CASE STUDY 54

Flanders: a facilitation policy

Some States formally devolve heritage policy and management to the sub-national 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.

Through its 2008 Cultural Heritage Decree (revised in 2012), Flanders has adopted a facilitation policy, which relies on an active network of cultural heritage organizations to support local ‘heritage cells’ focused on transmission and safeguarding of heritage (Vision Paper, 2010). Within this bottom-up approach, the government is mainly seen as a quality controller, monitor and moderator while communities and civil society are at the forefront of safeguarding efforts.

#### **Local and national: a two-dimensional network**

The facilitation policy essentially functions as a two-dimensional network:

* At the national level, specialized organizations are entrusted with the task of implementing the decree and of providing thematic or methodological expertise across Flanders. They tend to be organized by intangible cultural heritage domains recognized by the Convention.
* At the local level, generalist heritage workers organized in ‘heritage cells’ are ensuring collaboration and synergies between local actors.

Two independent non-profit organizations play a key role in facilitating this network:

* The Flemish interface centre for cultural heritage (FARO) aims to strengthen and support the cultural heritage field in Flanders in order to realize the main objectives of the Cultural Heritage Decree.
* Tapis Plein focuses primarily on methodologies for guiding citizen participation in intangible cultural heritage safeguarding (UNESCO Periodic Report, 2013).

The facilitation policy is supported by government subsidies to these organizations, so that they can fulfil their role for example for the training of the ‘brokers’ or mediators between national authorities and the heritage communities (Jacobs, 2012 and Jacobs et al. 2014). These organizations also have functions beyond ICH safeguarding, so their entire subsidy is not used for ICH-related activities. The Flemish community also subsidizes local administrations to help them develop a local heritage policy (UNESCO Periodic Report, 2013).

The Flemish policy is not limited to actors in the (subsidized) cultural heritage sector, but pertains also to the arts sector, agriculture and fisheries, the immovable heritage field, etc. (Vision Paper, 2010). As a result, organizations outside the heritage sector are eligible for project funding under the ICH facilitation policy if they plan to undertake heritage-related projects.

#### **An online platform for participation in ICH policies**

Among other tools to enact its facilitation policy, Flanders has used an online platform for public participation. In 2012, the government and its network of stakeholders launched an interactive website for the safeguarding of ICH: [www.immaterieelerfgoed.be](http://www.immaterieelerfgoed.be)

The online platform intends to move beyond the existing inventory to propose innovative instruments for networking, information sharing and learning among intangible cultural heritage stakeholders. While it includes a database of intangible cultural heritage elements, the website also features various other functions which enable users to:

* link elements of ICH with examples of best practices, experts hubs and networks of expertise;
* develop, share, show and report on safeguarding measures and measures for the transmission of ICH; and
* link actors of all types (communities, experts, NGOs etc.) and at all levels (local, municipal, Flemish community level). (Flanders State of the Art, 2014).

#### **International cooperation as an important policy objective**

International cooperation is an important objective of the Flemish intangible heritage policy. Firstly, Flanders has played a proactive role in the Convention’s mechanisms. From 2012 to 2016, Belgium is serving as a member of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee. Through the UNESCO/Flanders Funds-in-Trust, the Flemish Community has provided support to various capacity-building projects for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in Southern Africa.

Furthermore, international cooperation has not only been a governmental concern: just like the other aspects of policy implementation, civil society has played an active role in it, too. For instance, FARO and Tapis Plein were co-founders of the international ICH Forum for NGOs accredited by UNESCO and are assisting in its day-to-day coordination (Flanders State of the Art, 2014).

#### **Further information and sources**

* + Flanders State of the Art. 2014. *Safeguarding cultural heritage in Flanders: perspectives, policies and practice*. The Arts and Heritage Agency. <http://www.faronet.be/en/news/safeguarding-intangible-cultural-heritage-in-flanders-perspectives-policies-and-practice>
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	+ Jacobs, M. 2012. ‘La sauvegarde du PCI en Flandres: un changement de paradigme’ in *Culture & recherche* n°127. <http://www.unesco-vlaanderen.be/media/73009/m%20jacobs_cr127_automne%202012.pdf>
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