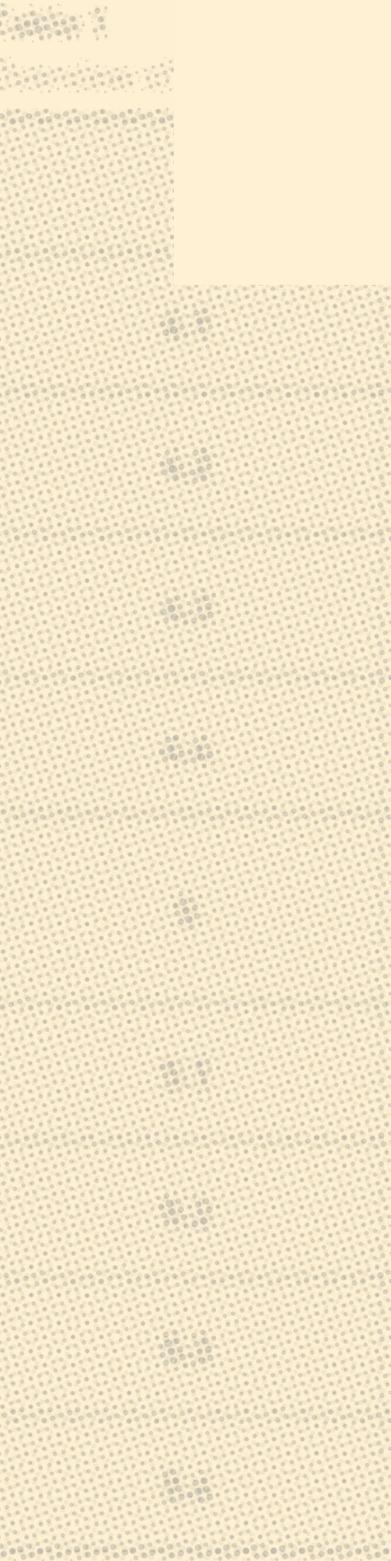


# Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage through formal education in Flanders: A critical analysis of the implementation of the 2003 UNESCO Convention

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## A critical analysis of the implementation of the 2003 UNESCO Convention

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### ABSTRACT

In 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. This paper investigates its implementation in the formal education system in the Flemish part of Belgium. Linking education and intangible heritage is set as a high strategic priority, not only in the Convention but also according to the Overall Results Framework (ORF), a tool to measure its impact. Three levels are examined. First, the national level is discussed; on this macro level, educational policy and learning outcomes take shape. Second, the educational providers (meso), who transfer these outcomes into curricula. Third, schools and teachers (micro), who bring the curricula into practice. In addition, recommendations to enhance implementation are proposed.

The results show that the 2003 Convention has not yet permeated into the policy processes. Although the Flemish government developed open learning outcomes that

accommodate awareness-raising and – to a lesser extent – the safeguarding of intangible heritage, the 2003 Convention did not serve as a reference framework. Evidently, considering the short time frame since the conception of the ORF, the results need to be interpreted as a baseline measurement on which to build. To conclude, this paper aims to put the overall results framework to the test in a particular context. Nevertheless, when leaving the institutional and operational scope of the specific case in Flanders behind, the paper provides useful reflections and strategic learnings for the implementation of the 2003 UNESCO Convention in other contexts as well.

### Keywords

safeguarding, 2003 UNESCO Convention, Overall Results Framework, formal education, curriculum, learning outcomes, Operational Directives, implementation, primary and secondary education

## Introduction

In June 2018, the General Assembly of the States Parties to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage approved the overall results framework (ORF). The decision was preceded by a consultative process and can be seen in light of the recent Theory of Change approach. Moreover, the aim was to devise a tool to measure the impact of the 2003 Convention around the globe at various levels. It contains 26 core indicators and 86 assessment factors, subdivided into eight thematic categories (UNESCO: 2018). Within this framework, education was conceived as a crucial factor in safeguarding ICH, so four indicators concerning education were elaborated.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the periodic reporting mechanism was revised and aligned with the ORF to assess these core indicators. However, given the short time since its conception, research at the intersection of ICH and education is still limited.

