

## The ICH Agora

**Motto:** "Touch so Catch"

(We hope that once you get involved into our ICH community, you would catch the opportunities for development and catch the possibilities of future.)



THE ICH AGORA

## Who are we?

**Type:** Ltd

**Place of physical establishment and legislation:** Sofia, Bulgaria

Ecommerce - We are a platform for small local shops in Europe (that register on our website with a subscription) that promotes and sells their products. The products they offer will be traditional for the region and culturally focused. We only facilitate the connection between the customer and the shop.

It's a digital service platform, including website and application, that registers commercial and social businesses of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Europe. This platform aims to contribute 2 aspects: promoting the circulation and profitability of cultural products; breaking down the barriers of time and space to expand the role and influence of culture itself.

## ICH and our Platform

**Definition of ICH:** The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.

(a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage.

(b) performing arts.

(c) social practices, rituals and festive events.

(d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe.

(e) traditional craftsmanship.

**How are we connected to ICH?:** We do not sell intangible cultural heritage. We sell the material and physical products and digital online knowledge connected to the cultural heritage of the specific region in Europe.

3 levels:

1. Our business model mainly contributes to the products from **traditional craftsmanship**, which would attract more producers to set up their shops on the platform. Usual categories: **Crafts**
2. For those which can't develop as physical products but can learn (**performing arts, knowledge and practices, oral traditions and expressions**), there will be digital online knowledge like paid courses, e-books, documentaries, etc. Usual categories: **Music, Dance, Languages...**
3. For other elements which can't really transform into products for commercial use (**social practices, rituals and festive events and oral traditions and expressions**), they will be well used in the social activities like events, academic forum, exhibition, etc.

## Values and Goals

We are doing to create an easier access to, otherwise locally limited, cultural products of the region. This way we help the growth of tourism in the area/ country. Our goal is to protect, develop and transcend the European intangible culture through the market of culturally oriented products that relate to local traditions and beliefs. We also want to have an educational function through the free access to articles and research papers but also with the paid online courses, lectures, books, etc.

Our goals are to protect, develop and transcend the European intangible culture in a sustainable way. We wish to reach a virtuous circle: helping producers to

to financially sustain themselves and growing their profits so that they can develop ICH with financial support; at the same time, with the promotion of ICH, more and more people could get involved into the ICH market for products. Additionally, to create an educational space where different courses (videos, books and research papers) could be purchased and where articles could be read for free. It is also our goal to promote cultural events in European countries throughout the year and notify our users (who gave permission for email promotion) of them.

We address the need for conservation of old traditions and products with historic and cultural value. In the very beginning we will start with Bulgaria; however, we plan to expand to other European countries after it is launched. Our platform addresses the problem of the disappearance of the local rural businesses due to financial reasons or lack of interest in the field. Our business wants to promote social awareness for the ICH and promote its importance. The need to preserve the past, the culture and the mastery of local products and producers.

It will facilitate the connection between unknown products of cultural value and people who want to conserve their existence. Our platform will also help bring more tourists to the local areas of the producers and bring attention to the problem of disappearance of traditions and customs. We hope we can provide customers with authentic and valuable products that will enrich their cultural knowledge and let them experience the sustainable way of preserving culture. We hope we can become the biggest market for ICH products in order to preserve traditional crafts, earn money for the producers who are struggling, and make ICH more famous.

**How does our platform work?**

On one hand, the platform provides channels to set up a deeper connection between producers and customers. It displays ICH products and sells them online worldwide. The producers could register their shops and describe their activities and how it is unique and valuable. We will charge based on a monthly/annual subscription with one-month free trial. When a customer purchases a product/s, they will have to create a profile (for security reasons) and then input their data for payment (we will provide a payment with debit card and PayPal). We will have digital security systems protecting this information. Our shipment will be executed by either national post services or private companies based on the location of the shipment. There will be instructions for the producers on how to pack and send their products. We will also provide direct communication between the customer and producer.

