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International experience of the Russian university of traditional art crafts in the field of preservation and development of intangible cultural heritage

Abstract. The Russian university of traditional art crafts has accumulated significant experience in the field of international activities, defining its international mission as the desire to contribute to the formation of an ethical attitude towards our country – Russia – around the world through the high aesthetics of masterpieces in each type of traditional applied arts. A significant factor in institutionalizing the university's international achievements could be the opening of the UNESCO Chair "Multicultural diversity of traditional art crafts", as the university has been actively cooperating with this organization since 2024.

The Chair's activities in the field of education will be aimed at enriching the existing system of professional training for future artists of traditional art crafts, complemented by formal and informal education implemented with the participation of local communities and experts from the UNESCO education sector, supporting educational programs in traditional art crafts for Russia and foreign countries, taking into account UNESCO's priority "Africa", ensuring comprehensive access to quality education in the field of culture and arts.

In the field of education, the UNESCO Chair creates conditions for the formation of mutual respect, intercultural and intergenerational dialogue and the ability to responsibly manage the diversity of intangible cultural heritage in the interests of sustainable development and preservation of identity among the maximum number of segments of society through traditional art crafts.

The UNESCO Chair's activities in the field of science involve the study and documentation of traditional art crafts as a guarantee of preserving the diversity of intangible cultural heritage, creating registers and regional maps of these phenomena, including in digital format.

The Chair's initiatives are aimed at addressing the tasks set by the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy and UNESCO's Framework Program for Education in Culture and Arts.

Through the creation of the UNESCO Chair, the Russian university of traditional art crafts can make a significant contribution to strengthening international and regional cooperation, analyzing and evaluating global trends in the development of traditional art crafts locally, developing methodologies and strategies for the development of art crafts in communities, contributing to the disclosure of the cultural and artistic potential of different regions of the world, taking into account UNESCO's priority – "Africa".

Keywords: traditional art crafts, Russian university of traditional art crafts, UNESCO, intangible cultural heritage, higher education, international activities, artistic and creative mobility, Africa, regional cooperation, scientific research.

The article is the result of reflecting on the interim outcome of cooperation between the Russian university of traditional art crafts and the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to UNESCO, initiated by the university's president V.F. Maksimovich. The large-scale exhibition "The Splendor of Russia's artistic heritage", held in the Miró Hall at UNESCO Headquarters in 2024 [7], launched both further exhibition events [1; 8; 9; 11; 13] and preparations for opening a UNESCO Chair – the institutional foundation for interaction between the university and this organization. The university has reached a level of educational, scientific, artistic-creative and international activity that enables it to broadcast the splendor of Russia's traditional art crafts abroad through exhibition activities supported by a wide range of educational initiatives (popular science lectures, master classes, etc.). Cooperation with UNESCO will contribute to fulfilling the international mission of the Russian university of traditional art crafts: to foster an ethical attitude towards our country – Russia – worldwide through the high aesthetic value of masterpieces in every type of traditional applied arts.

The substantive basis for interaction with UNESCO is the preservation, development and popularization of traditional art crafts as intangible cultural heritage. It was this topic that was the focus of a meeting in March 2026 at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris between V.F. Maksimovich, president of the Russian university of traditional art crafts, and Fumiko Okhinata, head of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Section at UNESCO. The discussion also included K.V. Rynza, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to UNESCO, as well as staff of the Permanent Delegation of the Russian Federation to UNESCO. Together, they explored opportunities for collaboration in the field of traditional art crafts and specialized professional education.

According to the terminology of this organization, "intangible cultural heritage means practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills – as well as the associated instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces – recognized by communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation,

is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and it provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thereby promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity” [4]. The number of works created within traditional art crafts generally increases steadily: new masterpieces are being produced in various types of lacquer miniature painting, artistic lace-making, etc. Therefore, it is practically impossible to determine the exact number of artifacts – works – that need to be protected, unlike material cultural heritage sites, whose quantity is stable (for example, the Ferapontov Monastery). In other words, UNESCO proposes to protect, as intangible cultural heritage, the unique technologies for creating traditional art crafts and the knowledge of how these works are made, embodied in specific “instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces”.

