

The Experience of Pro Loco Associations and the Network of UNPLI

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I am proud to contribute to this publication that collects the documents of an interesting conference held in Venice on 26-28 November 2015 on *Cultural heritage. Scenarios 2015*.

It has been an important opportunity to show to the academic world the activities carried out throughout Italy by the network of Pro Loco associations who daily operate on the territories in order to promote and protect the Italian ICH.

UNPLI (Unione Nazionale Pro Loco d'Italia) is the Italian network of more than 6,300 Pro Loco associations. Many Italian towns and small cities have a Pro Loco, a civic membership association of volunteers that works with schools, local businesses and institutions to devise ways to enhance the town and attract visitors. The first Pro Loco was born in 1881. Pro Loco are closely linked with local communities of which they are expression. From 2003 UNPLI started to work on the safeguarding of the ICH with several national projects.

Pro Loco associations have been the instrument for the involvement of the local communities in the projects concerning the ICH because they already worked for the promotion, enhancement and transmission of many local traditions. The 2003 Convention is the instrument for raising the awareness of Pro Loco associations of their strategic role in the safeguarding the Italian ICH, working in a network with experts and institutions. Since 2007 UNPLI created a national library with all the documents (books, dvd, cd) collected from Pro Loco, municipalities, universities, schools and many other associations through our projects and activities.

On 2010, UNPLI launched the web channel on You Tube *Memoria Immateriale* with more than 1,400 videos and interviews to craftsmen, musicians, local experts and many other people on their connection with the CH of their regions. The channel is an important example of how the local communities have been involved in our activities. We have created it, and we constantly nourish it, with the cooperation of individuals and groups, in order to approach the techniques of craftsmanship, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning

nature and universe, performing arts, oral traditions and expressions, memories, etc.

In 2012 UNPLI has been accredited to the UNESCO's ICSICH.

In 2013 UNPLI created the website of the ICH NGO Forum (<http://www.ichngoforum.org>) and manage the linked Facebook page *Intangible cultural heritage and civil society*. The Forum is the platform for communication, networking, exchange and cooperation for NGOs accredited by UNESCO to provide advisory services to the ICSICH in the framework of the 2003 UNESCO Convention. NGOs are a pillar for the safeguarding of the world's living traditions, together with the holders of these traditions and the States. The Forum also welcomes NGOs that are active in the field of ICH and are in the process of accreditation.

The ICH NGO Forum organizes meetings and symposia on shared international challenges in the safeguarding policies and practices of ICH, and is particularly committed to follow the implementation and the evolution of the 2003 Convention. Periodic meetings take place simultaneously with the sessions of the Convention's General Assembly (every two years in June) and of the ICSICH (annually in December).

UNPLI is working with other Italian associations, accredited by the ICSICH, local and regional authorities, universities and experts, in order to build a national network of exchanging experiences, best practices and raise awareness of the importance of the Italian ICH and the 2003 Convention.