MAY 2025

REINVENTING OURSELVES IN A CHANGING WORLD

A Project for UNIMA

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We have known each other for more than twenty years now. Our acquaintance began during a distant edition of the Festival of Charleville-Mézières and deepened over the many—and sometimes unexpected—encounters that our profession can offer. Professional esteem, personal respect, and great humanity have always defined our relationship. Until…

Until we learned of each other's willingness to run, if elected to the Executive Committee, for the two most important positions within UNIMA: President and General Secretary.

It was impossible to ignore, and impossible to ignore each other. After a friendly first discussion, we began to meet regularly and to share our reflections on the current state of the association, as well as our ideas and visions for its possible future. This journey has continued for months now, meeting after meeting, to our mutual satisfaction.

Today, at a particularly challenging moment for UNIMA—when it seems heavily shrouded in a veil of mistrust—we feel the time has come to step forward and take responsibility by contributing our ideas to revitalize the association and restore confidence and hope in those who still believe in it.

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1.
INTRODUCTION TO OUR PROPOSALS

A community never exists in and on itself, nor forever, because by nature it is a changing, constantly evolving organism. Accepting change—and the risks it entails—is a physiological condition that cannot be ignored. But to respond to this condition, a community must constantly observe, listen to, analyze, and question itself. Its existence therefore depends on its willingness and ability to reflect on itself: on what it "is" and what it "wants to become."

This has always been the case for UNIMA as well. Since its founding in 1929, there have been many significant moments of change, such as in 1957, 1969/72, and 1992. These were times when the association, in response to historically significant events, felt the need to renew itself in order to better address future challenges. Today again, in a world of ongoing and rapid transformation, the association is alive with energy and many signs indicate a sincere desire for renewal. But for these signals not to be lost, they must be translated into legislative frameworks and serve to adapt our Constitution—the Statutes.

It should not be forgotten that more than thirty years have passed since the last major revision of the Statutes, and since then the world has undergone enormous cultural and social transformations: from climate emergency to social inequalities, from health crisis to migration, from globalization to glocalization, from the impact of major technologies to threats against democracy. It is therefore not surprising if today the overall structure of the Statutes—an expression of a system of international relations that has profoundly changed—appears partly inadequate. The repeated use of motions, congress after congress, shows how deeply this issue is felt within our association.

But this process of making small amendments rather than undertaking large structural changes has gradually weakened our Constitution. It has made it complex and inconsistent due to its many bodies, and heavy due to the myriad specifications it now contains. It has led to contradictions, errors, and inconsistencies that are plain for all to see and must be eliminated once and for all. For this reason, we can no longer proceed with continuous adjustments, but a courageous act of rewriting is necessary—one that adapts our Statutes, as well as the Rules of Procedure, to the current needs of the association and restores the coherence and vision essential to face the future with confidence and meet the many challenges ahead.

This rewriting must be carried out by the entire UNIMA community, using the participatory and representative tools at its disposal, and must be done in the spirit of its historic mission and the democratic and freedom-based principles on which it has always been founded. From these premises, a rewriting becomes an excellent opportunity to begin a journey toward building the kind of community we want to be and how we want it to live, organize itself, and structure itself in the years to come.

With this awareness, we must not fear change but embrace it as part of the long and important history to which we belong and of which we are justifiably proud.

In 2029, UNIMA will celebrate its 100th anniversary, and for years now, there has been talk about how to commemorate this incredible milestone. We believe the best way to celebrate—besides organizing the Centennial Congress in Prague—is to arrive at this event with an association that is young, fresh, and dynamic. Our candidacies for President and General Secretary are based on this idea of renewal. A four-year founding project to reach the 2029 milestone with this goal achieved. It would be a tremendous tribute to the people who founded it—but above all, a major success for us all.

1.1.
A COMMUNITY NETWORK IN SERVICE OF ALL

If we were to represent UNIMA's current operating system, it would be easy to use the analogy of the solar system. UNIMA is the sun, and the national centers are planets of various sizes orbiting it at different distances. But today, after the economic, social, and health crises of the past twenty years, this system is in crisis because new forces—not just gravitational—are reshaping it. More and more national centers are connecting directly with one another, and more aggregations are emerging, resulting in the association's actions, especially at the international level, relying increasingly on them. The traditional, exclusive centripetal relationship with UNIMA is being replaced by a horizontal movement among centers.

It is therefore necessary to reflect this movement in a new operational system for UNIMA. We must begin to see ourselves as an interconnected system of communities spread across the world (some would call it a network), and not as a simple sum of national entities held together by the gravitational pull of a global entity. We must begin to understand ourselves as a complex organism that lives thanks to the richness of the relationships it creates among all its components—where each part contributes to the life of the whole, and the whole ensures the survival of each part.