On the other hand, the platform gives a chance to popularize ICH. Not only focus on the commerce, it's also ready to be a centre of ICH protection, training, research and education. The platform collects and analyses data of ICH. With the profit from the products, it also organizes a series of activities like exhibitions, academic forums and courses, etc. For this part, visitors will find pages for: basic information introduction of every category and every element of ICH (name, location, existing time, description, history, important masters, etc.), forum for publishing articles, communicating, reporting the events, etc.), notifications for news, information, map to collect data.

*Example 1; Physical item: In some regions in Bulgaria there are shops or people that produce "martenitsi" (a bracelet that is tied to a certain celebration in a Bulgaria). It is a part of the intangible cultural heritage of Bulgaria. The said shop would register on our platform and sell their products on it, while having a detailed description of the tradition surrounding it and the symbolism behind the craftsmanship. If someone buys some*

*e “martenitsi”, through our website, the shop will send them with shipping services (we will try to make an agreement with an enterprise for shipping packages to the desired destination).*

*Example 2; Digital item: Bulgarian folk dances are also a part of the cultural heritage. An example of a digital item would be video courses on how to practice them, filmed by teachers in Bulgaria. The customer acquires it and can play it in order to learn how to dance or for research.*

**Who is selling the products?:** Independent craftsmen, producers and shops that connect their products with ICH of their region and thus adding a cultural value to them. For the digital items - teachers, researchers, professors and experts that create content for educational purposes.

**Shipment:** We want to integrate shipment as a part of the service we offer to producers and shops via collaboration with business partners.

## **Structure**

In the beginning of our enterprise, we will have in total 13 people working - 1 in marketing, 1 in IT, 1 in analysis and accountancy, 2 in management and 2 in customer service, 1-2 ethnologists, 2 administrative positions, 1 in design + photographer, 1 lawyer. The management stays on top while the other departments are below it in a flat structure. We will also hire people for one-time services.

The marketing department will take care of the advertisement and the social media of our platform; the IT will resolve technical problems; the accountant will give the management analysis of the financial state and suggest improvements; our customer service will take care of complaints and questions, also minor a

administrative tasks. The management department will make long-term decisions and follow the overall development plan. Managers will also keep relations with cooperating organizations, institutions and businesses. We will hire designers for the website and again if we do any corrections.

We will have a physical office where our strategy will be to have as open communication as possible - making weekly plans, schedules, specific tasks that need to be done, etc. We will also update either via emails or zoom calls our international team that works online. For even better communication we will organize team-building trips sometimes surrounding our work, sometimes for relaxation and better connections. We would like to have a friendly work environment where people can share their opinions but also to have a clear decision-making position.

We will have two managers. One will be coordinator through online communication and will also manage contact with other countries or international agencies. A second one will manage the physical office in Sofia, Bulgaria where she will organize team tasks and in-place tasks. The two managers will coordinate together to create sustainable long-term and short-term plans in order to achieve the best results. The other employees will have a circular model of hierarchy and can express opinions and give suggestions to the management. However, all final decisions are made by both managers.

## Design

It mainly includes 4 parts.

1. There will be a search engine with categories of different products. Once a customer clicks on a product, it will open a page where the name, description, photos, location, creator and price will be displayed, with access to view the full profile of the shop. Information for the cultural value will also be written with links to more in-depth articles. The products will have reviews thus giving a possibility for feedback by the customer.
2. The platform will have a forum that contains all articles, upcoming events and courses about ICH, also additional information and links to other cooperating partners and institutions.
3. Direct chat between producers and customers if any problem occurs or if there are any relevant questions. It will have built-in translation to facilitate easier conversation.
4. A donation page. The resources will go to financing the input of more ICH products. For example, filming courses, translation,

**Home page description:** Sidebar containing the following buttons for redirection on the platform (Home; Store; Forum; Map; Donation; About Us). Below it, we will have pictures of products that switch, below, a short introduction and information about the purpose of our platform, below it, displays with the categories of our products, downwards - recent articles and upcoming events, after that, collaborators and at the end contacts and others. We will make optimizations and create mobile and tablet versions for best customer experience.

