

# Squaring the Circle?

In Search of the Characteristics of the Relationship between Intangible Cultural Heritage, Museums, Europe and the EU

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This paper seeks to analyze the complex and evolving relationship between intangible cultural heritage (ICH), museums, Europe as a geographical region and the European Union as a regional organization.

With the aim to understand this relationship and find relevant quantitative and qualitative data, the number of inscriptions coming from European countries (and separately from the EU member states) to the Representative List of ICH is analyzed, as one of proofs of the interest shown by States Parties to the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (the 2003 Convention). Inscriptions from the EU members are also examined by paying special attention to the way they incorporate museums and the role ascribed to museums visible in nomination files. Also examined is how the EU defines 'intangible cultural heritage' in practice, e.g. via diverse funds and programs, with the aim to see how close (or how far) its interpretations of what is 'intangible heritage' are to the 2003 Convention's definition, and what is the place provided by the EU for museums promoting ICH. At the end the paper presents the challenges and possible traps that might be encountered in the process of including ICH in the current EU and museums heritage policies and actions.

In order to provide a clear referential framework, the research is based on an interdisciplinary approach, involving the legal, institutional, and political dimensions. In terms of the sources used, information was drawn from international governmental (EU, UNESCO) and non-governmental organizations (NEMO, Europeana) primary sources – e.g. conventions (with a focus on the 2003 Convention), institutional agreements, directives, policy documents and statements, operational directives, and open calls for funds.

## Europe, the EU and the 2003 Convention

The undisputed success of the most recognizable international 'promotion machine' for cultural heritage – the UNESCO List of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (WHL) established by the 1972 Convention and now covering more than 1,000 entries – served (though not without many controversies raised and debates held) as a model for the 2003 Convention, which established the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This

list currently includes 463 inscriptions from 124 countries (as of December 2019).

Soon after the adoption of the 1972 Convention, the WHL proved to be a great success story and also promotional machine – but mainly for one region of the world: Europe, which has the majority of inscribed sites.<sup>1</sup> This situation caused growing international consternation throughout the 1980s, and in the 1990s mechanisms were invented in order to correct this imbalance, including the launch of the Global Strategy for a Representative, Balanced, and Credible World Heritage List in 1994.<sup>2</sup> Despite these initiatives, European hegemony on the WHL remains in place, making it still a ‘most European convention’. Thus it comes as no surprise that one of the arguments raised at the time of drafting the 2003 Convention was that this instrument should finally mitigate this imbalance by raising and promoting the richness of traditions, customs, rituals, and traditional craftsmanship of African, Asian, and Latin American origin.<sup>3</sup>

The hope of having a 2003 ‘non-Western Convention’ did not materialize however. In the UNESCO lobbies one may indeed hear, ‘off the record’, that “UNESCO is not for Europe, and Europe does not need the 2003 Convention”, or that “the governing bodies are clear that they invest only in developing countries, like Africa, Latin America” (noted in July 2016). The statistics, however, show that Europe as a region can handle this ‘neglect’ quite well, with the number of inscriptions being a visible proof of the frozen power structure in the global heritage regime, in which Europe has played a key role for decades. Europe, as a region, has been highly successful in operationalizing the 2003 UNESCO Convention (or in other words, in “capitalising on new possibilities”<sup>4</sup>), as regards the presence of intangible cultural elements originating from Europe on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Out of the five world regions, Europe has (since December 2019) 175 unique inscriptions, which constitutes the second largest share (34%) in the regional representation. It is still very close to Asia and the Pacific with 35%, and in the period 2016-2018 Europe was a leading region.

Another step in the analysis of the widespread European presence on the ICH international arena reveals the central role of the activities undertaken by the 27 EU member states in heritage diplomacy, which has resulted in the large number of inscriptions on the Representative List, forming at the same time an

1 For more on the history of creating regional groups in the framework of the 1972 Convention, with the aim to ensure an equitable representation of the different regions and cultures of the world, especially in the context of the elections to Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (Article 8 of the 1972 Convention) see L. Meskell, C. Liuzza and N.s Brown, ‘World Heritage Regionalism: UNESCO from Europe to Asia’, *International Journal of Cultural Property* 22:4, 2015, p. 437-470. See also: H. Schreiber, ‘Intangible cultural heritage, Europe and the European Union: dangerous liaisons?’, in: A. Jakubowski, F. Fiorentini, K. Hausler (eds.), *Cultural Heritage in the European Union: A Critical Inquiry*. Leiden and Boston, 2019, p. 324-364.

2 Meskell, Liuzza and Brown, *World Heritage Regionalism*, p. 438; C. Brumann and D. Berliner, *World Heritage on the Ground: Ethnographic Perspectives*. Oxford and New York, 2016, p. 11.

