

ICOMOS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS Working Group (SDGWG)



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Transforming Heritage Evidence into Global Action

Welcome to the second issue of the ICOMOS Sustainable Development Goals Working Group (SDGWG) Newsletter.

When we shared our inaugural edition ahead of the May launch of our Regional Webinar Series, our focus was on positioning heritage at the heart of the sustainability agenda. We set out to bridge a critical gap: while cultural heritage is a primary driver and enabler of a sustainable future, it remains underrepresented in the UN 2030 Agenda. We promised to arm our National and Scientific Committees with practical, results-oriented tools to change this narrative.

This second issue marks a major shift from ambition to active execution. The webinars are no longer just a plan; they are a high-momentum reality delivering the strategic insights, regional perspectives, and advocacy tools needed to influence global policy.

The list of highlights:

- **Pioneering Regional Localisation & Multilingual Toolkits:** We celebrate the remarkable success of our ongoing regional webinar series, having now successfully finished the sessions for Africa and Asia-Pacific with a terrifically engaged audience in both regions. These follow our high-level session for the Europe and North America (ENA) Region and the inaugural session in the Arab Region, which aligned regional expertise toward the upcoming MONDIACULT 2027 conference.
- **Expanding Our Linguistic Reach:** To ensure these tools truly serve grassroots practitioners, we have officially launched the Arabic, Spanish, and French translations of the SDGWG toolkits. Furthermore, we have finalised the Chinese and Bengali translations of the document, with the Hindi version well on its way to completion.
- **Operationalising the Evidence, the Power of Synergy:** Dr Andris Kairiss breaks down the dual technical resources introduced during our webinar series: the Mapping Heritage Contributions to the SDGs tool and the Structural Framework for VNRs/VLRs. Together, these open-access tools let practitioners collect raw field data and turn it into a report-ready narrative for UN reviewers, showing that heritage is a measurable driver of sustainable development.
- **Confronting the AI Dilemma:** In a timely and critical reflection, Dr Linda Shetabi challenges the heritage community to evaluate advanced technologies in light of their hidden environmental and social footprints. Highlighting recent 2026 data on the massive carbon, water, and land costs of Artificial Intelligence, this piece reminds us that ethical heritage guidelines must start with the SDGs themselves, ensuring that technological adoption does not undermine environmental justice or local community authority.
- **Speaking the Language of Global Urban Policy:** We explore how framing heritage through external frameworks can open new doors. Donovan Rypkema demonstrates how empirical data from historic neighbourhoods inherently satisfy UN-Habitat's Five Principles for Sustainable Neighbourhood Planning, while Prof. Khalid Harrouni reports back from the World Urban Forum (WUF13) in Baku on delivering practical training for climate-resilient, bioclimatic, and affordable housing solutions.

- **Grassroots Continuity & Crowdsourcing Heritage:** Turning to a practical example of circularity, we look at the rehabilitation of the historic Nolla mosaic in Spain. Architects Angela López Sabater and Xavier Laumain share the success of the NollaMap project, a participatory digital tool that connects tangible material traditions with global exchange networks and local identity.

Heritage Under Fire: A Grim Reality for the SDGs

As we celebrate these milestones, we cannot ignore the dire situation of the SDGs in regions where conflicts are still actively lit. The destruction of cultural heritage is a direct, devastating result of violence, threatening both the identity and the sustainable recovery of local communities. Many precious sites in Europe and the Middle East continue to face immediate danger or irreparable loss. In these contexts, protecting heritage is not a secondary concern; it is a vital necessity for peacebuilding, community resilience, and human rights, highlighting the critical urgency of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) alongside our cultural targets.

Shape the Future: A Call to Immediate Action

As outlined in our recent May 2026 Bi-Monthly Meeting, the SDGWG is fully committed to driving the Culture Goal 2030 Campaign. The ultimate roadmap discussed in our first issue remains our north star: mobilising our global network to secure a dedicated, standalone Culture goal in the post-2030 Agenda.

However, this global strategic ambition relies entirely on local action and data. The participation data and field insights gathered through our completed webinars are vital for ICOMOS's institutional reporting on sustainability impact for 2026.

We urge all National Committees (NatComs), Scientific Committees, and individual members to download these newly translated multilingual tools, designate local SDG contact points, and actively engage with national ministries to insert dedicated cultural heritage subchapters into upcoming UN Voluntary National Review (VNR) cycles.

To sustain this momentum, we need your voice and expertise. Whether you can assist with field-testing the localisation templates, contributing translations, or lending technical insights, please reach out and join this collaborative, voluntary effort. Together, we are ensuring that cultural heritage is no longer a footnote in the sustainability debate, but a foundational pillar of a livable planet. Enjoy the read, and let's keep driving the debate forward!

The ICOMOS SDGWG Editorial Team

Explore the tools and get involved at icomosdggw.com/mapping-heritage/



Prepared by:
Dr Naima Benkari
ICOMOS SDGWG Focal Point

Mainstreaming Heritage in Global Policy: Key Takeaways from the 2nd SDGWG Bi-Monthly Meeting

By Dr Naima Benkari,

Focal point of the ICOMOS Sustainable Development Goals Working Group (SDGWG)

The ICOMOS SDGWG met on May 9, 2026, to advance a critical mission: turning technical heritage tools into global action and positioning cultural heritage at the heart of international development policy.

Here are the top headlines for the heritage community:

- **The Campaign for a Standalone "Culture Goal":** The group is driving the Culture Goal 2030 Campaign to secure a dedicated Culture SDG in post-2030 frameworks. Efforts are underway to integrate a "culture chapter" into national SDG reporting (VNRs/VLRs), backed by high-level advocacy leading up to MONDIACULT 2027.
- **New SDG Localisation Tools Approved:** The SDGWG officially approved the SDGs Mapping Template and Structural Framework. Designed to link local heritage initiatives with concrete SDG metrics, the tools have been piloted in Spain, Ireland, and Latvia, and are being translated into Arabic, French, and Spanish for global use.
- **Securing a Seat at Global Forums:** Cultural heritage solutions are being strategically embedded into major upcoming global platforms, including ICOMOS GA2026 (keynote planning for Session 11), WUF13 in Baku (focusing on bioclimatic, climate-resilient housing), and COP31 in Antalya (bridging SDG 13 with cultural preservation).

Shape the Future: Get Involved!

To sustain this momentum, the SDGWG urgently needs your expertise. If you can help with field-testing the new localisation templates, language translations, or communications, please reach out to Dr Naima Benkari or Task Team Coordinator Dr Farnaz Faraji.



Exploring Heritage Conservation with UN-Habitat's Five Principles

For more than a decade, the ICOMOS SDGWG has been working effectively to make the case that heritage conservation should be a central component of comprehensive sustainable development efforts. While progress continues to be made in that regard, the Heritage Conservation = Sustainable Development equation has not yet reached international consensus. To broaden the understanding and acceptance of heritage conservation's contribution to sustainable development, two approaches may be useful:

- 1) framing the argument in someone else's language, and
- 2) supporting the case with quantitative evidence.

UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

DISCUSSION NOTE 3
URBAN PLANNING

A NEW STRATEGY OF SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING: FIVE PRINCIPLES

UN-Habitat supports countries to develop urban planning methods and systems to address current urbanization challenges such as population growth, urban sprawl, poverty, inequality, pollution, congestion, as well as urban biodiversity, urban mobility and energy.

In recent decades, the landscape of cities has changed significantly because of rapid urban population growth. A major feature of fast growing cities is urban sprawl, which drives the occupation of large areas of land and is usually accompanied by many serious problems including inefficient land use, high car dependency, low density and high segregation of uses. Coupled with land use speculation, current models of city growth result in fragmented and inefficient urban space where urban advantage and city concept are lost.

