



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

**Venice Office**  
Regional Bureau for Science  
and Culture in Europe



**SOFIA**  
REGIONAL CENTER  
FOR THE SAFEGUARDING  
OF THE INTANGIBLE  
CULTURE HERITAGE IN THE  
SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE  
UNDER THE AUSPICES OF  
UNESCO

## CONCLUSIONS

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# **Ninth Annual Meeting of the South East European Experts Network on Intangible Cultural Heritage**

***“Intangible cultural heritage and the  
diversity of cultural expressions: synergies  
and coordination between UNESCO 2003  
and 2005 Conventions”***

**Venice, Italy, 18-19 June 2015**

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*A meeting organized within the framework of the contribution  
of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation to the  
UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe*

We, the participants in the 9th annual meeting of the South-East European Experts Network on Intangible Cultural Heritage (Venice, Italy, 18-19 June 2015), henceforth “the Network”, wish to thank the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (Venice) for the warm hospitality and for the successful organization of this meeting; we also wish to express appreciation for the support offered by the Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage in South-East Europe (Sofia, Bulgaria) to the organization of this meeting.

We wish to highlight that this meeting, which is a follow-up to the previous meetings in Arbanassi, Bulgaria (June 2007), Safranbolu, Turkey (May 2008), Zagreb, Croatia (April 2009), Râmnicu-Vâlcea, Romania (May 2010), Belgrade, Serbia (May 2011), Athens, Greece (May 2012), Sofia, Bulgaria (May 2013), and Limassol, Cyprus (May 2014) marked a further step towards enhancing regional cooperation on the safeguarding and promotion of intangible cultural heritage, and developing a common understanding of related challenges and opportunities.

The following trends and topics of common interest emerged during our discussions, and recommendations for future action were made accordingly:

## Progress, experiences and challenges in the implementation of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage

While the participants stressed the relevance of national projects both for awareness raising and for safeguarding of ICH and agreed on the need to prioritize those projects rather than focusing predominantly on nominations for the lists of the Convention, they acknowledged the paramount role of nominations as important means to raise awareness not only among experts and civil servants directly involved in the implementation of the convention but also among civil society and the general public. Furthermore as inventories and awareness raising activities are often promoted with a view of nominating an element, the preparation of nominations ultimately supports the implementation of safeguarding measures that benefit other elements of ICH.

Multinational nominations are seen as an opportunity for enhancing international cooperation between communities, experts and institutions. However, these initiatives can sometime generate controversies when experts recognise similar cultural patterns among different groups, while community members do not regard their heritage as being shared with other groups.

Cooperation with and involvement of communities remains a major challenge in the implementation of the convention. It is noteworthy that several Member States in South-East Europe (SEE) have amended their inventorying policy to involve communities in a more active way. New inventories, sometimes prepared at the local level, are added to existing ones. Recent entries in the inventories, among other initiatives, provide evidence of the increased awareness of the role of ICH for sustainable development especially with regard to social, environmental and economic dimensions.

Living Human Treasures systems or the idea of an exceptional value underpinning the former masterpieces programme are common to several Member States in the SEE region. In some cases, experts are advising their legal counterparts at the national level to have the relevant laws amended in order to avoid hierarchical approaches.

Finally, several States have included or are trying to include ICH in curricular and extracurricular education programmes in schools. This can be regarded also as a positive outcome of the 2014 meeting on the theme of ICH and education. Participants remarked that the production by UNESCO of a specific educational kit on ICH, based on the experience of the World Heritage in Young Hands, would be especially beneficial.

## The UNESCO 2003 and 2005 Conventions: synergies and coordination

The participants stressed the importance of linking the two conventions in the practice of safeguarding and promoting cultural expressions which also meet the definition of ICH, as well as at the policy level. In this regard, it was noted that the meeting would have benefited from the participation of UNESCO staff from the Secretariat of the 2005 Convention.

Many participants regard revitalization as a fertile ground to explore the operational synergies between the two conventions. Participants presented mainly examples from the domain of craftsmanship and traditional music. In these domains, the viability of ICH is regarded as closely associated with providing the conditions for the creation, dissemination and enjoyment of cultural goods, including at policy level.

Participants especially underlined the need for clarification on the distinction between “commercialization” and “over-commercialization” in the field of ICH. In fact, it was stressed that in some cases (especially related to craftsmanship) cultural and economic sustainability are closely linked and the safeguarding of ICH elements also rely on the sustained profitability of the related activities.

Concerning coordination among UNESCO conventions, the participants suggested in particular that UNESCO prepare a user-friendly tool presenting the different UNESCO cultural conventions and their possible synergies at operational and policy level.

## Intangible cultural heritage, foodways and sustainable development

The participants are already familiar with issues related to food-related elements. With only two exceptions, SEE States have already nominated elements associated with the agro-food domain to the Lists of the Convention or have inscribed such elements on national inventories.

Participants agreed on the importance of intersectorial cooperation at the national level for an effective safeguarding of foodways under the 2003 Convention. Ministries of agriculture, economy and health are regarded as key interlocutors for the Ministries of culture when it comes to safeguarding agro-food related elements.

Branding and festivals established to promote particular products and cuisines were recurrent patterns in the participants' presentation. In some cases brands are regarded as a risk for the viability of ICH as they codify what used to exist in a spontaneous way. This codification damages those bearers that do not comply with the established regulations. In other cases brands promoting traditional products can have a positive effect as they contribute in raising awareness about the value of the socio-cultural process underpinning the preparation of the latter and thereby facilitate the safeguarding and the

transmission of know-how as well as of social and cultural practices associated with the branded products.

Participants reported of several interesting indirect consequences of the inscription of food-related elements in the SEE region. These inscriptions especially contributed to sustainable development with regard to women empowerment, promoted good practice in international cooperation and stimulated local communities in investigating and safeguarding other ICH elements.

In addition, participants presented some concrete examples in which ICH practices (mostly related to agriculture and land management) were contributing to risk resilience and mitigation.

Finally, participants expressed their interest in developing future cross-border and multi-national cooperation activities on food-related ICH.

## Regional cooperation: priorities for future action

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Participants confirm the relevance and usefulness of these annual meetings of the South-East European Experts Network on ICH as the main specialized regional platform for exchanging experiences and developing cooperation, and support their continuation; in this regard, participants put forward the following recommendations for the organization of the next meeting:

1. Participants appreciate and approve the kind proposal by Croatia to host the next meeting of the Network, in 2016
2. One main thematic focus should continue to be proposed for each meeting, in order to allow for an in-depth and constructive discussion; in this regard, participants agree on the theme proposed by Croatia as host country of the meeting next year, on the coordination and synergies between the 1972 and 2003 conventions
3. National presentations on the state of implementation of the 2003 Convention shall continue focusing on the most significant novelties achieved and challenges emerged during the previous year