3 Brumann and Berliner, *World Heritage*, p. 12.

4 Brumann and Berliner, *World Heritage*, p. 11.

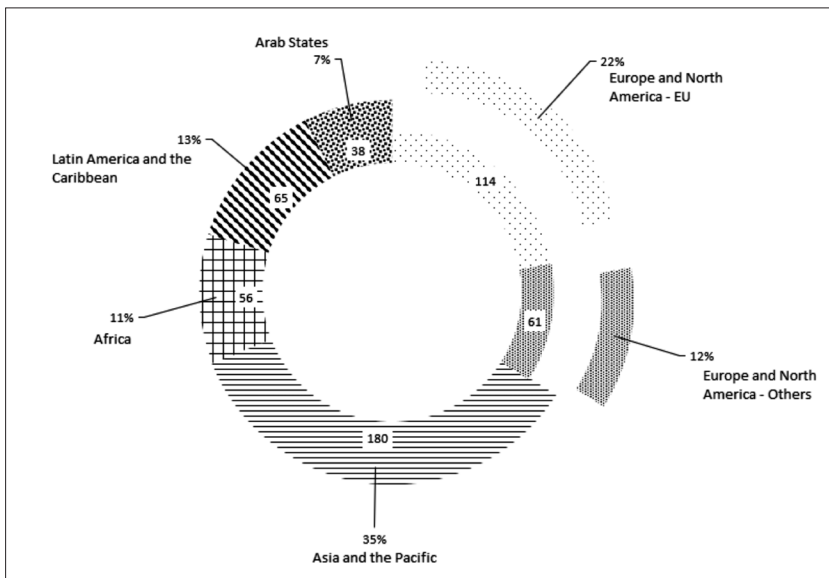


Figure 1. Number of inscriptions on the Representative List of ICH of Humanity – regional imbalance. Methodology: only unique inscriptions were counted for each region (multinational inscriptions were counted as one in each region). For EU member states also only unique inscriptions were counted for the whole group. Source: own elaboration, December 2019.

overwhelming majority of inscriptions representing Europe as a geographical region on this UNESCO list. As of December 2019, out of the 46 states forming Groups I and II (generally representing Europe as a regional group), 27 EU member states possess definite majority of ICH inscribed elements out of all counted for this region. All current EU member states are also States Parties to the 2003 Convention, with Malta joining as the last EU member in spring 2017 (with the exception of the UK, which is, however, currently in the Brexit process).

Although the number of inscriptions does not necessarily reflect the potential, richness, or status of ICH in a given country, they generally reflect the financial and diplomatic capacities of the EU member states.<sup>5</sup>

### The role of museums stemming from the EU member states' ICH nomination files

In order to answer questions regarding the role of museums for the safeguarding of ICH I have analyzed 114 nominations coming from the EU member states (multinational counted as one, data as of December 2019, UK has not yet ratified the 2003 Convention). I have taken both a quantitative and a qualitative approach. Firstly, I have checked the number of nominations

<sup>5</sup> Schreiber, *Intangible cultural heritage*, p. 328-329.

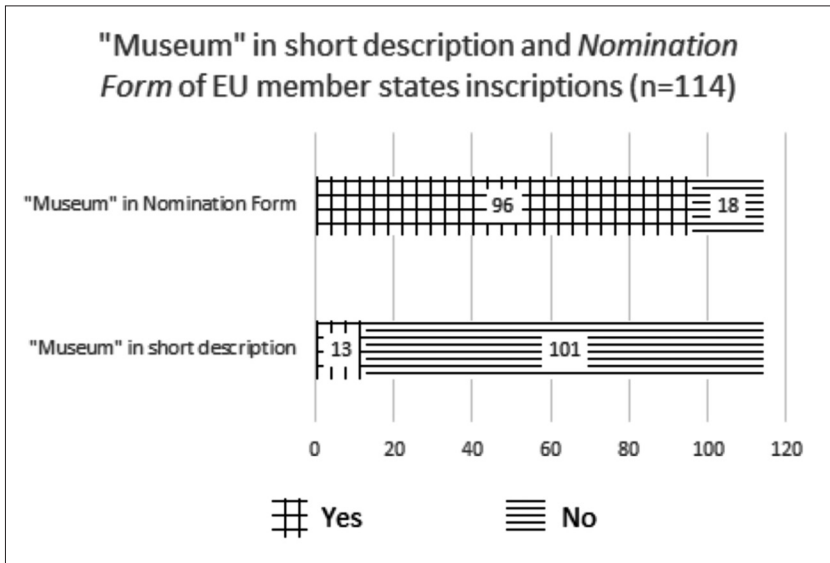


Figure 2. Number of references to museums in short description of ICH elements inscribed into the Representative List of ICH visible at the UNESCO website and number of references to museums in nomination files. All analysed nomination files were submitted by the EU member states (as of December 2019). Own elaboration.

