



## **REPORT OF THE ICH NGO FORUM (2022)**

This report provides a presentation of the status and current role of the ICH NGO Forum. It summarizes activities undertaken in 2021-2022, emphasizing initiatives to increase the number of NGOs from underrepresented regions and the findings of the project that mapped the expertise of accredited NGOs. This report also describes the Forum's organizational development efforts as well as recent plans and activities designed to enable NGOs to more substantially contribute to the Convention.

### **I. The Forum in/as Practice**

The Forum now brings together 217 accredited NGOs (ANGOs) working across the world and with a myriad of different competencies in the field of safeguarding ICH. Its activities are carried out with the participation of communities and supporting the communities, groups, and individuals who practice, perform and transmit ICH. The Forum's membership ranges from community-based organizations, to larger NGOs which support national- and international-level implementation of the 2003 Convention and engage in policy development. As such, it brings to the Convention extensive and highly diverse safeguarding experiences and expertise which place it in a highly privileged position for providing the advisory services to the Committee as set out in Article 9 of the Convention. In view of the huge diversity of ICH elements and their related communities, groups and individuals, no single organization is capable of providing such advice or to engage in evaluation and other activities of the Committee. This is a highly significant and distinctive feature of the ICH NGO Forum, setting it apart from many large international NGOs that operate within the framework of other international treaties. Its diversity, as recognized from the inception of the Convention, is essential for the ICH NGO Forum to be able to respond to the multi-dimensional nature of intangible cultural heritage and its actors.

As the membership organization representing 217 accredited NGOs, the Forum is ready and able to offer both targeted and appropriate support to the Committee and its bodies as and when this is required. This approach is in line with the increasing outreach to non-state actors in international law-making generally, including international cultural heritage governance. The potential roles of accredited NGOs in the Convention was not elaborated at the time of drafting, but the Forum has begun to carve out its place through practice over the past 12 years or so and is actively giving a voice to the cultural communities which they represent. We believe that the time is now ripe for the reflection on the ongoing role that accredited NGOs can play in implementing the Convention at both national and international levels, as proposed by the Committee that was initiated in 2017 to reach a positive conclusion. This role needs to be defined in specific and concrete terms and codified in the Operational Directives of the Convention.

## II. Augmented activities and engagement in 2021-22

The Steering Committee of the ICH NGO Forum has completed a major project involving a systematic surveying of ANGOs worldwide and has carried out a robust agenda of new activities in 2021-2022 in order to improve its organizational structure and respond to the growing needs of the accredited NGOs, the Secretariat and the Intergovernmental Committee. This section of the report summarizes the activities of the ICH NGO Forum from the beginning of October 2021 to October 2022.

### Activities organized at the Intergovernmental Committee meeting in 2021 (16COM)

The activities organized by the ICH NGO FORUM attracted the enthusiastic participation of the largest ever number of ANGOs during the Intergovernmental Committee meeting (IGC) in 2021. The online format stimulated participation by registrants to a record high of two thirds of the total of 184 NGOs accredited as of December 2022. NGOs participation in the Forum during the IGC meetings has increased steadily in the last six years: 47 NGOs in 2016, 54 in 2017, 63 in 2018, 68 in 2019, and 86 in 2020, then increasing most substantially to 122 in 2021. The Forum's online sessions included many NGOs who had not had the opportunity to attend in person, enabling them to become actively engaged in the Forum. The increase in attendance reflects the more extensive array of services and opportunities provided by the Forum to its members.

Two orientation workshops for newly accredited NGOs were organized, one in English and one in French, a week prior to the Intergovernmental Committee meeting. These workshops explained the Convention, the rules and procedures of the meetings, the agenda and ways for new ANGOs to participate effectively at their first meeting. Both were well attended, 54 in the English session and 43 in the French session.