In the UNESCO approach to defining intangible cultural heritage, there are important semantic features for us. Thus, the process of preserving heritage includes a system of continuous professional education created and implemented at the Russian university of traditional art crafts, as it is this system that ensures the preservation, development and multiplication of knowledge, skills and professional abilities of future artists in 29 unique types of art. The “cultural spaces” referred to in the 2003 Convention are regional-historical centers of traditional art crafts, such as Bogorodskoye, Sergiev Posad and Fedoskino (Moscow region), Mstyora (Vladimir region), Kholuy (Ivanovo region), where institutes – branches of the university – are located, serving as key actors in transforming these places into territories of sustainable artistic and creative development.

At the same time, specialists note several paradoxes of the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage: “European culture is represented only by phenomena more or less connected with folklore, i.e., with ‘low’ culture, while Eastern cultures refer to both folklore and high culture heritage as their intangible masterpieces, for example, Nogaku theater in Japan or Kunqu opera in China” [2, p. 25]. European practice is such that intangible cultural heritage encompasses many forms of traditional culture: when forms of traditional culture cease to be dominant in society’s life, they “transition” into the category of heritage requiring certain protective measures to prevent loss.

Traditional art crafts of Russia have the potential to overcome the aforementioned contradiction. The works of traditional art crafts represent high art; they are alive and have not become mere museum artifacts, as beautiful handmade items of this kind are in demand in modern society and enjoy popularity. Traditional art crafts, as an embodiment of Russia’s cultural code, possess significant creative potential. However, they require protection and support measures (for example, to prevent the use of artistic solutions that do not take into account regional-historical artistic-technological, stylistic, compositional, coloristic and aesthetic traditions in design, including through AI). There is also a need to address the inertia of public consciousness, which fails to draw clear distinctions between the high art of traditional art crafts and primitive, kitschy craft items.

We believe that the situation in Russia regarding traditional art crafts as intangible cultural heritage is unique and has no analogues in the world. Therefore,

the establishment of a UNESCO Chair “Multicultural diversity of traditional art crafts” at the university will contribute not only to the development of this type of art and its regional-historical centers but also to the further conceptualization of the term “intangible cultural heritage”, methodologies for its identification, description and cataloging.

To determine the directions of activity and goals of the Chair, the authorial team additionally studied and analyzed the provisions of the Medium-Term Strategy for 2022–2029 [10], the sustainable development goals within the spheres of UNESCO’s competence, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (articles 26, 27), the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage of 2003, the Framework Program for Education in Culture and Arts 2024 [6], the declaration of the World Conference on Cultural Policy and Sustainable Development “Mondiacult-2025” [3], as well as the structure of the program and budget for the first four-year period 41 C/5 (2022–2025) [5] and the second four-year period 43 C/5 (2026–2029) [12].

The Chair “Multicultural diversity of traditional art crafts” aims to ensure the preservation and development of traditions of art crafts as intangible cultural heritage. Its opening will facilitate international cooperation within the UNITWIN network, exchange best practices, enhance research capacity, foster respectful attitudes towards the diversity of traditional art crafts and countries where this intangible cultural heritage is preserved, contribute to the agenda of sustainable development and expand creative activities and creative industries locally.

The key *areas of activity* for the Chair should include:

1. Development of international cultural and educational cooperation: this involves fostering academic research in regional and historical centers of traditional art crafts on national, regional and global scales.

2. Training specialists: preparing professionals in the field of traditional art crafts who can ensure the continuous transmission of intangible cultural heritage and apply their knowledge practically for cultural and economic development at local levels.

3. Research and documentation: investigating the genesis and current state of traditional art crafts, documenting them, creating registries and reconstructing lost types.

4. International exhibitions and awareness campaigns: organizing international exhibitions titled “The Splendor of heritage of traditional art crafts”, conducting workshops and delivering popular science lectures to raise awareness among a wide range of communities, groups and individuals about these art crafts as intangible cultural heritage.