Cities of the future should build a different type of urban structure and space, where city life thrives and the most common problems of current urbanization are addressed. UN-Habitat proposes an approach that summarizes and refines existing sustainable urban planning theories to help build a new and sustainable relationship between urban dwellers and urban space, and to increase the value of urban land. This approach is based on 5 principles that support the 3 key features of sustainable neighbourhoods and cities: compact, integrated, connected.

THE FIVE PRINCIPLES ARE:

1. **Adequate space for streets and an efficient street network.** The street network should occupy at least 30 per cent of the land and at least 18 km of street length per km².
2. **High density.** At least 15,000 people per km², that is 150 people/ha or 61 people/acre.
3. **Mixed land-use.** At least 40 per cent of floor space should be allocated for economic use in any neighbourhood.
4. **Social mix.** The availability of houses in different price ranges and tenures in any given neighbourhood to accommodate different incomes; 20 to 50 per cent of the residential floor area should be for low cost housing; and each tenure type should be not more than 50 per cent of the total.
5. **Limited land-use specialization.** This is to limit single function blocks or neighbourhoods; single function blocks should cover less than 10 per cent of any neighbourhood.

Here is how we at Heritage Strategies International have recently done that. UN-Habitat has issued a set of principles for Sustainable Neighbourhood Planning. Nowhere in that document is "heritage conservation" or "historic preservation" even mentioned. And yet when we read the principles, which advocate for adequate street networks, high density, mixed land-use, social mix, and limited specialisation, it became clear that what we have found in recent preservation impact studies in the US reflected those principles in historic neighbourhoods.

HIGH DENSITY URBAN GROWTH vs. URBAN SPRAWL



A compact city. Paris, France
© UN-Habitat/Laura Petrella



Urban sprawl. Uberlandia, Brazil
© UN-Habitat/Alessandro Scotti

Exploring Heritage Conservation with UN-Habitat's Five Principles

We had been invited to speak at the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in Tbilisi, Georgia. So, my colleague Katlyn Cotton made her presentation on how findings from our research in US cities demonstrated how historic neighbourhoods met those principles. The purpose was not to suggest that findings from Miami or Philadelphia would be the same as those in cities in the South Caucasus. Rather, it was to offer analytical approaches that might be useful elsewhere.

Contrary to conventional wisdom in the US, historic districts are often both dense and diverse. The densest city in the US is New York, with a population per square mile of 27,372. Yet the density in the city's historic districts is 57,495. In refutation that historic neighbourhoods are home only to rich, white households, in many cases, the population in historic districts mirrors the demographic mix of the city as a whole. Our empirical data from cities like San Diego, Dallas, and Nashville further demonstrates robust job growth and equitable housing cost choices within these zones.

How can this be true even in a city of 21st-century skyscrapers? Older neighbourhoods tend to have smaller lot sizes, smaller housing unit sizes, frequently zero-lot line development, and a wide diversity of housing typologies. With a wider diversity of housing choices, there comes a wider diversity of price points, for both rental and ownership, and, therefore, a wider diversity of people who choose to live in the neighbourhood. The result is neighbourhoods with diversity and density at a human scale. What planners today both advocate and struggle to provide is exactly what historic neighbourhoods already are. We encourage the ICOMOS community to review our attached presentation, "Five Principles of Sustainable Neighbourhood Planning + Heritage Conservation", to explore these transferable methodologies.



PlaceEconomics



Publications

Over the past two decades, no firm or institution in America has conducted more analyses of the economic impacts of historic preservation than has

 PlaceEconomics / Dec 3, 2021

Visit **"Five Principles of Sustainable Neighbourhoods Planning+Heritage Conservation"** at:

<https://icomosdggwg.com/publications/>



Prepared by:

MS Donovan Rypkema

President, Heritage Strategies International

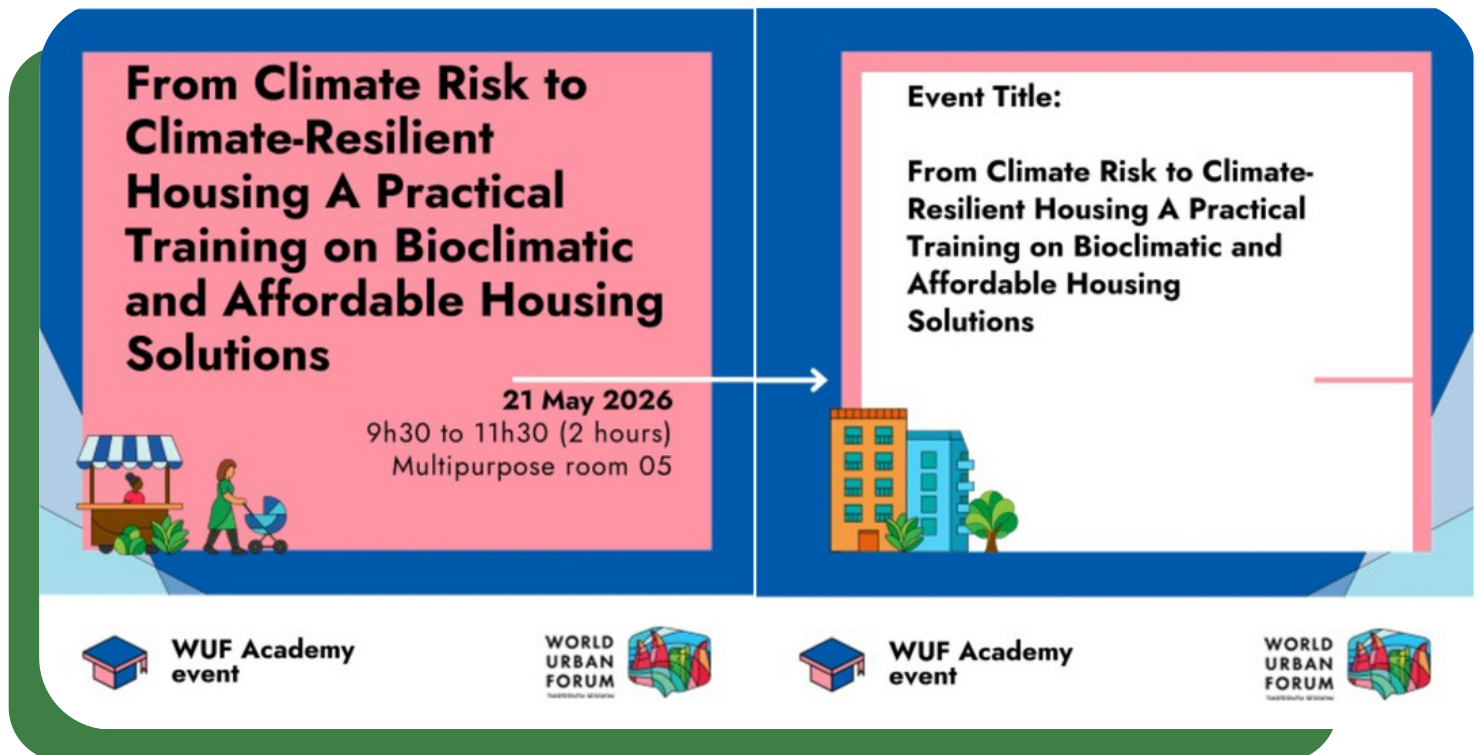
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Participation at World Urban Forum WUF13, Baku, Azerbaijan

The Ecole Nationale d'Architecture of Rabat (ENA Rabat, Morocco), under the auspices of the Ministry of National Territorial Planning, Urban Planning, Housing and Urban Policy, has organised an international training session within the framework of the WUF Academy during the UN-Habitat World Urban Forum WUF13, held in Baku (Azerbaijan) from 17 to 22 May 2026.