Elections of new members of the Steering Committee are held annually. A call for candidates was sent out in early October by an Electoral Board composed of four members from three different electoral regions: Africa (two members), Western Europe and North America (one member), and Eastern Europe (one member). An online poll was held to elect four new members to the Steering Committee each for a two-year term. The new elected members were: Ms. Tamara Nikolić Đerić, Eastern Europe; Mr. Martín Andrade-Pérez, Latin America and Caribbean; Mr. Sekou Berte, Africa; and Mr. Mohamed Lemine Beidieu, Arab States. The four joined the three members elected the previous year : Mr. Laurier Turgeon, Western Europe and North America ; Janet Blake, Asia and the Pacific; and Mr. Robert Baron, International NGOs. The following were chosen by consensus for the executive positions of the Steering Committee for 2021-2022: Laurier Turgeon (President), Janet Blake (Vice-President), Robert Baron (Secretary) and Martin Andrade Perez (Treasurer).

The annual symposium organized during the week of the 2021 Committee meeting presented the preliminary results of the mapping project commissioned by the Secretariat following upon on Decision 15 at 14COM. ([Decision 14.COM 15](#)). This symposium was designed to generate input about the contents and the recommendations of the report. The symposium ended with a stimulating and eye-opening roundtable discussion on ICH, intellectual property, licensing and new media.

Two side events were organized during the week of the Committee meetings. A roundtable online discussion on the topic of “Traditional Knowledge Labelling and Indigenous Rights”. Another session introduced a forthcoming #HeritageAlive issue of the journal on traditional musical instruments.

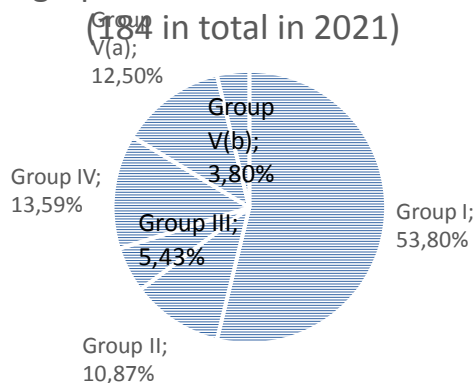
A general meeting with all of the Forum’s working groups discussed their needs and explored how the Steering Committee could better assist them in structuring their activities and strengthening their organizational structure. After this very constructive meeting, all agreed to meet again during the year to enhance communications and exchange, better coordinate activities, and define common goals. Working groups held their own sessions for exchange among their members and to prepare their agendas for the coming year. They include the Working Group on Under-Represented Regions; the Working Group on Research, and the Working Group on the Overall Results Framework.

The General Assembly of the Forum, held on Wednesday evening December 15<sup>th</sup>, was well attended with more than 90 participants. The meeting was opened with a powerpoint presentation in memory of our dear colleague who passed away in 2021, Albert van der Zeijden, by Marco van Baalen, Director of the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage. Following the *in memoriam*, the Steering Committee delivered the annual report of activities and the financial report. The members were informed that the Steering Committee, who worked, as ever, without compensation, had donated the funds from the contract of the mapping project, of the amount of \$15 000, to the operating budget of the Forum to finance new initiatives. The results of the elections to the Steering Committee were officially announced and outgoing members, Jorge Gustavo Caicedo, Reme Sakr and Kayolan Nikolov were warmly thanked for the deep engagement, determination and commitment to the Forum. All three had served two two-year terms.

### Tackling the regional imbalance of accredited NGOs

The Forum prioritized tackling the geographical imbalance of accredited NGOs and increasing the participation of those from under-represented regions. The geographically imbalanced distribution of accredited NGOs was identified as a major concern in the ICH NGO report of last year, and has also been pointed out by the General Assembly, the Committee and the Secretariat. After the accreditation cycle of 2019-2020, more than half (54%) of the accredited NGOs came from Electoral Group (EG) I (Western Europe and North America). (See figure 1 below) Compared to EG 1, all of the other regions are under-represented: Electoral Group II (Eastern Europe) with 11%; EG III (Latin America and Caribbean) with 5%; the EG IV (Asia and the Pacific) with 14%; EG Va Africa with 12%; and EG Vb Arab States with only 4%. There are a large number of States Parties without any ANGO’s at all: 10 in EG II (Eastern Europe); 21 in EG III (Latin American and the Caribbean); 32 in EG IV (Asia and Pacific); 33 in EG Va (Africa); 14 in EG Vb (Arab States); and 5 in EG I (Western Europe and North America).

