

ICTM, UNESCO, and Scholarly Expertise in the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

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The International Council for Traditional Music was founded in 1947 as the International Folk Music Council. From its start, the Council was affiliated with UNESCO, founded two years earlier, as a consultative partner or otherwise. The organizational structure of ICTM, the corresponding terminology, and even the word “council” in its title still resemble the UNESCO structure,¹ and the relation is also reflected in the “mission” or “purpose” of both international organizations. However, UNESCO’s mission includes collaboration between its member states and covers education, science, and culture, whereas ICTM is a non-governmental organization (NGO) of music and dance scholars and others mainly working in the field of culture.

I will start with some historical notes. Then, I will discuss how the scholarly expertise of ICTM was used in the context of UNESCO activities, in particular in the production of the Collection of Traditional Music of the World, and in the preparation and implementation of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereafter, 2003 Convention), in which I was involved between 2002 and 2016.²

Historical developments in the twentieth century: Peace and knowledge

The constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was signed on 16 November 1945, and came into force on 4 November 1946, after ratification by twenty countries. The constitution states that “since was begin

in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”³ On the UNESCO website, the organization calls for dialogue, mutual understanding, and the intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity to achieve peace in the world. It recognizes that this is not easy: “Cultural diversity is under attack and new forms of intolerance, rejection of scientific facts and threats to freedom of expression challenge peace and human rights. In response, UNESCO’s duty remains to reaffirm the humanist missions of education, science and culture.”⁴

In May and June 2018, the director-general of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, underlined these general principles in her addresses and speeches. She mentioned the importance of cultural diversity for social development and economic growth, and remarked that “cultural diversity is not in itself a factor of peace and progress. For this it requires learning, learning about otherness ... and to recognize the value concealed in each culture” (Azoulay 2018b). A few days earlier, she said she had regretted “the recent trends towards xenophobia, nationalism and exclusion” (ibid. 2018a). Similar words were used in the director-general’s speech on the occasion of the Peace and Prosperity Forum in Jeju, Korea, on 28 June 2018 (ibid. 2018c). In these messages, Azoulay summarized some tasks that UNESCO has always considered to be essential, in particular, to enhance the capacity to live in peace.

UNESCO did not come out of the blue, but had historical roots. Before UNESCO, there were organizations of intellectuals who tried to establish international cooperation between nations and individuals to achieve peace. In 1922, the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (Commission internationale de coopération intellectuelle, CICI) was established as an advisory organization for the League of Nations. CICI aimed to promote international exchange between scien-

1 Although the ICTM is not based on states parties like UNESCO, it has a World Network that consists of representatives and liaison officers from many countries and regions. Furthermore, the ICTM has an Executive Board and a General Assembly (<https://www.ictmusic.org/>), like many UNESCO entities.

2 I am very grateful to the editors and Rieks Smeets, who critically commented on earlier versions of this essay.

3 “Men” is nowadays replaced with “men and women” when referring to this constitutional statement. See <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/introducing-unesco>.

4 <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/introducing-unesco>.

tists, researchers, teachers, artists, and intellectuals. It included a group of less than twenty people of world fame, such as Marie Curie, Sigmund Freud, and Albert Einstein. In this group, the letters between Einstein and Freud originated and were published in 1933 under the title “Why War?” (Einstein and Freud 2016; see also Helden 2001:9–16). In his letter, Einstein asks Freud: “Is there any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war?” Freud’s answer is not optimistic, and he states at the end of his letter: “we pacifists have a constitutional intolerance of war, an idiosyncrasy magnified, as it were, to the highest degree” (Einstein and Freud 2016:14–15).

This discussion between Einstein and Freud happened when Adolf Hitler took power in Germany and established the Nazi regime. Following World War II, these issues were and still are on the minds of many world leaders and intellectuals, including ICTM members.⁵

Shortly after UNESCO’s birth, the ICTM was founded at an inaugural meeting in London as the International Folk Music Council (IFMC), in September 1947 (Karpeles 1969:16–17; *BIFMC* 41, Oct 1972:6–26). Maud Karpeles was the major convenor of this meeting and was IFMC secretary until 1963, and after that its honorary president until her death in 1976. In 1947, she presented as one of the aims of the IFMC “to promote understanding and friendship between nations through the common interest of folk music” (Karpeles 1969:16; see also Stockmann 1988:9–10). Karpeles also wrote that the IFMC

has always had good relations with UNESCO with which, prior to the formation of the International Music Council in 1949, it enjoyed consultative status. It has since continued to maintain direct contact with UNESCO, as is shown by the frequent attendance of a UNESCO representative at our conferences. (Karpeles 1969:19)

This UNESCO representative in the early years of the Council was Luiz Heitor Corrêa de Azevedo, head of the Music Section of UNESCO, who attended the first conference in Basel, Switzerland (1948), and also IFMC conferences in Opatija, Yugoslavia (1951) and Trossingen and Stuttgart, Federal Republic of Germany (1956).⁶ Azevedo published an article “L’UNESCO et la musique populaire” in the first *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* in 1949. He was member of the Council’s Executive Board from 1970 to 1976.⁷ From the optimistic words of Karpeles above, it

is not clear that the status of the Council in UNESCO decreased considerably after the establishment of the International Music Council in 1949, as we will see.