## Acquiring Customers and Marketing

Our business is targeted towards all nationalities and ages above 18. We would also like to collaborate with other enterprises and institutions. We will target our advertisements towards people interested in culture and history, trying to get their interest and curiosity to be invested in our cause. Our clients might however not be aware of the value of the products - that's why we will provide detailed information about the ICH, so they understand the importance of their contribution. We wish to design our business in a way that both young people and the older generation with little digital knowledge will be able to use it easily whilst the platform would be engaging. We will acquire customers with good design and marketing campaigns. Also, with promotion on social media and with help from partners.

### Methods:

1. Our platform wants to acquire customers by founding long-term collaborations with other enterprises and/or organizations and with marketing campaigns on social media and with google advertisements.
2. If possible, our platform would also form agreements with local/ national institutions in order to improve and develop tourism, economy and social appreciation of the intangible cultural value of their products.
3. We will also focus on sustainability and moral values to connect with people through our project to achieve one common goal.
4. One of our main ways to acquire customers will be through email subscription notifying them of new items or products in their field of interest and/or upcoming events.
5. We will have a keyword strategy around culture, traditions, and other more specific to the products.

6. Social media and google advertisements
7. Retargeting - Segment your audience and deliver unique content based on actions they have taken with your brand

**We plan to develop a multi-media strategy to promote both our platform and ICH.**

1. Setting up a social media matrix: accounts on the Facebook, Instagram, X, Pinterest, TikTok, YouTube, etc.
2. Contact with local press and radio for reporting and promotion, including content provided by our platform and content produced by them.
3. Put advertisement to the multi-platform on social media to attract more visitors for the platform and shops.

## **Products**

Here we will provide a list of categories and a few exemplary products in them. Given, however, the fact that they depend on the input of the independent enterprises they will expand and may vary in the final website. They also gathered specifically for Bulgaria since it's going to be the first country.

## **Music**

1. Sheet music
  - 1.1. National dances sheet music from the Thracian region
  - 1.2. National songs sheet music from the Rhodope mountains
  - 1.3. National songs sheet music from the Shopi region
2. Instruments
  - 2.1. Gaida
  - 2.2. Gadulka
3. Courses

- 3.1. Gaida courses
- 3.2. Gadulka courses
- 3.3. Bulgarian metric courses

## **Dances**

- 1. Music
  - a. Music for Northern region "horos"
  - b. Music for Rhodope mountains "horos"
- 2. Courses
  - a. "Ruchenitsa" dance courses
  - b. Northern region
    - i. Gankino horo
    - ii. Chichovo horo
    - iii. Elenino horo

## **Crafts**

- 1. Food and Drinks
  - a. recipe books
  - b. Courses
    - i. "Shopska salad"
    - ii. "Banitsta"
  - c. Products
    - i. Bulgarian cheese
    - ii. Rakia
- 2. Clothes
  - a. National Bulgarian costumes "Nosiiya"
- 3. Daily use/ decoration products

## **Languages**

- 1. Bulgarian

- a. courses
- b. books
- c. native movies
  - i. "Time of parting"

## **Public networking**

Our platform plans on having a donation page where people can donate for the development of the project (this means facilitating interviews and on-spot communication with the producers to help them create a video course, photos and in general join our website). Not only that, we plan on having a feature where a client could donate to a specific producer or shop. Those donations will be individual, and their use is a personal decision of the owner of the said shop.

## **Partners**

Shipping service, NGOs, National institutions, Private enterprises with specific needs and requests.

**Our strategy for finding potential partners:** By organizing events together and collaborating in projects concerning the intangible culture and its preservation. Also, trying to make agreements with enterprises for bigger purchases and thus promoting the work of our producers. For the online courses we will try to collaborate with different educational programs and institutions that could benefit from our platform as well as researchers in the field.

We would like to keep good relations with our partners by celebrating successes with them, sending them development charts and also complimentary products of those we sell, keep them informed of our important decisions and also

mention them for their help and collaboration at events, social media, articles, etc.

We need the support of the EU and national institutions in Bulgaria in the best -case scenario. Also, both financial and social help from NGOs connected with I CH. Not at last, collaborating enterprises that would like to form agreements with us.

### **Digital resources**

Our business model is based on a digital platform; therefore we rely on digital marketing, website creation and management, online customer service and information sharing. Our team will also communicate partially online. We will have to use Zoom and other applications for online business calls with audio and video, also via email. We will share accomplishments and progress. We will make weekly reports.

