousness, and to offer alternative ways of knowing. As a result, audio-visual storytelling and digital archives have emerged as highly effective means of preserving, enhancing, and documenting ICH.

**The Making of the Digital Library**

The DL is designed as a digital toolkit where handicraft activities are described accurately through documentation and survey about traditional Jordanian handicrafts, based on the 2002 National Law for the protection of the handicrafts made in Jordan, and the involvement of local facilitators. Artisans' lives, handicraft techniques, and forms of knowledge transmission will be documented by interviews that will be available to the public in a dedicated section of the DL. Specific workshops online and on site and scientific papers will be available to disseminate the information and collected data. This research also aims to produce a stronger awareness of the items exhibited 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.

According to the Faro Convention (Council of Europe 2005), cultural heritage is a collection of artifacts that people identify as a reflection and expression of their continually changing values, beliefs, knowledge, and traditions, regardless of who owns the resources. The entire environment that results from interactions between people and locations across time is included. Through memory practice and regeneration, young generations should be made aware of and given access to folklore and popular traditions as living cultural legacy. It is beneficial to connect communities to their past and create storytelling plans for understanding intangible heritage. Knowledge is a new type of capital and experiential design is a new form of economy in a culture where learning is the prevailing trend.

The DL is a knowledge-based repository and digital platform for documenting, archiving, and disseminating cultural practices and promoting traditional Jordanian handicrafts as an element of the nation's intangible heritage. The enhancement strategy

generates sophisticated visualizations, educational multimedia, and multiscale modelling, emphasizing immersive value, direct comparison, and interaction as well as introducing new methodologies of technology-based simulation and imagination (FIG. 1).

To be more specific, the DL illustrates the handicrafts and objects made by Bedouin and artisans as well as rituals and symbolism, domestic settings, regional customs, and tent-building methods to offer new ways of interaction between the visitor and the experience of visiting the museum, supported by audio-visual storytelling contents. By experimenting with languages and media, audio-visual storytelling brings oral history to life and makes it accessible. It documents the lifestyle of the artisans, their techniques, tools, practices, and glossaries.

The DL thus has multiple goals. On the one hand, it should improve and maintain the Folklore and Popular Traditions Museums' collections digitally by organizing them in accordance with several categories related to the variety of kinds of heritage they represent. On the other hand, the DL should promote interconnections between geography, craftsmen, and cultural practices by identifying where and by whom cultural items and products are manufactured. The DL consists of three groups for this purpose: Bedouin tents, ritual garb, and traditional dress. According to the "Products, Techniques, and Stories from Artisans and Bedouin Communities" formula, the details are provided.

This contribution does not address how the DL will be available through a *phygital* experience (Ballina *et al*. 2019). In a perfect scenario, specific digital content will be physically displayed on site without detracting from the experience of visitors and helping them in approach-

ing and imagining the lived experiences of the original artifact's users so they can understand their significance in its provenance (Chu and Mazalek 2019). For instance, the new exhibits for the two museums, including the Digital Library of Living Traditions (online), the Digital Tent (Folklore Museum), and the Dress Studio, will make the multimedia information accessible (Popular Traditions Museum). These installations will serve as meeting points where people can hear relatable tales from the men and women who renew this exceptional common knowledge. Furthermore, as a product strongly associated with the cultural tourism sector, the DL can be seen as an additional digital attractor, capable of captivating visitors with the magic and mystery of people's stories.

## Documenting Stories and Practices: Audio-visual Interviews for Bringing Oral History Alive

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 section focuses on the involvement of audio-visual storytelling practices 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).

Users can freely browse the list of products included in the archive from the platform's home page and can filter the results according to a variety of criteria, including the categories of products they fall under, the areas in which they are produced, the clusters to which they refer, the museums where they are displayed, and, finally, the manufacturing techniques used (FIG. 2). The DL's prin-

cipal goal is to digitally enlighten Jordan's intangible legacy. By utilizing digital technologies, the archive is changed from an addressability mechanism to a generative, algorithmic, protocol-like, and programmatic *arché* (Ernst 2004), enabling customization and contextual understanding of the information delivered to users and displaying benefits like a customized method of learning (Danks *et al.* 2007).

