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THE INTERNATIONAL STATUS OF THE "LAZGI" DANCE AS AN INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY: A STATISTICAL AND DOCUMENT-BASED ANALYSIS

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Abstract: Lazgi, a dance of the Khorazm Region of Uzbekistan, was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity on 12 December 2019, yet few studies explain what this status means in practice or place it within the statistics of UNESCO's lists. This article examines the legal basis of the status, the position of Lazgi in global and national inscription statistics, and changes in Uzbekistan's inscription pattern after 2019. A mixed design was used, combining document analysis of the 2003 Convention, Committee decision 14.COM 10.B.41 and the nomination documents with descriptive analysis of secondary data. At the 14th session, 35 of 42 nominations were inscribed (83.3%). Lazgi is one of 272 elements (32.0% of 849) tagged as dance, and it is the only dance among Uzbekistan's 16 elements on the Representative List. Uzbekistan's inscription rate rose from 0.50 per year (2008–2019) to 1.67 per year (2020–2025; $p = 0.017$), and the multinational share rose from 1 of 6 to 8 of 10 elements ($p = 0.035$). The Committee found that all five criteria were met and that viability was not under serious threat. The study concludes that the status is a framework of commitments rather than enforceable protection, and that Lazgi is typical of UNESCO's lists but unusual within Uzbekistan's portfolio. Because no data on practitioners exist in the public sources, indicators for monitoring are proposed.

Keywords: Lazgi; Khorazm; intangible cultural heritage; UNESCO; inscription statistics; Uzbekistan

1. Introduction

Ask someone in Khiva or Urgench about Lazgi and you are unlikely to get a textbook definition. You will more probably be told about a wedding, a spring festival or a family gathering where the music started and somebody stood up to dance. This is one reason why the tradition is interesting for heritage studies. It has never really been an "object" that can be kept in a museum. It exists only when it is performed, and it stays alive only when older dancers and musicians pass it on to younger ones.

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003) was adopted on 17 October 2003, entered into force on 20 April 2006 and today has more than 180 States Parties (UNESCO, n.d.-d). Uzbekistan ratified it on 29 January 2008 (UNESCO, n.d.-e). After the 20th session of the Committee in December 2025, UNESCO's lists contained 849 elements from 157 countries (PTI, 2025; Permanent Delegation of Spain to UNESCO, 2025). The fourteenth session, held in Bogotá from 9 to 14 December 2019, brought together more than 1,400 participants from 134 countries; it examined 42 nominations for the Representative List and inscribed 35 elements (UNESCO, n.d.-c). One of them was the Khorazm dance Lazgi, inscribed on 12 December 2019 (UNESCO, 2019a; 2019b).

There is a large academic debate about what the Convention achieved and what listing does to the traditions it names (Aikawa-Faure, 2009; Kurin, 2004; Hafstein, 2009; Smith and Akagawa, 2009; Foster and Gilman, 2015). Dance in Uzbekistan has been studied as part of social and political

change (Doi, 2002). However, most writing on the inscription of Lazgi is in news reports and tourism texts, and I could not find a study that uses inscription statistics to show where Lazgi stands. This article tries to fill a small part of that gap.

Four research questions guide the study. (RQ1) What is the legal basis of the status, and why did the Committee inscribe Lazgi? (RQ2) What is the position of Lazgi in the global statistics of UNESCO's lists and in Uzbekistan's own portfolio? (RQ3) Did Uzbekistan's inscription pattern change after 2019? (RQ4) Which risks and responsibilities follow from the status? For RQ3 the hypothesis (H1) is that both the annual inscription rate and the share of multinational nominations were higher after 2019 than before.

2. Methods

The study uses a mixed, descriptive design with Lazgi as a single case. The qualitative part is a document analysis of the 2003 Convention (UNESCO, 2003; see also Blake, 2006), the Committee decision and the nomination documents. The quantitative part is a descriptive analysis of secondary data that are publicly available. No primary data were collected, so no ethical approval was needed.

Table 1 lists the datasets. The Uzbek inscription data (year of inscription, list, and single-country or multinational nomination) were compiled from UNESCO's records for Uzbekistan (UNESCO, n.d.-e). The concept tags of Lazgi and the number of elements carrying each tag were read from the UNESCO page of the element (UNESCO, 2019b). The tourism data are annual numbers of foreign tourist arrivals reported by the Statistics Agency of Uzbekistan and published in the press.