5. Educator training: developing educators who will integrate traditional art crafts into preschool, primary, secondary and higher education programs for representatives from various countries, considering UNESCO’s priorities such as “Africa” and ‘Gender equality’.

6. Engagement with youth: creating systems to introduce children and youth to traditional art crafts in collaboration with participants from the UNESCO Associated Schools Network.

Objectives of the Chair's activities:

1. Development of cooperation mechanisms in the field of preservation and development of traditional art crafts with the participation of research and teaching staff from universities, museum employees, specialized enterprises, additional education teachers, representatives of local communities and experts from the UNESCO Secretariat. Implementation of courses for beginner/advanced specialists in various types of traditional art crafts. Exchange of experience in teaching traditional art crafts, including trips and teleconferences with regional-historical centers in Russia, France, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Burkina Faso, Guinea, involving experts from the UNESCO Education Sector. Maintenance of a specialized website and publication of bilingual scientific, educational and methodological literature.

2. Development of cooperation with communities, groups and individuals engaged in practical activities related to intangible cultural heritage in Russia, France, Bulgaria, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Guinea and Burkina Faso. Organization of exhibitions on various types of traditional art crafts aimed at comprehensively familiarizing the public with the characteristics of this art form and fostering an ethical attitude towards Russia, its culture and history.

3. Scientific pedagogical research, development of effective methodologies and educational technologies for engaging with traditional art crafts, teaching these art forms as intangible cultural heritage at all levels of education, including higher education. Creation of a course titled "Traditional art crafts: theory and practice of preservation and development of intangible cultural heritage" in Russian, English and French languages, along with the development of educational and methodological materials.

4. Development and implementation of joint interdisciplinary research on traditional art crafts aimed at their identification, documentation, study, preservation, protection, promotion and integration into formal and informal education systems, as well as the revival of aspects of these forms of intangible cultural heritage. Key outcomes of this research include updated registries and regional maps of traditional art crafts in countries such as Russia, France, Bulgaria, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Guinea and Burkina Faso. The results will be presented at relevant scientific forums, conferences, creative meetings, seminars and webinars that foster collective idea generation based on diverse experiences and practical developments related to the preservation and advancement of intangible cultural heritage and specialized formal and informal education. Additionally, findings will be published in scientific journals, including UNESCO reviews.

The establishment of a UNESCO Chair is an important project within the framework of realizing the international mission of the Russian university of traditional art crafts. Of course, for the newly created Chair, stakeholders have been identified – those who influence its activities and/or experience the outcomes and results of its work. Among these stakeholders, we have outlined:

- students at all educational levels: individuals interested in or receiving professional education in the field of traditional art crafts;
- educators and pedagogical staff: teachers, educators and scientific-pedagogical workers from schools and universities in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan,

France, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso and Guinea who are enhancing their capacity in teaching intangible cultural heritage;

- educational and research institutions: schools, research institutions, museums and other organizations that possess expert knowledge in intangible cultural heritage or show interest in it;
- enterprises: companies engaged in creating works of traditional art crafts;
- carriers of intangible cultural heritage: artists of traditional art crafts who receive public recognition and are involved in educational and research processes;
- youth from regional and historical centers: young people from villages, settlements and small towns that are centers of traditional art crafts, engaging in the collection and dissemination of information about intangible cultural heritage.

The expected impact of the UNESCO Chair “Multicultural diversity of traditional art crafts” on educational, socio-economic and cultural development at local, national, regional and global levels can be assessed as follows:

At the local level, growth of engagement among local residents from regional and historical centers of traditional art crafts (local community) in the preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage, development of creative industries, ensuring employment for specialists in these art forms, enriching educational programs at all levels, including those for schoolchildren, promoting best practices of traditional art crafts among children and youth, fostering respectful attitudes towards cultural diversity, encouraging mutual dialogue between cultures and creative directions and their synergy.