The IFMC was one of several organizations involved in the establishment of the International Music Council (IMC) in 1949. As a result, IFMC lost its consultative status with UNESCO to IMC, and then became affiliated to UNESCO via the IMC.⁸ It is significant that in an article by Anaïs Fléchet on the IMC and UNESCO’s policies with respect to music in the years 1945–1975, the author concentrates on political issues, but does not mention the Council at all. Instead, she only mentions some individuals who played a role in both Council and IMC circles, such as Alain Daniélou, Alan Lomax, and Charles Seeger, and their important work in the field of the UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music and in establishing the journal *The World of Music* (Fléchet 2013–2014:62, 65).

Christiane Sibille (2016:279) argues that expert networks of composers, artists, musicologists, and organizations that survived World War II “were integrated in the work of the newly founded UNESCO.” Traditionally, scholarly societies were on the whole fairly Eurocentric, and focussed on composers and “art music.” They excluded “research into non-European music and other non-historical approaches to music” and folk-music research from their activities. These societies also “excluded from the outset ... contemporary popular music, a field that was dominated by the emerging music industry. After that, non-European music was pushed aside.” Research into such subjects was eventually given to NGOs, like the International Commission of Popular Arts (Commission internationale des arts et traditions populaires, CIAP) that had been established in 1928 (*ibid.*:264, 280).

In this context, the work of the IFMC was apparently considered to be less significant than the work of the IMC. Formal consultative relations between ICTM and UNESCO were only re-established in 1996. See, for instance, the report by the ICTM secretary general, Dieter Christensen (1996), and the remarks by Krister Malm, ICTM president, 1999–2005, on the International Music Council (IMC): “Historically IMC has been much focussed on promoting Western Art Music. This was the main reason for ICTM to leave IMC a decade ago and establish its own direct relationship with UNESCO” (Malm 2003:8). Every six years, this “consultative status” has been reviewed, and ICTM has kept this status until the present day. ICTM is currently one of the 392 international NGOs and 33

5 Many scholars and diplomats have warned about the parallels that can be drawn between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in relation to methods used by fascism. One such warning came from the former US secretary of state, Madeleine Albright (2018).

6 See *BIFMC* (1, Oct 1948:4; 5, Nov 1951:5; 10, Oct 1956: 5;41, Oct 1972:27–33).

7 See <http://ictmusic.org/governance/history>.

8 For instance, in 1952 IFMC’s request for financial assistance for publications was made by the IMC, together with requests from the IMC itself, the International Musicological Society and other organizations; see annex 25, document 32 EX/4 of the Executive Board of UNESCO, 11 Dec 1952.

foundations and similar institutions that enjoy official partnerships with UNESCO.⁹

Such a “flexible and dynamic partnership” with an NGO gives UNESCO the opportunity “to benefit from its expertise, the representativeness of its networks for the dissemination of information and, if appropriate, its operational capacities in the field” (UNESCO 2020:155). Its advisory association with UNESCO gave ICTM higher status and the possibility of applying for funding from UNESCO. Over the years, financial assistance was granted for a variety of Council projects, such as the publication of the *Journal of the IFMC* in 1952 and 1953, the publication of an international collection of folk songs, and several world conferences since 2000.¹⁰

Moreover, since ICTM regained its consultative status with UNESCO in 1996, several officers of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) section¹¹ of UNESCO have attended its world conferences and taken part in discussions: Noriko Aikawa in Hiroshima (1999), Rieks Smeets in Sheffield (2005), David Stehl in Sheffield (2005) and Vienna (2007), Frank Proschan in St. John’s (2011), and Tim Curtis in Bangkok (2019).¹² This attendance seems to reflect the important role that ICTM played as a result of editing the CD series UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music of the World, evaluating more than half of the applications in the Masterpieces programme, and assisting in the implementation of aspects of the 2003 Convention. In 2001, ICTM President Krister Malm reported on the difficulties in the production of the CD series (see below), but he also wrote that “our relations to UNESCO are excellent” in his report to the General Assembly held in Rio de Janeiro (Malm 2001:6).