Dataset	Content / unit	Period	Source
Committee decision and nomination file	Text of 14.COM 10.B.41; consent and inventory documents	2019	UNESCO (2019a; 2019c)
UNESCO list statistics	Elements and countries; nominations and inscriptions at 14.COM	2019, 2025	UNESCO (n.d.-c); PTI (2025)
Uzbek inscriptions	Year, list type, nomination type (16 + 2 entries)	2008–2025	UNESCO (n.d.-e)
Concept tags of Lazgi	9 tags and counts of elements per tag	Oct 2026 (date of access)	UNESCO (2019b)
Tourism	Foreign tourist arrivals, millions per year	2017–2023; 2025 (part year)	Daryo (2024); Tour Central Asia (n.d.); Euronews (2025)

Table 1. Datasets used in the study.

Counts, percentages and annual rates were calculated. For H1 two periods were compared: 2008–2019 (12 years, up to and including Lazgi) and 2020–2025 (6 years). The two annual rates were compared with an exact conditional test, which treats the number of inscriptions in the first period as binomial given the total number. The shares of multinational nominations in the two periods

were compared with Fisher's exact test (two-sided). The significance level was 0.05. Calculations were done by the author in Python with the SciPy library. The qualitative material was read closely and coded for the five inscription criteria and for the concerns named in the literature.

The samples are small (16 elements), so the tests are exploratory and a significant result does not show a cause. The Uzbek list was compiled by the author from UNESCO's country page and will change with later inscriptions. The tag counts are those shown by UNESCO's website at the time of access and may change after new inscriptions. Tourism data are national, because I did not find public data for Khorazm after 2019, so they give context only. There was no fieldwork, and the nomination form itself was not analysed in detail.

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Table 2 summarises the main figures. The Committee inscribed 35 of the 42 nominations examined at its fourteenth session, which is an inscription rate of 83.3%, and Lazgi was one of these 35 (2.9%). The decision was taken by broad consensus without a vote (Society.uz, 2019). UNESCO describes Lazgi with nine concept tags (Figure 1). "Dance" is one of them, and 272 of the 849 elements on the lists (32.0%) carry it, so dance is a very common category. Some other tags of Lazgi are rare: only 66 elements (7.8%) are tagged "social gathering", 17 (2.0%) "body percussion" and 4 (0.5%) "holidays".

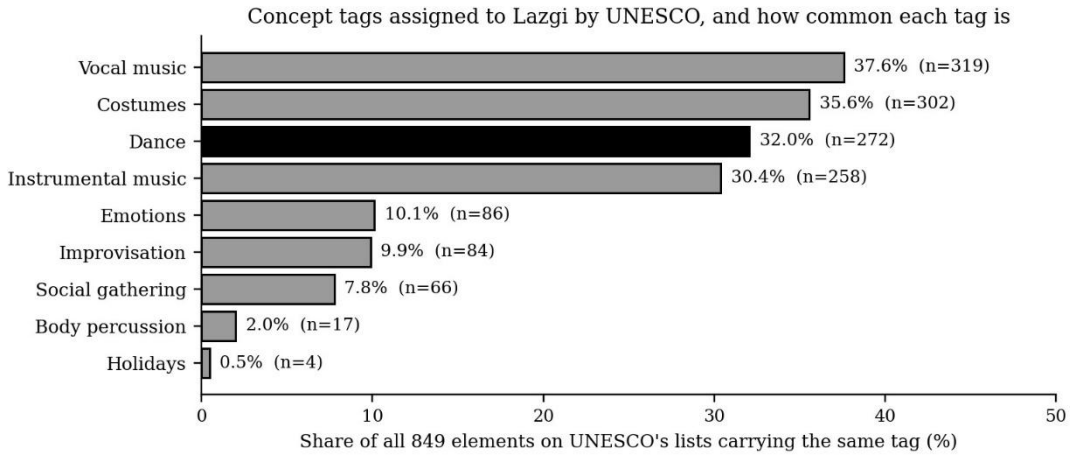


Figure 1. Concept tags of Lazgi and the share of all 849 elements carrying the same tag (author's calculation from UNESCO, 2019b).

Indicator	Value	Source / calculation
Elements on UNESCO lists (Dec 2025)	849 in 157 countries	PTI (2025)
Nominations examined / inscribed at 14.COM	42 / 35 (83.3%)	UNESCO (n.d.-c)

Elements tagged “dance”	272 (32.0% of 849)	UNESCO (2019b); calculated
Uzbek elements on the Representative List	16	UNESCO (n.d.-e)
Uzbek elements on all lists	18 (about 2.1% of 849)	16 + 1 Urgent Safeguarding + 1 Good Practice
Ratification to inscription of Lazgi	11 years 10 months	29 Jan 2008 to 12 Dec 2019
National inventory to inscription	10 years	2009 to 2019
Lazgi’s rank among Uzbek inscriptions	6th of 16	By year of inscription

Table 2. Key indicators.

