



COOPERATIVE CULTURAL HERITAGE

From Recognition to Safeguarding & Collective Action



COOPERATIVE
CULTURAL
HERITAGE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cultural heritage¹ safeguarding depends largely on the communities who create, practise, transmit and care for their heritage. This principle is well established in international cultural heritage policy. The UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage places communities, groups and practitioners at the centre of safeguarding. Similarly, the UNESCO World Heritage framework has progressively emphasised on community participation, including through the adoption of “Communities” as its fifth Strategic Objective in 2007. The right to participate in cultural life is also recognised under Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) protects the right of persons belonging to minorities to enjoy their own culture. The MONDIACULT conferences of 1982 and 2022 helped establish the significance of culture in international development policy. Taking this forward, the 2025 MONDIACULT Outcome Document² stressed on participation in cultural life as a human right and called for the recognition of culture as a stand-alone goal in the post-2030 agenda. These international developments reinforce the importance of enabling communities to actively participate in cultural life and contribute to decisions concerning their heritage.

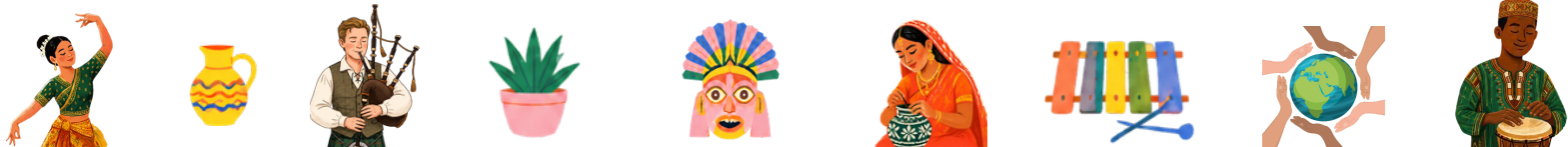
Cooperatives provide an established model through which communities can exercise agency and act collectively. Guided by the cooperative values of democracy, solidarity and self-help, and principles such as democratic member control, member economic participation, and concern for community, they can support livelihoods, transmit knowledge and skills, manage shared resources, and care for cultural places and assets.

In 2016, UNESCO inscribed Germany’s “**Idea and practice of organizing shared interests in cooperatives**” on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This recognition acknowledges that cooperative ideas and practices, and by extension, cooperative movement(s) can themselves constitute cultural heritage. The relevance of cooperatives to cultural heritage is therefore twofold: cooperatives can themselves be bearers of cultural heritage, while also providing economic, social, and cultural structures through which communities safeguard wider cultural heritage.

The UNESCO 1972 World Heritage Convention defines cultural heritage in terms of monuments, groups of buildings and sites of outstanding universal value (Article 1). The UNESCO 2003 Convention defines intangible cultural heritage as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills recognised by communities as part of their cultural heritage, together with associated instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces (Article 2). This brief draws on the definitions of cultural heritage established in both conventions.

² UNESCO, MONDIACULT 2025 Outcome Document: Culture Ministers’ Commitment, UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development, Barcelona, 29 September–1 October 2025, sec. 1 and 3, “Cultural Rights as Human Rights,”

https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2025/09/EN_MONDIACULT_Outcome_Document%20Final%2027.09.25.pdf



This brief examines these two dimensions: the heritage of the cooperative movement itself and the role of cooperatives in safeguarding cultural heritage more broadly. It begins by examining cooperation as living heritage, then considers how cooperative values and principles can support heritage safeguarding through collective governance, livelihood support, knowledge transmission and community action.

The brief then examines **how these capacities operate in practice**. Examples from intangible cultural heritage - including argan practices in Morocco, the culture of Jeju's women divers, traditional irrigation and Switzerland's alpine pasture season - illustrate different relationships between cooperative organization, transmission, livelihoods and collective resource management. Examples from built and tangible heritage in Italy and Norway demonstrate how cooperatives can also support the accessibility and sustainable use of heritage sites and the continued stewardship of cultural landscapes.

The brief next highlights **ICA's growing engagement with cultural heritage**. Through the Cooperative Cultural Heritage Programme, ICA has expanded its focus from sites associated with the history of the cooperative movement to a wider range of intangible heritage practices and traditions. Along with ICA's advocacy around MONDIACULT 2025, particularly its call for culture to be recognised as a standalone goal in the post-2030 agenda, the initiatives provide a basis for advancing recognition of the cooperative movement's own heritage and the role of cooperatives in safeguarding heritage.