The 2003 UNESCO Convention provides each of the state parties the freedom to explore their own means for implementation. Here, the strategic goals of the Convention and the ORF are to be translated from the international scope to the various levels in Belgium, as State Party to the Convention, where the Flemish Community has competence for cultural affairs and education. The UNESCO-accredited NGO Workshop Intangible Heritage (in Belgium) has taken on a crucial role as a competent body in the implementation in the field in Flanders. Jorijn Neyrinck, director of the organisation, made linking intangible heritage and education a high priority on the organisation's research agenda in 2019. As a full-time teacher in secondary education in Flanders and an arts and archaeology working student at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), I decided to investigate the link between intangible heritage and education in the region. At the VUB, Marc Jacobs coordinates the UNESCO chair on critical heritage studies and safeguarding the ICH. With the help of Marc Jacobs and Jorijn Neyrinck, I submitted a research proposal to the VUB. The master thesis aimed to critically examine the implementation of the 2003 Convention in the formal education system in Flanders. The above-mentioned periodic reporting mechanism, as described in Article 29 of the Convention and Article 152 of the Operational Directives, highlights the relevance of this study.<sup>2</sup> Belgium will need to deliver a new periodic report by December 2021. The research project was not only a case of assessing the current status in Flanders but also about making recommendations for future policy and

practice in light of the recently developed ORF. From this perspective, this investigation can be seen as a baseline measurement on which to build.

At the outset, the learning outcomes for primary and secondary education, developed by the Flemish government and civil service (2020), were screened using the ORF and the Guidance Notes elaborated by external experts and consultants. Relevant indicators for this qualitative analysis are 4, 5 and 6. They can be found in the thematic area 'transmission and education'. The first two were used to measure educational policy implementation, learning outcomes and supplementary initiatives. Core indicator 6, concerning higher education, was left out of the screening process. However, solely employing this approach would not suffice. According to Article 171 of the Operational Directives, communities, groups and individuals (CGIs) need to be involved (UNESCO: 2018; Blake: 2019; Jacobs: 2020). Further, relevant experts and cultural brokers within or outside the cultural sector should also be considered.<sup>3</sup> To investigate the participation of both, the development process of educational policy and curricula was examined. Here, the thesis drew on in-depth interviews with policy advisers and relevant stakeholders in the (intangible) cultural heritage and education sectors. Finally, during this research, the thesis explored the connections with international frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and other UNESCO concepts used in Flemish educational policy.

This paper presents the results of the research submitted as a master's thesis at the VUB in June 2020, as mentioned above. It is structured according to the three relevant operational levels. First, there is the macro or national level. Here, the specific case of the general education system and policy in Flanders, as a part of Belgium, is explicated. Second, a closer look is given to the meso level of the educational providers. By transferring the official learning outcomes into curricula, these providers play an intermediate role in the educational landscape in Flanders. Third, the paper discusses the micro level. This involves the didactic choices schools and teachers make within the given framework from above, related to integrating intangible heritage. Finally, relevant recommendations on the three levels are proposed to enhance the implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

## The context of cultural and educational policy in Flanders

Belgium became a State Party to the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage on 24 June 2006. However, Belgium has a complex state structure. Undoubtedly, this context has affected cultural and educational policy choices throughout the country's brief history to the present day.

The country declared its independence in 1830 and seceded from the Netherlands. A few months later, the national congress adopted a constitution, which turned the new state into a parliamentary monarchy. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church still had a considerable influence, especially on formal educational practices. The constitution was considered, at that time, to be progressive, because it encompassed notable liberal aspects. A gradual process of cultural emancipation sparked several conflicts during the 20th century and led to the first state reform in 1970. As a result, three cultural communities were established: a Dutch-, a French- and a German-speaking Community, each with its own cultural autonomy. During the second and third reform, and in response to the request for more economic autonomy as well, three regions were added: Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels-Capital Region (Witte, Craeybeckx and Meynen: 2009).

After additional reforms in 1993, 2001 and 2011, Belgium now has a federal state structure consisting of three regions and three communities, each with its own legislative body and government.<sup>4</sup> The regions are connected with their territory, and the communities are based on the concept of language and related to the people living within that territory. Therefore, the latter has competence for cultural affairs and education, which makes them legally responsible within the geographical boundaries of the Dutch-language area and the bilingual Brussels-Capital Region. The implementation of heritage policies lies in the hands of the Flemish government and civil service. However, due to the prior division into regions and communities, immovable heritage in Flanders is accommodated under the supervision of the Department of Environment, while cultural heritage (tangible or movable and ICH) falls under the Department of Culture, Youth and Media.<sup>5</sup>

And what about education and the formal school system? Educational policy is an exclusive competence of the Flemish Community, with the exception of decisions

concerning compulsory education.<sup>6</sup> The Flemish government takes on the role of developing learning outcomes valid for primary (6–12 years old) and secondary education (12–18 years old). In this development process, it appoints separate committees staffed by experts in a particular field, such as university professors, researchers and experienced teachers.<sup>7</sup> Putting educational policy into curricula in Flanders rests in the hands of the educational providers. They operate as intermediaries in the field and are able to give their personal touch and operational emphasis. Once the outcomes have been developed by the Flemish government, they are transformed into curricula by the providers, according to their own character and pedagogical background.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the learning outcomes set by the Flemish government and civil service are minimum goals that the providers need to achieve. However, when transferring the official outcomes to the level of the educational providers, they have the authority to expand these goals.