The scholarly work of the Council has not always been very prominent. In the beginning, much attention was given to the practice of music and dance. For instance, the international conferences in Venice (1949) and Biarritz/ Pamplona (1953) were accompanied by international festivals of “folk music.” However, “conference participants grew tired of watching the same show. At the same time, to those of a scholarly bent the IFMC did not offer enough” (Christensen 1988:13). On the

occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Council, the long-serving secretary general of the ICTM, Dieter Christensen, further wrote that in the 1950s, there were several attempts to get ethnomusicologists from the USA involved in the IFMC. One reason for the stagnation of the IFMC in 1955 was that several members regretted that the scholarly domain in the IFMC was weak, and they wanted to strengthen “international intellectual exchange.” Those members expected this to change when more “Americans” would join the IFMC (ibid.). In the 1950s and 1960s, American ethnomusicologists were looking more at anthropological approaches than their European counterparts (see also Nettl 1988:23).¹³

Earlier, Maud Karpeles had described why the practice of organizing festivals together with international conferences had come to an end after the one in Oslo (1955): “The main reason for discontinuing the festivals on an international basis was the increasing difficulty of getting authentic traditional groups” (Karpeles 1969:21). Although Karpeles mentioned this concept of authenticity, she also recognized “folk music as a living art” that should be dealt with by its own methods and not by “methods borrowed from the lifeless” (ibid.:27–28).¹⁴ It is interesting that Alexander Ringer, in his capacity as editor of the same volume of the *Yearbook of the IFMC*, clearly rejected the concept of authenticity for scholarly purposes:

the fashionable concept of “authenticity” has no more validity as a basic postulate in the philosophy of folk music than “purity,” its nineteenth-century counterpart. Both are essentially romantic myths that occupy legitimate positions in the realm of ideology but are basically irrelevant, if not dangerous, to scholarly investigation. Living traditions are subject to change virtually by definition. (Ringer 1969:4)

Stockmann (1988:4–5) also wrote about the problematic issue of “authenticity” in music and dance. This might lead to glorification of the past that was seen as the “genuine,” the “authentic,” and “rating the changes only negatively, as a decay.” The concept of “authenticity” has been very present in discussions about the relation between tangible and intangible heritage, because in the 1972 Convention on World Heritage¹⁵ it was used as an important selection criterion (see [figure](#)

9 See <https://en.unesco.org/partnerships/non-governmental-organizations>.

10 See, for instance, *BIFMC* (6, Sep 1952:11–12); *BICTM* (103, Oct 2003:5); Seeger (2015:272).

11 Nowadays this section is called the Living Heritage Entity. I will use the old name, which was used in the period covered in this chapter.

12 In April 2009, Cécile Duvelle, then chief of the UNESCO-ICH section, declined ICTM’s invitation to attend the world conference in Durban, South Africa (July 2009): because of the overload of applications for the Representative List of the 2003 Convention, the ICH Secretariat could not undertake such travel that year (see below).

13 The issue of international festivals during Council conferences, and the relation of the Council to organizations involved in such activities like CIAP and later CIOFF (International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Arts), established in 1970, need a fuller treatment than is possible in this essay. As continues today, ICTM world conferences are often planned together with *national* festivals taking place at the same time.

14 She agreed with R. R. Marett: “The living ... must be studied in its own right and not by means of methods borrowed from the lifeless” (Marett 1920:13).

15 That is, UNESCO’s Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.



Figure 1. The Jango-ji temple was one of the Nara monuments inscribed on the World Heritage List because of its “outstanding universal value.” Nara, 23 October 2004 (photo by Wim van Zanten).

1). At a meeting co-organized by UNESCO in 2004, international experts concluded in the so-called Yamato Declaration that authenticity is “not relevant when identifying and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage” (UNESCO 2006:18) (see figure 2).

UNESCO CD series: Collection of Traditional Music of the World

From 1991, the CD series Collection of Traditional Music of the World was produced under the responsibility of UNESCO.¹⁶ Manufacturing and distribution of the CDs and the booklets with liner notes was done by the company Auvidis / Naïve. This CD series was a continuation of the well-known UNESCO collections on gramophone records, such as Musical Sources and A

¹⁶ This section is partially based on an earlier publication in Dutch (Zanten 2010:100–102). The scope of the present chapter does not allow discussion of IFMC efforts to record, preserve, and perform “authentic folk music” via radio programmes in more detail. However, in many countries the radio played an important role in the dissemination of music and the IFMC established a Radio Committee in 1951 (*BIFMC* 6, Sep 1952:7–8). The IFMC also published an interesting “Statement on copyright in folk music” in 1957 (*BIFMC* 12, Sep 1957:25–27), which can also not be discussed here.

year	no. of CDs	year	no. of CDs	year	no. of CDs
1991	48	1996	12	2001	3
1992	6	1997	4	2002	1
1993	9	1998	12	2003	none
1994	8	1999	3	2004	none
1995	12	2000	1		

Table 1. Number of published CDs per year in the UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music of the World, 1991–2004. (Based on a list dated 25 February 2003 supplied by the ICH section of UNESCO).