Building on this foundation, the brief identifies **practical directions for policy, including legislative policy and action**. It calls on cooperatives to recognize and protect heritage within their own organizations and communities and to integrate safeguarding into cooperative practice. It proposes that ICA and cooperative apex organizations build on the existing Cooperative Cultural Heritage standards through practical safeguarding guidance, peer learning and partnerships, and connect cooperative action more systematically with established heritage frameworks, including the 2003 Convention, the 1972 World Heritage Convention and UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme.³

The recommendations are accompanied by a practical checklist to help cooperatives identify and safeguard cultural heritage. It outlines five steps: identifying heritage, assessing safeguarding needs, planning appropriate measures, seeking support, and sustaining and reviewing safeguarding efforts. The checklist also identifies potential partners who can support cooperatives at each stage, whether or not the heritage concerned has received formal recognition.

³ Established by UNESCO in 1992, the Memory of the World Programme aims to safeguard documentary heritage, facilitate its accessibility and raise awareness of its significance. Documentary heritage includes manuscripts, archives, photographs, audiovisual records and other materials of historical and cultural value. The Programme is particularly relevant to the preservation of records and archives documenting the history of the cooperative movement.





Looking ahead, **MONDIACULT 2029** and the **International Decade of Culture for Sustainable Development (2027–2036)** offer opportunities for ICA to bring the role of cooperatives to cultural heritage safeguarding into international cultural policy discussions. Building on its existing Cultural Heritage Programme and advocacy efforts, ICA can further document the contribution of cooperatives in heritage safeguarding, develop practical guidance from existing initiatives, and expand collaboration with heritage bodies.

The central proposition of this brief is that cooperatives have a dual significance for cultural heritage. Cooperative practices are themselves recognised as heritage, while the community-centred nature of cooperatives makes them valuable actors in heritage safeguarding. By recognising and strengthening this dual role, cultural heritage policies can make greater use of cooperatives as partners in placing communities at the heart of safeguarding efforts.



1. COOPERATION & THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT

At its simplest, cooperation means working together towards a shared purpose. Across societies and throughout history, communities have pooled labour, knowledge and resources; practised mutual aid and shared stewardship; and developed collective ways of responding to common needs. These practices take different forms across cultural and historical contexts, but reflect a longstanding principle - collective action can enable people to achieve economic, social and cultural objectives that may be difficult to pursue individually.

The modern cooperative movement gave this broader idea a durable institutional form. The Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, established in England in 1844, are widely associated with the emergence of the modern cooperative enterprise, alongside other cooperative models developing across Europe and elsewhere during the nineteenth century. The establishment of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) in 1895 helped connect these developments through a shared cooperative identity.

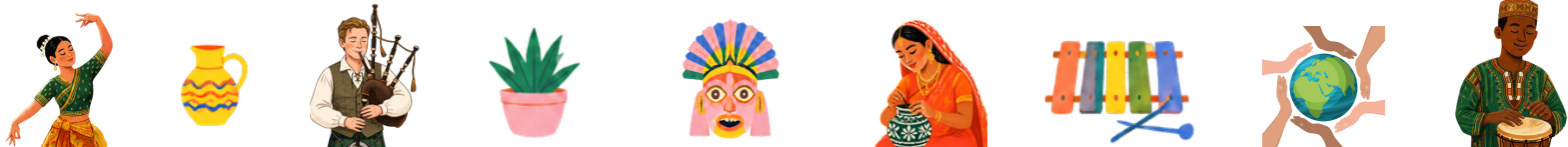
Today, around three million cooperatives operate worldwide, with at least 12 per cent of humanity participating in the cooperative movement.⁴ Active across sectors including agriculture, finance, housing, health, and culture, their relevance was reaffirmed by the United Nations' designation of 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives.

ICA defines a cooperative as an autonomous association of people voluntarily united to meet common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise. Its values, including self-help, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity, are translated into principles of voluntary participation, democratic control, education, cooperation among cooperatives and concern for community.

A cooperative, however, is more than an organizational or legal form. It functions through practices of collective decision-making, shared responsibility, mutual support, knowledge transmission and trust. These practices are learned, repeated and adapted as members respond to changing circumstances.