## Connecting education and cultural heritage: Screening the official learning outcomes on the national level

Education can play a vital role in raising awareness of the concept of cultural heritage. In an ever-evolving society, it is essential that this takes place from an early age. So what role can schools play in the understanding and, in particular, the safeguarding of intangible heritage?

In Flanders, young children have to attend pre-primary school, starting from the age of five years old. When comparing the relevant attitudinal learning outcomes<sup>9</sup> of the pre-primary and primary education with the ORF, mainly core indicator 5 has to be taken into account. It focuses on the extent to which intangible heritage is integrated into primary and secondary education. Attitudes such as respecting, appreciating and reflecting on cultural expressions of the community and that of others can be found in the curricula of pre-primary and primary education. Nonetheless, instead of conceiving heritage as a goal, the official learning outcomes constitute an environment in which the different types of heritage can be integrated as a means to learn. Mostly this is the case for the learning outcomes relating to attitudes. The outcomes seem to meet assessment factor 5.2. ICH can be used as a means of explaining or demonstrating other subjects as well.<sup>10</sup> However, just like the inclusion of local content, the Flemish government has not set any explicit conditions

about this instrumental use. Therefore, the educational providers can achieve these goals without integrating ICH. So assessment factors 5.1 and 5.3 are met, with the remark that it depends on the emphasis and conditions the educational providers create on a lower level in Flanders.

In secondary education, the official learning outcomes recently underwent a major conceptual and operational reform. In 2017, the Flemish government developed 16 decretal key competences. At the foundation lie eight European Key Competences, derived from the UNESCO concept of lifelong learning.<sup>11</sup> At the time of this research, only the learning outcomes for the first stage of secondary education could be examined. The ones meant for the second and third stages were yet to be approved by the Flemish Parliament. In Flanders, the choice of study is traditionally delayed until the start of the second stage of secondary education. So the first stage consists of a basic formation in which students from 12 to 14 years of age receive more or less the same fundamentals.

At first sight, cultural awareness and cultural

expression appears to be the most relevant decretal key competence in which ICH could be integrated. A thorough screening reveals that the concept is not explicitly mentioned. However, the Flemish government expanded the eight European Key Competences and developed eight additional key competences. The key competence on historical awareness is one of them and emphasises the connection between the past, the present and the future. Although no explicit references were found, some skills and attitudes related to the concept of historical thinking open possibilities. From a broader scope, relevant attitudinal goals can be found in competences in other languages, competences in Dutch and in the citizenship competences. The competences concerning sustainability and cultural awareness and expression are not interconnected on the conceptual level. Sustainability is only approached through a technological or scientific viewpoint. This means the official learning outcomes do not see any relationship between ICH and achieving sustainability.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, according to Article 170 of the Operational Directives, intangible heritage can act as a catalyst for sustainable development.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 1**  
Overview of core indicators 4 and 5 with assessment factors (UNESCO: 2018, 121)

4	Extent to which both formal and non-formal education strengthen the transmission of ICH and promote respect for ICH
4.1	Practitioners and bearers are involved inclusively in the design and development of ICH education programmes and/or in actively presenting and transmitting their heritage.
4.2	Modes and methods of transmitting ICH that are recognised by communities, groups and individuals are learned and/or strengthened and included in educational programmes, both formal and non-formal.
4.3	Educational programmes and/or extracurricular activities concerning ICH and strengthening its transmission, undertaken by communities, groups, NGOs or heritage institutions, are available and supported.
4.4	Teacher training programmes and programmes for training providers of non-formal education include approaches to integrating ICH and its safeguarding into education.
5	Extent to which ICH and its safeguarding are integrated into primary and secondary education are included in the content of relevant disciplines and are used to strengthen teaching and learning about and with ICH and respect for one's own and others' ICH.
5.1	ICH, in its diversity, is included in the content of relevant disciplines, as a contribution in its own right and/or as a means of explaining or demonstrating other subjects.
5.2	School students learn to respect and reflect on the ICH of their own community or group as well as the ICH of others through educational programmes and curricula.
5.3	The diversity of learners' ICH is reflected through mother tongue or multilingual education and/or the inclusion of 'local content' within the educational curriculum.
5.4	Educational programmes teach about the protection of natural and cultural spaces and places of memory whose existence is necessary for expressing ICH.

