



# Report on the First International Conference of NGOs Accredited to the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Santa Susanna (Catalonia, Spain), 6-13 June, 2015



**ens**  
de L'associacionisme  
CULTURAL català



**INTANGIBLE  
CULTURAL  
HERITAGE**  
Patrimoni Cultural  
Immaterial

# INTRODUCTION

Visit to Patum in Berga.



The First International Conference of NGOs Accredited by the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage took place from June 6-13, 2015 in Santa Susanna (Catalonia, Spain) called by the Ens de l'Associacionisme Cultural Català and the ICH NGO Forum. The decision to organise this meeting, proposed by the Ens, was made by the Forum in November 2014, during the Intergovernmental Committee meeting held in Paris.

The overall objective of the meeting was to further develop the definition of the Forum's role and structure, so that it could make a more effective contribution to implementing the Convention. It was a question of finding a different framework from the meetings prior to the Intergovernmental Committee meeting, where enough time could be devoted to discussions about various issues related to the Forum's activities. At the same time though, a meeting of this nature is obviously a chance to spread the word about the Convention among the bodies and associations of the territory where it is held. Representatives of NGOs and local experts were welcome to attend therefore, without it interfering in the debates of the accredited NGOs.

In conjunction with this initiative, a virtual forum was held before the conference, so as to promote and enable the widest possible involvement in drawing up the issues to be dealt with in Santa Susanna. Out of the different contributions received, 11 came from accredited NGOs. There was a higher participation in





The *Patum* of Berga.

the conference itself, with 14 accredited NGOs deciding to come to the Santa Susanna event, some of them with more than one representative. The Ens endeavoured to promote local participation and used the opportunity to inform about the Convention and the work of the accredited NGOs. In the end 73 people enrolled, along with some others who could only attend a few sessions, so the final figure came to more than 80 participants. In order to avoid interfering with the work already planned for the accredited NGOs, it was decided to divide the Conference into three kinds of sessions: accredited NGOs, non-accredited NGOs and a joint session of accredited and non-accredited NGOs. In addition, several visits were arranged that enabled participants to find out about some examples of local intangible cultural heritage.

## Accredited NGOs

Prior to the Santa Susanna conference, as all the accredited NGOs had been told, a virtual forum was set up for 3 months using the Internet, so as to make progress with defining the issues to be dealt with in the meeting and also to encourage the widest possible involvement from all NGOs. Although only 11 of the 178 accredited NGOs contributed in the end, the results of this virtual forum provided a useful basis for the work in Santa Susanna. The subjects to be debated were the ones originally presented by the organisation, as the few new subjects proposed received no support. These 5 subjects were:

### 1. What kind of internal organisation do we want for the NGO Forum

### 2. Evaluation body

### 3. Ethics

### 4. The mission/role of NGOs and the Forum

### 5. Sustainable development

A series of claims was presented for each of these subjects in the virtual forum and the participants had to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed. The results of this open participatory process gave the starting point for the face-to-face debates. However, only three of the five proposed subjects were discussed during the meeting, namely the mission/role of the NGO Forum, the Forum's internal organisation and the evaluation body.



Members of the accredited NGOs.

14 accredited NGOs attended the Conference:

- Associazione Giochi Antichi
- CIOFF (Conseil International des Organisations de festivals de folklore et d'arts traditionnelles)
- Ens de l'Associacionisme Cultural Català
- Instituut voor Vlaamse Volkskunst
- International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF)
- International Organization of Folk Art
- Memoria Imaterial CRL
- Museums Galleries Scotland
- NYNGO Student Ethnographic Association
- SENA WANGI (Sekretariat Nasional Pewayangan Indonesia)
- Tapis Plein
- The Syria Trust for Development
- Traditions pour Demain
- UNESCO Etxea - Centro UNESCO del País Vasco

The accredited NGO meetings lasted for one and a half days. The accredited NGOs that took part in the Conference thanked the organisers, in particular for the fact it enabled improvements in the work of the ICH

NGO Forum. The following three documents were to emerge from the debates; they will be presented in the next Forum meeting that is to take place in Namibia on 29 November 2015.



## 1. The role and functions of the Forum

### Mission, vision, values

Based on the ICH NGOs knowledge, relationships and experience with the bearers and practitioners of ICH, the Forum promotes and advocates, at UNESCO, the values that underlie the safeguarding of ICH.

The Forum contributes to the sustainability of living heritage for future generations in a changing world and to the empowerment of communities, groups and individuals.