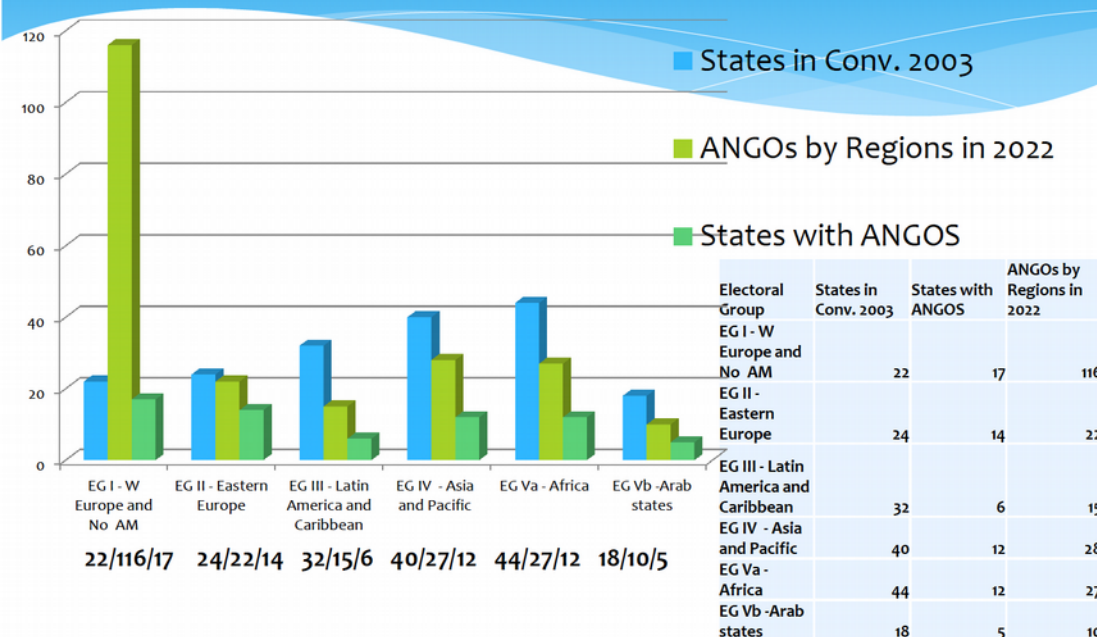
Figure 1. Geographical distribution of accredited NGOs



■ Group I ■ Group II ■ Group III ■ Group IV ■ Group V(a) ■ Group V(b)

During the last nomination cycle of 2021-2022, imbalance has persisted rather than decreasing. Expanded efforts made to recruit more NGOs from under-represented regions has led to a slight increase in accreditations in all of these regions. However, the numbers in EG I have increased at the same rate. Indeed, the number of applications recommended by the Intergovernmental Committee for accreditation and accepted by the General Assembly in July of 2022, have not contributed to decreasing this imbalance since half of them (17 out of 34) were from EG I (Western Europe and North America), bringing the total of accredited NGOs from EG 1 to 116, more than four times that of any one of the other electoral groups. EG IV (Asia and the Pacific) comes second with 27, EG Va (Africa) also with 27, and EG II (Eastern Europe) fourth with 22. The other two regions remain chronically under-represented, having only 15 (EG III, Latin America and the Caribbean) and 10 (EG Vb, Arab States). It is also worth noting that the region that has the fewest number of States Parties to the Convention, EG I, has the most accredited NGOs, whereas the regions that have the largest number of States Parties to the Convention (ER III-Latin America and the Caribbean, ER IV-Asia/Pacific, and ER Va-Africa) have much fewer accredited NGOs (See graph below). In these regions, the States Parties could therefore play an important role in increasing the number of accredited NGOs, in partnership with UNESCO offices, Category 2 Centres, the ICH NGO Forum and others. Stakeholders from EG I may also wish to consider the advisability of refraining from not to encourage accreditation of more NGOs from this region until the geographical balance within accredited NGOs is more equitable.

