

Present



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Heritage International Institute

Parma University

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Strathclyde University

El Alamein Institute for Higher Education

University Network for Children in Armed Conflicts

Kufa University

Tribhuvan University

Vytautas Magnus University

Present:

“Intangible Heritage Horizons and Echoes: Safeguarding the Invisible”

Over recent decades, the concept of cultural heritage has undergone a profound transformation at the social, anthropological, and legal level, progressively expanding the scope of its protection. From a notion originally limited to tangible assets, the international community has moved towards the normative recognition of non-objectifiable forms of heritage, consisting of living practices, knowledge, and cultural expressions. This conceptual expansion finds its formal legal expression in Article 2 of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

This definition reflects three fundamental legal principles:

1. **The living nature of intangible heritage**, constantly recreated by communities in response to their environment and history.
2. **Community-based ownership**, according to which heritage primarily belongs to the communities that practice and transmit it.
3. **Continuity and transmission**, which require a dynamic form of safeguarding aimed at ensuring the vitality of cultural practices without freezing them.

Today armed conflicts, climate change, desertification, and natural disasters worldwide pose unprecedented danger for intangible cultural heritage worldwide, including those registered in the UNESCO list, and sometimes lead to destruction of social cohesion and communities' practices and identity. Meanwhile cultural globalization and economic pressures entail the risk of homogenization, decontextualization and loss of cultural diversity.

The conference aims to combine academic discourse and actionable policies to face the current challenges. We invite scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to a systematic exploration of intangible cultural heritage through the lenses of law, anthropology, sociology, and technology. Through comparative analysis of normative models and the identification of best practices, the initiative aims to reinforce the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage as an essential component of peace, international security, sustainable development, social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and human rights.

Unlike tangible cultural heritage, intangible heritage still lacks specific legal instruments for protection in situations of armed conflict, such as those provided for material cultural property under the 1954 Hague Convention and its Protocols. Safeguarding cultural heritage therefore requires constant cooperation between experts, institutions, and local communities, both in times of peace and crisis, to ensure the preservation of the knowledge and practices that keep heritage alive.

Within this framework, advanced digitization, intelligent archives, and artificial intelligence offer unprecedented opportunities to document, transmit, and preserve cultural practices. At the same time, their use raises significant legal and ethical issues concerning the ownership of cultural data, control over digitization processes, and the risk of appropriation or decontextualization of traditional knowledge, thereby showing the importance to guaranteeing cybersecurity.

In the belief that digital language can be a fundamental tool for promoting the importance of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, Heritage International Institute developed the Virtual Museum on Cultural Heritage, promoted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and recognized by the United Nations. The Virtual Museum is the first initiative at a global level offering an example of digital interpretative exegesis of cultural heritage that combines different digitization models. The Conference will be the occasion to extend the Virtual Museum to intangible cultural heritage.

Join us in shaping a future where the knowledge and practices of today remain the heartbeat of tomorrow!

Submission Guidelines

Deadline for Abstracts: 20 March 2026

Format: *Max 500 words (Times New Roman, 12pt)*

Submission: academicdirection@hii.institute

Notification of Selection: 30 March 2026

Areas of focus are not limited to:

1. Value and Interpretation of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Objective: To explore the meaning, function, and future perspectives of intangible heritage as a cultural and legal asset.

- The 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage: impact, perspectives, and best practices for effective protection.
- Collective memory and the relationship with intangible aspects of cultural heritage.
- Intangible heritage as a means of promoting sustainable peace and social cohesion.

2. Intangible Cultural Heritage and Human Rights

Objective: To analyze the connections between intangible heritage, accessibility, and fundamental cultural rights.

- Access to and participation in intangible cultural heritage as a human right.
- Persons with disabilities and access to intangible heritage.
- The interplay between cultural rights and intangible cultural heritage.
- The role of heritage-bearing communities and the protection of their rights.
- Intangible heritage and economic inequalities: how wealth and poverty affect the transmission of knowledge.
- Politicization of intangible heritage and its impact on safeguarding, research, and interpretation of the past.

3. Intangible Cultural Heritage in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts

Objective: To address the challenges of legal protection of intangible heritage in situations of armed conflict.