A UNIMA understood as a globally interconnected system of communities working together for the cultural and social promotion of puppet theatre must necessarily focus on the national centers, as they are what ground the association globally.
They are the ones with strong ties to their regions and who, through their direct action, participate in the concrete transformation of reality. It is therefore from them that we must rebuild UNIMA—not as an association of individuals, but of communities. Only strong, well-structured national centers, firmly rooted in their countries, can make UNIMA's global action more effective and impactful. For it is precisely in the national-international (glocal) relationship that the most dynamic and interesting transformations occur.

In this perspective, UNIMA must imagine itself as open and inclusive, able to welcome other realities as well. It should be a network of communities associated with one another according to their specific characteristics and nature.

We could therefore envision:

- A first group of communities composed of full members, namely the National Centers, the essential backbone of the association.
- A second group composed of associate members—organizations or transnational networks sharing the same statutory objectives (e.g., AVIAMA, OAM – African Puppet Organization, etc.).
- A third group composed of affiliate members—national centers that are not yet fully structured or are in the process of structuring, or that do not meet the "criteria of the first two groups" (to be defined further).

The coordination of UNIMA's actions is entrusted to the International Executive Committee, whose mission is to:

- Contribute to the growth, stabilization, and rooting of communities around the world and ensure transparency in behavior;
- Promote cooperation and synergies between and with communities to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the association's international scope;
- Support transnational projects and encourage the creation of aggregations between communities to act more strongly within macro-regions.
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The international executive bodies are also tasked with:

- Developing their own international projects when necessary to stimulate and coordinate the work of communities;
- Identifying cultural, social, and political issues and themes to be addressed at the international level;
- Participating, as currently stated in point 8 of the Statutes' Objectives, "in the work of international organizations with similar goals";
- Carrying out lobbying and advocacy using information and promotional tools, media campaigns, and actions that mobilize public opinion.

This shift in the operating system should not only support the internal processes that are already naturally underway but also respond to what is emerging as the new geopolitical scenario.
UNIMA must reposition itself as a global association in light of this newly configured world structure, which has changed even in recent years. Because—and this is now an undeniable fact—the world no longer has "centers" but rather regions with different histories and social and economic characteristics, constantly transforming in dynamic ways.

1.2.
NATIONAL CENTERS AS FULL MEMBERS

Establishing National Centers as "full members" of the association and as the pillars of its actions significantly changes the architecture of the Statutes and corrects a major anomaly that still exists.

In fact, global associations like ours either have members drawn from the professional sphere and no national centers, or they have national centers, and in that case, it is the centers themselves that are the members—not the individual members that compose them. Non-governmental organizations such as the ITI (International Theatre Institute), OMEP (World Organization for Early Childhood Education), or ASSITEJ International (International Association of Theatre and Performing Arts for Children and Young People) have national centers as full members, and their entire statutory architecture is built around them.

There are international organizations that do not have national centers and instead connect individual entities directly around the world. For example, IETM (International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts), which has over 500 members from 60 countries, or EFA (European Festival Association), which now includes 100 members from 41 countries. However, in those cases, the members are networks, institutions, foundations, festivals, major theatres, and other highly structured entities, with significant budgets, that belong exclusively to the professional sphere. For the field of puppetry, and particularly for an association with UNIMA's mission, it is difficult to imagine an organization structured in this way. It is also difficult to understand the current model which, although it includes national centers, still considers the individual members of those centers as its full members.

Perhaps in a time when UNIMA was not yet a global association, as was the case in the post-war years, this was not considered an anomaly. But it is certainly odd that as the association has progressively expanded and more and more national centers have been established, this approach was never reexamined or corrected. Yet the fabric of puppet theatre (even in countries where it is more developed) is extremely diverse and fragmented. It often consists of small and medium-sized entities that operate between amateur and professional levels and are, on their own, unable to mobilize significant resources. This is why we have referred to UNIMA as an association of individuals—because it is often individuals who contribute to its work and development, not structured entities.

This is why we firmly believe in the importance of a new role for national centers in reviving UNIMA. UNIMA is made up of its national centers, and if we wish to strengthen it, we must ensure that it can rely more substantially on its members' contributions. These contributions should not be understood solely in economic terms but rather in terms of planning and action.

The more capable the association's members are of implementing meaningful projects at both national and transnational levels, the more UNIMA's actions will be multifaceted and impactful in the contexts where it operates. National centers must be recognized for the essential role they play.
But for a UNIMA built around national centers to truly take shape, it is essential that its democratic rules—establishing equal rights and responsibilities for all—are applied in a fair yet rigorous manner.

We are aware that an association composed of national centers reflecting diverse values, cultures, ways of life, and socio-economic and political systems faces a wide variety of circumstances and must demonstrate a listening attitude and understanding. However, while it is necessary to ensure plurality and respect for each of the centers that form our broad community, it is equally important to establish shared rules upon which UNIMA can base a serious and consistent system of oversight.

This is why, in parallel with rewriting the Statutes, we propose conducting a health check of all national centers. The goal is to obtain the most accurate picture possible of the association's actual state and its membership. This verification should be carried out both by reviewing founding documents and through online meetings. Thanks to this careful analysis, it will be possible to identify critical situations that require support in problem-solving. Moreover, the centers will be better prepared for a renewed role within the association.