## **Investigating participation: The development process**

Before discussing the transfer from a conceptual to an operational level, the focus has to shift to the development process. The reason can be found in Article 171 of the Operational Directives, in which two essential recommendations are included. Article 171 stipulates that CGIs need to be involved in the drawing up of educational curricula or programmes. Additionally, relevant experts and cultural brokers should be considered. At what level did these stakeholders participate in the development of educational policy and curricula?

To develop learning outcomes, the Flemish government appoints separate committees based on the decretal key competences. To increase the level of participation, an extensive public debate and inquiry were set up by the end of 2015. In this way, the Flemish government investigated the expectations of the public to increase the social relevance of the upcoming curricular reform in secondary education. In the case of the committee on cultural awareness and expression, CGIs did not partake in any phase of the development process.

Of course, including CGIs in all their diversity into the participative process is rather complicated to achieve at this level.<sup>14</sup> But maybe their voices could be heard indirectly by introducing relevant experts and stakeholders in the (intangible) heritage sector? In Flanders, the Flemish Institution for the Cultural Heritage (FARO) acts as an interface centre for the heritage sector, mediating between various policy levels, heritage organisations, global networks, universities and civil society.<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, the Flemish government appointed the organisation Workshop Intangible Heritage in Belgium as a competent body and organisation dedicated to the safeguarding of ICH in Flanders. Civil participation in heritage themes is one of its main goals. On the international level, both FARO and Workshop Intangible Heritage are accredited NGOs that provide advisory services to the Intergovernmental Committee of the 2003 UNESCO Convention. Taking this into account, both organisations indicate that they were not consulted in the development process of educational curricula or learning outcomes concerning cultural heritage.

When examining these findings, a closer look at the policy processes is needed.<sup>16</sup> The in-depth interviews with members of the developing committee on cultural

awareness and expression revealed that the 2003 UNESCO Convention and the Operational Directives did not serve as a reference framework. However, the recent curriculum reform in Flanders predates the conception of the ORF. From this perspective, it seems evident that the recommendations of the 2003 Convention have not permeated the policy processes yet. These results should instead be viewed as a baseline measurement for future strategic development concerning ICH.

## **The role of the Flemish Commission for UNESCO**

UNESCO can certainly seem a complex international organisation. To facilitate the connection with its member states, a network of national cooperating entities was set up around the world in accordance with Article VII of the UNESCO Constitution (UNESCO: 2011, 147–153). They take the form of committees and act as liaisons between national governments and UNESCO (Seeger: 2015, 273). The members are appointed by the government of each nation. What role does this organisation play in Flanders?

The commission was established by the Flemish government in 2003 to promote the relationship between UNESCO and the Flemish Community. The German and French Communities have a separate one, which makes Belgium the only country in the world with two 'national' commissions. The Flemish Commission for UNESCO (FCU) consists of twelve members qualified to vote and seven – mostly voluntary – advisory members; the FCU is funded by the Flemish Department of Foreign Affairs, which delegates one secretary (UNESCO Flanders, 2020). It is active in all domains of competence of UNESCO. As a result of the cooperation, both voting members and advisory members are appointed by the Flemish government for a term of six years, which can be renewed once. The main goal of the commission is to inform the public on UNESCO's ideas and to develop outcomes and appropriate actions to bring the international organisation and the Flemish Community closer together.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, both departments delegate office holders as relevant experts to the board of the organisation. In a way, the FCU acts as a mediator – or cultural broker<sup>18</sup> – between relevant policy areas.<sup>19</sup> Ideally, when reforming learning outcomes and curricula, an advisory opinion should be requested from the FCU.

From this perspective, the FCU functions as an

independent and transparent body that assembles valuable expertise. Its merit lies in establishing useful connections between relevant stakeholders across policy areas (immovable heritage, cultural heritage, education, etc.). Considering the complexity of the above-mentioned state structure, this can be seen as its most valuable quality. Nonetheless, the role both departments (Culture, Youth, Sport and Media and Education and Training) ascribe to the FCU – or the organisation attributes to itself – does not always correspond to reality in current practice. As the interviews revealed, a lack of staffing capacity was pointed out as the main reason for not always meeting goals. Within the limits of the professional support around the work of the commission, a selection of mainly UNESCO specific duties is realised, such as advice on nominations or initiatives. Nevertheless, due to the lack of capacity, cross-domain activities or potential developments, such as linking education and ICH, did not – or seldom – found their way onto the agenda in the past. Recently, however, a new dynamic approach has been introduced, and the FCU succeeded in placing heritage and education on the strategic action plan for 2021.