where reference to ‘museum’ appears. Secondly, I have explored the context where this word appears in order to identify the role ascribed to the museum within the nomination (the ‘gravity’ of the ‘museum’ for described practices and communities). It was observed that the reference to ‘museum’ does not appear too often in the short description, visible at the UNESCO website, of any ICH element (short description of an ICH element visible at the UNESCO website is taken from the nomination file: it is regarded as a nomination file ‘in a nutshell’). Only thirteen short descriptions contained any reference to museums. The situation changes significantly when one analyzes the whole nomination file: the majority of inscriptions refer to museums (see Figure 2). However, the context of these references differs widely.

There are observations to be made on the basis of my analysis:

1. In some cases the establishment or enlarging and redesigning of a museum is planned as an element of a safeguarding plan – in that sense one may say that the 2003 Convention has a ‘museum-(re)generating’ effect, e.g. to implement the 2003 Convention Serbia established ICH Centre at the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade responsible for safeguarding all ICH elements inscribed to ICH lists both at the national as well as the international levels (e.g. *kolo*, traditional folk dance); Portugal established The UNESCO Centre for the Appreciation and Safeguard of the Estremoz Clay

Figure<sup>6</sup> in the process of preparation of the nomination file on Craftmanship of Estremoz clay figures; in the process of preparation to the nomination procedure Naples Municipality created a specific section dedicated to *pizzaiuolo* in the Mediterranean Museum of Culture, Arts and Tradition; the Lombardy Region, the Cremona Municipality and the Department of Musicology supported the creation of an audio-visual archive at the Stradivari Museum about the learning processes, technical skills and personal histories of violin-makers in 2011 (Traditional violin craftsmanship in Cremona was inscribed into Representative list in 2012); and a new museum dedicated exclusively to Rebetiko (inscribed in 2017) was opened in the same year in Trikala (Thessaly, Greece). It is important to underline, however, that the scale of these planned ‘museum-(re)generating’ projects differs: sometimes it is related to a small museum at school, sometimes to a huge, large-scale institution.

*(museum as an effect of ICH Convention);*

2. In some cases museums existed long before the nomination process had started. In some cases the museum is considered to be a part of a wider group of engaged actors (alongside NGOs, a state administration, experts, academics, practitioners themselves) (e.g. the Museum of Folk Arts in the case of Armenian cross-stones art; the Ethnographic Museum of Istria in the case of Annual carnival bell ringers’ pageant from the Kastav area; the Historical Museum of the City of Kraków in the case of *szopka* tradition);

*(museum as an element of an ICH community, museum as an actor that initiated the ICH inscription process);*

3. In a few cases nominations were ‘purely-museum-like’, e.g. they were written and created by a museum network, which are key actors in safeguarding a given practice and where a museum acts as a competent body (e.g. cultural practices associated to the first of March; traditional wall-carpet craftsmanship in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, Aubusson tapestry, Blaudruck); in some cases one museum plays a key role in transmitting ICH and preparing the nomination file (e.g. bobbin lacemaking in Slovenia)

*(museum as a part of intangible practice cultivation);*

6 This name is used in the nomination file, however in the short description, reviewed by UNESCO before publishing it on its website the word ‘UNESCO’ is avoided, see *Craftsmanship of Estremoz clay figures*, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/craftmanship-of-estremoz-clay-figures-01279> and compare to nomination file no. 01279 (Dec. 12. COM 11.b.26) (26/07/2020).

4. In some cases museums were presented solely in the context of their traditional functions, such as collecting, researching, archiving. They are presented more as ‘memory keepers’ than as active players engaged in safeguarding living practice (e.g. the Slovak National Museum – Music Museum in the case of bagpipe culture in Slovakia)

(*museum as researching and collecting institution*);

5. The terminology used in the museum context varies; *virtual museum*, *living museum* (e.g. Fandango’s Living Museum) or writing about dry stone walling sites as “living museums” in the case of the multinational nomination file submitted by Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland), *ecomuseum* (e.g. the Batana Eco-museum) or an *Open Air Living Museum*.

The relationship between the EU, museums and the 2003 Convention is not very clear in the nomination files I studied. When ICH nomination files mention the European Union it usually appears in three roles regarding their influence on museums activities: 1) as an institution providing funding for projects ran by museums (or even contributing to establishing a new museum as in the case of Rebetiko Museum in Trikala, dedicated also to the memory of Rebetiko composer Vassilis Tsitsanis); 2) as legal regulator, issuing laws that a museum has to take into account when organizing the practice (e.g.