Entitled “From Climate Risk to Resilient Housing: A Practical Training on Bioclimatic and Affordable Housing Solutions,” this session, initiated by ENA Rabat, is organised in partnership with the UNESCO Chair “Education and Research in Sustainable Bioclimatic Architecture and Urbanism,” Dr B.N. College of Architecture (India), and Technische Universität Berlin – Habitat Unit (Germany).

The event serves as an international platform for exchange among researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers on operational solutions for resilient housing that combine thermal comfort, sustainability, and affordability in response to climate challenges.



This training brought together a distinguished panel of experts and leading institutions, including ENA Rabat, Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, University of Westminster, Technische Universität Berlin, Dr B.N. College of Architecture, and the Fédération Nationale des Agences d'Urbanisme (FNAU), fostering a unique synergy between academic research and international operational expertise.

A special thank you to the distinguished speakers, experts, and contributors whose insights enriched this international exchange: [Abdelhadi Ibnyahya](#), [Khalid El Harrouni](#), [Brigitte Bariol Mathais](#), [Giulio Verdini](#), [Hassan El Mouelhi](#), [Dr Asmita Joshi](#), [Zakaria Abyaa](#), [Rajae Haissouss](#), [Lamyar Sarhrouchni](#), [Adil Zabadi](#), [Mohamed Amine Bajji](#), [Atay Guldehan](#), [Youssef Diab](#), [Nuarrual Hilal Md Dahlan](#), [Siame Hanna Ishac](#), [Elise Macline](#), [UN-Habitat Morocco](#), and [Degron Robin](#). Their expertise and commitment made this training session a valuable platform for dialogue and collaboration on climate-resilient and sustainable housing.

Participation at World Urban Forum WUF13, Baku, Azerbaijan

Kingdom of Morocco

Ministry of National Territory Planning, Urban Planning, Housing and City Policy

المملكة المغربية

وزارة إعداد التراب الوطني والتنمية والإسكان وسياسة المدينة

FROM CLIMATE RISK TO CLIMATE-RESILIENT

Housing A Practical Training on Bioclimatic and Affordable Housing Solutions

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Director
Architect HQADP
N.S of Architecture of Rabat

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national des agences d'urbanisme

Giulio VERDINI
PhD Reader in Planning
/ University of Westminster

Hassan ELMOUELHI
Urbanist, Principal Investigator,
Project leader, and lecturer
Habitat (art T) Baris

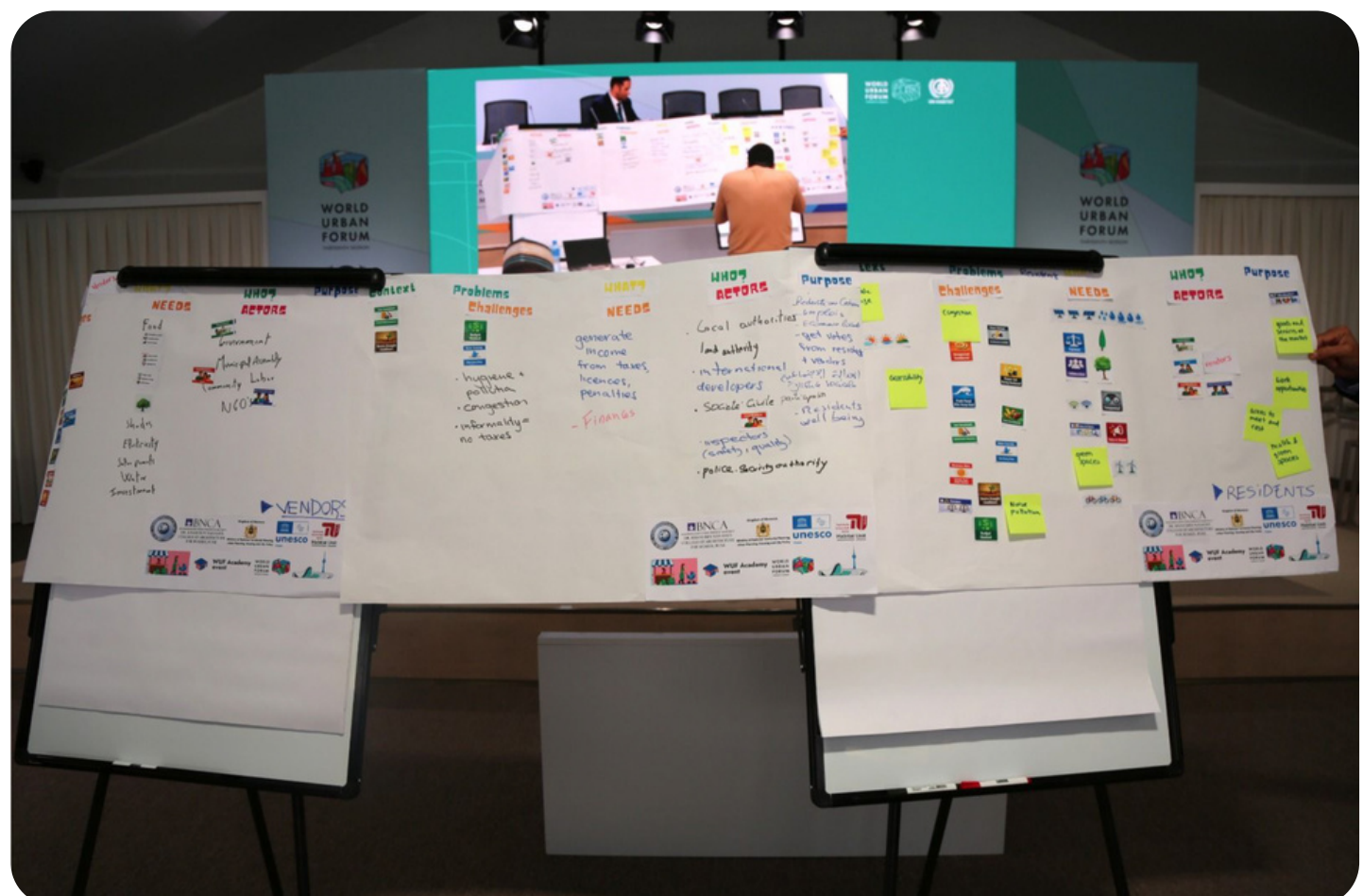
Zakaria ABYAA
PhD Candidate in Architecture
and Urban & Regional Planning
/ National School of Architecture

This WUF Academy training session, led by the National School of Architecture of Rabat (ENA Rabat) under Morocco's Ministry of National Territorial Planning, Urban Planning, Housing and City Policy, presents practical and transferable approaches for designing, assessing, and improving climate-resilient housing and public spaces. The session provides operational tools and decision-making frameworks to address heatwaves, energy poverty, thermal comfort, affordability, sustainability, and social equity through plenary presentations and practical exercises adapted to diverse urban contexts.

MATNUHPV

Thursday 21 May | 9:30 p.m to 11:30 p.m | Multipurpose room 5

WORLD URBAN FORUM



Participation at World Urban Forum WUF13, Baku, Azerbaijan



The main issues discussed by the participants were:

- Ensuring the right to housing requires participatory methodologies that place people and communities at the centre of decision-making.
- Preserving heritage sites of everyday life plays a significant role in supporting recovery processes, particularly in post-disaster contexts where social and cultural continuity matters.
- Multi-actor governance demonstrates that meaningful and sustainable outcomes often emerge through trust, collaboration, and long-term partnerships.
- Pilot implementations can serve as important pathways for broader and more effective change due to policy transformation.

Finally, happy with all the actors participating in this nice and amazing experience, and truly curious to see how these discussions and collaborations will evolve further at WUF14 in Mexico City.