- Safeguarding intangible heritage during armed conflicts: the need for special protection of heritage bearers.
- Crimes against intangible cultural heritage in war: documentation and accountability.
- Protection of intangible heritage under international criminal law (including the ICC Office of the Prosecutor's 2021 Policy on Cultural Heritage).
- Cultural genocide: historical evolution and contemporary relevance for intangible heritage.
- Intangible heritage as a tool for conflict prevention and reconciliation.
- The role of women in the creation, transmission, and management of intangible heritage during armed conflicts.

4. Intangible Cultural Heritage and Digital Technologies

Objective: To examine the role of advanced technologies in documenting, transmitting, and safeguarding intangible heritage.

- Advantages and risks of heritage digitization.
- Strategies, methods, and techniques for digitizing and documenting intangible heritage.
- Digitization as a means to preserve and transmit cultural practices.
- Applications of artificial intelligence in intangible heritage safeguarding.
- Digital heritage and human rights: accessibility and participation.
- Sustainable models of heritage digitization.
- Emerging perspectives on digital heritage and the UNESCO Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage (2003).

5. International Restitution of Cultural Property and Intangible Heritage

Objective: To analyze international legal frameworks and legal issues related to cultural objects and intangible heritage.

- International legal frameworks for the restitution of cultural property: private international law rules and legal gaps.
- The notion of "cultural property" and international transfers: museum and collection exports.

- Donations, inheritance, and international transfers of cultural property.
- Jurisdictional conflicts in ownership claims: *forum rei sitae*, *forum necessitatis*, and alternative forums.
- Applicable law in restitution claims: *lex originis*, *lex rei sitae*, and overriding mandatory rules.

6. Children, Armed Conflict, and Intangible Cultural Heritage

Objective: To consider the protection of children's cultural rights in crisis contexts.

- Protection of cultural heritage as part of children's rights to education, cultural expression, and identity.
- The role of heritage in preserving children's identity and sense of belonging.
- The impact of armed conflicts on cultural heritage and children's communities.
- Challenges faced by children in conflict zones and consequences for cultural identity.
- Best practices and initiatives to safeguard heritage and support children's well-being in conflict-affected areas.
- The role of education and cultural awareness in preserving intangible heritage and fostering resilience among youth.

7. Performing Arts

Objective: to explore the encompassing vocal and instrumental music, dance, theatre, and festive rituals.

- Traditional dances and music are strong tools for cultural cohesion and survival. They also often act as tools of psychosocial resilience for healing and collective trauma processing in post-conflict zones.
- Performing arts and continuity: when physical sites are destroyed, performing arts remain portable vessels of history, ensuring a community's identity survives displacement.
- The tangible-intangible symbiosis: examining the "physical" side of the performative—the craftsmanship of traditional instruments, costumes, and sacred spaces—and how their loss impacts the performance itself.
- Performing arts and digital safeguarding and emerging technologies.

Legal protections for bearers: policy responses under International Humanitarian Law to protect not just the "art," but the practitioners who are its only living repositories.

8. Interplay Between Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage

Objective: To explore the relationship between tangible and intangible cultural heritage and the need for integrated approaches.

- Current challenges in the simultaneous protection of tangible and intangible heritage.
- The need for integration between the 1972 World Heritage Convention and the 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- Identification, conservation, and interpretation of tangible and intangible heritage.
- Exceptional combinations of natural, landscape, and cultural elements: tangible and intangible heritage in dialogue.
- “Hybrid Heritage” bridging the gap between the tangible and intangible: music is a primary example, relying on tangible assets like musical scores and instruments, but also oral tradition, specialized knowledge, and savoir-faire passed down through generations.

9. Interplay between intangible cultural heritage and natural heritage

Objective: consider how intangible practices—such as ancestral farming techniques, water management rituals, and artisanal fishing methods—serve as active mechanisms for preserving natural ecosystems

- Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) as a Tool for Biodiversity Conservation
- The loss of linguistic or ritual diversity could be correlated with the degradation of local flora and fauna?
- Bridging the gap between indigenous/local wisdom and modern environmental science.
- Mythological Landscapes and the "Sanctity" of Natural Sites
- Rights, Nature, and Accessibility: the protection of natural heritage often depends on the intangible narratives (myths, songs, and spiritual beliefs)
- The role of collective memory and storytelling in sustainable land-use and conservation ethics.
- Inclusive Digital Stewardship: the right to access natural heritage through intangible digital innovation.