The cooperative movement can therefore be understood both as a network of enterprises and as a way of organizing collective life around shared values and practices.

⁴ International Cooperative Alliance, "Facts and Figures," accessed October 3, 2026, <https://ica.coop/en/cooperatives/facts-and-figures>



2. COOPERATION AS LIVING HERITAGE

The relationship between cooperation and cultural heritage received explicit international recognition in 2016, when UNESCO inscribed Germany's nomination of “**Idea and practice of organizing shared interests in cooperatives**” on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The inscription is significant not simply because it concerns cooperatives, but because of what it recognizes as heritage - the **idea and practice** through which people organize **collectively** around **shared interests**.

The inscription describes cooperatives as associations through which members of a community work together to improve living conditions, overcome shared challenges and promote positive change.⁵ Importantly, the heritage value does not reside primarily in cooperative buildings, products or legal structures. It lies in the knowledge, values and social practices through which cooperation is organized and sustained - collective participation, democratic decision-making, shared responsibility and the transmission of cooperative knowledge and values. In this sense, the inscription recognizes cooperation not simply as an economic arrangement, but as a socially transmitted practice.

This understanding situates cooperative practice clearly within the conceptual framework of UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Convention defines intangible cultural heritage as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.⁶ Such heritage is transmitted across generations while being continuously recreated in response to changing environments, histories and circumstances, contributing to a sense of identity and continuity.

The 2016 inscription therefore establishes an important connection between the cooperative movement and living heritage: cooperative ideas and practices can themselves constitute cultural heritage when communities recognize, practise and transmit them as such. It also provides a basis for considering a broader relationship. Cooperatives can be not only bearers of cultural heritage, but organizational structures through which communities sustain knowledge and practices, manage shared resources and steward the material spaces, records and objects associated with their heritage.

This dual relationship - **cooperatives as expressions of cultural heritage and cooperatives as actors in its safeguarding and stewardship** - provides the starting point for examining how the cooperative movement can contribute more systematically to cultural heritage policy and practice.

⁵ UNESCO, “Idea and Practice of Organizing Shared Interests in Cooperatives,” *Intangible Cultural Heritage*, inscribed 2016, accessed October 3, 2026, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/idea-and-practice-of-organizing-shared-interests-in-cooperatives-01200>

⁶ UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, art. 2(1), adopted October 17, 2003, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>



3. COOPERATIVES AS ACTORS IN CULTURAL HERITAGE SAFEGUARDING

Beyond being expressions of living heritage themselves, cooperatives can provide communities with structures through which cultural knowledge, practices, resources and places are collectively sustained and managed. Their potential contribution lies in characteristics such as collective ownership, democratic participation, shared responsibility, pooling of resources and concern for community. In practice, these characteristics can support cultural heritage in several ways:

- **Sustaining practices and livelihoods.** Many forms of living heritage depend on practitioners being able to continue their work. By pooling resources, sharing infrastructure, improving access to markets and strengthening collective bargaining, cooperatives can help create the economic and social conditions that allow cultural practices and associated knowledge to remain viable.
- **Supporting transmission of knowledge and skills.** Cooperatives can provide settings for training, apprenticeships, shared learning and exchange between generations. Such structures can support the transmission of knowledge while allowing communities to adapt their practices to changing circumstances.
- **Strengthening collective agency.** Democratic governance and shared ownership can give practitioners greater influence over how their heritage is practised, represented and economically used. This can be particularly important where commercialization, tourism or market access creates both opportunities and risks for communities.
- **Stewarding places and material heritage.** Cooperatives can collectively own, manage or maintain buildings, cultural spaces, landscapes, archives, collections and other assets associated with community or cooperative heritage. Continued community use can also help sustain the relationship between material heritage and the living practices connected to it.
- **Pooling resources and building partnerships.** Collective organization can make it easier for communities to mobilize finance, expertise and institutional partnerships that may be difficult for individual practitioners to access, including cooperation with public authorities, heritage institutions and other cooperatives.

These capacities do not mean that cooperative organization automatically results in effective heritage safeguarding. Commercial pressures, unequal participation, standardization of traditional practices and products, or exclusion can weaken community control. The contribution of cooperatives therefore depends on how they are governed and whether communities and practitioners remain central to decisions about their heritage.

The following examples illustrate how these capacities are already being applied in different cultural and geographical contexts.