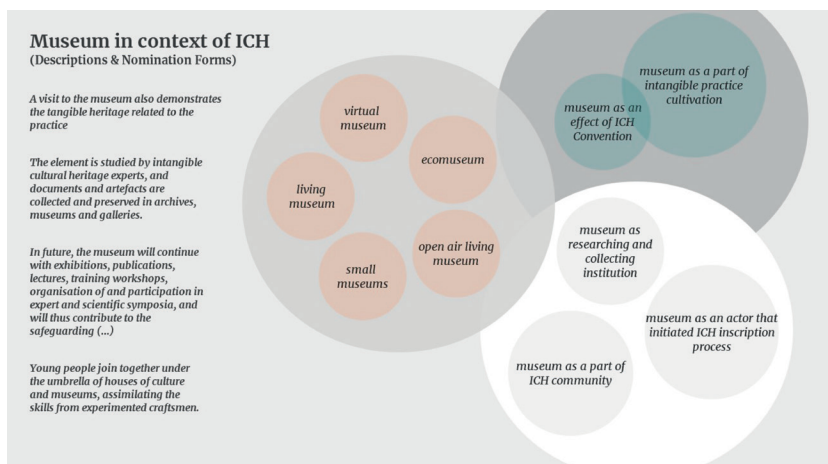


Figure 3. Terminology used – the role of museums in ICH nomination files (short description visible on the UNESCO website and other parts of nomination files) submitted by the EU member states. Citations from nomination files are presented on the left. Note: diverse roles of museums usually overlap and do not function in isolation. Own elaboration.

safety regulations during Valencia Fallas festivity<sup>7</sup>); 3) as an actor engaged in providing a research framework and diverse ‘EU scientific programmes’, e.g. in case of Rebetiko in Greece.

## ‘Intangible heritage’ and museums in the EU funding

Museums are considered as one of the crucial elements of culture infrastructure in Europe. The survey published in 2007 on European Cultural Values reveals that when thinking about culture, for eleven percent of European citizens the first thing that comes to mind is a museum. Respondents in Slovakia, Austria (26%) and Luxembourg (23%) were most likely to make this association. 41% of European citizens declare to visit a museum at least once a year. Respondents in Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands were most likely to have visited a museum or gallery at least once in the last year – the participation rate there is above sixty percent. What is also worth stressing is that the Internet is changing the ways in which many people consume cultural content: almost a quarter of leisure-time users say that they access museum, library and other specialist websites, in order to boost their knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

Cultural programs preceding the Creative Europe Programme had never included any ‘intangible heritage’ terminology in their descriptions or guidelines.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, the Creative Europe Programme is not the only one that funds projects designed for safeguarding ICH. The European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund also provide financial support for ICH, among other programs. The references to ICH began to appear and grow in visibility also in more (or less) appropriate configurations in Horizon 2020 or Interreg. An analysis of projects combining museums and ICH is presented below (Figure 4 and Figure 5).

It is important to note that in order to analyze the relevance of ‘intangible cultural heritage’ in the funding programs I have deliberately decided to search for the phrases ‘intangible culture’ and ‘intangible heritage’ due to the fact that search results for ‘intangible cultural heritage’ were very rare and did

7 “As regards the use of gunpowder and fireworks, the central and regional administration have adapted legislation to permit the use of these elements while complying with European safety standards while maintaining traditional pyrotechnical traditions” – nomination file no. 00859 (*Valencia Fallas festivity*, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/valencia-fallas-festivity-00859> (26/07/2020)). The controversies about the compliance of festivity activities with the EU regulations were earlier covered by media: *Spain overturns EU law to keep fiesta fires alight*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/feb/21/spain-eu-fiestas-fires> (26/07/2020).

8 European Commission, *European Cultural Values, Special Eurobarometer 278 / Wave 67*. S.L. 2007, p. 5, 12 and 26.

9 Among the three pilot programmes (so-called first-generation programmes) which have been introduced since 1996 (until 1999), one was specifically devoted to cultural heritage, i.e. Raphael (formally established by the European Parliament and Council Decision of 13 October 1997). Although the objectives and areas of the Raphael programme were set quite broadly, only the projects related to tangible cultural heritage were covered by the programme funding of €70 million. It ended in 2000 and was substituted by the programme Culture 2000–2006 (equipped with €240 million), and subsequently Culture 2007–2013 with a budget of €400 million to support projects and activities designed to protect and promote cultural diversity and heritage.

not give the possibility to fully acknowledge the interest in and the presence of 'intangible' cultural heritage.