## Geographic distribution of NGOs accredited to the Convention 2022



Since the ICH NGO Forum has no control over the accreditation process as determined by the operational directives of the Convention and the intergovernmental Committee, it has taken corrective action to protect the interests of members from under-represented regions. It has implemented a very strict principle of equal representation of electoral groups in all of its governing bodies. The Steering Committee is made up of one elected member from each of the six electoral regions and one representative of an international NGO. The ad hoc committees that have been formed to deal with issues related to governance and bylaws have all been composed of an equal number of members from each electoral region. The officers of the Electoral Board are selected in order to represent the different electoral groups and the Steering Committee also strongly encourages representation from all electoral groups in the working groups. For the project on the mapping of expertise of the accredited NGOs, the 65 one-to-one interviews were conducted first and foremost with NGOs from under-represented regions in order to map the expertise of these NGOs that do not always have the opportunity to participate actively in the Convention. The number of NGOs interviewed from EG I were limited to 14 out of a total of 65. In this way, the Forum has attempted to overcome the effects of this imbalance by ensuring that the voices of the NGOs from under-represented regions are heard and their participation is effective within its organizational structures.

A series of concrete actions have also been taken this year to increase the number of accredited NGOs in the under-represented regions. The Forum's working group on a More Balanced Geographical Representation of NGOs, currently composed of 33 members from different

electoral groups, has met five times this year and has launched initiatives towards addressing this imbalance. These efforts will include engagement with regional networks to promote accreditation, and may also include workshops, seminars, involvement of Category 2 centers and accredited NGOs encouraging non-accredited NGOs in their region to apply for the next accreditation cycle, that is by the April 1, 2023 deadline. The Forum's activities will provide specific instructions about the accreditation process and how to fill out the accreditation form [as well as the benefits of accreditation](#). This outreach programme includes the following measures :

- 1 ) organization of online meetings with regional groups of accredited NGOs explaining the purpose of accreditation and goals and collecting data on their partner NGOs working in the field of ICH which could potentially apply for accreditation;
- 2) contact NATCOMS in not-represented countries [without any accredited NGOs](#) and collect data on their national counterparts active in the field of ICH with a potential for accreditation;
- 3) search for focal points from each region who could establish first contact with “newly” located NGOs and provide information about themselves as accredited NGO/accreditation system and the ICH NGO Forum in their regional language;
- 4) task WG group members from under-represented regions to conduct awareness raising campaigns and recruit from 1 to 5 NGOs from their neighboring countries;
- 5) contact national delegations to see if they can inform the Forum of NGOs potentially interested in accreditation;
- 6) provide intensive assistance to interested parties 3 to 4 months before the deadline;
- 7) open up applications to NGOs that do not specialize solely in ICH, such as libraries, archives, cultural organizations, and other organizations not primarily devoted to heritage;
- 8) develop and prepare a sample toolkit in the form of short videos and paper leaflets aimed at the awareness raising and recruitment.

The Forum will make recommendations for a simplification of the forms, assist applicants in completing the current forms and encourage State Parties to help NGOs to apply for accreditation.

### The Project on Mapping the Expertise of the NGOs accredited to the 2003 Convention

The completion of the ICH NGO Forum mapping project was a high priority year-long endeavor of the Steering Committee. Commissioned by the Secretariat in August 2021 following Decision 14.COM 15, it provided an unprecedented opportunity to identify an extraordinary range of competencies and activities of the NGOs accredited to the 2003 UNESCO Convention. It also explored potential approaches for ANGOS to share expertise among themselves as well as with the Secretariat, States Parties and other Convention stakeholders. In order to conduct the project, an online survey was designed and shared with the 194 NGOs accredited as of August 2021. This was followed by peer-to-peer interviews with 65 NGOs, the large majority of which are from under-represented regions. The interviews elicited remarkably fine-grained accounts of their expertise across a broad range of safeguarding practices and candid discussions about how they might expand their involvement with the Convention. Participating NGOs agreed about the importance of enhancing regional networks and sharing expertise among peer NGOs on a regional basis. Support from regional networks is especially important when NGOs experience impediments in articulating their work with public structures within their own State Parties.

The mapping project resulted in proposals for revising the accreditation and reporting forms (ICH-08 and ICH-09), which would enable more effective identification of NGOs best equipped to support the States Parties and the Secretariat in safeguarding ICH through the 2003 Convention. It yielded substantially expanded categories and terms for the vocabularies used to index accredited NGOS (ANGOs) activities. Infographics of ANGOS were also created for this



project that will provide ready access to information about their expertise, activities and potential advisory functions for the work of the Committee and enhanced implementation of the 2003 Convention. The project's findings contain extensive information about the competencies and range of expertise of ANGOs that may be readily shared both with other ANGOs and other stakeholders of the 2003 Convention.