4. COOPERATIVES & CULTURAL HERITAGE IN PRACTICE

Cooperatives already contribute to the continuity of cultural heritage in different regions and sectors, although their role is not always described explicitly as heritage safeguarding. The following examples illustrate different ways in which cooperative organization can support transmission, livelihoods, and collective governance.

Within intangible heritage

Argan practices and know-how, Morocco

The practices and knowledge associated with the argan tree in south-west Morocco were inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2014. Rural women are among the principal bearers of knowledge related to harvesting, processing and extracting argan oil. Women's cooperatives have become part of the economic and institutional environment through which this knowledge continues to be practised. UNESCO's inscription decision specifically identified the creation of cooperatives and associations among the proposed safeguarding measures and recorded the participation of women's cooperatives in the nomination process.⁷

The example highlights how cooperatives can connect traditional knowledge, livelihoods and community participation, while situating heritage within a wider ecological and productive system.





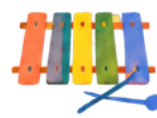
Culture of Jeju Haenyeo, Republic of Korea

The culture of the Jeju haenyeo - women divers who harvest seafood using knowledge of the sea and marine environment - was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List in 2016. Local fishery cooperatives hold fishing rights and form part of the structures through which knowledge is transmitted to younger generations, alongside families, haenyeo associations, schools and the Haenyeo Museum. Representatives of village fishery cooperatives were also directly involved in the UNESCO nomination process.⁸

Here, cooperative organization is embedded within the practice itself. It supports resource governance, transmission and collective participation while contributing to the continuation of an environmentally sustainable livelihood.

⁷ UNESCO, Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Decision 9.COM 10.30: Argan, Practices and Know-How Concerning the Argan Tree," 9th sess., Paris, 2014, paras. R.3–R.4, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions/9.COM/10.30>

⁸ UNESCO, Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Decision 11.COM 10.B.24: Culture of Jeju Haenyeo (Women Divers)," 11th sess., Addis Ababa, 2016, criterion R.4, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions/11.COM/10.B.24>



Traditional irrigation, Europe

Traditional irrigation systems use shared knowledge of landscapes, water flows and locally maintained channels to distribute water collectively. The practice, inscribed by seven European countries⁹ on UNESCO's Representative List in 2023, depends on close cooperation among farmers, landowners, associations, local authorities and water cooperatives. Cooperatives also participate in maintaining physical irrigation infrastructure and transmitting associated knowledge.¹⁰

The Swiss experience is particularly illustrative. Historic water cooperatives continue to manage common water resources through local and participatory arrangements. The example shows how cooperatives can contribute to collective governance of a common resource, and transmission of environmental knowledge.

Alpine pasture season, Switzerland

Switzerland's alpine pasture season, also inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List in 2023, combines livestock farming, cheesemaking, maintenance of pastures and buildings, social practices and knowledge of the alpine environment. Knowledge and skills are transmitted within families and among seasonal workers, but also through alpine societies and cooperatives.¹¹

This example illustrates how cooperative structures can contribute to the continuity of a living productive landscape, where livelihoods, knowledge, social relationships and stewardship of place remain closely interconnected.

Within built and tangible heritage CoopCulture, Italy

CoopCulture is an Italian cooperative working extensively in the cultural heritage sector, across museums, archaeological parks, libraries and other cultural sites. Its activities extend to several UNESCO World Heritage properties, including the Archaeological and Landscape Park of the Valley of the Temples in Agrigento and sites associated with Pompeii.¹² Through visitor access, interpretation, educational activities, digital services and links between cultural sites and their surrounding territories, the cooperative showcases how cooperative enterprise can provide professional services that support the accessibility, interpretation and sustainable use of major heritage assets.¹³

⁹ The seven countries are Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

¹⁰ UNESCO, Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Decision 18.COM 8.b.17: Traditional Irrigation: Knowledge, Technique, and Organization," 18th sess., Kasane, 2023, criterion R.1, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/18.COM/8.b.17>

¹¹ UNESCO, Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Decision 18.COM 8.b.8: Alpine Pasture Season," 18th sess., Kasane, 2023, criterion R.1, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/18.COM/8.b.8>

¹² CoopCulture, "Archaeological and Landscape Park of the Valley of the Temples," accessed October 4, 2026, <https://www.coopculture.it/en/poi/archaeological-and-landscape-park-of-the-valley-of-the-temples>



