

Inventory Evidence

Inventory of the intangible cultural heritage element

(under the 2003 UNESCO Convention)

Truffle hunting and extraction in Italy: knowledge and traditional practices

The element “Truffle hunting and extraction in Italy: knowledge and traditional practices” as intangible cultural heritage was filed in the MEPI Form – release 4.0 (form of the inventory of the elements of the intangible cultural heritage under the 2003 UNESCO Convention) used by Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali e per il Turismo (Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism - MIBACT) since 2019 (an updated version was released in 2020). The MEPI form consists of a set of thematic fields; it is possible to attach photographic and video documentation only by signing a disclaimer to publication and dissemination; such thematic fields correspond to cataloguing codes drawn up by ICCD - Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione in compliance with the SIGECweb system in use at Ministero per i beni e le Attività Culturali e per il Turismo.

The MEPI form has been developed to allow the identification of the intangible cultural heritage elements and to facilitate accessibility and processing by the communities directly involved. The form contains a specific field where the community’s participation process in the identification of the element, their consent to contents and adherence to its updating may be detected.

The updating of the MEPI inventory shall be carried out according to times and modes of the Periodical National Report drawing up (in compliance with the Operational Directives of the 2003 UNESCO Convention), in cases of nomination extensions at national as well as international level (on an extended or shortened basis of the elements included), or should the involved communities apply for supplementing new aspects and components of the element or for revising information already included in the inventory form previously drawn up.

The inventory includes also a specific field dedicated to the detection of possible risk factors for the element vitality and safeguard as well as a field to detect other inventories/catalogues (at local, regional or community level) connected to the element itself.

An extract of the MEPI general outline is attached:

CD			IDENTIFICATION FORM
	CDM		Form Code
PI			IDENTIFICATION PROCESS AND MODE
	PET		Time period
	PAC		Community’s participation and consent
	PAN		Community’s consent to the inventory updating
OG			IDENTIFICATION OF THE ELEMENT
	OGN		Name of the element
	CGI		Community(ies), group(s), individuals involved
	LOR		Geographical location
	DES		Description
	MOT		Transmission modes
	SVS		VITALITY STATUS OF THE ELEMENT
		SVSM	Safeguarding measures
		SVSA	Risk factors for the safeguarding
NS			HISTORICAL INFORMATION
	NSE		Historical information about the element
DO			DOCUMENTATION
	RBS		Bibliographic references and webpages
	FTA		PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION
	VDC		VIDEO DOCUMENTATION
RM			REFERENCES TO OTHER INVENTORIES/CATALOGUES

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CM			CERTIFICATION OF DATA
	RAP		Community's representative
	DAR		Date of enrollment

The complete form of the inventory is available online in Italian at the website of Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione (ICCD) at:

<http://www.iccd.beniculturali.it/it/780/inventari-convenzione-unesco-2003-dal-2019>

The abstract of the MEPI form is available online in Italian and in English at the website of Associazione Nazionale Città del Tartufo (ANCT) and Federazione Nazionale Associazione Tartufai Italiani (FNATI) at:

<http://www.cittadeltartufo.com>

<https://www.fnati.it/>

Element Identification Code:

MEPI 4.00 ICCD_MEPI_2464007393851

Name of the element:

Truffle hunting and extraction in Italy: knowledge and traditional practices

Community associated with the element:

The community that identifies itself with the element "Truffle hunting and extraction" consists of a national, cross-regional network made of 73.600 bearers and practitioners named "Tartufai". Some of them join 45 groups associated with Federazione Nazionale Associazione Tartufai Italiani (FNATI), some are individuals, approximately 44.600, who do not join any association, some others join 12 Associations made of about 20.000 free practitioners who cooperate with Associazione Nazionale Città del Tartufo (ANCT). The large community, distributed throughout the Italian territories suited to the element's practice and coming from an activity experienced individually, that goes beyond the binomial extractor(cavatore)-dog only when the truffle hunter becomes mentor of the new generations and hands down to them the knowledge, was able to express forms of collective solidarity developing them into forms of associations as a result of a voluntary organized gathering so as to foster exchange of practices and experiences among groups and individuals.