The project's findings demonstrate that common areas of ANGO activity and expertise that can be fruitfully shared include the following: (1) inventorying/documentation that is often highly participatory and uses digital technologies; (2) capacity building for safeguarding; (3) formal and non-formal educational programmes across the life cycle that foster transmission and incorporate ICH in curricula; (4) organizational development and financial management; (5) media documentation techniques; (6) informed consent protocols and archival practices (7) modes of presenting ICH; (8) preparation of nomination files; (9) research on effective safeguarding and the impacts of listings; (10) developing sustainable and regenerative tourism; (11) creating innovative and sustainable business models around ICH elements for bearers and their communities; (12) partnerships with states parties to create policy, educational curricula and legislation; and (13) project management models and tools to train communities to train themselves. ANGOs are increasingly employing ICH for socially ameliorative purposes and in integration with other social and cultural objectives (such as tackling domestic violence). ICH is employed in emergency and pandemic situations, utilizing innovative approaches that provide practical, material responses along with psychological support. The project also revealed that many safeguarding areas emphasized by ANGOs are highly articulated with the SDG goals, opening up promising possibilities for cooperation between ANGOs and States Parties over ICH safeguarding encompassing multiple sectors of society.

The survey and interviews enabled the Forum to generate a number of recommendations listed in this report that can be addressed to ANGOs, States Parties, the intergovernmental Committee, UNESCO Secretariat and other stakeholders. The mapping project identified both current areas of strength as well as areas warranting further development. More needs to be done to develop higher education curricula, with the vast majority of ICH in formal education currently undertaken in schools. Archives present great potential for sustaining safeguarding through enabling current and future generations to access their ICH documentation; ANGO expertise in this area needs to be more widely shared. The development of archiving skills needs to be done in tandem with providing more information and support for bearers about informed consent protocols, their intellectual property and other rights for their ICH and associated documentation. ANGOs are increasingly working with the museum sector on exhibitions, community engagement, educational programmes and other ICH-related activities. Collaborations with museums of all disciplines would benefit from greater development and engagement with more museums. The survey revealed a much broader scope of the ICH in which ANGOs are active than expected. They are safeguarding traditional games and sports, traditional knowledge about the environment and climate change, foodways, customary practices, belief systems, knowledge about nature and the universe and animal husbandry along with a widening variety of traditional arts, which suggests that the understanding and utilization of the potential genres of ICH within the 2003 Convention can be similarly expanded.

Furthermore, the mapping project enabled the Steering Committee to increase its operating budget to develop and finance new projects. One of these was the creation of the Albert van der Zeijden Prize.

#### Creation of the Albert van der Zeijden Prize

The SC agreed to establish a prize in memory of Albert van der Zeijden for the best article published by an author of less than 35 years of age in the journal *Heritage Alive*. The prize amounts to 500 euros, awarded for each of the next three issues. A process for selection of the winner has been established by the editorial board of *#HeritageAlive*, through an open competition and a jury review of submissions. The recipient has already been selected for this year and will be awarded the prize at 17COM.

#### Participation of the Forum in the Reflection on the listing mechanisms

The Forum presented ideas for ways that ANGO's could contribute to the evaluation of the listing mechanisms during the meeting of the working group on the listing mechanisms on 25 – 26 April 2022. They included providing information on the status and impacts of safeguarding on inscribed elements, conducting field visits and providing advisory services that could include follow-ups on listed elements, supporting the work of the Evaluation Body by providing additional information on applications for inscribed elements and mediating among governmental and intergovernmental actors, bearer communities and civil society organizations.

#### Assisting NGOs and communities in situations of crises

The ICH NGO Forum participated in a number of meetings and initiatives to assist NGOs and communities in emergency situations. The Steering Committee participated in a meeting convened by UNESCO on March 17<sup>th</sup> to discuss the safeguarding of heritage in Ukraine in this time of armed conflict, reporting on efforts by the Forum and its members to safeguard ICH. They underscored the importance of supporting bearers and the need to safeguard ICH in times of armed conflict and its importance for refugees. The Forum was represented at another meeting organized by UNESCO on May 12<sup>th</sup> regarding the safeguarding of ICH in Ukraine. The activities reported include field research and assessment of the needs of bearers who are refugees from Ukraine and live in multiple East European countries. During these meetings, the Steering Committee stressed the importance of the work of NGOs in safeguarding of ICH of Ukraine and among Ukrainian refugees. It is keeping informed about the needs of NGOs, including through a presentation at the SC meeting by Oleksandr Butsenko, who leads the Ukraine accredited NGO "Culture for Democracy".