Area	Source	Searched phrase	2007-2013	2014-2019
<b>CULTURE</b>	The Culture Programme (2007-2013) <sup>10</sup>	intangible culture	9	-
		intangible culture + museum	1	-
		intangible heritage	6	-
		intangible heritage + museum	1	-
	Creative Europe (2014-2019) <sup>11</sup>	intangible culture	-	100
		intangible culture + museum	-	7
		intangible heritage	-	46
		intangible heritage + museum	-	2
	Europeana <sup>12</sup>	intangible culture	46	
		intangible culture + museum	3	
intangible heritage		266		
intangible heritage + museum		20		
<b>EDUCATION</b>	ERASMUS+ <sup>13</sup>	intangible culture	2	287
		intangible culture + museum	0	13
		intangible heritage	7	194
		intangible heritage + museum	0	15

10 Based on search results of phrases 'intangible heritage', 'intangible heritage, museum', 'intangible culture' and 'intangible culture, museum' via the official Creative Europe website: *Creative Europe Project Results*, <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/projects#>) (14/04/2019).

11 Based on search results of phrases 'intangible heritage', 'intangible heritage, museum', 'intangible culture' and 'intangible culture, museum' via the official Creative Europe website: *Creative Europe Project Results*, <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/projects#>) (14/04/2019).

12 Based on search results of phrases 'intangible heritage', 'intangible culture', 'intangible heritage' and 'museum', 'intangible culture' and 'museum' via the Europeana Website: Europeana, <https://www.europeana.eu/> (14/04/2019).

13 Based on search results of phrases 'intangible heritage', 'intangible culture', 'intangible heritage, museum', 'intangible culture, museum' via Erasmus+ Projects website: *Erasmus + Project Results*, <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/>) (14/04/2019).



<b>RESEARCH&amp; INNOVATION</b>	CORDIS (Horizon 2020, FP7, FP6) <sup>14</sup>	intangible culture	69	
		intangible culture + museum	35	
		intangible heritage	60	
		intangible heritage + museum	36	
<b>MARITIME POLICY</b> <sup>15</sup>	European Fisheries Fund (EFF) 2007-2014	intangible culture	NDA	NDA
		intangible heritage	NDA	NDA
	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) 2014-2020	intangible culture	NDA	NDA
		intangible heritage	NDA	NDA
<b>COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY</b>	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) <sup>16</sup>	intangible culture	NDA	NDA
		intangible heritage	NDA	NDA
	European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) <sup>17</sup>	intangible culture	1	
		intangible culture + museum	0	
		intangible heritage	1	
		intangible heritage + museum	0	
culture	96			
culture + museum	46			
<b>INTERNAL MARKET, INDUSTRY, TOURISM AND INTERPRENEUR- SHIP</b>	COSME Programme (2014-2020) <sup>18</sup>	intangible culture	-	0
		intangible heritage	-	1
		intangible heritage + museum	-	0
		museum	-	2

Figure 4. Possible sources of ICH and museum projects funding within EU (after the entry into force of the 2003 Convention). NDA – no data available.

14 Based on search results of phrases ‘intangible heritage’, ‘intangible culture’, ‘intangible heritage, museum’ and ‘intangible culture, museum’ via CORDIS website within collection ‘Projects’, aggregating the research and innovation projects, realized within Horizon 2020, FP7, FP6, FP5 and earlier programmes stretching back to 1990: Cordis, [http://cordis.europa.eu/projects/home\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/projects/home_en.html) (14/04/2019).

15 There is no official project database for EFF and EMFF funds.

16 There are no official databases with all European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development projects – each country provides information on the beneficiaries of the fund separately.

17 Based on search results of phrases ‘intangible heritage’, ‘intangible culture’, ‘intangible heritage, museum’, ‘intangible culture, museum’ via ENRD official website: Projects & Practice, [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects-practice\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects-practice_en) (02/10/2017).

18 Based on search results of phrases ‘intangible heritage’ and ‘intangible culture’ via COSME official data website: *COSME data hub*, <https://cosme.easme-web.eu/#> (14/04/2019).

The analysis of the EU funding for (broadly interpreted) intangible culture and heritage projects proves the impact of the 2003 Convention. After its entry into force the used terminology has started to change. However, there is still not much cause for optimism when it comes to the number of projects actually linking museums and intangible culture or intangible heritage. One must however consider that the existing websites and the way the data are collected do not give a full and coherent picture of the situation. E.g. for maritime and agricultural policy (no data available when one searches for 'intangible') a good example constitutes 'Reviving the tradition of fish markets in Gdansk' (Poland). The project was implemented from August 2013 to August 2014, long after the entry into force of the 2003 Convention. It could be considered as belonging to the domain of intangible cultural heritage, but the key words (theme) were: adding value to fisheries, short circuits, gastronomy, tourism, cultural heritage.<sup>19</sup> Similar situations were found in projects with titles like 'Revitalising Traditional Craft Culture' or 'Destination Pottery Village' (see Figure 5).