Rørosmat and the Røros cultural landscape, Norway

The World Heritage property of Røros Mining Town and the Circumference includes not only the historic mining town but also the agricultural landscapes surrounding it. Local producers established the Rørosmat cooperative to support traditional small-scale farming through shared distribution, marketing and locally rooted tourism and food economies. UNESCO identifies the cooperative system as contributing to the continuation of traditional practices that shape the landscape and to its sustainable management.¹⁴ The case demonstrates how a cooperative can help sustain a cultural landscape by maintaining the livelihoods and productive practices through which that landscape continues to be used and cared for.

What these experiences show

These examples point to a recurring pattern. Cooperatives can be particularly relevant where the continuity of heritage depends on sustaining the social, economic and environmental systems in which it is practised. They can provide structures for practitioners to organize collectively, maintain viable livelihoods, transmit knowledge, govern shared resources and negotiate change.

At the same time, the examples show that cooperatives rarely act alone. Public authorities, heritage institutions, associations, educational bodies and communities themselves form part of wider safeguarding mechanism. The value of the cooperative model therefore lies in providing a formal structure through which communities and practitioners can participate more effectively in safeguarding their heritage.

¹³ International Cooperative Alliance, *Call to Action: Embedding Cooperatives in a Stand-Alone Goal on Culture* (Brussels: International Cooperative Alliance, 2025), https://ica.coop/sites/default/files/2025-12/unesco_policy_paper_v4.pdf

¹⁴ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Preserving Traditional Farming through Cooperative Systems in Røros (Norway)," *World Heritage Canopy: Heritage Solutions for Sustainable Futures*, accessed October 4, 2026, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/canopy/rorosmat>

5. FROM COOPERATIVE HERITAGE TO A BROADER SAFEGUARDING ROLE: ICA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE PROGRAMME

Through its Cultural Heritage Programme, ICA is strengthening the recognition of cooperatives and their role in safeguarding cultural heritage. Launched in 2025, the programme initially focused on identifying and documenting sites associated with the history and development of the cooperative movement. The first Cooperative Cultural Heritage List comprised 32 sites across 25 countries, accompanied by a common criteria for identifying cooperative heritage.¹⁵

The programme expanded in 2026, with ICA extending its focus beyond historic sites and institutions to encompass intangible traditions and practices connected with cooperative organization, values, and knowledge. The addition of 63 inscriptions in September 2026, including the culture of Jeju's women divers, Switzerland's alpine pasture season and traditional irrigation practices, brought the list to 95 elements.¹⁶

The programme already incorporates several aspects of heritage safeguarding such as preservation, knowledge sharing, community participation, and sustainability.¹⁷ The inclusion of intangible heritage also brings attention to the role of cooperatives in safeguarding other cultural practices apart from the cooperative movement itself. In this way, ICA's Cultural Heritage Programme thus points to two complementary dimensions:

The heritage of the cooperative movement. Cooperatives have their own cultural heritage - historic sites and institutions, archives and collections, as well as traditions, knowledge, values and practices transmitted within the movement. Identifying, documenting and conserving this heritage helps preserve cooperative memory and communicate the development and diversity of the movement across generations and regions.

Cooperatives as actors in safeguarding cultural heritage. Cooperatives can also contribute to heritage that does not originate within the cooperative movement. As the examples in this brief demonstrate, cooperative organization can provide communities and practitioners with mechanisms for collective governance, viable livelihoods, knowledge transmission and stewardship of shared resources, places and cultural assets.

As a next step, ICA can build on these standards by documenting how cooperatives contribute to safeguarding, the challenges they face, and the support they need.

¹⁵

International Cooperative Alliance, "First World Map of Cooperative Cultural Heritage Sites Unveiled," 2025, ICA, <https://ica.coop/en/newsroom/news/first-world-map-cooperative-cultural-heritage-sites-unveiled>

¹⁶

International Cooperative Alliance, "ICA Announces 63 New Cooperative Cultural Heritage Inscriptions," September 28, 2026

¹⁷

International Cooperative Alliance, "Criteria & Nominations," *Cooperative Cultural Heritage*, accessed October 5, 2026, <https://culturalheritage.coop/criteria-nominations>



6. FROM PRACTICE TO POLICY: STRENGTHENING THE COOPERATIVE CONTRIBUTION TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

This section offers recommendations for cooperatives, ICA and cooperative apex organizations, governments and heritage institutions. Practical measures have been identified to document and safeguard heritage, strengthen cooperation between the cooperatives and the heritage sector, and improve the recognition of cooperatives in cultural heritage policies.