## From theory to practice

The focus on the national level in the framework of safeguarding intangible heritage through education lies on young people as a priority target group, as stated in the preliminary draft of the Convention (Third session of the Intergovernmental Meeting of Experts on the Preliminary Draft Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003, 6, para. 25). Therefore, schools and teachers – and the contexts in which they work – should be understood as crucial factors in bringing the target group and subject closer together. In Flanders, the educational providers need to transfer the official learning outcomes – which are conceived as minimum goals – into curricula, according to their own identity and educational emphasis. Additionally, they possess the right to expand these minimum goals. The question at hand is how the educational providers make this transfer, focusing on the goals concerning ICH, and how these concepts find their way into practice by schools and teachers?

## Transferring learning outcomes into curricula: Educational providers

As mentioned, the learning outcomes developed by the Flemish government lack explicit references to the concept

of ICH. Mostly, it is referred to as 'cultural expression'. Of course, integrating or specifying which local content to use is not possible on this level. Nonetheless, despite this broad framework, opportunities to integrate ICH are undoubtedly present.

The deliberately open outcomes – often without explicit reference to ICH – offer the advantage of being implemented by any school in Flanders. Due to its broad formulation, however, the specific relationship of intangible heritage with the contextual environment and the CGIs can be omitted when applied at the level of educational providers. Moreover, an important additional question is whether the educational providers have sufficient insight into the general concept of heritage. Possibly as a result of this, which advisory partners and frames of reference have they consulted during the transfer from official outcomes into curricula for the schools? In the past, field research reported a gap between the heritage and the education sector in Flanders, causing relevant initiatives and information from both sides not to seep through (Van der Auwera, Schramme and Jeurissen: 2007).

When investigating this transfer, great diversity in vision and approach by educational providers in the way they implemented ICH was found. Nevertheless, the involvement of relevant experts was limited to a bare minimum, and, more importantly, stakeholders such as FARO and Workshop Intangible Heritage were not consulted at this level. A common reason refers to time pressure from above during the transfer process, as politicians want to push through their own educational policy choices during their term of office. Ideally, the goals concerning (intangible) cultural heritage should be presented to the stakeholders to investigate whether they are well balanced and make full use of the possibilities the open framework offers. The screened curricula of the educational providers remain open and lack explicit goals on ICH, as well as concrete didactical suggestions. However, putting the curricula into practice is a matter for schools. Therefore, teachers, who possess considerable didactic freedom in Flanders, play a decisive role, especially because a dynamic notion of heritage implies an engaging interaction with the curricula, taking into account the pupil's sociocultural background. How will a school teacher in Flanders implement the curricula in practice?

## Into the classroom: Schools and teachers

When investigating the role of schools and teachers in Flanders, the same question comes to mind: do they have sufficient understanding of the concept of heritage and ways to use it as a medium in the classroom?

In 2016, the Cultural Diversity: Opportunities and Socialization (CuDOS) research group of Ghent University conducted a study on cultural education in secondary schools in Flanders (Beunen, Lievens and Siongers: 2016, 84). The results show that heritage as a means to teach lags behind. Of the teachers surveyed, 71.6 per cent indicated that they never used heritage during lessons. In addition, almost three quarters stated they were not aware of the opportunities that local heritage institutions have to offer. What underlying causes can be found for this missed attunement?

First, the curricula do not include or specify any conditions or goals regarding ICH. They mostly refer to the general concept of cultural expression, which means the specific integration of intangible heritage is not obligatory. This non-committal status is detrimental to the integration of ICH in formal education, and the curricula lack incentives. Therefore, developing lessons concerning ICH depends on the goodwill of schools or teachers. Schools can emphasise the connection with the local context,<sup>20</sup> but making a commitment on paper does not necessarily mean it will be implemented in practice. In the end, teachers remain crucial actors in bringing local content into the classroom or acquainting pupils with it during extramural activities.

A second reason can be found in the wide range of employment of ICH. It tends to have transversal opportunities. This means it can be used to achieve other goals as well. Nonetheless, using ICH as an instrument for learning about other subjects appears to be an arduous task. In 2007, the University of Antwerp conducted a study on heritage education in Flanders (Van der Auwera, Schramme and Jeurissen: 2007). On the school level, 15.8 per cent declared that they lacked the specific know-how of heritage education. On the teacher level, 9.3 per cent found themselves not capable of integrating heritage into class practice.

Both reasons refer to the notion of teacher agency, which endeavours to describe the ability of an actor to act in a particular context (Biesta, Priestley and Sarah Robinson,

2017). It has been a part of international sociological research for some time,<sup>21</sup> but when implementing policy, such as the 2003 Convention, it is often overlooked.