The Forum acts as a bridge between the UNESCO 2003 Convention bodies and other stakeholders, especially communities, groups and in some cases individuals.

In the fulfilment of its mission, the Forum is guided by mutual respect and tolerance for the rich diversity of contributions of all ICH NGOs.

1. The Forum is the representative and coordinating body of the accredited ICH NGOs.
2. The Forum facilitates the contribution of the ICH NGOs to the implementation of the principles of the UNESCO 2003 Convention.
3. The Forum serves the needs of the ICH NGOs in general, accredited and non-accredited.
4. The Forum expresses the common points of view of the accredited ICH NGOs.
5. The Forum serves as a platform for sharing ICH safeguarding experiences and for strengthening competences, expertise and capacities of ICH NGOs, by involving relevant actors and stakeholders in the safeguarding process.
6. The Forum coordinates with the Secretariat of the UNESCO 2003 Convention the operational aspects of the collective contribution of ICH NGOs to the implementation of the Convention.
7. The Forum develops the network of accredited ICH NGOs and facilitates

Accredited NGOs in a discussion session.



dialogue, exchange of information, practices and their implications, in order to provide shared experiences on concrete situations (eg: armed conflicts, natural disasters).

8. The Forum facilitates the relations between the experts and the community of ICH NGOs in order to identify common themes and to provide joint proposals to the bodies of the Convention.
9. The Forum aims to be consulted by the ICH Committee on the accreditation process conditions and on the definition of criteria for the accreditation.
10. To coordinate its activities the Forum will establish a Steering Committee.

## 2. The Steering Committee

- The function of the Steering Committee is to represent the Forum and coordinate, encourage, facilitate and support its roles and functions.
- To be part of the Steering Committee you have to be a member of an accredited NGO and a duly appointed representative of your NGO. If you don't get re-accredited, you're out. Availability, skills and experience within the convention, capacity (to attend the meetings - twice a year at least), past involvement are some criteria.
- People will be nominated by the search group (short term - 3 people: ) for the steering group, for the seven people according to the criteria mentioned and taking into account those who have been most active. These people will be presented and ratified in Namibia.
- 1 year as a candidate, 2 years serving, 1 accompanying next ones: 4 (2) years mandate, shadowing system. The first people will have to be there longer -> 2 years.
- Up to 7 people.
- We are keen on the Steering Committee to be diverse in geography, themes and gender. For this first steering committee, the three members of the search committee will take part and will look for 4 other people.

Presentation of results of accredited NGOs.





Members of the accredited NGO.

- Search group will make descriptions of each nomination, to prove why they made that choice.
- The three members of the search group elected are: Joanne Orr, Jorijn Neyrinck, Carmen Padilla.

### 3. The contribution of the Forum to the Evaluation Body to be taken forward by the future Steering Committee

- Encouraging ICH NGOs to start the work of the preparation of the list of their own experts and to share it with the Forum, which will make this data base accessible.
- On a yearly basis ask ICH NGOs who want to present their candidature for the evaluation body to inform the Forum.
- Having information regarding the results of the elections to the Evaluation Body.  
Asking previous ICH NGOs of the Evaluation Body to share their experience with the Forum.
- The Forum (Steering Committee) encourages ICH NGOs to provide information regarding all elected, nominated and other relevant participation positions in all the UNESCO bodies.
- The NGOs meeting in the Santa Susanna Conference will present these proposals for approval in Namibia, which should establish a firm base for the future work of accredited NGOs and collectively through the ICH NGO Forum.



Meeting of non-accredited NGOs



Josep Viana, president of the Ens de l'Associacionisme Cultural Català.





Debate between non-accredited NGOs.

## Non-accredited NGOs

The work with non-accredited associations and bodies who had registered in the Conference aimed to further their knowledge of the Convention and equip them sufficiently to increase their involvement in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. The majority of the 14 NGOs attending came as one would expect from Catalonia, but there were also some from other regions in Spain and one from Belarus, as well as two representatives from a German NGO that has requested accreditation who were allowed to attend the accredited NGOs' debates as observers. Furthermore an expert from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico) and a civil servant from the Finnish government had shown an interest in participating in the Conference and it was decided that their presence could enrich the debates. A total of nearly 70 people took part in these sessions.