Reported by:

Dr Khalid El Harrouni

Full Professor, UNESCO Chair, Ecole

Nationale d'Architecture, Rabat, Morocco

Nolla mosaic: a networked heritage between memory, sustainability and the common participation

The rehabilitation of built heritage is no longer just an aesthetic or cultural issue. We argue that it is one of the smartest and most sustainable ways to build society. In contrast to the immediacy and simplistic solution of demolishing and starting over, preserving the history embedded in our homes also helps preserve our collective history as a society, standing against the globalisation of the so-called “zebra buildings” (identical residential blocks characterised by white and black striped façades, from which they receive their distinctive name). This residential construction model is replicated almost identically across multiple cities, reproducing a standardised pattern that erodes the architectural, cultural, and climatic identity of each place, creating homogeneous urban environments lacking character and individuality.

It may seem redundant to point out that every historic building embodies a vast amount of already invested energy: materials that have been extracted, transported, and crafted; specialised craftsmanship (know-how); climate-responsive solutions adapted to their environment; and construction techniques developed over generations... but we will remember it here.

When an architectural intervention aimed at achieving contemporary standards of comfort and habitability is carried out with the utmost respect for a building’s historical, constructive, and spatial essence, it achieves an appropriate and necessary balance between heritage conservation and functional adaptation.

For this reason, recovering historic flooring, original materials and structures, as well as traditional decorative elements, represents a far more environmentally responsible way of intervening in architecture, one that is also more respectful of collective memory and available resources. It avoids the consumption of new materials and drastically reduces the generation of waste and emissions associated with new construction.

And at this point in the discussion, we will pause. The rehabilitation of historic flooring is a particularly significant example. An old pavement is not only a functional surface; it is a material document. It speaks about artisanal techniques, local economies, ways of inhabiting space, and a specific construction culture. Restoring it means activating the transmission of traditional knowledge that would otherwise disappear.

The specific case of Nolla mosaic brings us back to Spain’s Second Industrial Revolution (1870), as a product with a clear significance as a high-quality manufacture designed to last over time.

Nolla mosaic tiles, produced from the mid-19th century in Meliana. Valencia (Spain), with a visible influence from the English company Minton & Co., is among the most interesting architectural and artistic elements of Spanish Modernism. Highly durable and of great aesthetic value, they consist of monochrome stoneware tesserae in a variety of geometric shapes, laid one by one to form geometric and figurative patterns that were used to clad floors, façades, plinths, and even urban furniture.

Common in 19th-century bourgeois homes, they are still present today in public buildings and urban spaces, as well as in private residences that have been preserved over decades. Their commercial success achieved significant international reach, both artistically and economically, and examples of this material have been found in countries such as Portugal, Argentina, the Philippines, and Mexico.

Nolla mosaic: a networked heritage between memory, sustainability and the common participation (from the last page)

Since 2010, research has been carried out on Nolla ceramic tiles, the factory, and the legacy of Nolla's company has been left around the world. These studies address all aspects of this heritage, industrial, architectural, artistic, historical, and social, and include everything from research into the production and history of the material for dissemination activities aimed at its recognition, such as workshops, publications, exhibitions, and even two international congresses.

These initiatives have usually been coordinated through CIDCeN (Centro de Investigación y Difusión de la Cerámica Nolla - Centre for Research and Dissemination of Nolla Ceramics), which, since 2015, has developed a wide range of activities at local, national, and even international levels.

Within the actions carried out by the cultural association, and thanks to a grant from the Spanish Ministry of Culture and its role as a collaborator of Valencia World Design Capital (WDC2022), the NollaMap project emerged in 2022. It is a web platform that works as a large georeferenced database of buildings or sites where examples of Nolla mosaic can be found around the world. It is a participatory map in which citizens can upload examples of Nolla ceramics through a simple online form that generates a record for each item.

These contributions are complemented by the scientific team of CIDCeN, resulting in a tool that offers a clear, visual, and accessible overview of the global reach of this tangible and intangible heritage. The main objective of the project is to help enhance the value of this heritage legacy through a digital tool that allows users to locate, record, share, and consult information from anywhere in the world, promoting awareness and understanding of its significance as cultural heritage.

Mapping a type of flooring present in numerous countries constitutes a fundamental tool for understanding the international dimension of a material heritage that, although originating in a local production context, achieved extraordinary global dissemination. The identification and documentation of these floors make it possible to reveal the networks of technical, commercial, and cultural exchange that enabled their expansion, demonstrating how a single construction tradition became integrated into highly diverse social and geographical contexts.

In this sense, mapping not only contributes to heritage conservation but also highlights the capacity of certain architectural elements to act as a bridge between cultures, territories, and communities, shaping a shared legacy that transcends borders and connects different realities through a common material expression.

This perspective is directly connected to several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to sustainable cities, responsible production and consumption, climate action, cultural heritage protection, and the strengthening of partnerships.

There is also a social and emotional dimension that should not be underestimated. Preserved buildings generate urban continuity and a sense of belonging. The memory of a city is not preserved solely in archives or photographs, but in everyday spaces, where flooring plays a fundamental role as a constantly present element in historic buildings.

Nolla mosaic: a networked heritage between memory, sustainability and the common participation (from the last page)

In this context, documentation and analysis tools such as NollaMap are of particular relevance. We invite you to explore the platform and contribute with examples from your own countries via www.nollamap.org and through the social media channels from the investigation group: @CIDCeN and @legadoNolla

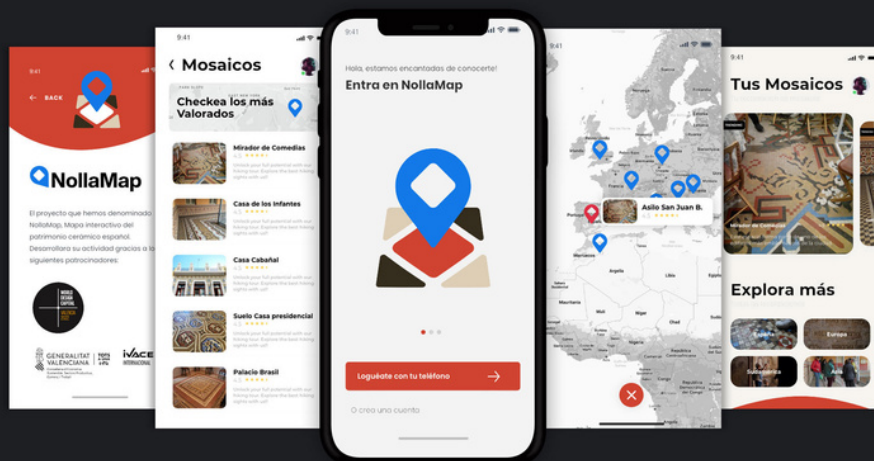


Figure on the Left:

Documentation work in private houses
©Xavier Laumain

Figure on the Bottom:

NollaMap Project.



NollaMap



Prepared by:

Angela López Sabater (left) &

Xavier Laumain (right)

Architects. ICOMOS-Spain members



From Heritage Action to SDG Evidence: New Tools for Mapping and Reporting Cultural Heritage Contributions

Two new practical resources developed within the ICOMOS SDG Working Group are helping to make the contribution of cultural heritage to sustainable development more visible, more usable, and easier to communicate in policy and reporting contexts: the Mapping Heritage Contributions to the SDGs tool[1] and the practical guidance framework Cultural Heritage and the Sustainable Development Goals: A Proposed Structural Framework for the Cultural Heritage Subchapter of Voluntary National Reviews.[2]

These resources were created in response to a very practical problem. Cultural heritage often contributes to sustainable development in clear and meaningful ways, yet that contribution is still not always easy to explain in a concise, structured, and evidence-based manner. In Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), and other national or local reporting processes, heritage-related information may remain scattered, overly descriptive, or only weakly connected to specific SDGs, beneficiaries, or measurable outcomes. As a result, important heritage work may remain underrepresented in development narratives and decision-making.