## Recommendations to enhance implementation

The 2003 Convention provides each of the state parties the freedom to explore their own means of implementation. To comply on the national level with the involvement of stakeholders, relevant experts and CGIs during the development process of educational policy, two actions could be considered.

First, the learning outcomes should be presented to relevant stakeholders, such as FARO and Workshop Intangible Heritage. Given the specific characteristics of the development process, the ICH network must act as a whole, so a dialogue can take place between the development committee or committees and relevant experts.<sup>22</sup> In this dialogue, the FCU could act as a mediator – that is, if the FCU can build on the current dynamic approach and gain influence by expanding the secretariat and profiling itself as an advisory body with relevant expertise in the field of education, scientific research, culture and communication. The role of the FCU should be enhanced, so it can effectively act as a cultural broker, linking the policy areas 'Education and Training' and 'Culture, Youth, Sport and Media' in the Flemish civil service.

Second, establishing a connection of learning outcomes with the local context should ideally shift to the micro level. The individual practitioners and bearers, groups or communities of ICH appear to be insufficiently involved in the design of educational programmes and in actively presenting and transmitting their heritage.<sup>23</sup> Their involvement can be incorporated at the level of schools and offers opportunities to link regional or local heritage curricula. Schools have the potential to serve as contexts to bring practitioners and pupils closer together and, with the cooperation of relevant stakeholders, set up participative workshops. In this light, the decision to create an open and generic framework of learning outcomes on the national level is understandable and even beneficial for local contexts.

Nevertheless, because ICH is not explicitly included in educational policy, there is a risk that ICH is insufficiently

transferred into curricula (by the educational providers). To seize all opportunities and therewith expand the official learning outcomes, the concept of heritage and its various forms should be more concretely incorporated in Flemish educational policy. The connection with local content is challenging to include in the framework at this level, also for the entire Flemish Community but, to counteract non-commitment at the lower levels, it would be desirable, certainly for ICH, to include more conditions on integration.

The curricula seldom explicitly refer to intangible heritage, making its integration by schools and teachers difficult.<sup>24</sup> For example, intangible heritage can also be used as a means to teach in different subjects, although not every teacher sees the transversal opportunities. Here, providing sufficient didactic suggestions, inspirational guides and clear cross-curricular connections should be elaborated and disseminated.<sup>25</sup> However, the professional freedom and creativity of teachers should not be limited. The difficulty lies in finding a balance between openness and concreteness. When including regional or local content regarding ICH in the curriculum framework, a more bottom-up process should take place.

In this process, schools in Flanders are autonomous in interpreting the given framework from the educational providers and setting up a valuable learning environment. On this level, the notion of teacher agency is often overlooked in the case of heritage education. Contextual factors such as curricula, the pedagogical project of schools or the local network in which they are embedded (connection with formal or informal relevant actors) affect the integration of ICH. More so, in this tension between structure and agency, it is the set of personal factors that, in the end, determine whether an international UNESCO framework finds its way into practice at the lowest levels. The teachers' own cultural awareness and didactic skills or confidence therein are relevant factors in achieving the safeguarding of ICH through formal learning. They find support in textbooks from educational publishers. However, these mostly rely on generic didactic examples instead of responding to cultural diversity, meaning that more specific and locally embedded examples of ICH are omitted.

To facilitate the implementation of the 2003 Convention, the role of teachers needs to be enhanced. Ideally, a didactic heritage framework should be developed to support teachers in employing heritage, as a goal or as a means,

into the classroom. Furthermore, the concept of a schools' pedagogical project in Flanders offers opportunities to link regional or local heritage curricula. These do not necessarily need to contain substantive goals or guidelines, but rather can encompass an additional vision on involving the heritage context of the school. How this vision takes shape in practice depends on the formal and informal partners of the local network.<sup>26</sup> These regional or local curricula can fit into the imposed framework from above, such as the UNESCO Convention of 2003, the official learning outcomes of the Flemish government and the curricula of the educational providers.<sup>27</sup> Schools should depend more on the local context and function as a pivot in a network, which includes actors such as parents, the neighbourhood, teachers and various formal and informal partners. Besides, integrating the individual teacher into a broader social network can help address the challenges in the relationship between teacher agency and heritage education.<sup>28</sup> Safeguarding ICH can be a small but valuable part of this.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper presents the results of a qualitative study exploring the integration of ICH into the formal educational system in Flanders. It aimed to put the ORF to the test in a particular context. According to these findings, at present, the 2003 Convention has not yet permeated the policy processes. Although the Flemish government developed open learning outcomes that accommodate awareness-raising and – to a lesser extent – the safeguarding of intangible heritage, the 2003 Convention did not serve as a reference framework. Evidently, considering the short time frame since the conception of the ORF, the results need to be interpreted as a baseline measurement on which to build.