1.3.
RELATIONS BETWEEN NATIONAL CENTERS AND UNIMA

Although UNIMA is apolitical, it has never been detached from historical changes or indifferent to their consequences. The events culminating in the Prague Spring had repercussions that became evident during the 1969 and 1972 Congresses. The fall of the Berlin Wall led to the last major revision of the Statutes at the Ljubljana Congress in 1992. In that case, the dissolution of the bipolar world order that had governed international relations since the post-war period also confronted UNIMA with the issue of real democratic representation of all its member countries. Electing the Executive Committee solely through individual members physically present at the Congress benefited only the wealthiest countries and was thus deemed outdated and no longer acceptable.

Credit goes to the Statutes Commission of the time—composed of Sirppa Sivori Asp, Cesare Felici, Michael Meschke, and Hubert Roman (president)—for proposing a motion, later approved, that introduced the role of international councilors. These individuals, democratically elected by national centers in proportion to the number of their members, were tasked with attending the Congress and voting for the election of the Executive Committee and Commissions. These councilors, along with ten additional councilors elected during the Congress, formed the Council.

In this way, all national centers could potentially be represented through their delegations. Starting with the 1996 Congress in Budapest, this model—still in effect today—became the framework for managing the relationship between National Centers and UNIMA.

Thirty years after the adoption of this system of representation and voting, and while we continue to support the principles that inspired it, can it still be considered an effective solution that upholds those very principles? The answer, of course, depends on how we conceive of UNIMA.
In a UNIMA of national centers—as we envision it—structured as an interconnected system of communities across the globe, this system now appears insufficient and, in many ways, outdated. It does not ensure true and complete representation of national centers at the international level, and the cost of exercising democracy remains skewed in favor of wealthy countries.

It must be acknowledged that the introduction of the international councilor's role helped streamline relations between UNIMA and national centers. But it must also be acknowledged that it created a more complex intermediary decision-making space—the Council – which has not always fostered those relations. Perhaps this is because national centers, having entrusted international councilors with the role of ambassadors to UNIMA, felt relieved of their responsibility to directly carry out international policy. Or perhaps it is because international councilors, although elected by their national centers, often fulfilled this role autonomously—and at times in a self-referential way—without truly acting as representatives.

This is why we believe it is important that centers be directly represented at Congresses by delegates identified and chosen from within their own leadership bodies, not by other individuals elected solely for that purpose. While the difference may seem minor from a formal standpoint, it has a major impact in substance. National centers do not need a diplomatic corps to act as intermediaries; they must engage directly with the international governing bodies in place at the time. Only in this way can their needs and demands be fully represented.

The votes allocated to a center may also be exercised by a single delegate designated by the center itself at the Congress. If, as is currently the case, the votes belong to the center and not to individuals, then requiring a matching number of people to exercise those votes is a flawed premise. There is a difference between a center's delegation attending the Congress—which may include any number of participants—and the specific individual or individuals empowered to vote. Requiring, for example, four councilors to cast four votes (and whether vote allocations should be tied to membership numbers is another question) is also problematic from a cost perspective.

In fact, the current paradox is that the dues paid by some centers are less than the cost required to exercise the votes those dues are supposed to entitle them to.

Voting—the highest expression of democracy—should not be dependent on the economic means of a person or the center they represent. By paying their dues, all national centers must be guaranteed their right to vote. Thanks to now widely available digital voting platforms, this issue is easily resolved and unrelated to physical attendance at Congress.

We must begin to think of UNIMA as an increasingly sustainable association—and in doing so, we will also make it more democratic.

1.4.
UNIMA IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE: CONTINENTAL COMMISSIONS

The founders of UNIMA, with remarkable foresight, had already envisioned the world as the global village it has since become. This is precisely why they created a global association in which everyone could recognize themselves and take part. But their vision was likely fueled by a dream: that building a global village would coincide with lasting peace among peoples and the resolution of conflicts. Unfortunately, this has not been the case, and the world continues to be marked by deep divisions, injustices, and inequalities. In fact, being a global association today is even more complex than it was during the very difficult decades of the second half of the 20th century.

This is why UNIMA must equip itself with a new structure and new operational tools to continue being what it has always aimed to be: a place where the world's many peoples engage in dialogue and collaborate on equal footing. Tools are needed to ensure that all territories—understood as geographical, linguistic, and cultural areas—have a voice and can influence the life of the association. Until now, this task has been carried out by continental commissions, but their role, scope of action, and degree of representation have never been clearly defined. Perhaps this is why, in many cases, they have struggled to fulfill their mandates. Moreover, when they did operate, they often undertook activities that overlapped with those of thematic commissions, without ever clearly establishing a distinct mission.