The two resources respond to this gap from complementary angles. The proposed structural framework is intended to help organise cultural heritage content within a VNR or VLR in a way that is policy-relevant, coherent, and compatible with sustainable development reporting logic. Rather than offering a rigid model or a scoring system, it provides a practical drafting guide for those preparing or contributing to VNRs and VLRs, including ministries, municipalities, heritage agencies, and other public authorities. Moving from general statements about the value of heritage to a more structured presentation of governance, SDG contributions, inclusion, evidence of change, and next steps, it helps position cultural heritage more clearly within national and local development processes.

[1] Available at <https://icomosdggwg.com/mapping-heritage/>

[2] Available at <https://icomosdggwg.com/publications/>

Why it exists

- Heritage content in VNRs can be fragmented or overly descriptive
- Countries need a concise way to show heritage as part of SDG implementation
- The framework helps authors write in development-policy language
- It is a guide for structuring evidence, not a rigid scoring system

The 7-part subchapter structure

- 1 Role of cultural heritage in national sustainable development
- 2 Governance, stakeholders, and implementation arrangements
- 3 Mapping cultural heritage contributions to the SDGs
- 4 Selected practices and evidence of change
- 5 Leaving No One Behind: inclusion and equity
- 6 Challenges, data gaps, and lessons learned
- 7 Outlook and next steps

Figure 1. Rationale and structure of the proposed framework for the cultural heritage subchapter in VNRs/VLRs

The Mapping Heritage tool is more operational. It focuses on one heritage action at a time and makes it possible to document, in a simple and comparable way, what was done, by whom, for whom, with what results, and with what relevance to the SDGs. In this sense, it turns an individual project, initiative, policy measure, or local practice into a short evidence package. This is useful not only for VNRs and VLRs, but also for donor communication, internal learning, advocacy, partnership-building, and the wider visibility of heritage practice.

From Heritage Action to SDG Evidence: New Tools for Mapping and Reporting Cultural Heritage Contributions

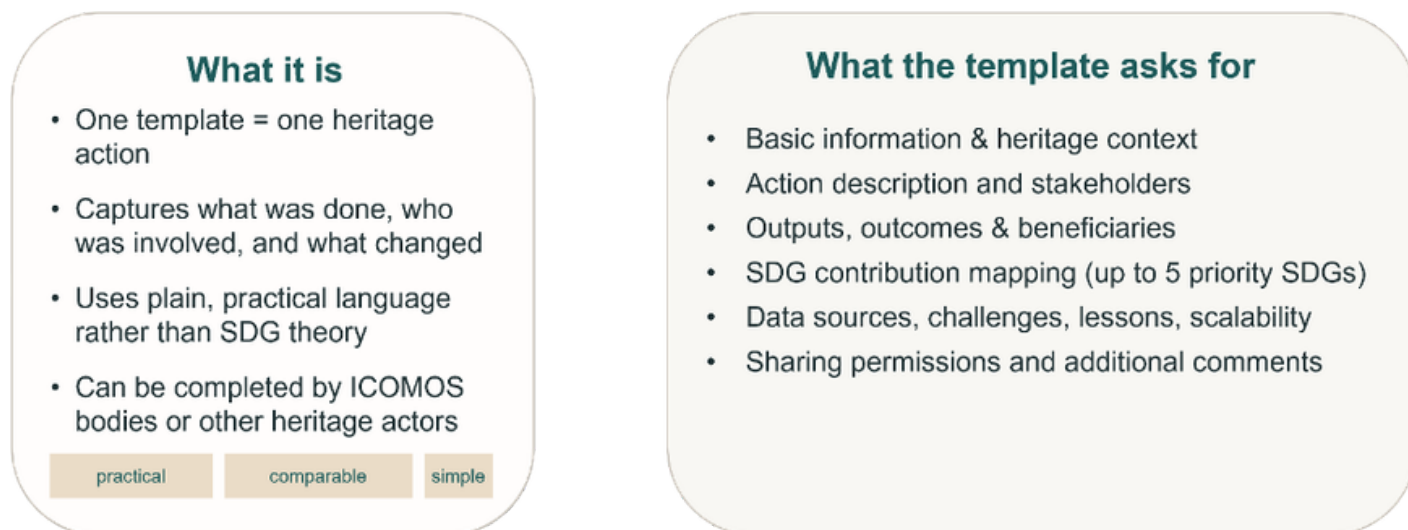


Figure 2. The Mapping Heritage Contributions to the SDGs tool

Their real strength, however, lies in their synergy. The Mapping Heritage tool helps gather the raw material: actions, actors, outputs, outcomes, beneficiaries, equity aspects, SDG links, and supporting evidence. The structural framework then helps transform this material into a coherent and report-ready narrative suited to VNRs, VLRs, and similar processes. One tool helps collect; the other helps structure. Used together, they create a practical pathway from local heritage action to development reporting.

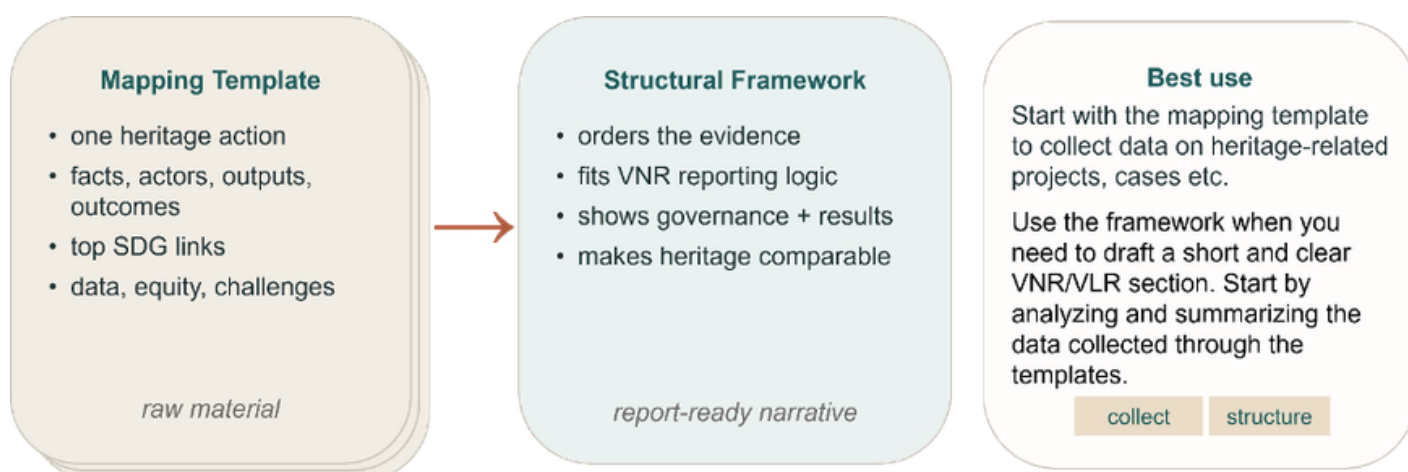


Figure 3. How the two tools complement each other

These resources do not replace the need for national and local processes. To be fully effective in actual reporting, public authorities, heritage institutions, municipalities, and other stakeholders still need to agree on how information is collected, reviewed, summarised, and incorporated into official texts.



Reported by:
Dr Andris Kairiss
SDGWG Task Team 3 Coordinator

Positioning Heritage at the Heart of the Sustainability Agenda: New Regional Webinar Series

As part of ICOMOS's ongoing commitment to the **#Culture2030Goal** campaign, the Sustainable Development Goals Working Group (SDGWG) is pleased to announce a new series of regional webinars: **"Integrating Culture and Cultural Heritage into Sustainable Development."**

As we approach the critical final years of the UN 2030 Agenda, cultural heritage must be recognised not just as a legacy of the past, but as a primary driver and enabler of a sustainable future. This series is designed specifically for ICOMOS National and Scientific Committees, as well as individual members, to provide the tools needed to advocate for culture in global and national policy.

