

Naples Conference on Cultural Heritage in the 21st century

Concept Note

1. Context

The Naples Conference marks the milestones of the 1972 World Heritage Convention and the 2003 Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, 50th and 20th anniversaries, respectively. These landmark normative instruments support Countries and their communities in documenting, monitoring and managing cultural and natural sites, as well as safeguarding their living heritage and cultural expressions. A repository of cultural assets and knowledge - enshrined in World Heritages sites and living heritage elements - the Conventions have contributed significantly to fostering sustainable development at national and global levels, whilst their near-universal ratification testifies to the growing recognition of cultural and biological diversity worldwide.

Today, humanity is facing great challenges in the first quarter of the 21st century. Climate change, globalization, the technological revolution, mass migration, urbanization, conflicts, and the rise of inequalities are forcing us to reconsider our priorities and strategies. Within the heritage sector, these societal and environmental shifts are beginning to propel a more human-centered approach, enabling the safeguarding of heritage while meeting challenges of our time.

The MONDIACULT Declaration, unanimously adopted by 150 Ministers of Culture in 2022 during a UNESCO conference, affirms, for the first time, culture as a “global public good”, to be safeguarded, promoted and integrated in all other sectoral strategies and plans. The Declaration calls for the explicit recognition of culture within the development agenda beyond 2030 as an objective in its own right, while defining a broad set of cultural rights that need to be taken into account.

As the first major event that brings together these two heritage Conventions following MONDIACULT, and building on the Declaration’s strong call for action, the Naples Conference celebrates heritage in its diverse forms, inspiring enhanced and new forms of safeguarding through active participations of communities. Reflecting on the achievements of the 1972 and 2003 Conventions, discussions by experts will center around the potential of heritage as a driver of sustainable development, peace and stability.

Among the key issues to be addressed is the need to promote an innovative and inclusive approach to heritage that considers the relationships between nature and culture, tangible and intangible, as well as heritage and creativity, as complementary elements of a whole, defining us as one humanity.

2. Why Naples?

The City of Naples boasts a unique integration of natural/cultural as well as tangible/intangible heritage that mutually reinforce each other. On one hand, Naples features a remarkable natural

setting, dominated by the sea and the Vesuvius volcano. On the other hand, it is home to an exceptional variety of tangible and intangible cultural heritage attributes that are closely connected.

The City has maintained a unique cultural identity against the increasing threats of cultural homogenization and equalization, and the loss of cultural diversity and identity. The Historic Centre of Naples (listed as World Heritage in 1995) has retained its authenticity and is inhabited by the original local community, which continues to “live” their century-old cultural practices. It also provides a case study of sustainable urban tourism, capable of facing a considerable number of tourists without losing its spirit. The City’s increased investment in culture in recent years has further contributed to these efforts.

Naples therefore embodies the spirit of the Conference, demonstrating an exemplary approach to safeguarding cultural and living heritage as one.

3. Key objectives

As a Category IV meeting, the Naples Conference gathers specialists in the heritage field who possess in-depth knowledge in the key thematic of our time. It aims to **serve as a laboratory of ideas among experts** in their individual capacity, through meaningful and specific exchanges on the development of safeguarding practices and approaches.

Major objectives are:

- To convene experts who will exchange innovative approaches for better and more efficient protection and safeguarding of tangible and intangible heritage.
- To celebrate the achievements of the 1972 and 2003 UNESCO Conventions on the occasion of their respective anniversaries.
- To examine, as enshrined in the MONDIACULT Declaration, the prospective contribution of World Heritage and intangible cultural heritage as a global public good for present and future generations, and as a vector for sustainable social and economic development.
- Further building on the MONDIACULT Declaration, discuss frameworks to strengthen the rights of peoples and communities to their cultural and natural heritage and identity.
- To reflect, in particular, on the close interconnectedness between nature and culture as well as heritage and creativity, so as to harness such interlinkages towards the greater awareness and protection of the environment, including through the recognition of the cultural rights and traditional knowledge systems of local and indigenous communities.
- To consider ways through which living heritage contributes to the understanding and appreciation of World Heritage, whilst, in turn, noting the contribution of World Heritage towards the continuation and transmission of living heritage with communities.

The Conference will be closed by a “Call for Action”, inspired by discussions that emerged in the three days and undertaken by intellectuals, experts and communities, propelling solutions to current challenges and featuring actions proposed by the above-mentioned diverse stakeholders.

4. Dates

November 27th – 29th, 2023

5. Participants

- In-person event (partial live-streaming available)
- Total number of participants in the room: between 450 and 500 maximum
- Experts: Intangible and tangible heritage
- Speakers: Experts from heritage in emergency; sustainable tourism; heritage safeguarding in countries with limited sites and elements inscribed
- Observers: Member States of UNESCO and States Parties to the 1972 and/or 2003 Convention(s)

Each Member State or State Party may have up to 2 people in the Conference main room at once, including specialists and observers.