#### CULTURE

Europeana → *Europeana Food and Drink collaboration with National Historical Museum of Athens*

Creative Europe (2014-2020) → *Intangible Cultural Heritage and Museum Project*

The Culture Programme (2007-2013) → *Childhood. Remains and Heritage*

#### EDUCATION

Erasmus+ → *Cultural Heritage Journeys with Models*

#### RESEARCH&INNOVATION

Horizon 2020 → *Visual History of the Holocaust: Rethinking Curation in the Digital Age*

7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development  
→ *European Museums in an Age of Migrations*

Joint Programming Initiative on Cultural Heritage and Global Change

#### MARITIME POLICY

European Fisheries Fund (EFF) 2007-2014 → *Reviving the tradition of fish markets in Gdansk*

European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) 2014-2020 → *The Tirschenreuth FLAG project: Interactive digital museum about the local history of aquaculture and aquariums exhibiting local species*

19 *Reviving the tradition of fish markets in Gdansk*, [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/cms/farnet2/on-the-ground/good-practice/short-stories/reviving-tradition-fish-markets-gdansk\\_en](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/cms/farnet2/on-the-ground/good-practice/short-stories/reviving-tradition-fish-markets-gdansk_en) (12/07/2020).

#### COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) → *Revitalising Traditional Craft Culture*

European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) → *Destination “Pottery Village”*

#### INTERNAL MARKET, INDUSTRY, TOURISM AND ENTERPRENEURSHIP

COSME Programme (2014-2020) → *Seniors ENhancing Intangible and INTERgenerational heritage in Europe during the low and medium season*

#### DEVELOPMENT

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) → *Živa coprnija- active preservation of mythology tradition in Pohorje and Istria*

European Social Fund (ESF) → *Co-financing paper ‘The Importance of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Economy of Petronela Tudorache’*

Poland: Infrastruktura i Środowisko 2014-2020 (Cohesion Fund + European Regional Development Fund)

#### DEVELOPMENT AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Instrument for pre-accession assistance IPA and IPA II → *CULTUREVIVE*

European Development Fund (EDF) → *Community Art Space (CAS) - A tool for local development*

European Neighbourhood Policy Funds → *Living tradition - a trilateral cross border cooperation to preserve and revive community folklore*

Cooperation with UNESCO → *Mediterranean Living Heritage (MedLiHer)*

Protecting cultural heritage and diversity in complex emergencies for stability and peace, Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), 2017-2018 → *In Search of a Common Ground: Textile Cultural Traditions in the Island of Timor - their Preservation, Promotion and the Development of Cultural Social Capital*

Figure 5. Possible sources of ICH and museum projects funding within EU with examples. Own elaboration.

Despite the fact that “EU engagement in heritage has always been linked to the developments within UNESCO and Council of Europe”,<sup>20</sup> the adopted terminology in the abovementioned programs veers far away from the ICH definition as contained in the 2003 Convention. It seems to place ICH merely in the sphere of “cultural and creative industries”, thus including it in the strong “economy-based paradigm”, with the role of bringing “comparative advantage

20 E. Niklasson, ‘The Janus-face of European heritage: Revisiting the rhetoric of Europe-making in EU cultural politics’, *Journal of Social Archeology* 17, 2018, p. 141.

in an increasingly competitive tourism marketplace” (see below).<sup>21</sup> In the *Ex post evaluation of Cohesion Policy programmes 2007–2013, focusing on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund (CF) – Work Package nine: Culture and Tourism*, adopted in November 2014, one can read two interesting passages that reveal the understanding of the role of culture as an ‘intangible product’ and heritage as a mainly tangible asset (whether natural, historical, or cultural) which must be preserved and restored. If we extract from this paragraph ICH elements such as music, crafts, or performing arts, we see that they work in the broader context of culture and creative industries, although the drafters of this text also admit that culture is an “intangible product” and that there has been a move away from product-based definitions to process-based definitions of culture.<sup>22</sup> When referring to cities, the document introduces another cultural term: “tangible and intangible cultural assets”, which are identified and used with the sole aim of rendering places more attractive to tourists, other visitors, or to live, work, and invest in.<sup>23</sup>

## Introducing ‘intangible cultural heritage’ – the case of NEMO and Europeana

This specific understanding of what constitutes ‘intangible’ and of the role that museums shall play in the European space seems also to be reflected in approved statements by the largest European museums organization: NEMO and in the Europeana platform.