To accelerate the general implementation of the 2003 Convention, deeper penetration into policy processes has to be pursued. Ideally, safeguarding measures at the national level would strongly depend on capacity-building and awareness-raising. By improving support for mediation, in which Flanders is strong, further cooperation in both awareness-raising and capacity-building can be generated. Here, the role of the FCU, as an independent, intermediate and transparent body that assembles valuable expertise, needs to be further enhanced to consolidate and expand its network. Moreover, existing collaboration between the heritage sector and the

educational field could benefit from additional support. On the lower levels, schools and teachers have to be regarded as key actors and need to be equipped with more effective didactic tools and a framework to bring pupils and ICH (and the sector) closer together. Local content regarding ICH in educational settings cannot be worked out at the national level. A more bottom-up and participative process should take place.

To conclude, when leaving the institutional and operational scope of the specific case in Flanders behind, this article provides useful reflections and strategic learnings for the implementation of the 2003 UNESCO Convention in other contexts as well.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Core indicators 4, 5, 6 and 12 of the overall results framework are relevant to education.
- 2 Article 29 of the 2003 Convention: 'The States Parties shall submit to the Committee, observing the forms and periodicity to be defined by the Committee, reports on the legislative, regulatory and other measures taken for the implementation of this Convention.' Article 152 of the Operational Directives: 'States Parties submit their periodic reports to the Committee by 15 December every six years on the basis of a rotation region by region. The order of such rotation is established by the Committee at the beginning of the six-year periodic reporting cycle. States Parties use the periodic reporting process to enhance the monitoring measures, as well as active regional exchange and cooperation to ensure efficient safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage. Form ICH-10 is used for such reports; it may be completed online by each State Party (<https://ich.unesco.org>), and is revised at appropriate intervals by the Secretariat.'
- 3 Article 171 of the Operational Directives: 'Insofar as their development plans, policies and programmes involve intangible cultural heritage or may potentially affect its viability, States Parties shall endeavour to: (a) ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and involve them actively in elaboration and implementation of such plans, policies and programmes; (b) ensure that those communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals concerned are the primary beneficiaries, both in moral and in material terms, of any such plans, policies and programmes; (c) ensure that such plans, policies and programmes respect ethical considerations and do not negatively affect the viability of the intangible cultural heritage concerned or decontextualize or denaturalize that heritage; (d) facilitate cooperation with sustainable development experts and cultural brokers for the appropriate integration of the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage into plans, policies and programmes, both within and outside the cultural sector.'
- 4 In Flanders, the community and the region were combined straight away into one entity, thus creating one Flemish Parliament and one Flemish government.
- 5 The Flemish government is responsible for establishing connections between the cultural and educational policy areas as well. To secure cooperation and enhance cultural education, a liaison agency was set up: CANON Cultuurcel.
- 6 Decisions on compulsory education, such as the minimum and maximum age of pupils, are made by the federal government. In compulsory education, the minimum age is set at five years old and the maximum age at 18 years old.
- 7 The eight key competences for lifelong learning, adopted by the European Council, act as a framework for these committees.
- 8 The formal education system encompasses three of these educational providers. First, the education and schools provided by the Flemish Community (GO!). Second, the official subsidised network that comprises the public schools organised by provinces (POV) and municipalities (OVSG). Finally, subsidised free schools, of which the largest group is established by Catholic Education Flanders (KOV). A small part of this network, mostly named 'method schools', has formed a separate organization (OKO).
- 9 These learning outcomes – together with those of special primary and secondary education – differ from the ones in regular primary and secondary education. They act as development goals and have to be pursued rather than achieved.