What to expect:

- **Strategic Insights:** An overview of the current place of culture within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the #Culture2030Goal roadmap.
- **Practical Tools:** Introduction to "The Culture Goal: from necessity to reality" framework developed by #Culture2030Goal campaign as well as the SDGWG's new "Mapping heritage contribution to the SDGs" and "Proposed structural framework for the cultural heritage subchapter of VNRs," results-oriented tools for demonstrating the impact of heritage on sustainable development.
- **Regional Perspectives:** Tailored discussions with Regional Vice-Presidents and National Committee leads on navigating Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs).
- **Future Outlook:** Strategies for mobilising our network toward a standalone goal for Culture in the post-2030 Agenda.

Up to this date, four out of our five webinars have been conducted. Information on these past webinars are available at:

[this link](#)

Our last webinar, with a focus on the Latin and Central American time and contribution. To attend this last session of the webinars, check the information below.



Date & time: 7th of July 2026

19:00 CET



Place: Online- Zoom

To attend this webinar and receive the link, **[register here](#)**.

The AI Dilemma

This past week, I had the wonderful opportunity to participate in the University of Liverpool's Heritage Futures – AI Summer School held from 15th to 17th June. I delivered a lecture on how the MSc Conservation programme at The University of Hong Kong has used Generative AI to create digital narratives for heritage sites, and joined the students in testing how AI tools can support the development of design ideas at both urban and building scales. Working at the intersection of heritage conservation education, advanced technologies, and sustainability policies has made it increasingly clear to me that the availability of advanced AI tools heightens the imperative to evaluate them against broader environmental and social costs and their alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Over the past three years, I have been reflecting on the uses of Artificial Intelligence, and in particular, Generative AI in academia. Many universities have made a concerted effort to encourage and support students and staff in engaging with AI. These include providing free access to a variety of AI tools and supporting the integration of AI into pedagogical practices and administrative tasks. One of the many promises of these tools is enhanced academic engagement and improved access for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). AI literacy is deemed essential for all graduates hoping to secure employment in most professional fields. The magic wand of AI is said to hold many promises, including the conservation of heritage.

Yet the path to effective and ethical use is fraught with problems. The most recent report by the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health[1] demonstrates that the use of AI does not align with our sustainability goals.

The evidence presented in the report shows that the current trajectory of AI use fundamentally conflicts with several core SDGs, especially on climate, resource use, inequality, and environmental justice. This has direct implications for heritage because any claim that AI supports heritage conservation, and thereby its contribution to the achievement of the SDGs, must be weighed against these broader structural harms.

First, AI expansion undermines SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 13 (Climate Action). The report shows that data centres are becoming “country-scale” resource users, with global data-centre electricity demand projected to reach 945 TWh by 2030, an increase of about 111% in electricity use from 2025. That is a non-trivial fraction of global electricity, much of which is still generated from fossil fuels. More importantly, this is not a one-off training cost but a continuous operational burden. Because inference, which is the continuous running of models to answer everyday user prompts, accounts for an estimated 80–90% of energy use. With products like ChatGPT processing around 2.5 billion prompts per day, AI locks in a large and growing stream of energy consumption.

[1] Aczel, M., Chamanara, S., Matin, M., Farsi, A., Marwala, T., Madani, K. (2026). Environmental Cost of AI's Energy Use: Carbon, Water and Land Footprints. United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH), Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada. doi: 10.53328/INR26RMA002

The AI Dilemma

While the 2025 UN Global Compact report advocated for a principles-based approach on the use of AI, anchored on respecting and supporting human rights and the environment, it also challenged companies to “leverage AI to maximise their contributions to the 2030 Agenda”. History has shown that mitigation measures do not benefit everyone equally, with the disenfranchised and disempowered groups hardly benefiting from mitigation measures, especially when corporate profits are at stake. Thus, treating AI as an uncomplicated enabler of SDG 13 ignores the fact that it is simultaneously intensifying the very energy and emissions challenges the SDGs are meant to solve. Second, AI directly conflicts with SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 15 (Life on Land) through its water and land footprints, which are typically omitted from celebratory narratives. Every kilowatt-hour used for AI has not only a carbon footprint but also a water footprint (for cooling and power generation) and a land footprint (for infrastructure and supply chains). By 2030, the water footprint of AI-related data centres is projected at 9.3 trillion litres, and the land footprint at over 14,500 km (Aczel et al, 2026). I was shocked to learn that generating a single complex AI video used about 4.1 litres of water, roughly two days of drinking water for one person. This, at a time when Kian Madani’s[1] latest report shows that more and more river basins and aquifers are losing the ability to return to their historical “normal”(2026). His report indicates that the droughts, shortages, and pollution episodes that once looked like temporary shocks are becoming chronic in many regions of the world. He argues that human–water systems have exceeded their hydrological carrying capacities, and societies have spent beyond their sustainable hydrological budgets for so long that critical water assets are depleted, and for some, return to “normal” is infeasible.

In that case, how can heritage conservation attempt to address SDG 6 when the scale of depletion is so significant, and by the same token, how should AI be used in conservation work without exacerbating the problem?

Similarly, expanding land-intensive infrastructure for data centres and mineral extraction undermines SDG 15’s aims to protect terrestrial ecosystems and halt land degradation. For heritage conservation, often deeply tied to specific landscapes and ecosystems, such pressures on land and water are not abstract; they shape the very environments within which heritage is embedded.

Third, the pattern of AI consumption conflicts with SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). In comparing the uses of energy for AI text, vs image, vs video, it becomes clear that these choices are not neutral. Defaulting to images and video and pushing high-resolution outputs are “footprint decisions” with significantly higher ecological impacts. More importantly, unlike other types of technology, improving AI efficiency does not reduce total impact. Instead, it encourages more use, driving aggregate footprints higher, directly contradicting SDG 12’s call to decouple economic activity from environmental degradation and to ensure sustainable consumption patterns. This becomes particularly pertinent if we celebrate visually rich, AI-generated heritage reconstructions or immersive experiences without accounting for their hidden resource costs.

[1] Madani, K. (2026). *Global Water Bankruptcy: Living Beyond Our Hydrological Means in the Post-Crisis Era*. United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH), Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada. DOI: [10.53328/INR26KAM001](https://doi.org/10.53328/INR26KAM001)

The AI Dilemma

Fourth, the geography and material base of AI contradict SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). AI compute is “geographically concentrated,” with only 32 countries hosting AI-specialised data centres and over 90% of capacity in just two countries. More than 150 countries lack sovereign AI infrastructure. This entrenches a two-tier system in which a handful of states and corporations control the core infrastructure, while the majority of countries remain dependent, undermining inclusive and equitable industrialisation (SDG 9) and exacerbating global inequality (SDG 10). This unequal geography also mirrors long-standing imbalances in whose heritage gets digitally preserved, narrated, and circulated, and who has the capacity to shape those narratives using advanced tools.

Emerging work on data ethics and Indigenous data governance is instructive here. Frameworks such as the CARE principles (Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, Ethics) show that technical readiness alone is insufficient; data and digital tools must also be socially, culturally, and environmentally “ready for use”.

Fifth, the hardware lifecycle clashes with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and again SDG 12 and SDG 15. It is projected that up to 2.5 million tonnes of e-waste per year will be generated from AI infrastructure by 2030, alongside intensive demand for critical minerals concentrated in regions with weaker environmental oversight. This implies hazardous working conditions, polluted environments, and extraction-driven ecological damage borne disproportionately by already disadvantaged communities. That pattern is the opposite of “environmental justice” and sustainable production. Any claims that AI helps document, protect, or interpret heritage must be set against the realities of whose environments are degraded and whose health and livelihoods are compromised to sustain AI’s hardware.