After selecting the search parameters, users can access the product sheets, where each artifact 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 clusters they belong to.
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.

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. 3):

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.

Further, each sheet offers access to multimedia content like videos and pictures (FIG. 4). One of the goals of the platform is to provide an intuitive user interface that enables users to find out various details regarding Jordan's cultural heritage. According to UNESCO, intangible heritage is a constellation of connections, and it is crucial to delve into it to fully comprehend its complexity. With this goal in mind, the DL project also has a data visualization part that uses the so-called UNESCO Constellation as reference to provide a graphic overview of all the relationships among the data in the archive (FIG. 5). The chance to use visualization as a filtering mechanism for selecting key information will also be provided.

Finally, the glossary element is readily available to customers from both the product documents and those related to artists. Here, a list of the many Jordanian terms used in the archive is provided, along with meanings or explanations. Non-Jordanian users can benefit from this section by using it to deepen their understanding of the country's cultural heritage. The archive and glossary sections of the platform were in the prototype stage at the time that this contribution was written. The data visualization system is also now being improved so that it may be integrated into the platform, become responsive, and work as an extra filtering system for the data in the archive.

Alongside the digital documentation of the physical objects displayed in the two museums, the traditional artifacts and the handicraft practices for producing them are documented using audio-visual 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

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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 led to 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 the 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 "as primary sources of information, are used as evidences of the past and inculcate human memory" (Yap and 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 cultural 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 symbolized 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/Bedouin).

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

- Tent weaving, making, and transportation; rugs: Udhruḥ, Wādī Ramm, Mukāwir.
- Textile production: Udhruḥ and Ghawr As Sāfī (Petra), Banī Hamīdah (Madaba).
- Food and drink: Udhruḥ (Petra), Mukāwir.
- Music instruments: Udhruḥ (Petra).
- Embroidery: Marj Al Hamām ('Ammān), Jarash.
- Jewelery: Jarash.

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 and 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 jewelery are the primary expressions of the women's identity in the community (Jabbur *et al.* 1995).

As of the writing of this contribution, the interviews have been completed thanks to the involvement of a local video maker (to overcome the language barrier). 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,* mapping the interaction between tangible and intangible culture (FIG. 6).

**Preserving Memory: Reflections on Digital Transmission**

*Narrating heritage* is a real challenge for ICH, and telling stories effectively can drive audience engagement. For this purpose, digital media are a strategic tool for preserving and transmitting memories. People, the places where they live, rituals, and practices are the elements of that intangible heritage that international bodies recognize as a *Cultural Landscape* (Amoruso and Salerno 2019).

The project proposes a workshop-based methodology, relying on the digital storytelling practice (Hartley and Mc William 2009; Lambert and 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 DL has been designed as a knowledge-based repository for listening, visualizing (digital platform), and disseminating (augmented experience visiting the museum collections) the knowledge of the artisans and promoting Jordanian traditional handicraft as a component of national intangible heritage. Its purpose was to generate a narrative experience in which the learner used new imagination to rediscover memories and practices. The digital platform serves as a destination to store organizational memory and archive data for transmission in the future (FIG. 7).

Based on the 2002 national regulation for the protection of Jordanian handicrafts and the involvement of local facilitators, the DL is designed as a digital toolkit wherein the handicraft activities are accurately described through documentation and surveys about traditional Jordanian handicrafts. Interviews are designed to address the habitat, the domestic and folklore dimension, and the personal background of people, villagers, and Bedouin communities. The outcome of this research documents artisans' lives, handicraft techniques, and knowledge transmission.

As a result, the design of an augmented experience on-site (ongoing) represents the narrative discourse and the organization of the temporary (and spatial) experience, provoking reflections, entertainment, and learning at all levels of engagement. The technical review of contents for specific thematic areas (dresses, jewelry, Bedouin, folklore) and glossaries and transliteration from the Arabic language and local dialect are critical issues.