Geographic commissions were introduced in the mid-1980s (at the 1984 Dresden Congress), as a natural evolution of the first Third World Commission (1973), proposed by Michael Meschke, within a context of bipolar global relations still shaped by the decline of colonialism. At that time, many non-European countries were already part of UNIMA, but Europe (balanced delicately between East and West) held an unquestionably central role. In that context, geographic commissions represented a move toward a post-colonial worldview and a powerful reaffirmation of UNIMA's internationalist mission. Today, the global situation has completely changed, and UNIMA is a truly global association where internal balances are increasingly defined by actual forces at play rather than by its original Eurocentric history.

Hence the need to rethink the role of geographic commissions so that they are more deeply rooted in and better aligned with their respective cultural and social contexts. These commissions must become much more effective tools for identifying regional specificities and issues, promoting and encouraging the creation of initiatives and collaborations among national centers at the macro-regional level, and supporting both transnational and transcontinental projects. For this reason, they must be granted a special status—distinct from other commissions—that gives them a clear geographic and political mandate and allows them to play a true role in representing regional bodies.

Our proposal is that the geographic commissions be transformed into Regional Councils**,** composed of one delegate from each national center (president, national secretary, or a member of the executive committee) within the respective macro-zones—rather than individual members selected by commission presidents, as is currently the case.
These councils would be coordinated by a member of the Executive Committee*, along with a group of delegates selected from within the Council. In this way, they would function as regional parliaments, primarily tasked with acting as antennas—listening and facilitating dialogue about what is happening across their territories. Their role would be to connect national centers to develop cultural and social policies related to professional practices in homogeneous regions, to foster cooperation and synergy, and to promote and disseminate the most innovative experiences and practices.

Despite the significant role that such Regional Councils could play, they should not, in every respect, be considered formal governing bodies of the association. There are two main reasons for this. First, they must remain flexible and adaptable to the needs of various regional contexts and the evolving macro-planetary transformations. Their composition should be able to evolve and not remain bound to rigid or outdated geographic definitions. The second, and most important, reason is that they should in no way imply a move toward a "federal" vision of UNIMA. These councils should not divide the association into multiple regional sub-associations, nor should they compromise its international unity. On the contrary, they should promote unity by ensuring broader and more equitable representation of all territories. Now more than ever, it is crucial that we remain united.

** It could be imagined that the presidents of these Regional Councils would also serve as Vice Presidents of UNIMA.*

1.5.
WHAT TOOLS SHOULD WE USE?

Until now, commissions have been the primary tool UNIMA has used to carry out its projects. Commissions have existed in some form throughout UNIMA's history, but beginning in the 1970s (e.g., the Third World Commission, founded in 1973, or the Professional Training Commission, founded in 1976), they began to take on increasing importance.

Since then, their number and function have grown to the point that today they are considered indispensable—almost as if they were formal bodies of the association. However, their gradual institutionalization, and the fact that they have been activated to develop and execute all types of activities and projects, has over time revealed critical issues and dysfunctions that can no longer be ignored.

This institutionalization led to the election, at each Congress, of a president for each commission and the creation of one commission for each member of the Executive Committee. The president also has near-total control over the commission they lead: the power to choose members, define the program to be carried out, and set deadlines.
The result is that commissions operate as independent and autonomous bodies, each developing projects that are only shared at councils or congresses. More seriously, the association's four-year plan is no longer developed collectively by the Executive Committee and implemented by the commissions; rather, it often results from the sum of the individual intentions of the various presidents.

Because they were all created using the same structure and method (the only variable being the president and members), regardless of the type of project, some commissions have proved perfectly suited to their task—while others have turned out to be completely ill-suited. Excluding the continental commissions already discussed, the current commissions can be divided into three groups:

- Those focused on the operation of the association (Statutes, Communication),
- Those focused on themes (Professional Training, International Festivals, Education and Therapy, Heritage, Publications, Research), and
- Those of a more political nature (Cooperation, Humanitas, Youth).

Given the different "functions" of these commissions, can we still be sure that they are, as currently designed, the most suitable instruments for achieving the objectives set? Perhaps in some cases, tools that do not depend on a Congress vote would be more appropriate, allowing the Executive Committee greater flexibility in shaping them to fit its four-year vision. Perhaps we need tools designed solely for the Executive Committee, not open to outside participation but engaged in direct dialogue with national centers. Perhaps some commissions could evolve into or be replaced by networks. Perhaps others could become working groups, needing not presidents but coordinators—and not just one, but two or three…

From all these "perhaps," it becomes clear that to meet today's needs and better respond to such diverse demands, commissions must undergo a significant redesign.
It should not be the case that every activity or management aspect of the association must be translated into a commission. This approach has led to an excessive number of commissions, some of which become unmanageable from the moment they are voted in by Congress and remain so throughout the four years they operate.

Of course, some commissions are essential, but beyond these we need more flexible and adaptable tools (working groups, consultative tables) that can be more easily put in service of the association's broader mission.