Musical Anthology of the Orient, which were edited from 1961 to 1981 by Alain Daniélou, under the umbrella of UNESCO and the International Music Council.¹⁷

The first CDs were re-issues of earlier published gramophone records; 48 CDs were published in 1991. In the following years new albums were added (table 1). In 1995, the ICTM became officially responsible for editing the albums in this series. Those wishing to publish in the series were expected to send music recordings with liner notes to the ICTM editor, who would find a qualified reviewer for the project. If reviewer and editor were both satisfied, the materials would be passed on to the UNESCO-ICH section, and from there to Auvidis / Naïve with a request to produce the album.

The first ICTM editors of the UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music of the World were Dieter Christensen (1995–2000), followed by Anthony Seeger (2001–2003), successive secretaries general; I was the third and last editor (2004–2010). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the ICTM EB and many researchers, who had supplied the materials for the CD production, became increasingly frustrated because the albums that had passed the editing process successfully were nevertheless not published by Auvidis / Naïve. The company obviously had to deal with a declining demand for these CDs and tougher competition. Legally, ICTM could do nothing more after editing the materials. Apparently UNESCO’s contract with Auvidis / Naïve did also not supply UNESCO with enough power to get the edited albums published.

Before I took on the editorship in January 2004, UNESCO had fairly well decided to end the CD series. The preliminary text of the 2003 Convention was passed in June 2003, then on 17–18 September 2003, the ICH section organized an “Expert meeting on the UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music of the World: Analysis and perspectives.” This consultation with some ethno-

¹⁷ See an overview of the albums published in the series UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music on <https://ich.unesco.org/en/collection-of-traditional-music-00123>. Also see, <https://folkways.si.edu/> and the ICTM website (<https://www.ictmusic.org/publications/recordings-by-or-in-collaboration-with-ifmc-ictm>).



Figure 2. Participants of the UNESCO expert meeting on the safeguarding of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Adrienne Kaeppler, Noriko Aikawa, Chérif Khaznadar, and Wim van Zanten. Nara, 23 October 2004 (photo courtesy of Wim van Zanten).

musicologists (including, Anthony Seeger and me) and producers of CDs resulted in a recommendation to end the CD series and suggested the following refocus of activities:

The Group unanimously agrees that the UNESCO Collections had a pioneering role in the field of public awareness and that UNESCO should re-establish in the years to come that role in relationship to the new technologies and the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage which may be expected to enter into force in the course of 2006.¹⁸

In this situation, the major task for the editor at the time was to properly finish the series; in particular, to prepare some unfinished albums for publication and inform authors about the state of affairs.

On 13 May 2005, UNESCO cancelled its contract with Auvidis / Naïve and formally finished the Collection of Traditional Music of the World. UNESCO received the unsold copies of CDs and all the materials for the unpublished albums. At that time, ICTM's standpoint was that Smithsonian Folkways Recordings would be the best institution to take over the task of re-issuing

past recordings and publishing new CDs. Probably because the ICH section had new priorities and could not properly establish the property rights for titles produced in the past,¹⁹ it took until 23 April 2010 before a contract with Smithsonian Folkways was signed. By mid-2015, Smithsonian Folkways had released twelve unpublished albums that were edited and accepted by ICTM. Folkways intends to release two more albums that had been on the "pipeline" list of UNESCO in 2006. According to Folkways, four projects will not be published because information is missing and/or because of legal issues. By mid-August 2018, Folkways had also re-issued 115 UNESCO albums that had been published before 2004.²⁰

18 See https://ich.unesco.org/en/events?meeting_id=00069.

19 See also Seeger (2015:270), who speaks of UNESCO's "often overextended and undersupported professional staff."

20 Personal communication with Huib Schippers, then director and curator, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, August 2018.

Establishing the text of the 2003 Convention

In a 2004 article, Noriko Aikawa, former chief of the ICH section of UNESCO, describes the steps taken to prepare for the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. She describes “two vain attempts ... to establish an international instrument for the protection of folklore during the 1970s and 1980s” (Aikawa 2004:138) The real start came with the programme of intangible cultural heritage, established by UNESCO in 1992, that “afforded an opportunity to develop a new concept” (ibid.:139).²¹

I will discuss developments from around 1998: the moment that ICTM, as an NGO in consultative relations with UNESCO, started to play an important role in the discussions leading to this Convention. After the programme “Proclamation of masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity” was established in 1997, ICTM evaluated about half of the nominations by the member states (Seeger 2015:270). The other half of the nominations was evaluated by other international NGOs, more in the field of the social sciences, such as the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (Nas 2002:139).