We will need computers to operate the website and design it. In the future, we see potential for the integration of AI automation for data analysis, to make predictions for customer desires and needs based on previous data. and/or reply to common questions of customers, etc. Since we are e-commerce, we plan on having the following marketing strategy using digital resources:

One of our main ways to acquire customers will be through email subscription notifying them of new items or products in their field of interest and/or upcoming events. We will have a keyword strategy around culture, traditions, and other more specific to the products. We will develop social media and google advertisements. As well as retargeting (segment your audience and deliver unique content based on actions they have taken with your brand).

## **Sustainability and Environmental Policies**

Our business model is environmentally friendly and sustainable because the resources we use are digital and for the shipment of products we will opt for a non-contaminating methods of transportation as much as possible. We do not use natural resources. We work with digital assets that facilitate us to avoid irreplaceable resources. We will take actions for lower electricity usage within our team - have a policy for less usage in the physical office in Sofia, Bulgaria, but also promote to our online team methods to reduce energy usage.

## **Finance**

We are going to put an accent on the cultural value of the products of the shops on our website. This way we will attract more clients with both curiosity and appreciation for what they are purchasing. Another tactic we will use is sending email with recommendations based on previous purchases and also interesting articles that are linked with the history of a specific product. We are going to search for as much publicity as possible either through social media, collaborations, events, etc.

1. Subscription of the shops that are registered on our website.
2. Donations from customers
3. Collaborations with other enterprises and/or institutions.
4. Creation of advertisements:
  - a. on the platform for the shops that pay for this service,
  - b. promotion on the social media, billboard, radio, etc.
5. Service:

- a. shop development - Private sessions which purpose is to help shops to enhance their photos, description, overall marketing, strategy, etc.
- b. supply chain provision

## **Our business development now**

We created a name ("The ICH Agora") and developed the idea of our platform. We set up our values and core goals. We have a clear idea of the main process and a few sketches for the design and logo. We have yet to create a prototype platform for the website and a clear business structure (employees and resources needed). We need to establish our circular model in detail in order to be as sustainable as possible. We also need to inform ourselves of the EU laws (which we started doing) but it will take time to adjust everything according to them. The platform will start gathering the first shop owner registrations from Bulgaria.

We can commit to this platform because we see the need for cultural education and an everlasting interest in traditions. Considering the job market right now, it is always a better option to own your business since you have more freedom. However, even if this platform does not work the experience gained will help us find more job opportunities. That is why we do not feel it is a risk committing to our project.

## **Success Targets**

The services we provide are of interest to both customers and vendors. Our goals are measurable because we have a clear plan for execution, starting with the creation of the business model and then the development of the platform. They are also reachable with a good marketing strategy and cooperation with other organizations that want to support our business. We believe our platforms will be successful and is a reachable goal since it is of the utmost importance to conserve ICH products. Therefore, we will have the assistance of locals and professionals to achieve our goal.

At the beginning, we will measure our success through the number of organizations that want to take part in our project and the number of shops willing to register at our platform. After the launch, by the number of customers and by the results of the marketing. Other signs of success would be positive reviews, social attention and overall usage of the platform. It is very important to us that the businesses of ICH also grow and flourish.

We will know our project is in the right direction if our clients understand our goals and ideas, but also if they navigate easily through the website and find it interesting. We will get feedback from a focus group and analyse the results in order to get the best possible outcome.

A few milestones to measure our success:

**First month:** 2 000 clicks, 700 unique visitors, 100 purchases, 30 shops registered

**First six months:** 20 000 clicks, 4 000 unique visitors, 1 000 purchases, 100 shops registered

**First year:** 70 000 clicks, 10 000 unique visitors, 3 000 purchases, 200 shops registered

## Future development and Milestones

Visit and interview the producers in person to promote them and their products. With this process, set up a networking of producers. Collaborate with partners (National institutions, NGOs, European agencies, enterprises, shipping service company/ies) to make this platform better-known. And contact with certain companies focus on selling cultural products for a stable bargaining.