According to UNESCO, two forms of Lazgi exist: a “scenery” dance, performed on national holidays and folk festivities, and an interpretive improvised form, performed at community and family events. Paintings at the Tuproqqala archaeological site are cited as evidence of its age, and the song texts mainly praise love and kindness (UNESCO, 2019a; 2019b). The consent letters name local types such as Qayroq, Lagan and Surnay lazgi (UNESCO, 2019c), and other sources count eight or nine types (Shodiyeva, n.d.). The Committee found that the nomination satisfied all five criteria (Table 3). For R.3 it said that the viability of Lazgi was not under serious threat, because transmission is secured in families and schools and the dance is in state programmes. For R.4 it described a “bottom-up” preparation of the file, with scientists, municipalities and bearers taking part. For R.5 it noted that the national inventory, which has included Lazgi since 2009, is updated every three years (UNESCO, 2019a).

Criterion	Committee’s reasoning (summary)
R.1	Promotes solidarity among social groups; reflects real life; supports the aesthetic education of young people
R.2	Can promote friendship and dialogue in Uzbek society and internationally; may encourage young people to respect local traditions
R.3	Viability not under serious threat; transmitted in families and schools; part of state programmes; community-based safeguarding measures planned
R.4	File prepared with scientists, municipalities and bearers; experts from the Oltin Meros Public Foundation, National Commission for UNESCO, Khorazm Ma’mun Academy and Tamarakhanum House-Museum
R.5	On national and Khorazm regional inventories since 2009, maintained by the Republican Center for Folk Arts and the regional Cultural Department

Table 3. Committee reasoning for each criterion (summary of UNESCO, 2019a).

Figure 2 shows the Uzbek elements on the Representative List by year. Up to and including 2019 there were six elements in twelve years, which is 0.50 per year. In 2020–2025 there were ten elements in six years, or 1.67 per year, so the rate was 3.3 times higher. The exact conditional test gave p = 0.017 for the difference. The share of multinational nominations also changed (Table 4): one of the six elements up to 2019 (Shashmaqom, 16.7%) against eight of the ten elements after 2019 (80%). Fisher's exact test gave p = 0.035 and the sample odds ratio was 20. Both parts of H1 are therefore supported, although the numbers are small. Lazgi is the only dance among the sixteen elements. It is also the last single-country nomination before a period dominated by multinational files: after 2019 only Bakhshi art (2021) and ceramic arts (2023) were single-country inscriptions.

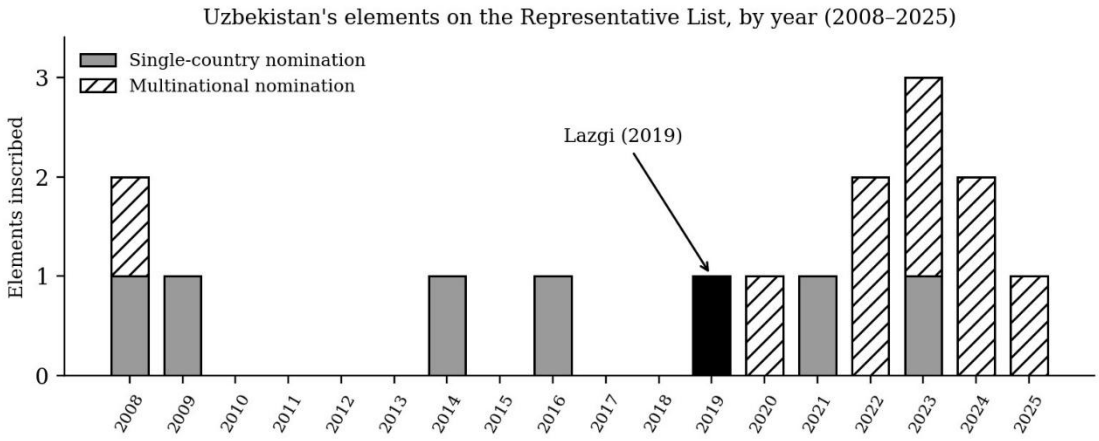


Figure 2. Uzbekistan's elements on the Representative List by year of inscription (author's compilation from UNESCO, n.d.-e).

Period	Years	Elements	Rate per year	Multinational	Share
2008–2019 (to Lazgi)	12	6	0.50	1	16.7%
2020–2025	6	10	1.67	8	80.0%
Test			p = 0.017 (exact conditional)		p = 0.035 (Fisher), multinational share

Table 4. Uzbekistan's Representative List inscriptions before and after 2019.