The evolution of such an approach resulted in a balanced relationship between the extractor and nature, which is the basis of the transmission of knowledge and techniques connected to the hunting and extraction identified as a sustainable practice. While in the families it is still the senior, individual "Tartufai" – the grandfather or the father – who teaches the tricks, places and ways of hunting and extraction so that the younger generations may gradually feel part of the community, the organized associations succeeded in gathering groups of practitioners coming from marginal territories, involving them on issues concerning the preservation of the habitat jeopardised by factors such as land abandonment and related urbanization, the clues that help identifying truffle plants and the extraction techniques which allow to ensure the regeneration of the different species.

From these shared experiences originated a national network based on regional associations which today participate in the transmission, both formal and informal, between generations.

Both ANCT and FNATI contribute to spot little groups of truffle hunters involving them in the general action already identified by the organized associations. The community thus formed and gathered around the same objectives has started to reflect on the element intrinsic values in a way that such associations today represent a reference point for bearers and practitioners and for the public institutions; they organize, and participate in, forms of formal transmission of the element; promote and organize interventions in grounds reserved to free hunting in agreement with public and private owners in order to protect the truffle habitat, designing and practising actions aimed at maintaining and regenerating the forest.

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IDENTIFICATION PROCESS OF THE ELEMENT (community's participation and consent)



Figure 1. Periodic Meeting of bearers (Tartufai) Associations

The anthropological analysis of the world of the truffle hunters as main characters and bearers of the oral and empirical knowledge connected to the element of truffle hunting and extraction in Italy, of the stories intimately related to it, of the gestures handed down, has been built around the ethnographic interviews with the truffle hunters but it is also based on bibliographic and archive research. NGO (SIMBDEA) accredited by UNESCO, the University of Pollenzo (Cuneo) and anthropologists from universities and institutions have been involved in the research. The identification process of the element is the result of a coordination work at national level pursued by a community-based, permanent working group made of

bearers and practitioners, without any discrimination of gender, coming from the various truffle areas throughout the regions, of technicians from the institutions, and experts of specialized Study Centres who worked supplementing different perspectives (cultural, environmental, forestry). The process of inclusion of bearers and practitioners disseminated throughout the national territory has been possible thanks to the activity of the truffle hunters community represented by FNATI, to the free associations of truffle hunters and to ANCT who encouraged by means of partnerships itinerant activities throughout the national territory (workshops, conferences), ensuring the gradual accessibility and inclusion of groups, individual bearers and truffle areas in accordance with the values of the element and of the community with which they identify themselves. This active participation is a direct evidence of the consent expressed by the community of bearers and practitioners who have identified the element and drawn up the inventory; it has contributed to the dissemination and sharing of knowledge and practices related to the different local traditions as well as to raise awareness, more in general, of the importance of the cultural values which bind human beings to their traditions and to nature. Such values were processed and experienced as a tool of sustainable development integrated with the human being's ability to adapt to the environment in response to natural evolution and as a source of memory functional to processes of transmission between generations.

Thanks to events, meetings, conferences and activities promoted by the vast and widespread community, the awareness of the element as intangible cultural heritage has grown also among the different stakeholders and the administrations (among which Municipalities, Regions, specialized Research Centers, etc.) and facilitated the participation of people and communities in all the Italian truffle areas, without any restriction to the accessibility of the element.