Between 2002 and 2016, I was involved with the 2003 Convention in several capacities: as editor of the *Glossary Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Zanten 2002); governmental expert for the Netherlands at the three “Intergovernmental meetings of experts on the preliminary-draft convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage” in 2002–2003; ICTM representative at sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee and the General Assembly of the 2003 Convention between 2006 and 2012 and the meeting of UNESCO NGOs (2009); member of the Consultative Body in 2011–2012;²² and advisor supplying technical assistance in preparing proposals for international assistance from the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund in 2014–2016.

In 2002, UNESCO started to organize the preparation of a convention concerning intangible cultural heritage. The first step was to make a glossary with key concepts that would be used in the text of the convention, such as definitions of “intangible cultural heritage,” “safeguarding,” “agency,” and “community.” On request of Aikawa, an international meeting of eleven experts, con-

sisting of anthropologists, legal experts, and ethnomusicologists, took place in Paris, 20–22 June 2002. In this group, Oskár Elschek and I were ICTM members.²³ By the end of August, the *Glossary* (Zanten 2002) had been edited and was ready to be used for discussions on the text of the convention that would start in September 2002. A short article on the discussions leading to these definitions was published (Zanten 2004).

The first “Intergovernmental meeting of experts on the preliminary-draft convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage” took place in Paris on 23–27 September 2002. Because the work was not finished during this meeting, it was followed by two other sessions in Paris: 24 February – 1 March and 2–14 June 2003. I was asked by the heritage department of the Dutch Ministry of Education to represent the Netherlands. These meetings of 250–300 representatives from about 110 member states were much more dominated by legal and political issues than the meetings in the small group of scholars working on the glossary. Several Western countries found this new convention unnecessary; the main reason may be what Laurajane Smith called the (English) “Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) that defines heritage as material (tangible), monumental, grand, ‘good’, aesthetic and of universal value” (Smith and Akagawa 2009:3). Hence, even establishing the agenda of the meeting took almost a full day.

During discussions, it appeared that not all delegates had looked at the *Glossary* that had been prepared for this meeting. Moreover, during the total of four weeks of meetings, spread out between September 2002 and June 2003, some member states sent different delegates, that is, delegates that had not attended the earlier meetings. This also caused delay, because issues concerning the convention text were raised that had already been solved in former sessions. One had to be patient in such meetings. This slow process also reflects UNESCO’s ideal that the states parties should reach agreement by consensus.

The above-mentioned *Glossary* (Zanten 2002) was not included as an annex to the 2003 Convention. In the beginning, this seemed to be acceptable, as the *Glossary* was meant to be a work-in-progress, a “modest start” (Zanten 2004:41). However, over the years several scholars changed their mind. The definitions in the *Glossary* were not perfect, but they were good enough. These definitions could have been very useful in subsequent discussions about the Convention. On 6–7 December 2007, the UNESCO-ICH section organized

21 A short historical overview of the period 1946–2013, thus including the first ten years of the 2003 Convention, may also be found on <https://ich.unesco.org/en/working-towards-a-convention-00004>. In the 1980s, the section of UNESCO-Culture concerned with ICH was called the “non-physical heritage” section; the name changed to “ICH section” in 1992–1993.

22 From 2012, Naila Ceribašić became ICTM’s representative, including service in the Consultative Body.

23 Oskár Elschek had been a member of the ICTM Executive Board from 1971 to 1987, and vice president from 1987 to 1997. I was member of the EB in the period 1996–2005 and 2009–2011, and vice president in 2005–2009 (see <https://www.ictmusic.org/governance/history>).

an “Expert meeting on ICH keywords” in Paris. This meeting was meant “to work out or update definitions for about thirty concepts that are frequently used in the context of the safeguarding of the ICH.”²⁴ This did not lead to a separate publication, but the “keywords” were used in all sorts of UNESCO documents, like the “ICH kit” explaining the Convention that was prepared by UNESCO and distributed in 2009.

The role of ICTM and other NGOs in the Convention

I will raise a few issues that are relevant to the position of ICTM in relation to the Convention. An overview of the activities of the ICTM and individual members concerning the 2003 Convention may be found in ICTM’s Activity reports, related to its accreditation renewals in 2015 and 2019, on the UNESCO website.²⁵

The Convention requires that “communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals” participate in the process of defining and safeguarding their intangible cultural heritage. Dance and music are only a part of the domains covered by ICH.²⁶ This means that the important role of NGOs, like the ICTM, in documenting music and dance in the context of UNESCO activities has been changed and reduced by the Convention. The more democratic, decentralized approach has also changed the role of central and local governments. I argue that the central and local governments should pay much more attention to the methods and techniques used by anthropologists, music and dance experts, and other social scientists. NGOs and scholars could assist in these decision-making processes by policy-oriented research.