Three events connected with Lazgi are listed in UNESCO's activity reports: a ballet "Lazgi" in Tashkent (5 September 2021), an international dance festival in Khiva (25–30 April 2022) and a further festival in Khiva (25–30 April 2026) (UNESCO, 2019b). Guests from more than 30 countries were expected at the 2022 festival (UzDaily, 2022). For context, Figure 3 gives foreign tourist arrivals in Uzbekistan. They were
6.75 million in 2019, fell by 77.8% to 1.50 million in 2020, and recovered to about 6.6 million in 2023, which is 97.8% of the 2019 level. For 2025, UN Tourism data cited by Euronews (2025) put

arrivals in January–September 73% above the 2019 level, and 10.7 million foreign tourists were reported for January–November. These sources use different definitions and periods, so they are not directly comparable with the national series in Figure 3. All figures are national, and I did not find public figures on tourists or performances connected with Lazgi in Khorazm.

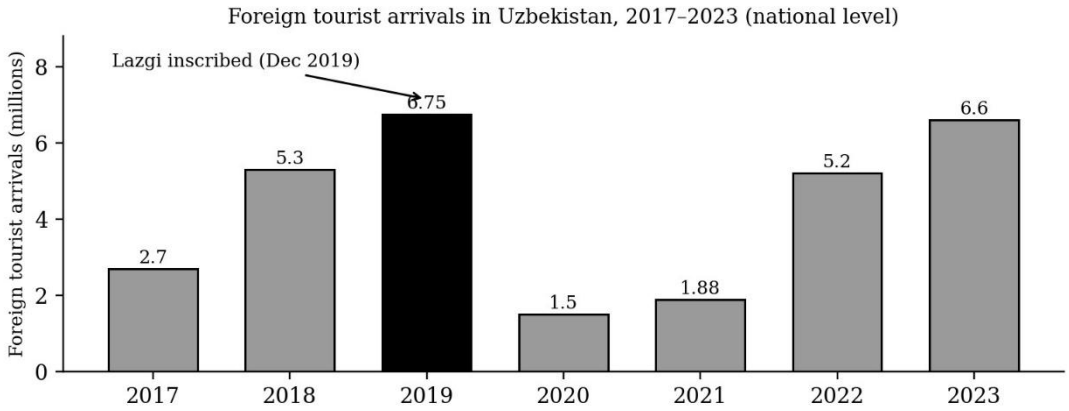


Figure 3. Foreign tourist arrivals in Uzbekistan, millions (Daryo, 2024; Tour Central Asia, n.d., based on the Statistics Agency of Uzbekistan).

Discussion

The statistics give a balanced picture. On the global level Lazgi is not unusual, because about one third of all elements are tagged as dance and 83.3% of the nominations at its session were successful. Its combination of tags is more distinctive: the tags "social gathering" and "holidays" are held by few elements, which fits the Committee's emphasis on weddings, festivities and family events. For Uzbekistan, on the other hand, Lazgi is unusual because it is the only dance among sixteen elements. Together with the nearly twelve years between ratification and inscription, and the ten years after the 2009 inventory, this suggests that the nomination was the result of long preparation and not a quick decision.

The results support H1: after 2019 Uzbekistan inscribed elements about three times faster, and mostly together with other countries. The numbers cannot explain why. A possible reason is UNESCO's mechanism that encourages multinational files (UNESCO, n.d.-a), together with a wish to present traditions that are shared across Central Asia and its neighbours. Another is simply that the country had more experience after 2019. These explanations should be tested by interviews with officials. It is also worth noting that a single-country nomination, like Lazgi, gives the state and the Khorazm community full responsibility for reporting, while in multinational files the duties are shared.

The literature repeatedly names five concerns that follow inscription: the move from community to stage, commercialisation, weak transmission, limited participation and the "freezing" of a tradition through documentation (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004; Brown, 2005; Smith and Akagawa, 2009; Alivizatou, 2012). They are listed in Table 5 together with the possible risk for Lazgi and a response suggested by the sources.

Concern	Possible risk for Lazgi	Possible response

Stage versus community	The "scenery" form could replace the improvised form of family events	Support both forms (Shay, 2002)
Commercialisation	Dance fixed into a few tourist patterns	Fair payment; guidelines made with performers
Transmission	Fewer young learners (migration, global entertainment)	Master–apprentice teaching plus schools
Participation	Practitioners left out of planning and reporting	Include bearers in inventories and reports (Noyes, 2006; Foster and Gilman, 2015)
Documentation	Archives could "freeze" the dance	Record many versions (Alivizatou, 2012)

Table 5. Main concerns after inscription and possible responses.