Description of the element

"Truffle hunting and extraction in Italy" is an intangible cultural heritage of knowledge and practices refined by continuous observations which have been passed down orally for centuries by shadowing and oral transmission which characterize the rural life of whole groups of bearers and practitioners, named "Tartufai", in the Italian truffle territories. They involve a wide range of skills and knowledge which allow their bearers to interpret climate factors, rainfalls, to recognize plant associations, the pattern of the grounds in order to ensure a correct and sustainable management of natural systems through the maintenance and improvement of forest and fluvial ecosystems and all the habitats related to the presence of the underground fungus. Such skills allow first of all the so called "Cerca" (Hunting), that is, the identification of those areas which foster the spontaneous growth of the truffle plant, from whose roots comes the underground fungus named truffle; then, they allow the application of the traditional technique to identify and extract it, the so called "Cavatura" (Extraction). This knowledge handed down over the generations includes also the special dog-truffle hunter

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Figure 2. Hunting of truffle-plants (Cerca) in natural habitat and beares (Tartufai) with “Vanghetto”.

relationship. In fact, between the two phases it becomes evident the outcome of the truffle hunter’s ability in training the dog to refine the olfactive ability so that when sniffing the air among hundreds of smells the animal goes towards the source of what it is looking for and, going around the truffle plant, it identifies the exact spot where to start digging, to let then the extraction to the care of the extractor.

The truffle hunter favoured the dog’s company collaborating to the hunting with his/her experience to read nature, to grasp the colour differences that characterize a truffle-ground, to recognize the truffle plants establishing with the animal a dialoguing relationship which determines the success or the failure of the undertaking. The latter is therefore the result both of the dog’s olfactive ability, improved with training, and of the truffle hunter’s skills, who, by means of a special spade called “vanghetto” or “zappino”, “zappetto”, “vanghella”, acts without changing the soil conditions.

Only the proper practice of the element allows maintaining ecological balance and plant biodiversity.



Figure 3. Tecnique of truffle-extraction (Cavatura) with dog and “Zappino”.

The knowledge of the secrets suggested by tradition ensures the seasonal biological regeneration of the truffle species making them renewable resources. Such knowledge of the rural world, already narrated in the classical era, is deeply tied to oral expressions and traditions which reflect the local cultural identity entering the vernacular vocabularies. The linguistic and lexical approach reflects the extent of the dissemination throughout the national territory and the variety of the cultural trait in all its facets: the truffle hunters, the truffle dog, the hunting, the preservation, the traditional culinary recipes in which the truffle is used, the festivity as moment of gathering of the community and passing phase of the seasonal calendar connected to the element.

The truffle species, in their regional peculiarities, take also typical oral expressive traits: in fact, according to their geographical location, they may be named: “trifola”, “baco”, “taratuffolo”, “trituffulu” and the “tartufai” himself/herself in the various dialects becomes “trifolau”, “trifulin”, “tartufaro”. This different dialectical terminology is also reflected in the creation of different symbolical cultural constructs in which the practice of the element is intertwined with mythology, especially as far as nature is concerned. For example, to the truffle hunter nature was not only the operating environment, but also the container where the human being placed anxiety, fear, which took manifold, negative identities, among which that of the witch (“Masche” in Piedmont and “Jannare” in Campania) as well as divinatory ones (“Nurtie” in Umbria). These figures or concepts by means of which rather unknown and ungovernable natural phenomena were interpreted would affect the community’s way of life. The truffle hunter seen as a “hero of the night” becomes,



Figure 4. Hunting of Truffle-Plant (Cerca) in natural woodland habitat. Bearer (Tartufai) with dog.

therefore, the one who shares spaces and times with those mythological figures whom others would not dare to challenge, assigning therefore to the truffle extracted magical and mysterious meanings.

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Ancient sources refer to thunder and lightning as markers of the favorable period for hunting,



Figure 5. Trasmision - Experiential guided tour in natural habitat with school groups and truffle-hunters

sometimes mythologically associated with magical mysterious powers recalled in popular beliefs. Aspects that, even more in the past – when hunting and extraction were a mainly night practice – symbolically characterize the “tartufaio” as a “wild animal” who, as a collector, is able to symbiotically enter into relations with nature and its rules, culturally marking popular imagination. Orality, knowledge, practice and tradition connected among themselves are the outcome through which the truffle hunting and extraction element includes traditional oral expressions, insights, and practices related to the universe.

