



ESU-Information

It's done: Fairground culture in Belgium and France recognised as Intangible Cultural Heritage at world level!



Happy and proud faces at the Christmas market in Brussels on 4 December.

It was an important day for all showmen and showwomen in Europe! At its 19th annual meeting in Paraguay's capital Asunción on 4 December, UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Intangible Cultural Heritage inscribed the lively fairground culture in Belgium and France on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Representatives from politics and showmen's associations, including the French Ambassador to Belgium Xavier Lapeyre de Cabanes, the Flemish Minister of Culture Caroline Gennez, ESU President Albert Ritter, the Chairman of the Belgian showmen's association La Défense des Forains Belges and ESU Secretary General Steve Severeys, Brussels Mayor Philippe Close, the Minister for

Culture and Tourism of the German-speaking Community of Belgium Gregor Freches, the Belgian State Secretary for Cultural Heritage Ans Persoons and the Minister-President of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation Elisabeth Degrÿse announced UNESCO's great decision at the Brussels Christmas Market.



Fairground fun without limits.

ESU Secretary General Steve Severeÿns said: 'Today's recognition by UNESCO is not the end of an adventure, but a beginning. In order to safeguard our showman culture for future generations, we will now set up an international working group. This will enable us to coordinate the various initiatives and measures and also encourage other countries to join our initiative. We are aware of the responsibility that comes with joining. We will enthusiastically continue to work with universities to research fairground culture. And we will continue to sensitise communities and governments at all levels to ensure that there is always a place for fairgrounds in our society.'

ESU President Albert Ritter said proudly: 'A long-cherished wish has been fulfilled today: The recognition of our fairground culture as an intangible cultural asset. It has been a long journey and I would like to thank everyone who has worked so hard over the past few years to realise this wish. A special thank you goes to you, Steve, who put your heart and soul into the UNESCO application and led it to a successful outcome with even more perseverance and tenacity.'



ESU Ambassador Jany de Vries, President Albert Ritter, Secretary General Steve Severeys (from left).

‘The lively passing on of traditions from generation to generation is what makes fairgrounds so special. This tradition is over 1200 years old - something very special! But of course the people who make it happen are also very special; the people who have the joy in their hearts to bring joy to other people. I think that's the most important thing about our work here in Europe. And that's why it's wonderful for me to be here today to say thank you for this wonderful work and that our work has finally been recognised at such a high level as UNESCO,’ emphasised Albert Ritter.



Meeting of the application committee in May 2019.

At the end of March 2023, the multinational application to recognise the lively fairground culture and traditional showmanship as intangible cultural heritage was officially submitted to UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

Fairground representatives from the national ESU associations had worked with international cultural experts over the past few years to prepare the application documents. In addition to a comprehensive justification, detailed positions and arguments on the cultural significance of the fairground profession, they also contained a video documentary financed by the ESU on the cultural and historical significance of the fairground and fairground in Europe.

The multinational application was submitted to UNESCO on behalf of Belgium and France. The background to this is that fairground culture has already been included in the respective national registers in these countries. According to Steve Severeyns, this is a prerequisite for the nomination of a cultural form, such as European fairground culture, for one of the UNESCO lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Recognition by UNESCO is important for all ESU associations. This is because the Belgian and French colleagues did not only refer to their nations in their application, but also to the work and life of all European showmen and showwomen. In this way, they have done invaluable groundwork.

Background: Intangible cultural heritage

Intangible cultural heritage includes living traditions from the fields of dance, theatre, music, oral traditions, natural knowledge and craft techniques. UNESCO has been supporting the protection, documentation and preservation of living culture for more than 20 years. The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in Paris in 2003. To date, 183 countries have acceded to it. Individual elements from the national lists of intangible cultural heritage of the signatory states can be proposed for one of three international UNESCO lists. More than 700 customs, performing arts, crafts and forms of natural knowledge from around the world are currently on these lists, including the tango from Argentina and Uruguay, traditional Chinese medicine, reggae from Jamaica and currently fairground culture in Belgium and France.

The Intergovernmental Committee for Intangible Cultural Heritage decides annually on the inclusion of new cultural forms on the UNESCO lists. The committee is made up of 24 elected States Parties to the Convention. Source: German UNESCO Commission

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