

Advocacy Statement

Collective Singing as Intangible Cultural Heritage

Call to safeguarding collective singing traditions

In an era of increasing cultural awareness and preservation, it is imperative to acknowledge that Collective Singing represents a vital facet of our Intangible Cultural Heritage.

With the European Union declaring 2018 as the European Year of Cultural Heritage, broader public awareness for the safeguarding of our heritage increased across Europe, and new initiatives and projects were born. Yet, despite the 20-year existence of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, there is still and too often a focus on tangible heritage, or as it says in the blog of the Europeana project: "In the past, the importance of intangible heritage has not always been fully recognised and little effort was invested in documenting, preserving and sharing it."

According to UNESCO, "Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge, and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts". Music has an important place within the performing arts, and vocal music has the biggest number of examples listed, which includes numerous choral and other collective singing traditions.

In a recent webinar, the European Choral Association presented the Baltic Song and Dance Celebrations in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which were recognised as UNESCO intangible cultural heritage of humanity in 2008. Other examples are the Canto a tenore, Sardinian pastoral songs - recognised in 2008 and Klapa multipart singing of Dalmatia in Southern Croatia - recognised in 2012. Next to the UNESCO lists (good safeguarding practices, representative list and list of ICH in urgent need of safeguarding), there are also national lists of intangible cultural heritage, and in Germany, this list includes singing in amateur choirs.

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage recognises the "importance of the intangible cultural heritage as a **mainspring of cultural diversity** and a guarantee of **sustainable development**". It is "transmitted from generation to generation and provides them with a sense of **identity and continuity, promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.**"

To recognise intangible cultural heritage is to recognise the **value inherent in every culture of the world**, as well as to understand that heritage is a **living practice** of communities globally and a vector for **social cohesion, democratic participation and improved physical and mental health** (see #BenefitsOfSinging and www.cultureforhealth.eu/knowledge).

Yet, many traditions considered as intangible cultural heritage are under threat, and collective singing has especially suffered for being banned in many countries during the pandemic. It is therefore more important than ever to promote the safeguarding of these traditions through performances, recordings and documentation, research and educational activities.

We therefore call on:

- decision-makers to recognise the importance of all activities contributing to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage including collective singing practices and to adopt appropriate measures of support, protection and promotion;
- cultural heritage professionals to fully recognise the importance and role of intangible cultural heritage worldwide and to join efforts to document, research, preserve and share it;
- persons active in the formal and non-formal education sector to integrate collective singing traditions in their work with children, youth and adults;