Geographical location and range of the element

The truffle areas where the community practices the hunting and extraction of truffle were identified, and therefore correspond to, the territories most densely populated by truffle hunters also most



Figure 6. Hilly truffle-landscape

active in the practices of the element transmission, depending also on the dissemination of the botanical species on the national territory. They are encompassed in the pure and mixed woods of the Apennines, inland hills, coastal and riparian areas, and around isolated plants of the agricultural ecosystem.

North: Langhe-Roero-Monferrato hills; Alta Val Bormida Savonese woods, Oltrepò Pavese-Mantovano, Pò, Ferrarese and Bassa friulana valleys; hills of Parma-Reggio Emilia-Modena-Bologna-Rimini provinces.

Centre: Crete Senesi, Mount Amiata, Apennines of Pisa-Firenze-Arezzo provinces; Apennines of Pesaro-Urbino-

Ancona-Macerata-Fermo-Ascoli provinces; Valleys of Tevere-Chiascio-Topino rivers; Valnerina-Nera river park, Colli Orvietani; Apennine woods of Perugia-Rieti-Roma-Frosinone provinces.

South: woods, rivers and hills of L'Aquila-Isernia-Campobasso-Avellino-Benevento-Salerno and Alta Val di Sangro provinces; Matese park, Mount Pollino; Gargano, Murgia, Tavoliere Cagliaritano-Sarcidano, Giara di Gesturi-Nuorese highlands; Nebrodi and Madonie park. These territories belong to the following Regions: Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Puglia, Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia



Figure 7. Truffle- territory coinciding with the "MAB" area (Molise Region)

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Transmission modes



Figura 8. Transmission- Educational Laboratory- Truffle Museum (San Giovanni D'Asso).

son, from grandfather to grandchild. In fact, the element has constantly and informally been transmitted between generations and

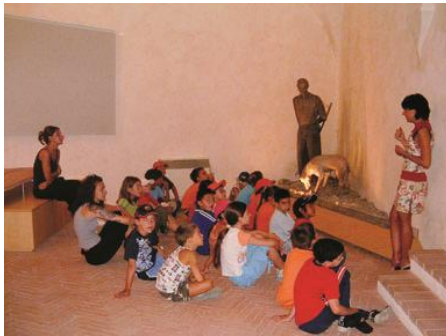


Figure 9. Transmission- Educational Laboratory- Truffle Museum (San Giovanni D'Asso).

the element; promote and organize interventions in grounds reserved to free hunting in agreement with public and private owners in order to protect the truffle habitat designing and practising actions aimed at maintaining and regenerating the forest. From a scientific point of view, the technical research on the observation of the biological cycle which generally involves the truffle areas has been since 1968 topic of discussion among scholars who every twenty years meet at the International Conference of Spoleto in Umbria, where researches carried out in different



Figure 11. Traditional cuisine. (Still water washing of the truffle).

Truffle hunting is a practice characterized by clues, guesses, alerted and refined senses ready to observe signs, traces, signals, appearances, circumstances, calls that truffle hunters feel and enact starting from the space-time coordinates fruit of their memory. The transmission of the complex body of knowledge connected to truffle hunting, of the forms and practices related to this underground fungus which conceals itself from the hunter, represents a topical path of how oral

memory is conveyed from generation to generation, and how competences are an intangible heritage. They mostly were an important part of family inheritance passing from father to son, from grandfather to grandchild. In fact, the element has constantly and informally been transmitted between generations and within the families, and has contributed to develop a sense of belonging to a wider community, opening to other modes of training/information so as not to stop the flow of knowledge and competences. Today the community, made of associations and individual bearers, is directly engaged in training young people by organizing courses and educational projects. At the same time, by disseminating the cultural value of truffle hunting and extraction connected to the various territories, the community promotes the other environmental, cultural, historical, traditional resources which this intangible element

is able to enhance and drive. The associations represent a form of sharing among bearers and practitioners; they organize and participate in, forms of formal transmission of