The first session of this group consisted of an approach to the Convention through two different presentations. In the first, Josep Viana, president of the Ens, and Josep Fornés, director of Barcelona's Ethnological Museum, explained and illustrated the relationship between popular culture and intangible cultural heritage and the step from one concept to the other. The first did it more from a practical point of view as president of an entity that embraces 29 federations and nearly 3,700 associations devoted on the whole to various manifestations of popular culture. The second, as an anthropologist and expert, contributed a more theoretical and historical view, with a vast array of specific examples. The second presentation was given by Lluís Garcia Petit, intangible

cultural heritage expert and advisor to the Ens, who explained the Convention's contents and way of working, positioning it in its context within UNESCO.

After a round of questions from participants, the session continued with working groups in which every participant could express their opinion about the Convention, its advantages and disadvantages, and questions that had arisen. In the exchange of ideas of these working groups, it emerged how useful the session had been and how much all the participants had learned from it, most of whom did not know about the significance and details set out by the Convention. Despite certain doubts that had arisen about the Convention's possible risks, the majority agreed it could be regarded as a useful instrument for protecting popular culture.

The second session of the non-accredited NGOs was devoted to how these entities could take part in the implementation of the Convention. In the first part of the session four of the NGOs presented their proposals: Josep Viana (Ens de l'Associacionisme Cultural Català, Josep Cruanyes (Association of Iconographic Establishments), Xavier Tresserras (Catalan Confederation of Sardana), Pedro Rodríguez and María José Mira (Federation of Music Societies in the Valencian Community). These were followed by some other contributions from the rest of the participants. After this, working groups were again set up, so as to see what participants thought about possible involvement of their organisations in implementing the Convention. In the final discussions based on the conclusions reached by each group, it seemed



Joint conference between accredited and non-accredited NGOs.

that in fact all the entities believed they are already working on some aspects of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and therefore share objectives with the Convention. However that should not

imply working exclusively within the parameters of the Convention. To sum up, working with non-accredited NGOs for two days made it possible to reach the following conclusions:

- The concept of intangible cultural heritage is broader-reaching than the concept of tradition or folklore, and gives visibility to cultural diversity and minorized cultures.
- The definition of ICH is plural and inclusive, and the fact it is widely accepted internationally makes it particularly useful, makes it possible to work with the same standards and it is important in those countries where minorities are overlooked. All in all, it is felt that ICH is a concept quite distant still from the day-to-day work of the associations and its definition ought to be open to review or adaptable to the relevant context.
- For its part, the Convention brings a new vision to heritage, making it broader and less elitist, and shows the wide scope of ICH.
- In the area of associations, the Convention serves as an international benchmark that enables increased exposure, including before authorities.
- At the same time it fosters the influence of these entities in public policy and is an opportunity to work in this field from different areas (institutions, experts, associations and so on) and in a cooperative way, as well as valuing and using existing research work.
- In any case, as the Convention by its very nature implies a large degree of dependence on the states, it could be an obstacle when, out of political, financial or other interests, the state itself does not facilitate its implementation. Further-

Working group between accredited and non-accredited NGOs.



more, it should be borne in mind that when registering an element in one of the lists, wrongly interpreting the Convention could result in overvaluing the activity, risking 'touristisation', restricting its development or leading to competition between the different elements.

- At the same time, the Convention could contribute to sustainable development (in the tourist sector for example) with community involvement.
- The Convention's international dimension makes it possible to identify related or similar cultural phenomena, to share experiences among the associations and compare their activities with others from around the world. This also facilitates bonding between the associations.
- On the whole the associations attending are willing to work at implementing the Convention, both in their own territory as well as with entities in the rest of the world. In this sense they consider the Convention affects them and signifies legitimisation of their work. So, defending ICH does interest the entities, which by their very nature can contribute, and in many cases are already contributing, to various aspects of safeguarding. Furthermore the entities can help significantly by involving individuals, groups or collectives that keep ICH alive.
- In the case of Catalonia, the entities appreciate and point out that the ENS is a spokesperson and a catalyst for the associations' activities and also when it comes to applying the Convention. It is therefore important to support the ENS operations in bringing a united vision and leadership.
- Finally, it should be highlighted that at the moment the work of applying the Convention demands that a series of needs be resolved, such as support from experts, establishing standard methodologies or updating legislation. In addition various challenges have to be overcome, like cooperation between universities, study and research centres, associations, etc., or encouraging effective activity from all involved.