The broad coverage of Russian regions and accumulated experience will enable the Chair to assist communities and groups on the ground in passing down traditions of art crafts from generation to generation, instilling a sense of identity and continuity, promoting respect for cultural diversity, advancing museum and exhibition activities and addressing complex contemporary issues such as the opportunities and limitations of using artificial intelligence and questions of copyright in culture, including in traditional art crafts. This experience will be scaled up to national, regional and global levels.

At the national level, inter-university exchanges and contacts with institutions engaged in education for creative professions across the regions of the Russian Federation are essential. This includes student artistic and creative mobility. The organization of professional development courses, master classes, presentations, exhibitions and round tables on the topic of intangible cultural heritage will play a significant role in enhancing knowledge and skills among students and professionals alike.

At the regional level, the Chair has an extensive network of contacts with representatives from the Commonwealth of Independent States. It is planned to develop these contacts while adhering to the principle of equal geographical representation to ensure a mutually respectful dialogue between cultures and the exchange of experiences, including participation from UNESCO Secretariat experts.

At the global level, the Chair’s work will take into account the development of cooperation in the “South-South” and “North-South-South” formats by enhancing interaction with other institutions within the Network in foreign countries.

The substantial experience of international cooperation of the Russian university of traditional art crafts will allow it to contribute, within its competence, to the implementation of UNESCO's programs and priorities, with a focus on the protection of intangible cultural heritage in different regions of the world, taking into account social, historical, cultural and other factors.

The visibility and expected outcomes of the Chair's activities at the national, regional and international levels include:

Expansion of training directions for future artists of traditional art crafts:

- at the national level, the number of training directions for future artists of traditional art crafts will expand from 29 to 34 at the higher education level;
- at the regional level, two new directions will be introduced in collaboration with the Vitebsk State University named after P.M. Masherov in the Republic of Belarus;
- on the international level, two new directions will be developed, taking into account UNESCO's priority for "Africa", in partnership with the Higher Institute of Arts named after Mory Kanté in the Republic of Guinea and universities in Burkina Faso.

Quantitative indicators of effectiveness:

- Number of developed cultural and educational programs; Number of individuals mastering cultural and educational programs; Number of students – course listeners; Number of local community representatives involved in the development and implementation of programs at national, regional and international levels; Number of UNESCO associated schools involved in the project; Number of attracted experts from the UNESCO education sector;
- Quantity of published results of scientific research – including scientific monographs, research articles, catalogs, textbooks and educational materials, etc., on the types of traditional art crafts;
- Number of international exhibitions accompanied by master classes and popular science lectures on the types of traditional art crafts;
- Number of partnerships with universities and specialized institutions in Russia and foreign countries, including those taking into account UNESCO's priority "Africa";
- Number of professional development courses, including online courses with simultaneous video conferencing participation from at least 20 countries;
- Number of international scientific events – at least three branded forums: "Traditional art crafts and higher specialized education: modern challenges and prospects", "Traditional art crafts in the 21st century: past in the present, present in the future" (for students, postgraduates and young scientists), International Bartram readings at the Art and Pedagogical Museum of Toy named after N.D. Bartram in Sergiev Posad, with the invitation of experts from the Secretariat and Education Sector of UNESCO.

In the field of scientific activities, the Chair:

1. initiates scientific projects in collaboration with Russian and international partners from Europe, Africa and Latin America in the field of traditional art crafts

and vocational education. These projects include discussions and expert evaluations with UNESCO-recommended specialists. The Chair also develops concepts and methodologies for researching traditional art crafts and integrating them into educational practices.

2. conducts field research on various types of traditional art crafts, builds the capacity of researchers and creates registers of intangible cultural heritage as well as regional maps of these phenomena.

3. develops educational content and teaching methods for traditional art crafts aimed at children, adolescents and youth, including for UNESCO Associated Schools (in collaboration with schools in Kazakhstan, Belarus and regional and historical centers of this art in the Moscow, Ryazan, Vladimir, Ivanovo and Omsk regions).

