CASE STUDY 28

Devolution and the role of NGOs in Flanders, Belgium

Some States formally devolve heritage policy and management to the subnational level. In Belgium, for example, which is a federal State with strong regional autonomy, the Government of the Flemish region takes responsibility for its own heritage issues. It has published a Cultural Heritage Decree and tasked a number of non-governmental and non-profit organizations in the tangible heritage and ICH field with the execution of the Decree. Two of the main organizations are profiled below.

#### Heemkunde Vlaanderen

A State-subsidized non-profit organization called Heemkunde Vlaanderen acts as an umbrella organization for those involved in heritage safeguarding, providing support to hundreds of heritage volunteers, local history associations, museums, archives and documentation centres. For example, it assisted the communities concerned in nominating the Aalst carnival to the Representative List of the Convention, organizing a congress on the topic in 2007, and it will develop special education toolkits about the carnival for primary and secondary schools. It also provides training and support for local heritage inventorying projects.

#### FARO

FARO (Brussels), the interface centre for both tangible and intangible cultural heritage in Flanders, is an independent non-profit organization. It is more closely linked to government structures as it is subsidized by the Flemish Government and supervised by the Agency of Arts and Heritage of the Flemish Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sports and Media. It was created in 2008 through the merger of two organizations – the Cultural Biography of Flanders (Culturele Biografie Vlaanderen) and the Flemish Centre for Popular Culture (Vlaams Centrum voor Volkscultuur).

The functions of FARO are defined in the Cultural Heritage Decree of 2008. FARO’s aim is to strengthen and support the cultural heritage field in Flanders in order to realize the main objectives of the Cultural Heritage decree:

* to develop an integrated cultural heritage policy, namely to stimulate qualitative management, long-term sustainability and the unlocking of the cultural heritage;
* to start up a network of cultural heritage organizations to cultivate, represent, acknowledge and valorize the various ways in which the public participates in and experiences cultural heritage;
* to stimulate further development of the various cultural heritage practices, museum, archival and library sciences, and ethnology; and
* to create an awareness of cultural diversity within the cultural heritage policy.

FARO draws up an annual action plan and submits a strategic plan to the Flemish Minister of Culture and the Flemish Government every five years. It maintains contacts with other institutions and organizations at home and abroad to develop national and international programmes, projects and networks. FARO itself develops many projects in the domain of ICH, including the provision of courses in heritage management. It regularly provides platforms for discussions and awareness-raising about ICH.

For further information:

* www.heemkunde-vlaanderen.be
* www.faronet.be/en/news