1.6.
ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

When we speak of economic sustainability, it is helpful to begin with a premise that is not necessarily self-evident today. In its search for the resources necessary for its survival, UNIMA must remain consistent with its nature as an NGO (a private but non-profit organization, independent from governments and international agencies) and with its core principles and values of equality, cooperation, and solidarity.
Fundraising models with ambiguous political implications, those that create inequalities and competition, or those that do not provide for forms of equitable use and/or redistribution of funds, are in direct conflict with our Statutes. Funding and fundraising strategies that generate disparities among members based on their financial means must be rejected. UNIMA must always and in every circumstance remain a free association, independent from any political or market-driven logic.

But what is UNIMA's current financial and economic situation? Looking at the most recent financial statements, it is clear that 80% of the organization's budget is funded by contributions from the French government and regional, departmental, or municipal administrations in France. Only about 20% (and growing) comes from member dues and contributions from national centers. This represents an extremely fragile situation, as the association's activities—and its very existence—depend heavily on the goodwill of French authorities, and thus on political decisions external to the association itself. If we want UNIMA to become autonomous and capable of securing its future, economic independence is a vital issue.

So how can we ensure UNIMA's survival in the near future? To answer that, we must first ask another question: Are we looking for answers based on the association's current statutory framework, or based on what it could become after a redefinition of its constitutional structure? The answer will certainly differ depending on the perspective. We believe that in keeping with everything we have proposed so far, we must search for solutions grounded in our vision—since it centers on redefining the role of national centers, it opens new possibilities to address the issue.

We are not suggesting that designating national centers as full members of the association will magically solve all of UNIMA's sustainability issues. Far from it. But it would mark a true paradigm shift that would fundamentally change the way we conceive of the budget. If UNIMA is indeed the sum of its members and not an entity in itself, then its budget must primarily serve a fundamental need: to support the international coordination work carried out by the Executive bodies.

To achieve economic independence, it would therefore be enough for membership dues to cover the association's institutional and operating expenses. In this way, even if all other current funding were to disappear, the association's survival would still be ensured.

This minimum objective is not impossible to achieve. With national centers as members, and other associate members, the existing model of calculating dues based on the number of individual members may no longer be appropriate. A new model should be considered. Perhaps, as other associations have attempted, we could introduce a model where each member's contribution is calculated as a percentage of their total budget—taking into account both their membership dues and any public or private funding they receive. This would not necessarily increase costs—compared to other associations, current UNIMA dues are not low—but rather offer a new, fair and equitable model that would ensure the association's core functioning. To achieve this, stricter rules on dues payment deadlines would also be necessary.

But if UNIMA's budget only covers the international coordination work of its Executive bodies, what resources remain for carrying out projects? Clearly, the above-described scenario represents a minimum condition for survival. With greater financial resources, UNIMA can undertake international projects guided by principles of resource redistribution and solidarity.
Furthermore, this paradigm shift opens the door to a new model in which national centers take the lead on transnational projects. The Executive's main role would then be to help national centers build capacity, encourage them to develop their own initiatives, and support them in fundraising at the regional level.

Indeed, recent years have already shown how fruitful this dynamic can be. Most of UNIMA's transnational activities have been carried out by one or more national centers. The "Puppets Saturday" initiative by UNIMA Norway/Nordic is a perfect example: national funding is used to finance a series of training sessions made accessible to participants worldwide. As tested in other associations (though not always successfully), it may also be possible to use national funding to allow certain individuals to receive support from their own country to work for UNIMA for a specific period and a defined number of hours. We must explore these paths—and we can—if national centers come to understand that the life of the association depends on them, that UNIMA is them.

What opportunities exist for UNIMA to secure funding for its own international projects in a world where cultural support is no longer the sole domain of national ministries? In this field, nonprofits, foundations, cultural networks, and funding agencies are playing an increasingly central role—and it is toward them that we must turn first. Most obviously, we should consider UNESCO, which could more easily support cooperation and training projects in Africa and Latin America; the EUROPEAN UNION (via Creative Europe programs for networks, cooperation, and more), which could fund projects in Europe with ripple effects in other regions and within the association itself.

It's worth remembering that the EU also finances projects that include non-European countries. Additionally, we must identify INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATIONS that support cultural projects in specific geographical areas and/or on particular themes (such as artist mobility, social inclusion, or professional training). These funds should be sought across all continents. It is essential that they also allow for projects in North America and Asia.

With some countries and their national centers, new projects could emerge, opening the door to new forms of financing for the association. We should not be afraid of the fact that this often happens thanks to the cultural affluence of European countries and Europe as a whole. What should help us overcome cultural prejudices and the fear of Eurocentrism is the assurance that—albeit in different forms—these funds will be redistributed and contribute to the growth of the association as a whole.

1.7.
REWRITING THE STATUTES

From what can be inferred from the available documents—though we may be mistaken—UNIMA's current Statutes appear to be derived from those adopted at the 1957 Prague Congress, which marked the association's restart after the interruption caused by World War II. However, congress after congress and amendment after amendment, the Statutes have been significantly modified over time to adapt to historical changes. At least up until the 1992 Congress, no major reform seems to have been undertaken to redefine their overall structure. Now, after thirty-three years, time has come to initiate a true process of rewriting the Statutes and Rules of Procedure.