For cooperatives

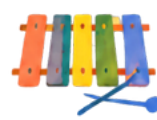


● **Recognize heritage within the cooperative and its community.** Building on ICA's initiative to identify cooperative cultural heritage, individual cooperatives can consider whether aspects of their own history, practices, buildings, archives, collections or institutional memory have heritage significance and take steps to document and protect them. They should also identify connections between their activities and the wider cultural practices, knowledge, skills, places or resources valued by the communities they serve. In both cases, recognition should involve the people who practise, transmit or attach meaning to that heritage rather than rely on external designation alone.

● **Identify appropriate protection and management pathways.** Where a cooperative building, site, landscape, archive or collection has heritage significance, recognition should be followed by appropriate protection. Depending on the national context, this may include statutory heritage designation or listing, planning and conservation controls, secure ownership arrangements, and conditions supporting continued or adaptive use. For archives, artefacts and collections, cooperatives should clarify ownership, custody, access and long-term preservation, including through agreements with archives, museums or other specialist institutions. Particular attention should be given to succession where a cooperative merges, dissolves, relocates or disposes of property, so that significant heritage is not inadvertently dispersed or lost.

● **Integrate safeguarding into cooperative practice.** Where cooperative heritage exists, cooperative management can incorporate transmission, documentation, training and management into their activities. For example, through apprenticeships, intergenerational learning, shared cultural spaces, or the continued use and maintenance of heritage assets.

● **Keep bearers and practitioners at the centre.** Democratic cooperative governance provides a useful foundation, but cooperative membership should not automatically be assumed to represent an entire heritage community. Practitioners and knowledge



holders should participate meaningfully in decisions concerning how heritage is represented, adapted and economically used.

- **Balance economic viability with cultural continuity.** Cooperative enterprise can strengthen livelihoods and market access, but commercial activity should support rather than determine the future of cultural practices. Particular attention should be given to equitable benefit-sharing, community control and avoiding unnecessary standardization or decontextualization.

For ICA and cooperative apex organizations

- **Build on the existing Cooperative Cultural Heritage standards.** ICA can continue expanding the identification and documentation of tangible and intangible cooperative heritage while strengthening the safeguarding dimension of the programme. Existing standards on living practice, community engagement, preservation, sustainability and knowledge-sharing can help cooperatives identify safeguarding needs, assess risks and plan for the longer term.
- **Translate recognition into safeguarding action.** For heritage requiring active support, ICA and apex organizations can encourage safeguarding approaches that identify what is at risk, what action is appropriate, who should be involved and what expertise or partnerships are needed. The Cooperative Heritage Action Framework proposed in this brief can provide a simple basis for this process.
- **Create opportunities for peer learning.** Existing cooperative experiences can be documented and connected through case repositories, exchanges and networks linking cooperatives working with crafts, foodways, agriculture, cultural spaces, archives, museums and other forms of heritage.
- **Connect cooperative action with established heritage frameworks.** ICA and apex organizations can help cooperatives engage more systematically with UNESCO and national heritage institutions. The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage provides a framework for safeguarding living practices and knowledge, the 1972 World Heritage Convention offers relevant approaches to the management and stewardship of cultural sites and landscapes, and UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme provides a useful reference for identifying, preserving and providing access to documentary heritage, including cooperative archives and collections.
- **Strengthen partnerships and heritage expertise.** Partnerships with cities, local authorities, heritage agencies, universities, museums, archives and specialist networks can provide conservation, documentation and management expertise that complements the organizational and economic capacities already present within the cooperative movement.





For governments and heritage institutions

- **Recognize cooperatives as potential safeguarding partners.** Cultural and heritage policies can acknowledge cooperatives among the organizational models through which communities may collectively manage cultural practices, resources and heritage assets.
- **Improve access to appropriate support.** Where relevant, cooperatives should be able to access cultural and heritage funding, technical assistance, training and programmes for conservation, transmission and documentation, alongside conventional cooperative-development support.
- **Connect cultural and cooperative policy.** Greater coordination between heritage authorities, cultural ministries and agencies responsible for cooperatives, social economy, rural development and local development can help address the interconnected cultural, social and economic conditions on which safeguarding often depends.
- **Support community-led stewardship.** Legal and policy frameworks should enable cooperatives to own and manage cultural spaces and heritage assets where appropriate and with the support of the communities concerned.