- Start a prototype of the website
- Set up a database of ICH in Bulgaria, as well as networking of producers
- Register legally in Bulgaria
- Create social media and make initial steps towards more publicity
- Gather the final team participants
- Complete a more finished website
- Media and advertisement development
- Contact organizations and possible sponsors with a proposal for commercial and social collaboration
- Start developing with specific contracts and goals
- Test and perfectioning
- Develop in the national level
- Develop in the European level (or more)

To reach these milestones, we will pursue:

- Set up website following the business model
- Gather information about ICH in Bulgaria and contact, interview and negotiate with the producers
- Hire a lawyer for legal affairs

- Create accounts on social media and implement the communication plan including the content, visual products, advertisement
- Contact with the organizations which are interested in this topic, culture sector of EU to sponsor
- Collect and analyse statistics to observe the trend of market and give an adjustment

We will increase the number of our team in order to grow the business and be able to handle all necessary administrative and analytical needs for our company to flourish and become more and more accessible. Collect data all throughout the year and organize focus groups, hand out surveys and try to gather public opinion in order to see the weak spots we might want to work on. Try to best facilitate the process for both the buyers and the producers.

## **Obstacles**

**Micro** - language barriers both between staff and producers with the platform, following EU laws strictly (documentation and legislation).

**Macro** - finding the right partners that have more authority and impact on society; also finding institution willing to help and cooperate with our organization; a potential problem is the lack of interest for our platform, for intangible cultural heritage, and not enough people being familiar with our project, online security, making sure the quality both of the content and the technical side of the website is exceptional, so we have more chances against competitors.

### **Strategies to overcome obstacles:**

Engage in projects and events that promote knowledge and awareness for the value of intangible culture. Moreover, change the marketing strategy of our so

cial media advertisement to have better results. Try to find other partners willing to help the platform and its goals. We will rethink our marketing strategies in order to get in touch with more people. We do not have competitors in this field, except small enterprises that would benefit from our platform. Our real competitors will be websites like Amazon, eBay, AliExpress.

Try to reach more people through collaborating organizations, NGOs and institutions. We will seek as much publicity as possible by changing after an analysis our marketing methods. We hope those actions would facilitate both money difficulties and lack of attention.

What inspires us is the contribution of our enterprise towards small local shops that preserve ICH. The moral and social value of our work is the greatest motivator. Also, seeing results and actual evidence of our help and success and having positive feedback from all included parties (collaborators, shops, customers, employees)