To this end, we propose a two-year process that would lead to the 2027 Council with a proposal—already discussed and shared—to be submitted for a vote at an Extraordinary Congress. During these two years (2025–2027), the Statutes Commission would be tasked with drafting, in the most participatory, transparent, and democratic manner possible—and in consultation with all Centers—the new Statutes and Rules of Procedure. In the following two years (2027–2029), a phased implementation would take place so that, by the 2029 Elective Congress, the association will have been fully renewed.

In general terms, the Statutes should be concise yet clear in stating the fundamental principles and defining the internal governing bodies. They should be composed of a small number of essential points and include strict procedures for modification. The Rules of procedure should be more detailed and accessible, serving to elaborate on and implement the Statutes' content in a concrete and procedural manner. As such, the Rules of Procedure, while still governed by clear procedures, should be more easily amendable. In all cases, proposals to amend either the Statutes or the Rules of Procedure should originate from a defined number (to be determined) of national centers, not from individual members.

Another useful—and given recent events, absolutely necessary—tool is a Code of Ethics and Conduct**.** This document should set out mandatory standards of behavior and communication, both within the association and in its external interactions. Signing this code would represent a commitment to the full adoption and application of effective policies against all forms of physical, sexual, verbal, and psychological violence. The Code of Ethics and Conduct should accompany the Rules of Procedures and apply to UNIMA, to all its national centers, and, more broadly, to anyone who is in any way part of the association.

1.8.
PROPOSALS

Below are the key proposed amendments to the Statutes (and consequently to the Rules of Procedure), based on the preceding reflections.
It is evident that the Statutes must be drafted in accordance with the laws and regulations governing associations in the country where UNIMA is registered; this may influence certain details of the wording.

- **Designate national centers as UNIMA members, not their members (an association of communities, not individuals).**
  This amendment alters the structure of the association and corrects a persistent anomaly in our Statutes. Global associations like ours either have professional members and no centers, or they have national centers—which are the official members, not the individuals who belong to them.
- **Redefine the role of the "International Councilor" and reconsider voting powers in favor of the Centers.**
  Centers should be directly represented in assemblies by delegates identified and selected within their own governance structures, rather than by other individuals elected solely for this purpose. While the difference may seem minor from a formal standpoint, the substantive impact of this change is significant.
- **Establish an Annual General Assembly (AGA) that is more dynamic and interactive than the current Congress and Council.**
  The General Assembly, composed of delegates from national centers, should take place online each year. In the fourth year, the AGA would be held both online and in person, within the framework of the Congress, and would include the election of Executive Committee members. The AGA agenda would be proposed by the Executive Committee in accordance with the Statutes and Rules of Procedure.
- **Reintroduce International UNIMA Conferences (Gatherings) as thematic forums for exchange and study.**
  International conferences would not include General Assemblies or institutional voting, but instead serve as opportunities for discussion around key themes relevant to the association. As with Congresses, national centers would apply to host these International Conferences.

- **Introduce direct candidacies for the positions of President, General Secretary (and possibly Treasurer), along with their direct election.**
  To enable association members to make informed choices among candidates for President, General Secretary, and Treasurer, it is important that candidates be allowed to declare their intentions and present their association projects well before the Congress. This would also encourage healthy democratic debate.
- **Replace the current Audit Commission with an Audit and Oversight Committee and introduce direct candidacies for its members.**
  The Audit Committee would become an oversight body tasked with monitoring the association's finances as well as ensuring compliance with the Statutes. As with Executive Committee positions, candidates for this committee should submit their applications prior to the Congress.
- **Replace the current Election Committee with a more agile Electoral Committee, appointed by the Executive Committee four months prior to the Congress.**
  This committee would oversee nominations, voting procedures, and the validation of results. It would operate according to voting rules established in consultation with the Executive Committee before the start of the candidacy period and would be dissolved at the conclusion of the Congress.

***** *For sustainability reasons, it is worth considering reducing the Executive Committee members' mandate to three years (instead of four), and consequently holding the Congress every three years. This would eliminate the need to organize a Council in the interim between two Congresses, resulting in clear cost savings and fewer organizational challenges.*

2.
BEING WHO? REFLECTIONS ON OURSELVES

We began this long series of proposals with a central idea: the existence of a community depends on its willingness and capacity to reflect on itself—on what it *is* and what it *wants to become*.
This ability to redefine itself remains fundamental if we are to envision a future. Although UNIMA's "mission" has always been clear, the way it has been carried out has evolved over time as the contextual conditions around it have changed. That "mission," clearly stated as early as 1929 and reiterated in a very different context in 1957, has been passed down to the present day. But it can no longer avoid confronting a world that has been radically transformed.
So, we ask: Who do we want to be?