On the Europeana platform a search for ‘intangible cultural heritage’ yielded 31 results.<sup>24</sup> In the majority of those hits, it is just an addition in the phrase: ‘tangible and intangible heritage’. In few cases it appears as a collocation to new formulas: “understanding of many **intangible aspects**, such as customs, beliefs or historical information” or even “**intangible and digital forms**”, “objects and related **intangible cultural issues**.”

NEMO on the other hand seldom made references to ICH, preferring “creativity”, next to concepts like “intangible knowledge”, “intangible meaning”, “intangible asset”, “intangible culture”, “intangible expression”, “intangible evidence.” Generally speaking, the topic of ICH as introduced by the 2003 Convention in NEMO’s published reports in the previous decade seems heavily marginalized. What is more surprising “ICH” as a phrase does not appear at all in the reports which – to the understanding of ICH experts – should deal with it, such as: *Museums, Migrants and Cultural Diversity* (May 2016); *Revisiting the educational value of museums: Connecting to Audiences* (March 2016),

21 Schreiber, *Intangible cultural heritage*, p. 359-360.

22 European Commission, *Ex Post Evaluation of Cohesion Policy Programmes 2007-2013, Focusing on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund (CF) – Work Package Nine: Culture and Tourism*. S.L., 2014, p. 8. Available online via: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgenerator/evaluation/pdf/expost2013/wp9\\_inception\\_report.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgenerator/evaluation/pdf/expost2013/wp9_inception_report.pdf).

23 Ibidem, p. 9.

24 31 search results for ‘intangible’, [https://pro.europeana.eu/search?q=intangible&page\\_search=2](https://pro.europeana.eu/search?q=intangible&page_search=2) (20/07/2020).

*Learning in Museums and Young People* (May 2015). In the *Progress report. Museums and creative industries* (NEMO, December 2017) ICH appears once in the footnote. However, this report contains only data from Poland, Iceland and Latvia. So I assumed that the last report on the same matter I studied, published at the end of 2018 with the subtitle: *Case Studies From Across Europe*, would embrace “ICH” with greater care. Unfortunately, there is only one sentence mentioning the adjective *intangible*: “The Historical Museum Frankfurt begins with the premise that everybody living in Frankfurt is an expert on the city. The Stadtlabor/City Lab at the museum provides the space and the method by which the untold stories and the **intangible knowledge** people have about the city can be gathered and shared.”

I also discovered the word ‘intangible’ in other NEMO reports: *Money Matters: The Economic Value of Museums (intangible meaning)* and *Museums in the Digital Age and Museums and the Development of Active Citizenship*. The last one constitutes a collection of articles from NEMO’s 2013 Annual Conference in Bucharest, Romania. Only two authors contributing to the latter report refer to ‘intangible’: “**intangible asset**” understood as democracy, rights, rules of law, freedom of expression, welfare/solidarity, education, environmental sensitivity, public spaces (*Europe: it is a transition, not a crisis* by Luca Bergamo) and “**intangible culture**” (*Museums and Europeana* by Harry Verwayen).

The lack of or very scarce references to the term of ‘ICH’ is continued also in NEMO Political Statements, however, two latest statements acknowledge at least the existence of ICH. *The Berlin Call to Action – Cultural Heritage for the Future of Europe* (June 2018) claims: “This *Berlin Call to Action* draws its inspiration and legitimacy from the expertise, enthusiasm and engagement of all those women and men who care for cultural heritage (tangible, **intangible** and digital) and who dedicate their expertise, time and energy, as professionals or volunteers, to ensure the transmission of this heritage to future generations. *The economic value of their work is significant; its social and cultural value is priceless.* (...) We should also recognize the value of **intangible expressions** of our heritage which are constantly evolving and enriching our society and living environment”<sup>25</sup>. The second one, *Priorities for Museums – NEMO Recommendations for the European Parliament Elections in 2019*, recognizes that: “Museums safeguard tangible and **intangible evidence** of the manmade and natural world for current and future generations. Their collections tell a rich variety of stories, interpreting past and present history. Museums *encourage dialogue, stimulating us to think, learn and reflect; to celebrate differences and discover affinities.* Museums contribute to developing cultural factors: they create memory and identity, and they *foster creativity, diversity and knowledge.* All of these factors are crucial for the building of today’s society. We believe that museums deliver these benefits for European society. Therefore NEMO invites the EU to an appropriate translation of this very potential of culture for society into apt initiatives on European level, investing into the inspirational, social, educational, connecting and cohesive power of cultural heritage and museums, to complement the already proposed measures *to enhance heritage’s economic potential for Europe.*”

25 NEMO, *The Berlin Call to Action – Cultural Heritage for the Future of Europe*. Berlin, 2018.

Having said that, one must underline that the above observed lack of ‘ICH’ terminology in the NEMO reports and documents does not mean that the organization is exclusively ‘tangible-centered’. The interest in ICH is visible and present but in other terms (what also constitutes a discourse problem). It is observable especially in references to projects focused on traditional cuisine, food heritage, regional food culture.<sup>26</sup>

