

OUTCOME DOCUMENT

The Bruges Recommendations

on Integrated Heritage Approaches

Recommendations to UNESCO, its partners
and its wider heritage networks

Bruges, Belgium
8 October 2026



1. Introduction

These recommendations were developed by the expert group convened during the meeting ‘(In)tangible: Towards Integrated Heritage Approaches in Managing and Developing Sites’, held on 8 October 2026 in Bruges, Belgium. The meeting was preceded by a series of interviews with heritage experts, which helped identify key questions and challenges for discussion.

Drawing on both the preparatory interviews and the exchanges in Bruges, the recommendations reflect the perspectives and practical experience of experts working across different heritage fields. Recognising the disciplinary specificities and methodological diversity of different heritage types and sectors, they also take into account international normative, policy and guidance frameworks. They reflect the growing recognition of the need for stronger synergies between different heritage frameworks and for approaches that understand heritage as a whole, while respecting the distinct concepts, methodologies and safeguarding or conservation requirements of different heritage fields.

Against this background, the experts gathered in Bruges propose a set of recommendations structured around three mutually reinforcing dimensions: principles, practice and policy.



PRINCIPLES

Shared values and
guiding
approaches



PRACTICE

Concrete
actions and
tools



POLICY

Enabling frameworks
and institutional
conditions

Frameworks and guidance consulted

These recommendations draw on, among others, the following international frameworks and guidance:

- UNESCO, Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972)
- UNESCO, Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)
- UNESCO Operational Directives for the Implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2024)
- UNESCO Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (2015)
- Council of Europe, Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention) (2005)
- UNESCO, Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in urban contexts
- UNESCO, Final Declaration of the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022 (2022)
- UNESCO, Call for Action “The Spirit of Naples”: Cultural Heritage in the 21st Century (2023)
- ICOMOS, International Charter and Guidance on Sites with Intangible Cultural Heritage (2024) UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (2025)
- UNESCO, Global Report on Cultural Policies: Culture – The Missing SDG (2025)
- UNESCO, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN, Preparing World Heritage Nominations (2011), Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context (2022), Enhancing Our Heritage Toolkit 2.0: Assessing Management Effectiveness of World Heritage Properties and Other Heritage Places (2023), Managing World Heritage (2026).

PART I

Principles

Guiding values for
integrated heritage
approaches

Recommendations

01 - 04



01

Recognise the reciprocal connections between intangible cultural heritage, spaces and objects

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is created, practised and transmitted by people, but it is also embedded in and connected to specific spaces, places, landscapes, buildings and objects. These spatial and material dimensions play an important role in the continuity, meaning and transmission of living heritage.

Integrated heritage approaches should therefore work in both directions: not only by identifying the intangible dimensions and the living heritage associated with heritage places and objects, but also by starting from intangible cultural heritage and recognising the spaces, places and material elements that communities, groups and individuals associate with its practice and transmission.



We encourage heritage management and safeguarding frameworks to recognise these reciprocal relationships and to consider the safeguarding of living heritage alongside the conservation and management of the spaces and material elements with which it is associated.

While focusing on the interconnectedness of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, the recommendations can also inspire further exploration of the relationship between natural, cultural (tangible and intangible) and underwater heritage.

02 Move beyond the tangible–intangible dichotomy while acknowledging disciplinary specificities

Integrated heritage approaches treat tangible and intangible cultural heritage as interconnected dimensions of broader cultural systems. At the same time, the efficiency of heritage management and planning benefit from conceptual clarity and from distinguishing between the intangible dimensions of tangible heritage, on the one hand, and intangible cultural heritage or living heritage as defined by the 2003 Convention, on the other hand.



We encourage further exploration of the inter-connections between tangible and intangible cultural heritage, while promoting conceptual clarity and acknowledging the specificities of different heritage frameworks.

03 Promote integrated value-based approaches to heritage

Integrated heritage approaches benefit from acknowledging the plurality of values that different stakeholders attribute to diverse heritage forms. Decision-making processes can be strengthened by developing transparent methods for identifying how values are attributed and assigned, which and whose values are being prioritised, how these are negotiated and whose perspectives are represented.

Existing value-based assessment methodologies offer important tools for balancing social, cultural, environmental, economic and community values. Further work could explore how such frameworks may more systematically incorporate living heritage and its contribution to the preservation and vitality of heritage places.



We encourage the further development of integrated value-assessment frameworks capable of incorporating and balancing the diverse values associated with both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

In line with this recommendation, we invite stakeholders to also reconsider authenticity through multiple perspectives. Assessments of authenticity benefit from incorporating not only expert knowledge but also the perspectives of local communities, practitioners and heritage bearers, including representatives of ICH elements. Such approaches can foster more inclusive understandings of heritage values.