While the UN report calls for a principled governance framework that emphasises transparency, equity, environmental justice, lifecycle responsibility, and “sustainable use”, the fragmented global policies on heritage and sustainability, alongside the global economic structures that prioritise growth and improved GDP over sustaining a liveable planet, concede that the status quo is unsustainable and misaligned with the SDGs. If AI were naturally compatible with the SDGs, such extensive corrective governance would not be urgent.

The latest evidence shows that, as currently designed and scaled, AI is not an automatic accelerator of the SDGs but a powerful driver of energy demand, water use, land appropriation, e-waste, and global inequality. If we are to retain AI as a tool within heritage conservation practice and pedagogy, we must therefore consider whether other lower-impact tools could reasonably deliver the same benefits. Ethical guidelines for AI in heritage must start from the SDGs, not from the technology, and must be explicit about whose interests are served, whose resources are consumed, and who bears the risks. They must begin with an understanding of whether the use of AI in heritage conservation delivers clear, tangible benefits for the communities whose heritage is at stake, not only for institutions, technology providers, or distant audiences. This includes benefits for local livelihoods, education, and cultural continuity, particularly for marginalised and Indigenous communities. Spectacular AI visualisations that primarily serve tourism marketing or institutional prestige, while externalising environmental and social costs, should fail this test.

The AI Dilemma

The question of who decides how heritage is represented becomes even more pressing as AI models are trained on vast datasets of cultural material. Communities, especially Indigenous peoples and groups historically excluded from heritage decision-making, need to retain meaningful authority over digital representations of their heritage, the datasets extracted from them, and the ways these materials are used to train or fine-tune AI systems. Ethical guidelines for heritage must therefore address free, prior, and informed consent for the use of community knowledge and imagery; the possibility to limit, condition, or revoke certain uses of heritage-related data; and the recognition that many of these rights are collective rather than individual. Without such authority to control, AI risks reproducing long-standing asymmetries in whose stories are told, who tells them, and who profits from them.

Existing instruments, such as the 2022 UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI, provide a starting point but are too general and already lag behind the rapidly evolving environmental and geopolitical realities of AI expansion. Heritage conservation operates at the intersection of culture, place, and long-term stewardship; it therefore requires more specific, field-tailored guidance. An updated framework should be co-created by heritage professionals, local and Indigenous communities, AI and data experts, and environmental scientists, and should explicitly link every recommended AI use to its implications across the SDGs.

If AI is to improve heritage conservation practice and pedagogy without undermining the ecological and social foundations on which heritage depends, we need such guidelines urgently. They must reframe AI not as an unqualified enabler of sustainability, but as a tool with conditional use, conditional on collective benefit, on respect for authority and rights, on rigorous responsibility for environmental and social costs, and on ethical commitments that extend across the entire lifecycle of digital heritage work.

Finally, none of these commitments can be realised without transparency and shared standards. Just as FAIR data principles emphasise documentation and interoperability, AI in heritage requires robust practices of disclosure and labelling. This includes clear documentation of datasets, models, and training processes; openness about the provenance and limitations of AI-generated outputs; and, where possible, public reporting of the approximate energy, water, and land footprints of major AI-based heritage initiatives. Common metadata standards indicating when and how AI has been used in heritage records, exhibitions, or reconstructions would allow practitioners, communities, and audiences alike to make informed judgements about authenticity, authorship, and reuse, and to align their choices with their ethical and environmental values.



Prepared by:

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Dr EGE YILDRIM (former ICOMOS SDG WG Focal Point)

Hello, I am Ege (Dr. Ayşe Ege Yıldırım). I am an urban planner specialising in heritage conservation and management, with about 25 years of experience working in Türkiye and internationally. My areas of interest include cultural heritage policy, advocacy and governance, UNESCO World Heritage, and sustainable development.

I obtained my bachelor's in City Planning and Minor in Architectural Conservation at the Middle East Technical University (METU) (Ankara, 1998); my MA in Conservation at the University of York (York, 1999) and my PhD in Social Environmental Sciences, Ankara University (Ankara, 2012).

I was a Fulbright Scholar at Pratt Institute (New York, 2006–07), Senior Fellow for Archaeological Site Management at Koç University (AnaMed Research Centre) (Istanbul, 2013–14) and a Salzburg Global Seminar fellow (2019).



My previous positions include conservation planner at KA-BA Architecture Ltd, Ankara (2000–06), heritage planner at the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture & Heritage (2008–12), heritage site manager and UNESCO World Heritage nomination coordinator for the Historic Guild Town of Mudurnu (2015–20); International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Focal Point for the SDGs (2016–20), key expert at the EU- Türkiye Anatolian Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Institute project (2019), and the OurWorldHeritage Sustainability Debates Coordinator (2021). As an independent consultant, I supported various clients including United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Mannheim Municipality, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, Global Parliament of Mayors (GPM), and the Korean National Commission for UNESCO. My most recent engagements include expert heritage advice to AtkinsRealis for the update of Urban Plan Al Ain, in Abu Dhabi, UAE, and UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List preparation consultant for Miletos and Didyma, supporting the Didim Chamber of Commerce, Aydın, Türkiye.

Since 2013, I have mainly been based in Istanbul as a scholar/ consultant/ heritage advocate. In 2021, I founded the investment platform/ social venture, Terra Mudurnu Culture, Tourism and Real Estate, Inc. I supervised the company's first cultural property project, Madanlar Mansion Boutique Hotel, on the ground in Mudurnu between 2022–25. I was a CHP candidate for municipal councillor of Mudurnu in the 2024 local elections. Since Fall 2025, I have been teaching part-time at Istanbul Bilgi University's Architecture and Art and Culture Management Departments.

I am a member, besides ICOMOS and other organisations, of Europa Nostra Türkiye (Board member), the Climate Heritage Network, and the Istanbul Citizens Assembly (Cultural Heritage Working Group). Besides my professional career, I have a longstanding interest and involvement in fine arts, performing arts, and creative writing (see: www.aegeyildirim.com).

To add some special words on my role at ICOMOS, I can easily say that being the Sustainable Development Goals Focal Point changed my life in a fantastic way. I had the honour of serving and learning how to be a leader in the global heritage community, to elevate the role of heritage in sustainable development, including for climate action, rights-based approaches and urban resilience. The friendships and collaborations I acquired were transformative and long-lasting. I wish to recognise my predecessors and mentors Andrew Potts, Sofia Avgerinou-Kolonias, Hossam Mahdy, Sofia Labadi, Marie-Laure Lavenir and Gaia Jungeblodt, and my successors Gabriel Caballero and Naima Benkari, with whom I have shared this amazing journey.

Call for Abstracts/ papers:

TMM_CH 2026:

Transdisciplinary Multispectral Modelling and Cooperation for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Cultural heritage at the forefront of transformation

14-16 December 2026; Athens, Greece

Some of the Conference Topics:

- The role of AI and generative AI in supporting Cultural Heritage documentation, restoration and Augmented Reality
- Memory Twin as a holistic framework for Cultural Heritage documentation, interpretation, and adaptive reuse
- Multiperceptions, narrative modelling, and collaboration for mutual understanding and peacemaking
- Public involvement (policy makers) and social awareness (media) for Cultural Heritage sustainable preservation, reuse and local development
- Transdisciplinary dialogue - Networking for the implementation of a novel interdisciplinary digital methodology and capacity building
- Promoting the need for a holistic interdisciplinary education for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage
- • Belt and Road initiative in multimodel cultural heritage preservation
- Historic cities and centers: New reuse and preservation strategies applying Circular Economy
- Dialogue between religious monuments, preservation works and values
- Green and blue deal for local and regional Sustainable Development
- Cultural heritage preservation addressing energy challenges
- Rebranding the World in conflict through transdisciplinary dialogue, culture, mutual understanding an Peace

Deadline for Abstracts submission: 13th July 2026

More information:

[Transdisciplinary Multispectral Modelling and Cooperation for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage](#)

Call for Abstracts/ papers:

Eco-Cultural Heritage, Cultural Landscapes and Memory of Place

2-6 November; University of South Bohemia, České Budějovice, Czech Republic

This conference warmly invites scholars, researchers, educators, and practitioners to submit contributions that address the complex interconnections among ecological systems, cultural heritage, and contemporary educational approaches.