## Concluding remarks

The relationship between Europe, the EU, museums and the 2003 Convention is complicated. It is resembling the ancient geometrical challenge of squaring the circle. On the one hand the term ‘museologization’ is considered as one of the gravest ICH ‘sins’ – e.g. in the *aide-memoire* for the completion of nomination files to the UNESCO Representative List it is advised that the “safeguarding measures should be concrete, precise and detailed; their primary focus should be on transmission rather than on **museological approaches that tend to freeze the element**” (par. 85), “to make sure that documentary evidence (...) relates clearly to living heritage and not, for example to lists of monuments and places or of accessions in a museum” (par. 113).<sup>27</sup> One may observe this approach even in some nomination files as in the case of Lithuanian multipart songs inscription (2010): “The archaic ‘Sutartinės’ are **not just a ‘museum piece’**. They form a valuable and living part of not only traditional, but also contemporary culture.”<sup>28</sup> On the other, it is hard not to acknowledge the importance of museums in safeguarding ICH – what is revealed in nomination files as well as other analyzed reports, documents, calls for funding.

EU policy documents and actions that introduce ‘intangible’ aspects into EU heritage discourse seem to acknowledge only the presence of this still ‘new’ heritage dimension, but so far without taking into serious consideration the way in which it is defined by the 2003 Convention.<sup>29</sup> The same, simply ‘add the adjective’ approach combined with ‘creativity’ regarding the context for ‘intangible’ is visible in official statements approved by European museums. The vagueness of the ‘intangible’ terminology used in the diverse actions, documents and policies leads on the one hand to the fragmentation of ICH’s presence and visibility on the EU level. On the other, the lack of coherent EU policy and strategy for the safeguarding of ICH and no real implementation of UNESCO’s understanding of ICH within the broader framework of the EU cultural heritage policies and actions might be related not only to the lack of awareness and will to follow UNESCO’s approach but also to the richness and diversity of ICH itself. An analysis of the funding of the projects including

26 The author would like to thank and acknowledge the anonymous reviewer who pointed out this situation.

27 Form ICH-02 – Aide-mémoire – EN – 26 February 2015, available at: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/forms>.

28 Nomination file no. 00433, DEC. 5.com.6.26: *Sutartinės, Lithuanian multipart songs*. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/sutartines-lithuanian-multipart-songs-00433> (26/07/2020).

29 Schreiber, *Intangible cultural heritage*, p. 360.

‘intangible’ cultural heritage as well as ‘museum’ references confirms the existence of a very fragmented and incoherent picture, with some serious gaps, misunderstandings, and a very broad interpretation of ICH. Pushing the metaphor of the squared circle to its limits, one may suggest that ICH is similar to a transcendental  $\pi$  (pi) – its character make it impossible to find the length of the side of the square of the same area as a given circle. The living, dynamic, transcendental character of ICH resembles pi a lot.

There is also, however, a very strong post-Maastricht trend to promote “European cultural heritage” as a tool for boosting EU member states’ economic markets. This visible but merely instrumental trend, referred to as creating “the EU heritage market”, must be taken into consideration and confronted with the delicate and identity-driven nature of ICH.<sup>30</sup>

There is also another significant threat to ICH with regard to the activities undertaken by States Parties and museums at the national level which eventually flow into the EU arena – that of reducing the meaning of ICH and considering only its *representational* character on the Representative List of ICH, which would be in this context eminent due to the trend to label, prize, and list cultural heritage at the EU level. The ‘economy-booster’ role ascribed to cultural heritage in the narrative prevailing in the EU, but implemented as well by museums might thus easily reduce the impact and meaning of the 2003 Convention, making it yet another product on ‘the (EU) heritage market’. Viewed in this perspective, inscriptions to the Representative List coming from EU member states are specifically vulnerable to oversimplification and commercialization. From this standpoint, it is hard for other meanings and aims than the growing number of tourist visits to the sites – with museums at the forefront where ICH practices can be touched, bought, eaten, drunk, and digested – to be transmitted or introduced. The supposed credo of the 2003 Convention, ‘communities first’, seems to be therefore in contradiction to the process of heritage-making at the EU level or in Europe in general, taken by some museums for granted, which appears to focus on ‘economy first’. While both implicit credos are interrelated, it would be naive to exclude the meaning of economy for communities and groups practising ICH. The centre of gravity that will be chosen by European museums and the ways they will balance their position in the European institutions and toward ICH is still a matter to be brought to wider attention and discussion among museum experts and practitioners.

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30 Ibidem, p. 360.