Finally, while the DL is a method of

preserving memory, the workshop activity aims to empower people through digital and audio-visual storytelling, promoting capacity building for knowledge generation and the activation of new meanings in the ongoing interaction between the representation of memories and their interpretation in society. This research also aims to raise awareness of the items on display in the two museums, as well as the connection between them and the Jordanian landscape. The DL's main objective, as a virtuous circle, is to generate continuous development of awareness of Jordan's extensive living heritage. The case study presented here delivers multimedia applications to understand the objects exhibited at the Folklore and Popular Traditions Museums of ʿAmmān, beyond their appearance and also through their significance.

Living heritage is defined by UNESCO 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"; its survival is preserved through transmission. So, everybody involved in the preservation process must deal with this kind of possible and imaginable transmission.
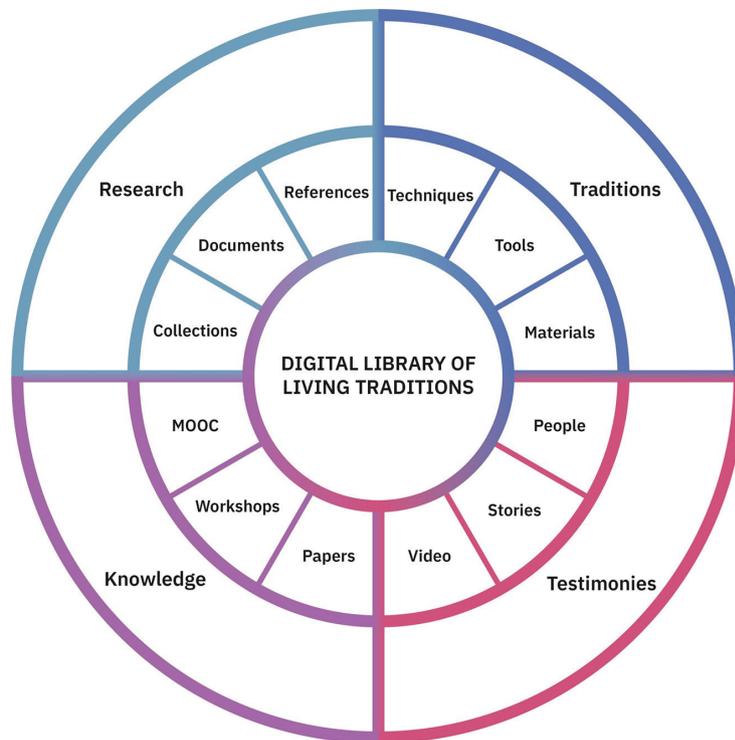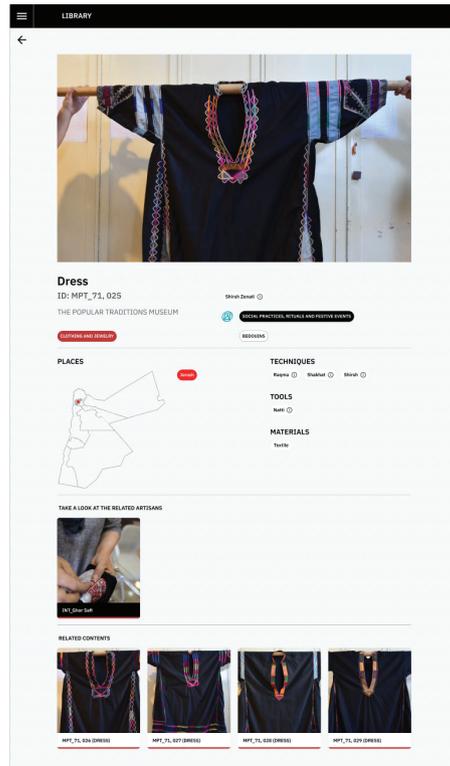