The conference provides a platform for interdisciplinary dialogue across the humanities, social sciences, and environmental studies to foster innovative and sustainable perspectives.

Thematic areas include:

- Eco-cultural heritage, cultural landscapes, and memory of place
- Interactions between environment, society, and cultural identity
- Sustainable development, regional development, and tourism
- Educational approaches and knowledge transfer into practice

Types of contributions, including:

- research papers
- case studies
- conceptual contributions
- posters

Publication Opportunities:

Accepted contributions will be published in the **conference Book of Abstracts (ISBN)**.

Selected papers will be considered for publication in the conference proceedings within the **KreativEU Journal Science, Heritage and Technology** (Taylor & Francis; planned publication in early 2027).

Deadline to Submit Abstracts: 31st July 2026.

More information:

[Eco-Cultural Heritage, Cultural Landscapes and Memory of Place](#)

Call for Abstracts/ papers:

International Symposium on “The Role of Local Communities in Safeguarding Intangible Heritage within Heritage Ensembles and Monuments”

8–11 November 2026, in Villa Rufolo, Ravello, Salerno, Italy

ICOMOS Italy and the International Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICICH)

The symposium will begin by situating intangible heritage within the global framework of ICOMOS and ICICH, then explore regional perspectives from around the world, and finally turn to Italy as the host country. Italy’s millennial heritage and long-standing expertise in integrating conservation with development provide a meaningful setting for this dialogue. By linking global challenges to local realities, the event will highlight how communities safeguard and revitalise intangible cultural heritage associated with monuments and ensembles, ensuring resilience and sustainable futures.

Deadline to Submit Abstracts: 15 August 2026

More information:

[The Role of Local Communities in Safeguarding Intangible Heritage within Heritage Ensembles and Monuments](#)



CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

ICOMOS Italy, ICICH and
Il Centro Universitario Europeo
per i Beni Culturali

**International Symposium:
The Role of Local Communities
in Safeguarding Intangible
Heritage within Heritage
Ensembles and Monuments**

Application Deadline
15 August 2026

 Consiglio Internazionale
dei Monumenti e dei Siti
Costituito Nazionale Italiano

 CENTRO UNIVERSITARIO EUROPEO
PER I BENI CULTURALI

 ICICH
International Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage

Upcoming Events:

Living Heritage: Respect. Enhance. Accept. Partnership.

22nd ICOMOS General Assembly and Scientific Symposium 2026

Session 11: Local First Responders: Community and Indigenous Leadership in Heritage Emergency Response for the SDGs

Organisers: ICOMOS Sustainable Development Goals Working Group (SDGWG). | Chair: Naima Benkari

This session aims to place communities, Indigenous peoples and local actors at the centre of heritage emergency response, recognising them as the primary first responders and decision-makers in many crises. It will explore how their knowledge, priorities and leadership can make emergency response more effective, ethical and SDG-aligned, in direct support of the ICOMOS Triennial Scientific Plan (TSP) theme “Disaster and Conflict Resilient Heritage , Preparedness, Response and Recovery”, with specific emphasis on the response phase. The session is also designed to generate new, documented case material to be used in the forthcoming update and expansion of ICOMOS Heritage and the Sustainable Development Goals: Policy Guidance for Heritage and Development Actors (hereafter “Policy Guidance”).



Upcoming Events:

World Heritage UK 2026 Annual Conference

Monday 05th & Tuesday 06th October 2026

The main focus of this conference is on “Connections through World Heritage.” Scheduled for two days (5-6th of October 2026), this conference will take place in Portrush Town Hall, Northern Ireland, along with the tours to visit the local World Heritage sites. This annual conference aims to review the work of world heritage sites and experiences in the UK and Ireland.

The main programme of this two days conference is accessible via the link below:

[Click Here for More information about the Conference](#)



Careers in Heritage and SDG:

1. PhD in Built Heritage Studies

University of Antwerp, Belgium

Position description:

- You will work actively on the preparation and defence of a PhD thesis in the field of built heritage, and specifically, augmented mapping of cocoa heritage in São Tomé and Príncipe or Ghana, depending on the candidate's language skills. The PhD project aims to fill the gap in research by studying the multidimensional and multiple narratives of cocoa heritage. It responds to the following research questions:
 - What tangible and intangible heritage values are associated with cocoa cultivation, and how can they be systematically documented and integrated into a transferable framework for mapping agricultural systems heritage?
 - How can an augmented, multimodal mapping approach be developed to represent cocoa heritage in a holistic, people-centred way?
- You develop scientific knowledge that has the potential to be translated into strategic insight and/or guidelines for understanding and mapping food-related multidimensional heritage in times of climate change.
- You will collaborate with colleagues within the Built Heritage group of Antwerp Cultural Heritage Sciences (ARCHES) and the Architecture and Interior(A+I) research group.
- You will publish scientific articles related to the research project both independently and with your promoters, Prof. dr. Yonca Erkan and Prof. dr. Sara Eloy.
- You will carry out a limited number of teaching and research support tasks for ARCHES (Antwerp Cultural Heritage Sciences) Research Group and A+I research group.

Read more details on the link below, and application:

<https://www.kuleuven.be/personeel/jobsite/jobs/60620925?lang>

Deadline for Application: 3rd August 2026 (by Midnight CET)

Careers in Heritage and SDG:

2. Postdoctoral Research Fellow in AI and Cultural Heritage

University of Agder (UiA), Norway

A fixed-term 100 % position is available at the University of Agder, Faculty of Fine Arts, as a Post-doctoral Research Fellow in AI and Cultural Heritage, affiliated to the Department of Popular Music, for a period of 3 years. The position may be extended to 4 years, including 25% teaching and administrative duties, depending on the Department's teaching needs. The position is located at the University of Agder's Kristiansand campus. The starting date is negotiable with the faculty.

This postdoc position will be part of WP6 ([AI for cultural heritage](#)) of MishMash, with the possibility of also contributing to other work packages.

The focus of this position is to explore AI integration in the discovery, organising, and distribution of Nordic Cultural Heritage, including archives, libraries and museums, but also more commercial and market-driven entities. WP6 has a broad focus; however, in this call, we seek projects exploring how we can significantly advance AI to effectively discover, organise, and showcase the vast richness of cultural heritage and creative works in all forms. And/or how we can develop interlinking systems within cultural heritage and creative works to enhance rights management and highlight their profound impact on contemporary creativity. In WP6, particular attention will be dedicated to minority cultural expressions, including Norwegian folk music, Sámi joik and world chant cultures.

The appointed candidate is expected to collaborate across the MishMash network and participate in all relevant MishMash activities.

Read More and link to application:

<https://www.jobbnorge.no/en/available-jobs/job/302288/post-doctoral-research-fellow-in-ai-and-cultural-heritage>

Deadline for Application: 9th August 2026 (by Midnight CET)

Contribute

We are especially interested to hear from you about your works, events and opportunities. Acceptable contributions are in the format of short reviews of conferences, seminars, interviews, publications, exhibitions, or other events that you feel are essential to be published on Cultural Heritage and SDGs.

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