- 10 For one of the first examples of this assessment factor, see 'Learning with Intangible Heritage for a Sustainable Future', published by the UNESCO in 2015: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232381>.
- 11 For more information on the key competences for lifelong learning of the European Union, please see [http://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/council-recommendation-on-key-competences-for-lifelong-learning\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/council-recommendation-on-key-competences-for-lifelong-learning_en).
- 12 See also Joris Van Doorselaere, 2021. 'Connecting Sustainable Development and Heritage Education? An Analysis of the Curriculum Reform in Flemish Public Secondary Schools.' *Sustainability* 13, no. 4: 1857.
- 13 Article 170 of the Operational Directives: 'With a view to effectively implementing the Convention, States Parties shall endeavour, by all appropriate means, to recognize the importance and strengthen the role of intangible cultural heritage as a driver and guarantee of sustainable development, as well as fully integrate the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage into their development plans, policies and programmes at all levels. While recognizing the interdependence between the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development, States Parties shall strive to maintain a balance between the three dimensions of sustainable development (the economic, social and environmental), as well as their interdependence with peace and security, in their safeguarding efforts and shall to this end facilitate cooperation with relevant experts, cultural brokers and mediators through a participatory approach. States Parties shall acknowledge the dynamic nature of intangible cultural heritage in both urban and rural contexts and shall direct their safeguarding efforts solely on such intangible cultural heritage that is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.'
- 14 When analysing this participative process, nonetheless, three drawbacks can be found. First, people are mostly not aware that they are bearers or practitioners of ICH. Therefore, this concern will likely not come up in the results. Second, due to the large scale of the debate, the results were merged into generic conclusions, so the local and cultural diversity cannot be captured. Finally, the social debate acted as a premise for the political debate. In this phase, heritage can be used improperly or can be deliberately abused. Therefore, it needs the input of relevant expertise and participation of the CGIs. In the case of the committee on cultural awareness and expression, CGIs did not partake in any phase of the development process.
- 15 For more information, please see [www.ich.unesco.org/en-state/belgium-BE?info=accredited-ngos](http://www.ich.unesco.org/en-state/belgium-BE?info=accredited-ngos).
- 16 On the one hand, supervising ICH policy and implementing the Convention of 2003 is located in the policy area 'Culture, Youth, Sport and Media' (CYSM) by the Department of CYSM of the Flemish civil service. On the other hand, developing learning outcomes for primary and secondary schools is the responsibility of the Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Scholarships (AHOVOKS) at the Department of Education and Training.
- 17 For more information, please see [www.unesco-vlaanderen.be/over-ons/vlaamseunescommissie](http://www.unesco-vlaanderen.be/over-ons/vlaamseunescommissie)
- 18 Jacobs, Marc. 2014. 'Cultural Brokerage, Addressing Boundaries and the New Paradigm of Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage. Folklore Studies, Transdisciplinary Perspectives and UNESCO.' *Volkskunde. Tijdschrift over de cultuur van het dagelijks leven* 115, no. 3: 265–291.
- 19 The Flemish civil service has some general issues with the compartmentalisation of policy areas. In February 2018, it launched a campaign to reduce this phenomenon (<http://overheid.vlaanderen.be/op-zoek-naar-ons-dna>). In addition, according to the interviews with policy advisers and relevant experts, a structural

policy consultation or platform, linking the Departments of CYSM and of Education and Training is missing. However, in this matter, they both rely on the FCU.

- 20 Schools can elaborate and emphasise a connection to local (intangible) heritage in their pedagogical project, which is a specific concept in the educational landscape in Flanders. It covers both vision and methods a school (or group of schools) wishes to pursue.
- 21 In Flanders, teacher agency is often approached in the context of the outflow of teachers. However, in her doctoral dissertation at the Catholic University of Leuven (2014), Virginie März investigated the impact of educational reforms on teachers in primary and secondary education. It is important for this study on the implementation of the 2003 UNESCO Convention to point out the fact that teachers are part of a network. According to Gert Biesta, Mark Priestley and Sarah Robinson (2017), this professional context gives direction and shape to their actions.
- 22 Ideally, this should also be the case when transferring the official learning outcomes into curricula by the educational providers. Here, the goals concerning (intangible) cultural heritage need to be presented to the stakeholders and relevant experts as well. In the specific case of Flanders, FARO or Workshop Intangible Heritage can investigate whether the developed curricula are balanced and make full use of the potential the open framework offers. The development process of these curricula often faces time pressure from the national level. In this light, building in a more considerable time margin could also increase quality and support.
- 23 In the screening process, this is reflected by the omission of core indicator 4 of the ORF.
- 24 In general, assessment factors 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 are approximated in the curricula. However, the outcomes and goals remain generic.
- 25 In Flanders, this is a task for the educational providers.
- 26 Potential partners with opportunities for informal learning can be found in the school environment as well; for example, youth movements or youth centres.
- 27 Elaboration can be based on the theoretical concept of 'community schools' to strengthen the learning environment.
- 28 Commonalities with this concept can be found in the vision and approach of schools associated with UNESCO (ASPnet) and Steiner schools.
- 29 Ideally, the city or municipality is part of this network, and the practical implementation can be embedded in existing local consultation platforms. This includes local partners, with the aim to promote equal educational opportunities for young people in a region. Culture and heritage education should not be separated from the principle of equal opportunities. ICH is also seen as a means and incentive to work on the Sustainable Development Goals.

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