04 Promote historical and diachronic research and perspectives

Historical research provides important insights into how the meanings, functions and uses of heritage places evolve over time. Without a historical background based on a scholarly analysis of archival and material sources, contemporary actors might, for example, claim or monopolize authenticity for elements that are not a constant feature throughout the site's history.

Historical research can support the drafting of future plans for heritage sites, drawing on the interplay of historical and contemporary perspectives brought out through stakeholder engagement.



We recommend drawing on historic and diachronic perspectives to help avoid static interpretations and to support more informed approaches to future planning.

PART II

Practice

From integrated
thinking to heritage
practice

Recommendations

05 - 10



05 Build multidisciplinary teams for integrated heritage approaches

The integrated heritage approach needs multidisciplinary teams of experienced experts in the domains and dimensions concerned, such as tangible and intangible cultural heritage, architecture, urban planning, anthropology, archaeology, history, tourism, stakeholder management and participation, who share a sensitivity and openness towards integrated and intersectional approaches.

Experts involved in interdisciplinary trajectories use the methodologies of their own expert domains in an agile way, working together as a team in a flexible and incremental process in which each step builds on the insights and experiences of the whole team.



Such interdisciplinary work can also create a ‘third space’ at the intersection of different sectors and disciplines, where an integrated perspective can generate heritage understandings, safeguarding and conservation approaches and future development scenarios that go beyond the sum of separate expert perspectives and measures for individual heritage types.

06 Strengthen meaningful and inclusive participatory governance

The participatory approaches promoted through the 2003 UNESCO Convention have contributed significantly to more inclusive forms of heritage governance by positioning communities, groups and individuals at the centre, as key actors, rather than passive beneficiaries of heritage policies. In particular, Article 15 provides an important framework for ensuring the widest possible participation of heritage bearers and practitioners in safeguarding processes, while the Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage offer valuable guidance on representation, inclusion, dialogue, mutual respect and community agency. These reflect the people-centered and rights-based approaches UNESCO promotes.

While participation is already embedded in the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention, including through the Operational Guidelines and related resource manuals and guidance, its implementation varies considerably across contexts. Further efforts are needed to translate these provisions into consistent and meaningful participatory practices throughout heritage processes, from nomination and management planning to monitoring, impact assessment and decision-making. Attention should be given to the effective involvement of rights-holders, local communities and practitioners of associated living heritage.

Integrated heritage approaches offer opportunities to strengthen the practical application of the aforementioned principles across both the safeguarding of living heritage and the management, conservation, and planning of heritage sites and cultural landscapes. Such approaches can contribute to ensuring that the rights, aspirations, knowledge, experiences and diverse perspectives of people who live, work, practice and engage with heritage are meaningfully reflected in governance structures and decision-making processes.



Participation should therefore be understood not merely as consultation, but as meaningful engagement that enables rights-holders and diverse, relevant communities to contribute to, and where appropriate, influence and inspire decisions affecting their heritage.

07 Integrate the safeguarding of living heritage into site management

Many heritage places are associated with expressions of living heritage reflected in knowledge, skills, practices, beliefs and forms of social and cultural organisation. The World Heritage Convention already provides several entry points for identifying these relationships. Criterion (iii), through its reference to cultural traditions and civilisations, provides a basis for considering the practices, knowledge and cultural processes through which such traditions are maintained, transmitted and transformed over time.

Criterion (v), through its recognition of traditional human settlement, land-use and sea-use and human interaction with the environment, creates further opportunities to understand heritage places in relation to the knowledge, practices and ways of life that have shaped and continue to sustain them. Most explicitly, Criterion (vi) recognises properties that are directly or tangibly associated with living traditions, ideas and beliefs, as well as artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.

Taken together, these criteria provide important entry points to highlight that the significance of heritage places may be inseparable from the living practices, knowledge, skills and traditions associated with them. Despite this recognition within the World Heritage framework, there is a need for further guidance and systematic approaches to identify these relationships and integrate the safeguarding and transmission of associated living heritage into the management and governance of World Heritage properties.



We therefore encourage the further development of methodologies, management tools and governance frameworks that enable World Heritage properties to identify associated living heritage and to support its safeguarding and transmission. Such approaches could facilitate the integration of living heritage into management plans, interpretation strategies, monitoring and decision-making processes while acknowledging communities, groups and practitioners as key actors in maintaining and transmitting the relationships between heritage practices, knowledge, ways of life, places and their material and environmental contexts.

08 **Ensure impartial facilitation and mediation in heritage processes**

Impartial facilitation and mediation can help connect the knowledge, skills, aspirations, perspectives and needs of the different actors and communities involved in heritage processes. By facilitating dialogue and negotiation among diverse interests, mediators can help navigate conservation requirements, tourism pressures, interpretation needs and financial sustainability, while ensuring that the perspectives and needs of communities, heritage bearers and practitioners are meaningfully considered.