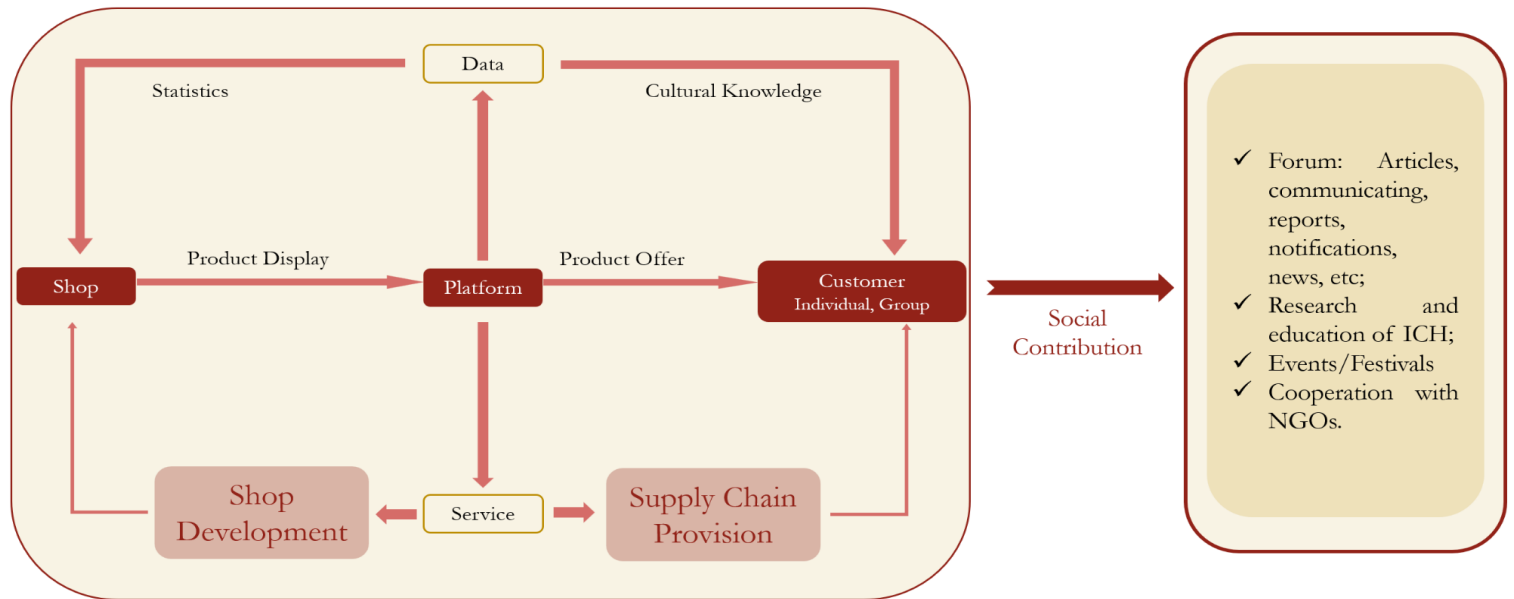
## **Alternatives**

Other alternatives might be creating a intranational physical shop for products connected only with the ICH of the specific country (so a transition from e-commerce to physical shop). However, it is not our preference to do so, so we can best achieve our goals.

The proof that our business model works would be the number of shops registered, customers, clicks on the platform and unique visitors. The numbers estimated are yet to be determined based on mathematical estimation equations.

If things do not work out at all, we may need to let go of the idea of e-commerce and transform into an NGO or become a physical shop in a chosen country . If we become a physical shop, we will make agreements with local shops in Bulgaria to send their products to Sofia, where we will send them to the intra-market. If we become an NGO, we will keep the forum part of our website and work on articles and education on ICH while also organizing events and collaborating with researchers.

## Model of the platform





### ITEMIZED FINANCIAL PLAN - THE ICH AGORA

|                         | Date Activity<br>Month / Year | Activity type                                | Estimated<br>Cost | Expense Category*          | Purpose                                                                                          |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| EX                      | January 2025                  | (EX. Purchasing Market Research)             | 150.00 €          | Materials and Supplies     | Gather data on direct competitors to develop a marketing strategy that targets segments X, Y, Z. |
| 1                       | 2025 One-time invest          | 7 Custom computers                           | 7,000.00 €        | Supplies and Communication | Facilitating management and communication                                                        |
| 2                       | 2025 One-time invest          | 7 Ikea office chairs                         | 1,000.00 €        | Supplies                   | Good work conditions                                                                             |
| 3                       | 2025 One-time invest          | 7 Desks                                      | 500.00 €          | Supplies                   | Good work conditions                                                                             |
| 4                       | 2025 One-time invest          | Decorations - plants, paintings, books       | 150.00 €          | Supplies                   | Good work conditions                                                                             |
| 5                       | 2025 One-time invest          | Enetrprise registration capital              | 1.00 €            | Tax                        | Obligatory                                                                                       |
| January                 | 2025 One-time invest          | Photography equipment - cameras, lights, etc | 3,000.00 €        | Materials and Supplies     |                                                                                                  |
| 6                       | January 2025                  | Office rent                                  | 400.00 €          | Supplies                   | A space to work                                                                                  |
| 7                       | January 2025                  | Electricity                                  | 120.00 €          | Supplies                   | Facilitating work task                                                                           |
| 8                       | January 2025                  | Office phones                                | 50.00 €           | Supplies                   | Facilitating communication                                                                       |
| 9                       | January 2025                  | Water                                        | 48.00 €           | Supplies                   | Health and sanitation                                                                            |
| 10                      | January 2025                  | Website domain                               | 20.00 €           | Communication              |                                                                                                  |
| 11                      | January 2025                  | Advertisements                               | 50.00 €           | Communication              |                                                                                                  |
| Total Amount Requested: |                               |                                              | 12 339            |                            |                                                                                                  |