For international cultural policy

International cultural-policy should recognise cooperatives as partners in heritage safeguarding and include their contributions in policy discussions and research. Better cooperation between international heritage bodies and cooperative organizations could help identify areas where policy support is needed.

Across these recommendations, community participation remains important. Cooperatives can play a significant role in strengthening communities' ability to make decisions about their own heritage, with safeguarding efforts guided by the people who practice and transmit that heritage.



7. PRACTICAL CHECKLIST FOR COOPERATIVES TOWARDS IDENTIFYING & SAFEGUARDING CULTURAL HERITAGE

This checklist is developed to complement ICA's existing Cooperative Cultural Heritage criteria and is intended to help cooperatives plan safeguarding measures, whether or not the heritage concerned has received formal recognition.

Action	Suggested measures for cooperatives	Potential partners
1. Identify heritage	Consult members and local communities to identify relevant traditions, skills, buildings, archives, collections and cultural places. Document their significance and the people associated with them.	Heritage practitioners, community representatives, local historians
2. Assess safeguarding needs	Identify risks to traditional knowledge, livelihoods, physical assets and community participation. Discuss and agree on priorities with those concerned.	Heritage practitioners, community representatives, heritage specialists
3. Plan safeguarding measures	Identify feasible measures such as training, documentation, maintenance of heritage assets, continued production of traditional goods or improved access. Assign responsibilities and identify required resources.	Training institutions, heritage specialists, local authorities
4. Seek support	Explore available expertise, funding and opportunities to participate in existing heritage programmes.	Heritage authorities, museums, archives, universities, ICA and cooperative apex organisations
5. Sustain and review	Include safeguarding measures in cooperative plans and budgets. Review progress with members and communities, and adapt measures as needs change.	Community representatives, heritage practitioners, local authorities



8. TOWARDS MONDIACULT 2029 & THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF CULTURE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (2027 – 2036)

ICA has already taken concrete steps to bring cooperatives into international cultural policy discussions. Ahead of MONDIACULT 2025, it advocated for greater recognition of cooperatives as cultural actors, stronger support for cooperatives working in the culture and creative sectors, and the recognition of culture as a standalone goal in the post 2030 development agenda. Its Cooperative Cultural Heritage Programme has also brought enhanced visibility to the heritage associated with cooperatives and their role in safeguarding it.

In the lead-up to MONDIACULT 2029, ICA has an opportunity to build on this work by highlighting how the involvement of cooperatives can strengthen community-led heritage safeguarding. This would also strengthen ICA's advocacy for a standalone culture goal by showing how cultural safeguarding contributes to livelihoods, community participation and local development.

The International Decade of Culture for Sustainable Development (2027–2036) also provides an opportunity to advance this work over the longer term.¹⁸ ICA can use the Decade to strengthen collaboration with heritage institutions and promote the contribution of cooperatives to cultural heritage safeguarding within international development policies.

The opportunity for the cooperative movement is therefore not simply to seek recognition within cultural policy, but to demonstrate through practice how cooperation can provide communities with sustainable means to preserve, transmit and manage the heritage they value.

¹⁸ United Nations General Assembly, *International Decade of Culture for Sustainable Development (2027–2036)*, Resolution 80/308, adopted September 4, 2026.

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Annexe 1 ICA [Intangible] Cooperative Cultural Heritage Inscriptions