The Convention recognized oral traditions that were defined in the *Glossary* (Zanten 2002:5) as “passing on by word of mouth and memorizing information from the past.” Safeguarding is not aimed at products, but at processes of re-creating living culture (ICH). Furthermore, the Convention was new in emphasizing the crucial role of the culture-bearing communities (and groups and individuals) for defining and safeguarding their ICH. This emphasis on the active role of communities in safeguarding is very interesting, because states

parties ratify conventions and not local communities. What do communities expect of safeguarding, and do they benefit from the efforts to safeguard their cultural heritage by conventions, or are conventions only enhancing national(ist) policies? Moreover, communities are seldom homogeneous and generally do not speak with one voice. So, who represents a community? (Zanten 2009:294–295; 2011:205) Is the expertise of NGOs used in a proper way? Ideally, local communities and central governments would work together and include the expertise of NGOs and other groups and individuals. Does this happen sufficiently?

In December 2007, one-and-a-half years after the 2003 Convention had become operational following its ratification by thirty states members in April 2006, I reported to the ICTM EB that I found the Intergovernmental Committee rather critical of NGOs. Overall the sessions were rather political and less fruitful than they could have been (see figure 3). ICTM was among the first fifty-one NGOs to become accredited to the 2003 Convention in November 2010. In the beginning, the NGOs attending the Intergovernmental Committee sessions and the General Assembly of the 2003 Convention—accredited or not—held informal meetings and discussed the NGO interventions at the session and other issues concerning the 2003 Convention. Around 2008, an unofficial NGO website and facilities for a discussion group were opened with the technical help of Egil Bakka.²⁷ This developed into the ICH NGO Forum, which from then on has been organizing meetings on the day before the official start of the session of the Intergovernmental Committee. Since 2012, the ICH NGO Forum has organized a thematic symposium every year. They also have an official place on the ICH website of UNESCO.²⁸

Between 2006 and 2012, the NGOs had very little time for making comments at the Intergovernmental Committee and General Assembly sessions. Typically, one or two NGO representatives had 5–10 minutes during a session that lasted five days. However, it must be said that many accredited NGOs only had experience on a national level, in their own country, and not in discussing international cultural policies. In principle, it is a good idea to give all NGOs the opportunity to attend the Committee sessions, but in practice we may ask how efficient and useful that is, as compared to the NGOs’ tasks on the national level.²⁹ Moreover, my experiences confirm Anthony Seeger’s remark about the meeting of UNESCO NGOs³⁰ that

24 See https://ich.unesco.org/en/events?meeting_id=00093.

25 See https://ich.unesco.org/en/accredited-ngos-00331?accredited_ngos_name=ICTM&accredited_ngos_country-Address=all&accredited_ngos_geo=all&accredited_ngos_ga=all&accredited_ngos_domain=all&accredited_ngos_inscription=all&accredited_ngos_safe_meas=all&accredited_ngos_term=all&accredited_ngos_full_text=&pg=00331.

26 See the variety of ICH elements on the well-documented UNESCO website (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/home>) under “Lists.”

27 Member of the ICTM EB from 1999 to 2005.

28 See <https://ich.unesco.org/en/ngo-forums-00422>.

29 In my opinion, the role of most NGOs is more important on the national, rather than on the international, level.

30 That is, NGOs that have a consultative status (or associate status) with UNESCO. It should be noted that this group of



Figure 3. The Intergovernmental Committee session is about to be continued after lunch break. Abu Dhabi, 29 October 2009 (photo by Wim van Zanten).

he attended in the 1990s: “it seemed that the NGOs in health and education were larger and better represented than those in culture” (Seeger 2015:272). Further, within the domain of culture, NGOs in the field of tangible culture seemed to perform better than those in the field of intangible culture.

At the 2010 Committee’s session in Nairobi, the UNESCO Secretariat raised the problem that the Subsidiary Body and the Secretariat could not cope with the many nominations for the Representative List. For the 2010 round, the Subsidiary Body had selected 54 out of a total of 147 nominations and, therefore, the backlog of nominations increased considerably.³¹ Kristin Kuutma (Estonia, chair of the Subsidiary Body, 2008–2010) suggested that the Committee change the whole system of examining the nominations for the lists. She said that more expertise of NGOs and individual experts was needed. The chief of the ICH-UNESCO section in Paris, Cécile Duvelle, supported Kuutma’s proposal at the session.

NGOs is different from the group of NGOs accredited to the 2003 Convention.

31 In August 2020, there still were 106 backlog files, submitted by 24 countries: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/backlog-files-00554>.