Bringing all partners together from an early stage of the process can strengthen the safeguarding of heritage while contributing to more inclusive and balanced heritage management and decision-making.

09 **Strengthen heritage education, capacity building and intergenerational transmission**

Educational programmes and capacity building at formal, non-formal and informal levels can strengthen understanding of the interconnections between tangible and intangible cultural heritage and contribute to their long-term preservation and safeguarding.



Attention should be given to youth engagement and intergenerational transmission, affirming young people as active participants in shaping the future of heritage.

10

Develop heritage interpretation that supports sustainable tourism, local development and a culture of peace

Heritage interpretation methods can help communicate the multiple values and meanings associated with heritage places while supporting meaningful tourism experiences, local economic activities and community engagement. Such strategies can also contribute to mitigating risks associated with over-simplification, commodification and unsustainable tourism.



By fostering dialogue, mutual understanding and respect across communities and generations, heritage interpretation can also contribute to a culture of peace.

PART III

Policy

Enabling conditions
for integrated heritage
approaches

Recommendations

11 - 14



11

Strengthen people-centered and rights-based approaches to heritage governance

Integrated heritage approaches acknowledge people as the primary actors in creating, maintaining, transmitting and interpreting heritage. Drawing on the principles of both the Faro Convention and the 2003 UNESCO Convention, heritage governance benefits from placing communities, groups and individuals at the centre of decision-making processes, recognising their agency in defining what heritage is, why it matters and how it is managed, preserved or safeguarded.

At the same time, integrated approaches require attention to the diversity of actors connected to heritage sites, including heritage practitioners and bearers, local communities, residents, heritage experts, visitors and other stakeholders who contribute to the social and cultural life of heritage sites.



We encourage the development of people-centred and rights-based governance models, as well as participatory mechanisms adapted to the different roles, interests and relationships that diverse actors maintain with heritage places and their associated living heritage.

12

Promote greater equity in heritage policies, management measures and funding priorities

Integrated heritage approaches require greater equity in the ways in which different dimensions of heritage are recognised and supported through policies, management measures and resource allocation.

This requires greater acknowledgement of the resources needed not only for the physical conservation, restoration and infrastructure of heritage places, but also for the continued practice and transmission of living heritage associated with them. Appropriate support should therefore be provided for safeguarding measures, transmission, capacity building, documentation, community-led initiatives and the participation of communities, groups and practitioners in heritage management and decision-making.



We encourage heritage authorities, funding bodies and site management structures to review policy measures, management mechanisms and funding priorities from an integrated perspective with a view to ensuring a more equitable balance between investments in physical conservation and infrastructure and sustained support for the people, knowledge, skills and practices that contribute to the continuity and vitality of heritage places.

13

Develop transformative governance models linking heritage and sustainable development

Integrated heritage approaches increasingly require governance models capable of connecting heritage conservation and safeguarding with community wellbeing, livelihoods, environmental sustainability and local development. Experiences from programmes such as the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme and UNESCO Global Geoparks demonstrate the potential of approaches that place people and sustainable development at the centre of conservation strategies.



We encourage the exploration and testing of innovative governance frameworks. Therefore we propose that UNESCO develop a similar programme on 'Living Heritage and the Built Environment' that aims to strengthen the integration of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, sustainable development and community participation.

14

Connect heritage conservation and safeguarding with climate adaptation and sustainability

Traditional knowledge, skills and practices, including those related to the sourcing, production and use of materials, can contribute to contemporary responses to climate change, environmental pressures, energy efficiency and sustainability challenges.

In many contexts, living heritage reflects knowledge developed through long-term interaction with local environments, including practices related to natural resource management, building and maintenance techniques, land and water management and adaptation to changing environmental conditions.

Integrated heritage approaches can help identify, document and support the continued transmission of such knowledge and practices, while exploring their relevance to contemporary conservation and climate adaptation strategies. At the same time, climate-related changes may affect not only the physical fabric of heritage places, but also the communities, practices, livelihoods and forms of knowledge through which their heritage is maintained and transmitted.



We encourage heritage policies, management frameworks and climate adaptation strategies to consider these interconnections more systematically, bringing together conservation and safeguarding approaches with environmental responsibility, community knowledge and sustainable development.

Closing remarks

We invite UNESCO, its partners and the wider UNESCO heritage networks to consider and integrate these recommendations into the further development of heritage policies, guidance, methodologies and practice, and to continue fostering exchange, experimentation and collaboration across heritage fields. In doing so, integrated heritage approaches can contribute not only to more inclusive and sustainable ways of safeguarding and managing heritage, but also **to creating meaningful spaces for younger generations, strengthening dialogue and a culture of peace, and supporting more resilient and sustainable futures.**

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