The situation in Ukraine inspired the Steering Committee to consider how the Forum can support ICH threatened by situations of conflict or natural disaster. The outcomes of these discussions included the launching of the Living Heritage for Peace initiative, recognizing and celebrating ICH as powerful resilience tools in conflict situations, beginning with the pysanky tradition of egg painting. A fundraising committee has been created to seek funding for assisting ICH in any country in the world experiencing situations of crisis caused by armed conflict or natural disasters, considered emergency situations, such as are now occurring in multiple regions. The range of situations defined as emergency will be defined, while allowing for flexibility. The



Intergovernmental Committee's operational directives on disaster response provides examples of such emergency situations.

### A strong presence of the Forum at the GA in Paris 5-7 July

The 9<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly provided the ICH NGO Forum the opportunity to present the report of main activities since the last GA in 2020, organize several side events, discuss projects with delegates, and meet with the Secretariat. These various interventions enabled the Forum to make itself better known to delegates, to increase its recognition, and to heighten its role as an advisory body to the Convention. It also gave the Forum an opportunity to hear the concerns of the delegates of the General Assembly and think of ways to address these concerns so as to improve its programmes, policies, and actions.

The Chair of the Steering Committee of the ICH NGO Forum presented the Forum's report of activities to the members of the General Assembly. His presentation of approximately 15 minutes was followed by questions and discussions with the delegates of the States Parties for more than an hour. Several members expressed concern about the geographical imbalance of accredited NGOs given that 54%, more than half, come from regional group 1 (Western Europe and North America). The GA was reminded, as underlined in his report, that the Steering Committee of the NGO Forum has taken this imbalance very seriously and have implemented several measures to deal with the problem: equitable representation of all regions within the Steering Committee and all ad hoc committees, the creation of a working group specially dedicated to the problem, awareness-raising and support to NGOs in under-represented regions and collaborations with Category 2 centres to recruit more NGOs in specific targeted regions.

The Forum organized four side events during the General Assembly. The first was a seminar on ICH good safeguarding practices to advance human security which included presentations on « Women's activities in maintaining sustainable agricultural practices in South Korea »; « The uses of ICH to mitigate family tensions in everyday life »; and « The uses of ICH in armed conflict and in post-conflict situations ». The seminar was also well attended, by an audience of some 90 participants (45 in person and 43 online), including a number of delegates from State Parties. The launch of the Heritage Alive! publication on traditional musical instruments, which included presentations of summaries of the articles as well as live musical performances, was attended by over 60 people and likewise enjoyed a positive response. Two other side events were organized on Wednesday evening: a conference by the President of the Associazione Sant'Antuono & le Battuglie di Pastellessa on good safeguarding practices in the area of traditional winemaking, and a second conference by the President of the [U.N.P.L.I. \(Unione Nazionale Pro Loco d'Italia\)](#) on safeguarding practices developed the NGO since its creation a decade ago.

### The ICH NGO Forum at Mondiacult 2022

The ICH NGO Forum presented a statement at the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development, held in Mexico City from 28-30 September 2022. The statement underlined the contribution of traditional cultural practices (ie storytelling, textile design, music) to the creative economies whether it be through audio-visual productions, clothing design and fashion, popular music or the tourist industry. It declared that the individuals,

communities and groups that safeguard the elements of the intangible cultural heritage, who very often nourish the creative economy, should be recognized and duly remunerated. The creative economy must be inclusive and fair to become a tool that helps to reduce poverty and contributes to sustainable development.