4. organizes international scientific and artistic-exhibition events focused on various types of traditional art crafts. These events unite specialists in the field and representatives of government bodies to discuss current issues in the development of intangible cultural heritage. The outcomes of these events are of interest to the Secretariat of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

5. positions the network scientific publication "Traditional applied arts and education" as an open discussion platform for the preservation, development and popularization of intangible cultural heritage. The materials published are useful for preparing analytical materials for UNESCO.

The research results obtained by the Chair serve as the foundation for the creation of databases aimed at preparing a registry of traditional art crafts in Russia, France, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Guinea and Burkina Faso, as well as regional maps of intangible cultural heritage. The outcomes of these activities can provide a basis for global UNESCO reports.

In the field of knowledge transfer, the Chair:

1. plans and organizes branded international scientific events with the participation of UNESCO experts, including forums: "Traditional art crafts and higher specialized education: modern challenges and prospects", "Traditional art crafts in the 21st century: past in the present, present in the future" (for students, postgraduates and young scientists), International Bartram readings at the Art and Pedagogical Museum of Toy named after N.D. Bartram in Sergiev Posad (in collaboration with the Rogachyov Center of culture and folk art in the Republic of Belarus).

2. organizes teleconferences titled "The Splendor of the Heritage of traditional art crafts".

3. initiates summer schools in both offline and online formats in regional and historical centers of intangible cultural heritage.

4. organizes artistic and creative marathons that facilitate the transfer of knowledge and promote respect for intangible cultural heritage.

5. publishes research results, including articles, monographs, textbooks, educational materials and catalogs, including bilingual publications that take into account the official languages of UNESCO.

6. issues a peer-reviewed online scientific publication titled “Traditional applied arts and education”, which is the only specialized journal in the world dedicated to the development of traditional art crafts and vocational education.

7. creates a specialized website with updated registries of traditional art crafts, providing open access for the global community to relevant information.

The idea of establishing the UNESCO Chair has garnered interest and support from partners of the Russian university of traditional art crafts, who have provided letters of endorsement (Table).

An analysis of the documents developed by UNESCO indicates that the activities of the Chair will contribute to the implementation of UNESCO’s Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029. Specifically, it will support Strategic Objective 1: “Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all”, with the aim of reducing inequality and fostering creative societies, particularly in the digital age. The Chair will also contribute to Outcome 5: “Enhancing the protection and promotion of heritage and forms of cultural expression”, ensuring alignment with Russian legislation.

Table

The list of partners of the Russian university of traditional art crafts that supported the opening of the UNESCO Chair and provided letters of support

<i>Category</i>	<i>Name (s)</i>	<i>Links</i>	<i>Role(s)/contribution(s)</i>
Higher Education Institution	Institut Superior Des Arts Mory Kante De Dubreka (Republic of Guinea)	https://isamk.edu.gn/	Institutional, intellectual, informational
Private Sector	Institut Superieur de Technologies (Burkina Faso)	www.istburkina.education	Intellectual, informational
Private Sector	Umanis Business School (Burkina Faso)	www.ubsburkina.education	Intellectual, informational
Higher Education Institution	Institution of education “Vitebsk State University named after P.M. Masherov” (Republic of Belarus)	https://www.vsu.by/	Institutional, intellectual, informational, technological
Higher Education Institution	Abkhazian State University (Republic of Abkhazia)	http://agu.site/	intellectual, informational, methodological
State Institution	State communal enterprise on the right of economic management “Specialized Gymnasium No. 199” of the Department of education of Almaty (Republic of Kazakhstan)	https://www.gs199.kz/	Institutional, intellectual, informational