We should be very grateful that the ICH Secretariat gradually developed professional standards for evaluating proposals for the Representative List of the 2003 Convention. In principle, the Consultative Body consisted of scholarly experts. Its reports, prepared by the Paris ICH Secretariat, also raised the standard of the evaluations. See also the article by Rieks Smeets, chief of the ICH-UNESCO section in Paris from 2003 to 2008, in which he talks about the “third source of guidance” supplied by the reports of the Committee and its Subsidiary and Consultative Bodies. If we want to understand the (fairly fast) developments in the 2003 Convention properly, these sources³² should be studied carefully next to the Convention text and the Operational Directives (Smeets 2012). However, unfavourable recommendations by these evaluating bodies, concerning the proposals for adding an element to one of the lists, have quite often been overruled by the Intergovernmental Committee. Hence, we may ask how serious the decision makers were with respect to the standards for evaluating the proposals and scholarly expertise.

32 To be found in the Aide-mémoires on <https://ich.unesco.org/en/forms>.

Integrating scholarly expertise into the practice of the Convention

During the 2000s, several expert meetings were organized by UNESCO on key issues of the 2003 Convention. To mention a few: gender and ICH (Dec 2003); the safeguarding of tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Oct 2004); inventorying ICH (Mar 2005); community involvement (Mar 2006); and the role of NGOs (Apr 2010).³³ However, two former chairs of the 2003 Convention, Chérif Khaznadar and Toshiyuki Kono, were of the opinion that the available expertise of individuals and NGOs was not appropriately used in the Convention.³⁴ They tried to “integrate scholarly and scientific activities into the practice of the Convention” by organizing the ICH-Researchers Forum that met for the first time in Paris on 3 June 2012, one day before the fourth session of the General Assembly began. The final report of this meeting was published in September 2012, with contributions from people closely involved with the Convention (ICH-Researchers Forum 2012).

In his foreword to the volume, Toshiyuki Kono reminded us that article 6, paragraph 7 of the 2003 Convention states that “States Members of the Committee shall choose as their representatives persons who are qualified in the various fields of the intangible cultural heritage.” According to Kono, this meant “not diplomats, but experts in various domains of the intangible cultural heritage will be the key players in the practice of implementing the Convention.” However, this was not what he saw happening in the different meetings and, for this reason, he helped to organize the first meeting of the ICH-Researchers Forum (Kono 2012:7–8).

There is no doubt that the 2003 Convention changed considerably after establishing the first Operational Directives in June 2007.³⁵ Probably also because of the critical remarks of the UNESCO Secretariat, the chair of the Subsidiary Body (Kuutma), and two former chairs (Khaznadar and Kono), diplomats and politicians gradually started to listen to NGOs and individuals who had pleaded that participants should concentrate on safeguarding programmes and capacity building, and not on listing ICH elements on the Representative List (or on the Urgent Safeguarding List, or the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices). The ICH-Researchers

Forum group met for the second and last time in Tokyo, Japan, in January 2013.³⁶

I contributed to this ICH-Researchers Forum (2012) with an analysis of the 10-minute films of nineteen ICH elements that had been added to the Representative List of the 2003 Convention in 2011. I advocated that the task of filming should be given to people with knowledge of “anthropological filming” and the corresponding methods and techniques, and that the video should comply with the criteria set for such nominations in the Operational Directives (Zanten 2012:87–88). One reason for choosing this topic concerning the submitted videos was that a recommendation of the “Expert meeting on the UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music of the World” in September 2003 (see above) was: “Taking into account the visual components of traditional music in addition to sound, UNESCO should seek to promote recordings in combination with film and additional information on DVD or CD-ROM.”³⁷ Moreover, in the meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee in Bali, November 2011, the Consultative Body reported that submitted videos for items on the Urgent Safeguarding List should not be “aimed at promoting tourism.”

It should be added that as regards visibility of ICH, UNESCO has on the whole done a remarkable job in making the documentation available on the Internet, including these short films, pictures, and sound fragments. It is a great display of the richness of ICH and cultural diversity in the world, and a tribute to the different communities, groups, and individuals who are involved in safeguarding these elements.

Operationalization and policy-oriented research

During 2013–2016, I was involved in supplying technical assistance to governments regarding nominations for the Urgent Safeguarding List and requests for International Assistance under one of the mechanisms established for funding safeguarding projects in line with the 2003 Convention. It was clear that several countries met with great problems when asked to formulate how a planned safeguarding proposal could be implemented in practice, that is, how to operationalize it from more abstract ideas about safeguarding to specific activities with a feasible timetable and a differentiated budget. UNESCO requires safeguarding projects to be trans-

33 See https://ich.unesco.org/en/events?categ=2005-2000&country=&keyword=&field_office=&domain=&safe_meas=&text=

34 See Khaznadar’s speech at the opening of the Intergovernmental Committee (4.COM) session in Abu Dhabi, 28 September – 2 October 2009, at <https://ich.unesco.org/en/4com>; and Kono’s speech at the opening of the Intergovernmental Committee (5.COM) session in Nairobi, 15–19 November 2010, at <https://ich.unesco.org/en/5com>.