### Toolkit on ICH and Sustainable Tourism

The working group on research produced a state-of-the art web dossier/toolkit on intangible cultural heritage and sustainable tourism. Following up on the symposium held at 14COM in Bogota dedicated to this theme, the group furthered its research activities on the topic, expanded the scope of the study, drew in new participants, and aligned their work with the new concepts in the tourist sector geared toward making tourism more sustainable (alternative tourism, slow tourism, experiential/immersive tourism, community driven tourism). The web dossier/toolkit aims to present the economic, social and cultural benefits of tourism while offering methods to counter the threats of tourism to the practices of bearer communities (excessive stylization and transformation and/or gentrification of traditional practices, loss of identity, environmental degradation). The web dossier/toolkit explains basic concepts, offers practical knowledge and shares concrete experiences to help bearer communities maximize sustainable tourism development benefits from their ICH. The toolkit was launched online with a webinar on October 27<sup>th</sup> and will be made readily available on the ICH NGO Forum website.

### Organizational Development

The ICH NGO Form has also undertaken a series of initiatives to strengthen its organizational structures.

The Steering Committee is collaborating more closely with the working groups. It is assisting them in their governance and organizational development. Meetings of the SC with the working groups (WG's) were held with the WGs in March and April. These highly productive meetings provided opportunities to share information about the activities and structures of every WG, which benefited each WG as well as the SC. All WG fulfilled the bylaw requirements for electing officers, a mission statement, an acceptable governance structure, an annual report of activities and an agenda for the work to be undertaken during year. The SC has allocated a budget to support requests for financial support of \$100 for translation and up to \$300 for specific projects.

An ad hoc Committee was created to revise the regulatory instruments of the Forum. A call was sent to all ANGOs. Applications were received from all regions, but none from International NGOs. The Committee was made up of members from each region, with more than one member from the Arab states and Africa. The Committee reviewed the bylaws and code of ethics as well as any documents relating to regulatory matters, generated by working groups. The Committee's main remit was to remedy discrepancies between the electoral rules and the bylaws as well as between the English and the French versions of the bylaws, and to update them in response to new needs that have been identified. It has also clarified the relative roles of the working groups and committees as well as the rules governing them. Its recommendations include reducing the membership of the SC to six members, each representing one of the six EG of UNESCO, with no additional representative from an 'international NGO'. If this proposal is approved, representatives of accredited NGOs will stand in the future election according to the region

where their main headquarters are located. Since all the international NGOs are headquartered in Group I, the Ad Hoc Committee felt that their separate seat results in the over-representation of that region in the SC.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the category of ‘international NGO’ in the ICH NGO Forum does not correspond to the UNESCO electoral structure and no such category is mentioned either in the Convention or in the Operational Directives.<sup>2</sup> According to the UNESCO website, accredited NGOs are affiliated to the electoral group where their headquarters are located.<sup>3</sup> In discussions on the matter in the Steering Committee, some members expressed the concern that international NGOs, which provide an important global perspective, would be excluded from governance, while others have argued that this proposed change would not *exclude* these NGOs from governance within the Forum, but would rather remove the geographical imbalance that this situation creates within the governance structures of the organization. A further important proposal of the Committee is to rename the Steering Committee as ‘Executive Board’ in order better to reflect its role and provide a clearer legal basis on which it can lead and represent the ICH NGO Forum. These and other recommendations regarding components of the regulatory instruments will be presented at an extraordinary meeting of the Forum’s General Assembly on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, and voted upon online before the General Assembly at the end of November.

The Forum is in the process of expanding its communication platforms to [better](#) inform NGOs and [States Parties effectively](#) about the Convention and the Forum through its [programprogrammes](#) during the annual Committee sessions, its website, social media and, potentially, through informational videos. These various [modalities-modes of communication](#) are currently being used and they can potentially be expanded for sharing [best-good](#) practices, information on accreditation procedures, UNESCO reporting requirements and providing support for NGOs from developing countries to attend the annual Committee sessions. Newly-accredited NGOs now receive formal letters from the ICH NGO Forum to welcome them and remind them of their role as NGOs, which can be complemented by similar communications from the Secretariat. This strategy also involves the updating and improvement of the Forum’s website which is currently underway, thanks to the generous financial support of the ICH NGO Forum, the Flanders Workshop for Intangible Heritage and the Norwegian Crafts Institute. The renewed website will be easier to navigate and will be able to house the toolkits (beginning with the one on ICH and Sustainable Tourism coming out this year) as well as an online version of #HeritageAlive.