State Institution	State institution of culture “Rogachyov center of culture and folk art” (Republic of Belarus)	https://rogachev.gov.by	Institutional, intellectual, informational
Private Sector	Association “Bulgarian Center of Bobbin and Needle Lace”, Bulgaria	kaloferlace@gmail.com	Institutional, intellectual, informational methodological
One of the leading specialists in the world in the field of lacquer art	Prof. Dr. Monika Kopplin, Neisemeyerweg 26 48165 Münster, Germany	monelisa.kopplin@gmail.com	intellectual
State Institution	Municipal budgetary institution of culture “Center for folk crafts ‘Bereginya’”, Kargopol, Russia	https://cnrbereginya.ar.kh.muzkult.ru/	Institutional, intellectual, informational methodological
Higher Education Institution	Yelets State University named after I.A. Bunin, Russia	https://elsu.ru/	Institutional, intellectual, informational methodological
State Institution	Yakut college of culture and arts named after A.D. Makarova, Russia	https://yakkii.ru/	intellectual, informational methodological
Private Sector	LLC “Fedoskino”, Russia	https://fabrika-fedoskino.ru	Institutional, methodological, informational, technological
Private Sector	LLC “Zhostovo factory”, Russia	https://zhostovo.ru	Institutional, intellectual, informational methodological
Private Sector	LLC “Factory of folk art crafts ‘Yelets Lace’”, Russia	https://eletskruscheva.ru/	Institutional, intellectual, informational, technological
Private Sector	JSC “Semikarakorsk ceramics”, Russia	https://aksinia.ru	Institutional, intellectual, informational methodological

The analysis of UNESCO documents indicates that the activities of the Chair will support the implementation of UNESCO’s Medium-Term Strategy for 2022–2029, particularly in achieving Strategic Objective 1: “Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all”, with the aim of reducing inequality and fostering creative societies, especially in the digital age. The Chair will contribute to Outcome 1: ‘Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all’,

as well as Outcome 5: “Enhancing the protection and promotion of heritage diversity and forms of cultural expression”, ensuring compliance with Russian legislation.

Furthermore, the activities of the Chair facilitate the realization of UNESCO’s Framework Program for Education in Culture and Arts (43 C/5, Intersectoral Result 4.8) through the development and application of a comprehensive set of measures, including technical assistance, capacity building, operational tool development and the promotion of intersectoral knowledge exchange. This aims to advance progress in education within the spheres of culture and arts, as emphasized in the final document “Mondiacult 2025”.

The UNESCO Chair at the Russian university of traditional art crafts will contribute to organizing accessible education for communities, groups and individuals living in rural areas, towns and small cities who are custodians of traditional art crafts. The establishment of registries for intangible cultural heritage types and regional maps of these phenomena in Russia, France, Bulgaria, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Guinea and Burkina Faso, along with cultural and educational programs, will help consolidate local communities through their direct participation in safeguarding and managing intangible cultural heritage. The international exhibitions and workshops organized by the Chair will enhance the positive image of regional and historical centers of traditional art crafts.

The specific nature of the Russian university of traditional art crafts is such that it does not have the right to teach foreign students the types of traditional art crafts from Russia, as this could lead to an unacceptable loss of the essence of the art itself, which is defined by specific regional-historical artistic and technological characteristics. The transformation of traditional art crafts due to their transfer to other countries is excluded.

However, this specificity of the university is not a barrier to extensive international activities aimed at disseminating and popularizing traditional Russian art crafts as a magnificent part of our artistic heritage abroad.

The university has accumulated sufficient experience in specialized international activities, allowing it to collaborate with foreign partners to:

- initiate research aimed at describing and studying the types of traditional art crafts. One of the most important outcomes of this research will be the creation of registries and regional maps of these forms of intangible cultural heritage;
- develop artistic and creative mobility for both students and faculty;
- create cultural and educational programs aimed at introducing the broadest segments of society to traditional art crafts.

Furthermore, the experience of the Russian university of traditional art crafts is undoubtedly beneficial for those countries, particularly African ones, where a wide variety of traditional art crafts still exists (for example, Burkina Faso), but there is no specialized professional education available. The Russian university of traditional art crafts, which has successfully established and operates a system of continuous professional education, can share its expertise and developments with international partners through the establishment of a UNESCO Chair. These partners have much to protect, preserve and develop in the field of traditional art crafts – an essential component of intangible cultural heritage.

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