35 For the different versions of the Operational Directives, see <https://ich.unesco.org/en/directives>.

36 This second meeting was organized by the International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI) and called the “2013 IRCI meeting on ICH: Evaluating the inscription criteria for the two lists of UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention.”

37 See https://ich.unesco.org/en/events?meeting_id=00069.

parent and accountable. Unfortunately, the UNESCO requirements were sometimes felt to be very complicated, and some people complained that formulating a proposal was as difficult as writing an academic article.

Part of the problem is that governments do not always employ the right civil servants to be involved with ICH. For ICH policies, legal experts and diplomats are less needed than properly trained anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, and others familiar with the field of culture and social sciences. Scholars should be encouraged to carry out policy-oriented research that is needed for understanding the social processes, including policy formulation, decision making, implementation, and evaluation with respect to ICH. This should be done in a proper anthropological way, that is, taking into account local concepts and ideologies. This means that they have to deal with the fact that communities may consider themselves to be the centre of the world and/or claim to possess “authentic,” “unique,” or “original” elements of living culture. At the same time, on the international policy level of decision making (UNESCO), concepts of authenticity, uniqueness, and originality are not relevant. What is relevant is what an element of living culture means to a particular community (see also Zanten 2013:139–140).

This methodological approach would be similar to the way in which social scientists study the belief in God and religious convictions. They study what religion means to the people concerned, and how it is socially constructed. For a sociological study of religion, a metaphysical question whether a holy book was truly written by God or a prophet is not relevant, whatever the religious conviction of the researcher.

Alfred Gell considers different art forms—painting, sculpting, performing arts, literature, etc.—as components of a vast and often unrecognized technical system that is essential for the reproduction of human societies. He calls this system the “technology of enchantment.” This technology makes us see the world in an enchanted form (Gell 1999:162–163). Gell’s ideas are very relevant for safeguarding policies in ICH. We should not only look at the symbolic functions of art objects, because then we miss the point of the enchantment generated by technology. Safeguarding ICH should mainly be concerned with the process of transmitting technical knowledge about living culture and not with questions of “beauty,” “authenticity,” and other value judgments by decision makers (Zanten 2011:218; 2013:139–140).

Conclusions

In the last thirty years or so, ICTM has played an important role as an NGO in consultative relations to

UNESCO concerning the editorship of the CD series Collection of Traditional Music of the World, the evaluation of nominations under the Masterpieces programme, and aspects of the implementation of the 2003 Convention. It is not clear how its scholarly expertise will be used in the coming years. The 2003 Convention covers a wide range of domains: oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage;³⁸ performing arts; social practices, rituals, and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship. This wide scope asks for the involvement of a diverse range of NGOs. Therefore, the influence of ICTM, which is mainly involved in the domains of the performing arts, rituals, and festive events, is substantially less than under the Masterpieces programme, where it had a privileged position.

We live in “times of trouble,” and we have to ask ourselves what we in ICTM can do “in pursuit of equality, social participation, human rights, and sustainability in the performing arts.”³⁹ Moreover, we increasingly have to deal with what on the UNESCO website is formulated as “new forms of intolerance, rejection of scientific facts and threats to freedom of expression [that] challenge peace and human rights.”⁴⁰ We will have to address questions similar to those asked by Alfred Einstein and Sigmund Freud almost one century ago: “Why war?” However, our answers may be somewhat different. Since the 1930s, we know that music and dance do not only unite people, but that they may also be used to divide them. Minority policies were not always tolerant, but were also based on revenge (*eine Art Vergeltungspolitik*) and the racist concepts of Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco (Elscheková and Elschek 1996:19).

I advocate that ICTM and its individual members include more policy-oriented research in the field of ICH. In their reports, they should also explain about the (anthropological) methods and techniques that they used in their research. In a way, such policy-oriented research could be part of what Timothy Rice calls “ethnomusicology in times of trouble: (1) music, war, and conflict; (2) music, forced migration, and minority studies; (3) music, disease, and healing; (4) music in particular tragedies; (5) music, violence, and poverty; (6) music, climate change, and the environment” (Rice 2014:193).

It seems to me that ICTM has the task to continue supporting peace by enhancing institutions like UNESCO. Talking to each other in long meetings in order to reach

38 See, for instance, Smeets (2004) for the special position of language in the 2003 Convention.

39 Statute 2b (“Mission”) of ICTM’s statutes, as amended on 15 July 2017, <http://www.ictmusic.org/statutes-ictm>.

40 <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/introducing-unesco>.

consensus may be tedious, but it seems far better than fighting wars with real weapons.

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