### III. Looking Forward: plans for the future

The ICH NGO Forum has over a very short time federated the ever-increasing number of NGOs accredited to the Convention and became their representative governing body that they now consider their own. Article 9(1) of the Convention allows for the accreditation of NGOs “to act in an advisory capacity to the Committee”, and as a “vehicle for representation”. At the drafting of

<sup>1</sup>A number of the international NGOs are also located in non-State Party countries, in particular in North America.

<sup>2</sup>OD 27 establishing the Evaluation Body, for example, mentions “six accredited non-governmental organizations, taking into consideration equitable geographical representation and various domains of intangible cultural heritage”.

<sup>3</sup>According to OD 92(ii), a criterion for NGOs being accredited is that they have “an established domicile and a recognized legal personality as compatible with domestic law” which implies selecting a single country and region for the purposes of accreditation.

the Convention, to avoid the dominance of one or two large international NGOs, it was hoped that the accreditation of a large number of NGOs, “with recognized competence” in the field of ICH from different regions and cultures would contribute to cultural diversity and sustainable development. But the Convention and the Operational Directives were less clear about how these diverse accredited NGOs would function collectively. This remained a “grey zone” in the Convention. The Forum was created in response to a need for collective representation by NGOs, communities, groups and individuals in the Convention and has developed itself through practice. It has established sound governance practices with well-defined bylaws and electoral rules that are constantly evolving and being improved upon. Its Executive Body, the Steering Committee, hold elections every year to elect candidates from each electoral region and an international NGO. It has established working groups and committees to deal with specific strategic and pressing issues, and an annual journal presenting results of research from the field on ICH. It organizes symposiums, conferences, workshops, and side events on strategic themes at the Intergovernmental meetings and the General Assembly for the benefit of its members, but also for that of delegates, committee members and observers that participate in its activities. It has a well-developed website and a newsletter aimed at keeping its members well informed and at facilitating communication among them. It is gaining the respect and the participation of NGOs as expressed by the rising number of NGOs registered at the annual meetings, growing from about one-third of all accredited NGOs in 2016 to more than two-thirds in 2021.

In the coming years the Forum would like enhance its advisory functions by taking on new projects for and/or in collaboration with the Secretariat, the Intergovernmental Committee, and the State Parties. It feels that it could contribute greatly to the upcoming reflection on the broader implementation of article 18 of the Convention, drawing from its systematic identification of good safeguarding practices through the mapping project. Given the diverse experiences of the accredited NGOs and the previous and ongoing work of the working group on research, it could assist the Secretariat in its current work on the three thematic areas aimed at developing a comprehensive approach to intangible cultural heritage safeguarding and sustainable development : 1) economic dimensions of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage; 2) safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and climate change; 3) safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in urban contexts. The symposium of the Forum this year is dedicated *Living Heritage, Climate Change and the Environment*, in the hope that will contribute to the reflection on this strategic theme.

Despite the emphasis placed in the 2003 Convention on the involvement of nongovernmental actors, more particularly NGOs and communities, NGOs have not been directly involved in the government of the Convention. In the last few years, the ICH NGO Forum has been invited to present its annual report at the Intergovernmental Meeting and at the General Assembly. The opportunity to present at these meetings is highly appreciated and it has enhanced communications between the NGOs, the States Parties and the Secretariat. It is regrettable though that the members of the Forum are not able to participate in discussions or even answer questions that often follow the presentation of the report to the States Parties. The NGOs sit on the Evaluation Body to evaluation applications for inscription of elements on the lists and requests for financial assistance. However, it should be pointed out that this a rather restricted emulative role of objectively applying criteria in a selection process; it is not a prospective role aimed at the development of the Convention. The intergovernmental process of the Convention remains highly state-driven. A stronger and more effective presence of NGOs throughout the



work of the Convention needs to be properly identified and formalized. The mapping project has clearly demonstrated that the ICH NGO Forum, through its diverse membership, offers a range of expertise and experience that makes it eminently suitable to contribute more substantially to the operation of the Convention. More active and direct ANGO representation in intergovernmental meetings of the 2003 Convention would also greatly enhance their capacity to contribute positively and effectively to the operation of the Convention.

The Steering Committee of the ICH NGO Forum (2022)