Figure 10. Transmission - Educational materials for children

geographical areas are compared, updated and the path for the following meetings made ready. The conference which took place in 2012 in Alba "Truffle hunting between origins, history, science and tradition" highlighted the need for a joint proposal which involved and engaged all in a collaborative effort aimed at exploring the world of truffle, especially as far as the hunting aspect is concerned, for a long time viewed as marginal. It was therefore necessary to look at popular culture in order to grasp the different aspects of the element: the general concepts, the operational practices preserved and handed down orally not to lose them, organizing them into codified processes for transmission. In fact, the elements characterizing truffle hunting

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and extraction, handed down through stories, fables, anecdotes, proverbs and ways of saying which find correspondence also with the expressions of the typical culinary habits and the traditional gastronomical knowledge, become part of a process of formalizing the body of knowledge by complementing the intangibility of knowledge and competences. To the sharing of knowledge and practices concerning the respect for the environment, to the maintenance and protection of the truffle areas, strong elements of socialization such as the lunch and the feast which leave the social family dimension to become a feature of a wider community based on associationism are added.

Historical information

The element consists of a body of knowledge and practices of the rural world passed down (already Theophrastus, III century B.C., Plutarch from Cheronea, I Century AD, Juvenal, *Saturae* 127 AD), disseminated throughout the national territory and based on the hunting carried out, also overnight, in truffle plant habitats ("tartufaie") producing truffle ("tartufo"), an underground fungus (9 native botanical species) distinctive for its typical scent and for being a limited resource originating only in symbiosis with the roots of specific trees (ash trees, poplars, beeches, etc.) according to local biodiversity (already Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, I century AD). Not negligible is its being a culinary seasoning in traditional regional cuisine (already Apicius, *De Re Coquinaria*, III or IV century AD; Ciccarelli, *Opusculum de tuberibus*, 1564; Pisanelli, *Trattato della natura*, 1596) still used today in combination with fat raw materials (olive oil, butter, eggs) necessary for the exaltation of the truffle aromatic characteristics as shown by historical, regional recipe books, cookbooks, culinary literature and fiction as a social, identifying aspect of cultural festive events such as fairs, folk festivals (inherited partly by the rural, pre-industrial calendar) on the rich tables of the landowners as evidenced in over two thousands years from Apicius on to Bartolomeo Scappi (1500), from Brillat-Savarin (1800) to Pellegrino Artusi (early 1900s).

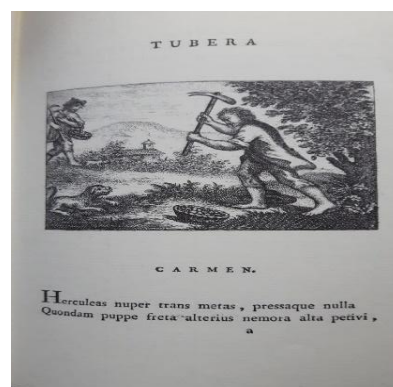


Figure 12. Historical Book- 1776 (Giovanni Bernardo Vigo).



Figure 13. Painting "Affresco del Buon Governo" (A. Lorenzetti). Detail of the truffle-hunting (Cerca) with the sow, 1338, Siena.

For thousands of years nature has preserved for humans a product whose origins are lost in history and legend, a secret that the earth gives up on special occasions only to sensitive and refined noses and that every time renews its magic. The world of the truffle hunter becomes complicated when the narrative is no longer about the product but about the body of knowledge of the hunter/extractor and about the techniques which bring to light a resource otherwise concealed.

It is in the ancient history of the human being that it is handed down from mouth to mouth, from father to child, an activity, that of the truffle hunter, which rests on customs, unwritten rules, and that knows no limits in exploring space and time. This activity is shared with invaluable partners that have diversified in the history: the observation of flies, the stick, the pig and the dog. Abandoned the pig for its difficulty to cover long distances and untameable voracity, over time the truffle hunter has favoured the relationship with the dog.