## Joint sessions

After the respective sessions held by the NGOs accredited by the Convention and the non-accredited NGOs, a joint session took place to present the work situation of the NGOs related to the Convention in different countries. That

led on to group debates, so that everyone had the opportunity to express their opinion. From these group debates and the general debate following the pooling together of each group's work, the following points stand out:

- The non-accredited NGOs should know more about the existence and the content of the Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- The accredited NGOs could help the non-accredited ones to learn more about the Convention and the work carried out by the Intergovernmental Committee.
- NGOs, whether accredited or not, do fundamental work for safeguarding the ICH.
- It is essential to increase public participation in implementing the Convention.
- Several specific initiatives were proposed to facilitate the non-accredited NGOs' access to information related to the Convention's work.



The Patum of Berga.

Given the interest that some experts and institutions had shown for the conference, the last session was devoted to exploring the relationship between experts, institutions and accredited and non-accredited NGOs, in the Convention's work. Some comments warned of risks with the Convention and with turning certain cultural practices into "Heritage", and also some specific aspects of the concept of intangible cultural heritage were questioned. Overall, the majority agreed on the need for experts, NGOs and institutions to work together to apply the Convention. In this context it was appreciated that specialist involvement was necessary, but that it should not be restricted just to anthropologists and safeguarding ICH should also be open to other specialists.

## Discovering local ICH

The other aim of the Conference was to show participants several examples of Catalonia's intangible cultural heritage:

- **Sardanes.** The sardana is a very popular dance in Catalonia, particularly in the northern region of the country. It was possible to attend a gathering of sardana dancing, in which a cobla, an orchestra unique to sardanes, played various pieces and the public attending got organised into circles to dance it.
- **La Patum de Berga.** This festival is inscribed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, after having been proclaimed a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2005. We were

The Band of College of Santa Maria de Blanes gave a concert.





Gegants outside the hotel where the conference took place.

able to join in some of the activities which run for 4 days. There it was possible to experience directly, amid the multitudinous crowd, how popular and deeply rooted this secular celebration is.

- **Bandes musicals.** A banda musical (music band) is a musical group made up of wind and percussion instruments basically. These bands are widely found in southern Catalonia and in Valencia, where they have an important social purpose and among other features act as a link between several generations. The Banda del Col·legi de Santa Maria from Blanes gave us a concert.



A representative of the lace makers.

Participants of the 1st conference visit Palau de la Música.





- **Puntaires.** While the Conference was running, a group of puntaires (lace-makers) were settled into the foyer of the hotel to show all the participants their mastery of this traditional craft.
- **Gegants.** A couple of gegants (giants) were also on display in the hotel foyer during the meetings.
- **Pessebres.** In one of the meeting rooms some models of pessebres (nativity scenes) were exhibited during the conference, illustrating the tradition of pessebrisme in Catalonia.
- **Inventory of the intangible cultural heritage of the Montseny Biosphere Reserve.** This project, which also included the setting of a methodology, is inscribed in the register of best practices of the Convention. We therefore went to the reserve to discover first-

hand the details of this project and the territory where it is taking place.

- **Castells.** Castells (human towers) have been inscribed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity since 2010. Originally from the Tarragona region, castells have extended throughout Catalonia and are currently going through a glorious phase. Participants in the Conference were able to attend a rehearsal of the Castellers de Barcelona, one of several groups in the Catalan capital.
- **Palau de la Música.** The Palau de la Música Catalana in Barcelona is the headquarters of the Orfeó Català, a one hundred year old choir, which forms part of a deeply rooted tradition in Catalonia. Furthermore the Palau de la Música is inscribed in the World Heritage List.



Participants of the 1st Conference.

## ASSESSMENT

After each of the sessions and at the very end of the Conference, the participants had the opportunity to evaluate the running of it and the results achieved. The assessments were very positive universally, both as regards the organisation as well as the work done. The majority view pointed out the interest of the Conference, how much could be learned from it and in the case of the accredited NGOs how practically useful it was. On the negative side, the main complaint that could be heard referred to the excessive length of the Conference and to the large proportion of time given to cultural visits, although the organisation of the sessions had made it possible for some people to attend the debates only.

In the view of the Ens de l'Associacionisme Cultural Català, the Conference promoter and organiser, the event was very positive, both for the impulse it has given to the internal organisation of the NGO Forum which it hopes will be ratified in Namibia, as well as for the coverage it has given the Convention among the association movements and experts in Catalonia. It also trusts that this meeting format can be continued in the future, with the improvements that might be introduced following this pioneering experience.



Magdalena Tavornik, member of CIOFF, accredited NGO.



Lluís Garcia Petit expert on Intangible Cultural Heritage and Ens's assessor.

## Organised



## With support from



## In collaboration with



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