The tourism figures must be read carefully. The recovery to 6.6 million in 2023 and the further growth in 2025 happened in the whole country, and they are strongly influenced by the pandemic and by visa and transport policy. I do not claim that the inscription of Lazgi caused any change. Nonetheless, as the data suggests, the audience for cultural events is great and on an increasing trend, which is precisely how literature predicts tension to emerge (Shay 2002). Doi (2002) already signified signs of formation of dance in Uzbekistan due to political and social transformations in the 20th century and thus highlighted that the danger is not anything new. The absence of Khorazm-specific analysis of artists and their audience is already an achievement as this indicates that no one is able to evaluate how the new improvised forms are doing against the movement present in the area.

In addition to that, the Committee presented the review confidently and pointed out that the bottom-up principle is not a bad thing. However, the literature claims that "community" is a complicated notion (Noyes 2006; Brown 2005) and thus one cannot be sure if the documents do give any information regarding whether ordinary performers were involved in the process. Figure 4 shows that the responsibility levels are allocated according to the international, national, and local levels (Bendix, Eggert and Peselmann 2012).

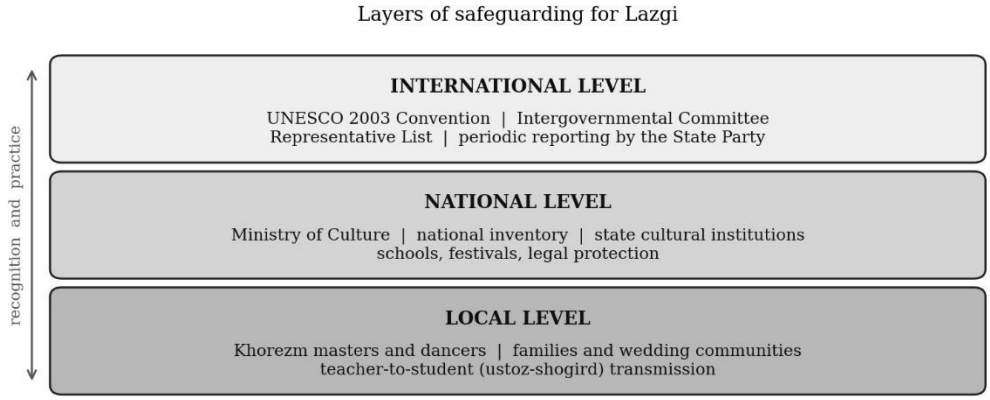


Figure 4. Layers of safeguarding responsibility (author's own schematic).

Since the Convention requires periodic reporting every six years (UNESCO, n.d.-b), Uzbekistan will need data on Lazgi. Table 6 proposes simple indicators that could fill the gap I found. They are suggestions and no data exist yet.

Indicator	How it could be measured	Who could collect it
Number of active teachers and students per teacher	Register of ensembles and schools in Khorazm	Regional Cultural Department
Share of young learners (under 18)	School and ensemble records	Ministry of Education; ensembles
Community versus staged performances per year	Annual count at weddings, holidays and tourist venues	Local authorities with bearers
Number of documented versions in archives	Archive catalogue	Folk Arts Center; Khorazm Ma'mun Academy
Share of show income paid to performers	Short survey of venues	Tourism sector with performers
Number of bearers consulted for each periodic report	Report annex	State Party

Table 6. Proposed indicators for monitoring the safeguarding of Lazgi.

The main limits are the small number of Uzbek elements, the national scale of the tourism data and the lack of fieldwork. Future studies could interview dancers, teachers and musicians in Khiva and other districts, collect data on performances and learners, and compare the first periodic report on Lazgi with practice on the ground. A comparison with other dances from Central Asia on the Representative List would also show which findings are specific to Lazgi.

Conclusion

The inscription of Lazgi on 12 December 2019 gave a regional dance of Khorazm a place in the shared heritage of humanity. The numbers show that it is typical of UNESCO's lists, where one element in three is a dance, but unusual in Uzbekistan's portfolio, where it is the only dance among sixteen elements. After 2019 the country's inscription rate rose from 0.50 to 1.67 per year and the share of multinational nominations rose from 16.7% to 80%. The Committee judged that Lazgi is not under serious threat, so the risks discussed here are possible future risks linked to staging and tourism. Because public data on practitioners are missing, the success of the status should be measured by the indicators proposed in this article and, in the end, by whether children in Khorazm still learn Lazgi from their elders and dance it at their own weddings.

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