No.	Inscription and country	Brief description	ICA link
1	Traditional irrigation: knowledge, technique and organization — Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Switzerland	Traditional irrigation practices sustained through collective water distribution, maintenance and transmission of knowledge, including through water cooperatives.	View entry.
2	Alpine pasture season — Switzerland	Seasonal livestock grazing and cheesemaking traditions maintained through shared pasture alpine societies and cooperatives.	View entry.
3	Territorio Sénia ancient olive trees — Spain	Ancient olive-growing traditions and landscapes safeguarded through agricultural cooperatives, shared production standards and collective marketing.	View entry.
4	Culture of Jeju Haenyeo (women divers) — South Korea	Traditional women's free-diving culture supported by fishery cooperatives that help manage fishing rights and sustain marine-resource stewardship.	View entry.
5	Coopérative Laitière du Beaufortain — France	Dairy cooperative preserving traditional mountain cheesemaking, local farming livelihoods and the transmission of specialised production skills.	View entry.
6	Al Aflaj traditional irrigation network system — United Arab Emirates	Traditional irrigation system sustained through communal water-sharing rules, collective maintenance and intergenerational transmission of technical knowledge.	View entry.
7	Cocoa Agroforestry System — São Tomé and Príncipe	Traditional cocoa cultivation integrating diverse crops and ecological knowledge, with farmer cooperatives supporting production and market access.	View entry.
8	Soave Traditional Vineyards — Italy	Traditional vineyard cultivation and landscape management sustained by small growers through shared quality standards and collective economic organisation.	View entry.
9	Qanat Irrigation Systems — Iran	Historic underground irrigation practices maintained through collective water-allocation rules, specialised knowledge and shared maintenance responsibilities.	View entry.
10	Barroso Agro-Sylvo-Pastoral System — Portugal	Traditional mountain farming and pastoral practices sustained through communal land management, shared resources and local agricultural knowledge.	View entry.





11	Commandaria Wine and The Wine Traditions of the Commandaria Villages — Cyprus	Traditional wine production and associated practices in the Commandaria villages, sustained through local viticulture and cooperative organisation.	View entry
12	Kithul Madeema / Kithul Kaepema — Sri Lanka	Indigenous Sri Lankan practice of extracting sap from the kithul palm, involving specialised tapping techniques and traditional knowledge.	View entry
13	Cultural Practices Related to Taif Roses — Saudi Arabia	Traditional cultivation, harvesting and distillation of Taif roses, including associated knowledge, livelihoods and cultural practices.	View entry
14	The Correspondence Collection of Robert Owen, 1821–1858 — United Kingdom	Historical correspondence documenting Robert Owen's ideas, activities and contributions to the development of the cooperative movement.	View entry
15	Fan Ennabat Cooperative — Morocco	Women's artisan cooperative in Agadir preserving and transmitting traditional basket-weaving skills through collective production.	View entry
16	Ashenda Cultural Festival — Ethiopia	Annual cultural festival celebrated by girls and women in Tigray and neighbouring communities through traditional dress, music, dance and collective participation.	View entry
17	Humana Nova — Croatia	Cooperative promoting work integration and circular textile production, linking employment opportunities with reuse and sustainable practices.	View entry
18	Salak Agroforestry System — Indonesia	Traditional agroforestry practices involving salak cultivation, local ecological knowledge and the management of diversified agricultural landscapes.	View entry
19	Traditional Brass and Copper Craft of the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru — India	Traditional metalworking craft involving specialised techniques for making brass and copper utensils, transmitted across generations of artisans.	View entry
20	Traditional art of Shital Pati weaving of Sylhet — Bangladesh	Traditional weaving of mats from Murta cane, preserving specialised craftsmanship and supporting artisan livelihoods.	View entry
21	Argan: practices and know-how concerning the argan tree — Morocco	Traditional knowledge and practices associated with cultivating argan trees and extracting argan oil, supported by women's cooperatives.	View entry
22	Cooperativismo & Desarrollo Publication — Colombia	Cooperative publication and archive established in 1975, documenting cooperative thought, research and practice over five decades.	View entry
23	Artisanal processes and plant-fibre techniques for weaving the pinta'o hat — Panama	Traditional craftsmanship involving the cultivation and preparation of plant fibres and the weaving of the pinta'o hat.	View entry
24	The Co-operative News / co-operative journalism — United Kingdom	Cooperative journalism tradition dating to 1871, preserving a record of the movement through independent reporting and its newspaper archive.	View entry



ICA STATEMENT ON THE COOPERATIVE IDENTITY

Definition of a Cooperative

A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

Cooperative values

Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Cooperative Principles

The cooperative principles are guidelines by which cooperatives put their values into practice.

1. Voluntary and Open Membership

Cooperatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

2. Democratic Member Control

Cooperatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and cooperatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

3. Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the cooperative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4. Autonomy and Independence

Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.

5. Education, Training, and Information

Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

6. Cooperation among Cooperatives

Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

7. Concern for Community

Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

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