2.1.
BEING A COMMUNITY

In the preceding texts, we have consistently referred to UNIMA as a community, a community of communities. This was not a purely terminological choice. We are convinced that the concept of "community" more accurately reflects the associative nature of UNIMA and can help us evolve our understanding of who we are, what we aim to do, and most importantly, why we want to do it *together*.
The world that UNIMA seeks to represent and interpret has expanded and transformed dramatically in recent years—both geographically and culturally. It now appears highly diverse and complex, with boundaries that are even more undefined than those we once assumed. This is a world that, based on the values it identifies with and the needs it expresses—human and artistic, professional and amateur, individual and collective—can no longer relate to the familiar image, long used to describe UNIMA, of a "family."

While the term *family* may have once suited an era when UNIMA represented a puppetry world composed largely of actual (artistic) families, we believe today that the values associated with that term can—and should—be encompassed by a broader and more fitting one: *community*. A word that better describes an open, porous, supportive, pluralistic, and inclusive association—one based on transcending all forms of division, self-sufficiency, and exclusion.
Of course, *community* also brings its own challenges. It is a broad term, and at times carries negative connotations, as it does not refer to a single, clearly defined group or organization but rather, generically, to any group of people who share common origins, ideas, interests, or ways of life.

So then, is there a specific idea of *community* that we can draw inspiration from—one that truly reflects what UNIMA is and should be?

We believe the vision theorized by Adriano Olivetti comes closest to this. He gave the concept political depth by defining it as a social group driven not by economic interest, but by moral purpose—animated by a civic spirit grounded in fraternity and solidarity. For him, the community's role was to reduce conflict, promote cohesion, and contribute to the betterment of everyone's lives.
A community understood in this way is a collective where members share a strong sense of belonging and a desire to participate—where, while respecting differences, people can speak, listen, and think together.
A community understood in this way is a tool to bring new meaning to collective action, to foster new values and practices, and to develop new forms of social relationships that always place the human connection at the center.
A community understood in this way is a cultural laboratory—one that, after developing new paradigms, works to have them embraced by society at large, which alone can translate them into concrete social practices.

This is precisely the dialectical role that a community like UNIMA must play in relation to the societies in which it operates: to propose, to provoke, and to infuse new cultural ideas into the social fabric and its institutions.
There is an urgent need, today, for a non-confrontational space where we can move beyond outdated dichotomies, worn-out formulas, and the many stereotypes that still constrain our field.
There is an urgent need, today, for an unconventional space where we can challenge paradigms long considered unshakable—yet which no longer serve to represent who we are.
There is an urgent need, today, for a space of freedom where we can develop virtuous policies and practices that offer constant stimulation to the social body and its institutions.

There is an urgent need, today, for a space of solidarity like UNIMA.

2.2
BEING A CULTURAL ASSOCIATION

The UNIMA community has always been, by the explicit will of its founders, a cultural association open to all, not only to professional puppeteers. In making this choice, they clearly rejected corporatism and competitive logic. They even emphasized this decision by changing the wording of the acronym—from *International Union of Puppeteers* to *International Union of Puppetry*.

UNIMA must continue to uphold this founding principle, because for an association that aims to be global and inclusive, it is impossible to draw rigid distinctions between who *is* a professional and who is not. Are professional puppeteers in Africa considered the same as those in North America? And in Europe, can the same definition of professionalism be applied across all countries? Even the notion of *amateur* allows for multiple interpretations and is full of nuance. It should not be understood simply as the opposite of professional. But then how should we define it? What does *amateur* really mean?

At the same time, and this should not be denied, in a world dominated by professionalization, this inclusive approach generates many misunderstandings that must be acknowledged and, when necessary, clarified.

The first misunderstanding lies in the fact that in several countries, UNIMA is perceived primarily as an association of amateurs. This undermines its ability to represent the full breadth of the puppetry world, including its professional sector. It is no coincidence that in many countries with a national center, other *professional* associations have emerged that do not consider UNIMA capable of representing them. On this issue, we must engage in both internal and external cultural reflection—while also questioning whether and how our current organizational structure may be contributing to, or maintaining, this perception.

The second misunderstanding stems from the belief that, because our association is cultural rather than union-based, it should not or cannot address social issues. This is also a mistake, especially today, when it is impossible to conceive of cultural policy that is not also social policy, and vice versa. A cultural policy that lacks a social dimension reflects an outdated, elitist, and aristocratic view of culture. A social policy without a cultural component reduces life and labor to mere economic negotiation and commodification. And unsurprisingly, this anachronistic separation feeds back into the first misunderstanding. Let us not forget that even in the current Statutes, under Objective 3, it is written: "*Support its members in securing their democratic interests, union rights, financial and legal matters, and gender non-discrimination in the context of their professional activities, in particular by making recommendations or submitting proposals to relevant authorities.*"

This is why it is important for UNIMA to become a space for new alliances—between amateur and professional (if such a division can even be made in art), and between the cultural and the social. UNIMA, proud of its founding values, must assert—now more than ever—that fostering dialogue between diverse actors and transversal perspectives is, in any domain, a bold political stance. And this broad vision is a strength to advance the profession—not a weakness.