1. Digital Library of Living Traditions, logical framework, 2023 (graphic by Giuseppe Amoruso).

2.  Digital Library of Living Traditions, set for the interview with the Rababa maker inside the Bedouin tent for the ceremonies, Udhruh community (photo courtesy of Mo'taz Sulaiman Aref Al- Sheihan, 2022.)
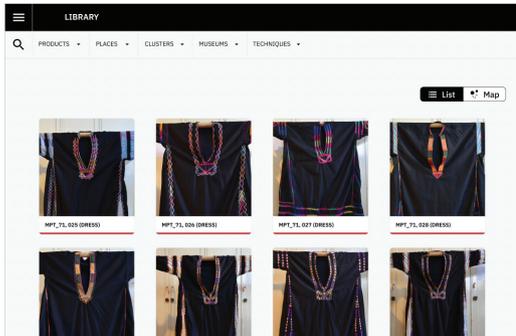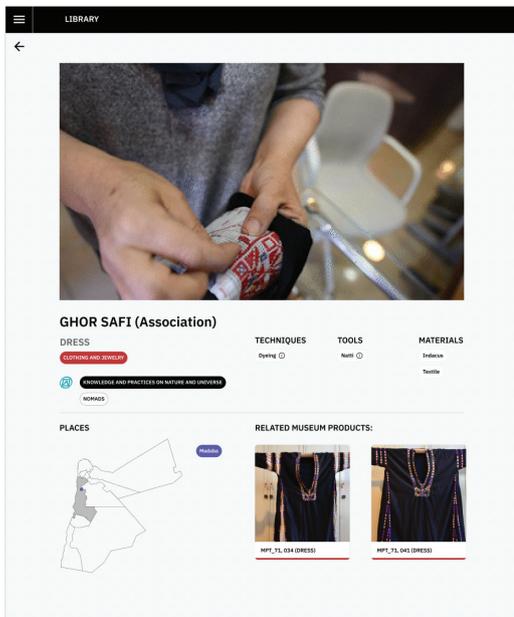




3.  Digital Library of Living Traditions, digital repository, 2023 (photo by Giuseppe Amoruso).
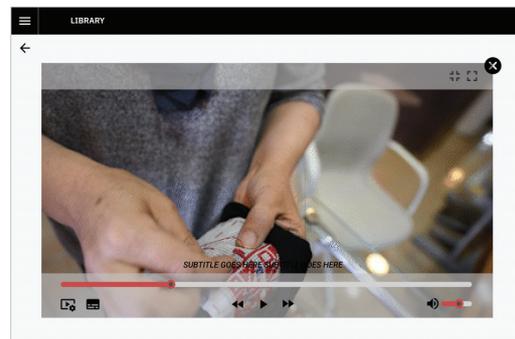
4.  Digital Library of Living Traditions, dress element information sheet, 2023 (photo by Giuseppe Amoruso).

5.  Digital Library of Living Traditions, data visualization concept (image courtesy of Michele Mauri, 2023).





6.  Digital Library of Living Traditions, information sheet dedicated to artisans or craft associations, 2023 (photo by Giuseppe Amoruso).

7.  Digital Library of Living Traditions, multimedia content, 2023 (photo by Giuseppe Amoruso).

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# Preliminary Report on the Excavation of a Roman Bronze-Casting Workshop on the Lower Terrace of the Temple of Zeus (Jarash/Gerasa)

## Introduction

Following an almost 40-year long tradition of excavations that began in October 1982, work was resumed in the *pseudokryptoporticus* on the lower terrace of the Temple of Zeus in Jarash in fall 2021. For that the author owes special thanks not only to Jacques Seigne, who allowed the team from the Katholische Universität Eichstätt (KUEI) to continue his work and supported us in every possible way, but also to Thomas Weber and Lutfi Khalil, who are most valuable partners and consultants in the project.

In the year 1993, Jacques Seigne and his team of the Mission français archéologique de Jerash (MFAJ) made an unexpected discovery during the excavation at the lower terrace of the Temple of Zeus. Behind the old temple, right in front of the northern entrance to the terrace, they found a big pit filled with strange pottery fragments. It soon

became clear that said fragments were smashed casting moulds and the installation was part of a bronze-casting workshop. When the MFAJ stopped working on the temple area in 2014, it was clear that the workshop had still not been completely excavated, even though three campaigns had already unearthed more and more details of this unique testimony of Roman craftsmanship. To further investigate the area of the foundry, Gerhard Zimmer, an expert on ancient bronze casting, initiated a new project funded by the DFG (German Research Foundation), with the author of this article as the field director. With Gerhard Zimmer's profound expertise on Greek foundries and the new insights from the recent excavations, we hoped to understand the technological differences between Greek and Roman workshops, among other things.

In fall 2021, a small square was opened inside the porticus, directly