2.2.
BEING AN NGO

At the 1992 Congress in Ljubljana, General Secretary Jacques Félix announced that UNIMA's official recognition as a full member of UNESCO was imminent. Shortly thereafter, the path begun in 1959/60 with UNIMA's affiliation to the ITI came to an end, and today, UNIMA is indeed an NGO affiliated with UNESCO.

The definition of an NGO—a private, non-profit organization independent from states and international governmental bodies—perfectly describes our association from its inception. So do its values. UNIMA is founded on moral rather than economic principles, on collaboration rather than competition. It is driven by a civic spirit rooted in fraternity and solidarity, and by a strong sense of belonging and participation. It is committed to giving new meaning to collective action, promoting new democratic practices, and developing new forms of social relationships centered on human connection. Like all NGOs, UNIMA's dialectical function in relation to society is to propose, provoke, and infuse new ideas into the social fabric and its institutions, to reduce conflict and division and contribute to improving the quality of life for all.

But while we fully embrace the values of NGOs, it is important to clarify that UNIMA's goals and objectives are those of a *cultural association* with a specific statutory mission. By its nature, its areas of action and its tools for intervention, UNIMA is distinct from humanitarian or social organizations. This clarification is not meant to exempt the association from civil or political responsibility—on the contrary.

What we want to assert—strongly—is that cultural action plays an essential role in promoting peace, defending human rights, protecting the environment, ensuring access to education and healthcare, fighting poverty, and more. And it is *through our cultural action*, based on a methodology rooted in equitable and solidarity-driven project development and the identification of clear local and transnational objectives, that we contribute to these causes as an NGO.

We do not have the expertise, human resources, operational tools, or funding necessary to carry out direct social and humanitarian relief efforts. However, through our cultural initiatives, we can foster social cohesion within communities, enabling them to grow, develop, and improve their well-being over time with increasing autonomy. We can teach and support care for people and things, help process traumatic pasts, rethink collective heritage, reimagine our economies and societies, and contribute—through training activities—to job creation. Finally, we can help generate new knowledge, new narratives, and new visions, which are essential to building a better future. These are the extraordinary tools we possess.

Fully aware of this strength—and also of our specific scope—we envision our collaboration within UNESCO along two primary directions:

- At the institutional level: to strengthen training and capacity-building projects for national centers in Africa, and to extend these efforts to other regions and continents. Education and training should be our top priority.
- In relation to other NGOs: to engage with the many organizations active on the international stage in order to explore paths for collaboration on specific projects. To create partnerships that facilitate UNIMA's contributions in areas beyond its immediate field of work.

2.3.
BEING IN DIALOGUE WITH THE GLOBAL NETWORK

UNIMA undoubtedly represents a virtuous space, an ideal community for promoting and developing transnational cultural and social policies. But in order for this large community to receive the recognition, visibility, and credibility it deserves, it must open itself further to the many associations and global networks dedicated to the performing arts. It must be present in the networks and working groups where the future of theatre and all performing arts around the world is being discussed.
Who should represent our field if not us? And who, if not UNIMA, can and must do it?

As early as 1960, UNIMA became a full member of the International Theatre Institute (ITI), which was also founded in Prague. Even at the Nagoya Congress in 1988, this collaboration with ITI was still active, with discussions around strengthening ties for the publication of the World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts.

In 2018, an initiative led by then Secretary General Idoya Otegui and ASSITEJ International President Ivette Hardy launched relations between the two associations, aiming to build joint projects.
In recent years, contact has resumed with ASSITEJ and ITI, and new connections have been initiated with other associations, always with the aim of establishing collaborations.

We must continue along this path and avoid any form of isolation. Keeping our association isolated means forcing the entire puppetry field into isolation—when in fact, we need the opposite: to reach out, open up, and engage with the world of performing arts. Isolation leads to detachment from the field, marginalization, and retreat. Our sector cannot afford that, especially since artistically, we are the exact opposite: we are highly open, porous, and in constant dialogue with all other art forms. UNIMA must make dialogue with other international networks one of its top priorities and seek out partners from various disciplines and sectors. This requires building relationships of trust, communicating more effectively about who we are and what we do, sharing common goals, and promoting partnerships that enable collective action.

Today, this dialogue is easier than before, also because the primary mission of many networks has changed. Whereas they once focused mainly on facilitating creative exchange, co-production, and touring, after the 2008 financial crisis—and even more so following the health crisis—this objective has shifted. Today, many networks no longer operate under competitive, corporate models but under collaborative and cooperative ones, with goals that align closely with those of UNIMA. They work primarily to address the negative economic and social consequences produced by current cultural policies around the world. They advocate for democracy, inclusion, freedom of expression, and cooperation.

We must work within networks to make our sector's voice heard—and to listen to others. It would benefit us greatly.

On the front page: *Amulets* by Claudia Losi