



**UN**  
**2023 WATER**  
**CONFERENCE**

NEW YORK  
22-24  
MARCH  
2023

## UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

### *United Nations of Rivers, Deltas and Estuaries*

17-24 March in Philadelphia and New York City

UNESCO Chair Water Ports and Historic Cities; UNESCO Chair “Fleuves et Patrimoine” (River Culture); Global Network of Water Museums WAMU-NET; Drinkable Rivers; Water Authority Amstel, Gooi en Vecht (AGV); Deltametropolis Association; Fairmount Water Works Interpretive Center; Delft University of Technology, Leiden University; Erasmus University; LDE PortCityFutures; AGUR, Dunkirk; Global Urban History Project GUHP; Inforelais, and others

#### **Background on the event**

Rivers are key to human survival, for the provision of fresh water, to facilitate transport or to produce renewable energy. At the same time, rivers are major polluters, carrying waste to the oceans. Together with local NGOs and international experts, we aim to bridge the gap between nature and culture, between organic and man-made, and to develop new ways of engaging with diverse water bodies from source to sea. Rivers play a key role in achieving SDG 6 and other goals and targets, for example, justice between upstream and downstream communities. The week-long side event “The United Nations of Rivers, Deltas and Estuaries”, took place in multiple locations in Philadelphia and New York City from March 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. It brought together a diverse and interdisciplinary group of professionals and academics from the water, culture, heritage and sustainable development fields, including several UNESCO Chairs. Participants met at diverse locations including the Fairmount Water Works Interpretive Center in Philadelphia, the Bernard and Anne Spitzer School at the City College of New York | CUNY; The New School, Columbia University, AIA New York Center for Architecture, and New York University in Manhattan. The event attracted support from the Philadelphia Water Department, Drexel University, The Alliance for Watershed Education of the Delaware River, Womenvai, Consortium for Sustainable Urbanization CSU, and many other partners.

#### **Water Action Agenda (one paragraph, if possible, please include the link to your commitment in the [Water Action Agenda database](#))**

We, the organizing members of the United Nations of Rivers, Deltas and Estuaries working in the fields of water, nature, culture, heritage, sustainable development, and design gathered in Philadelphia and New York between 17th and 24th of March, 2023. We are convinced - together with our partners - that we need to go beyond the current asset-oriented approach to river and waterbody management to include



socio-spatial, ecological and cultural approaches that include long-term and process-based perspectives connecting the past with the present and the future. We are facing multiple global tipping points; we need to find short term solutions while embracing adaptive strategies. We argue that targeted exploration and understanding of traditional ecological knowledge, practices and spaces, needs to be enhanced, transformed and partially preserved to achieve the SDGs and sustainable long-term ecosystems. As the initiating group of the United Nations of Rivers, Deltas and Estuaries we commit to activating synergies among UNESCO Chair holders, institutions, activities and whoever wants to join, including scholars and practitioners, minority groups from the majority world, Indigenous people, etc. Our aim is to connect and engage with academics, practitioners, policy makers, artists, activists and professionals of all ages and backgrounds in a network. We will assess and revise the commitments annually with all participating partners.

### Our core commitments

- Building a broad integrative community
- Providing open access to practices, methodologies, and to data
- Co-implementing demonstration actions
- Experimenting with frameworks
- Co-development of didactic material
- Collaboration action in support of leading policy making

### Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

The side event participants have collaborated to collectively develop commitments from international partners for the future of clean, accessible, drinkable, and socio-ecologically fair rivers, deltas and estuaries that acknowledge humans and non-humans. They aim to combine local stories with global narratives in a multi-scalar approach, enabling design-thinking and artistic interventions for the implementation of the Water Action Agenda. Learning from initiatives like Drinkable Rivers, River Sisters, RivershooD, River Commons, RiverWalks or the River Culture Project and their artistic interventions, they have decided to establish a network for:

- **Building up a community** of practice, coordinated by the core team (a group of ca 12-20 UNESCO Chairs, 20-30 academics, public institutions and water authorities, NGOs, artists, activities, etc. in the field) as ambassadors of rivers, deltas and estuaries to amplify and represent its voices.
- Creating and maintaining an **online open access dissemination platform** (connected to Bluepapers.nl) to share contents of webinars, select social media information, and all types of scientific publications.
- Activate river and water awareness through a **global studies series on water awareness** (the **Blue Papers**), a peer-reviewed, open access publication. Additionally, each of the future Blue Papers will deliver a **digest of the content to substantiate policy advice**.
- **Developing methods of analysis and collaborative practice** for considering pasts, presents, futures across **education programs**.
- **Promoting regional initiatives** focusing on inclusive collaboration, knowledge exchange, and initiating action on a wide variety of topics, e.g. decision-making, capacity building, awareness raising, and transboundary cooperation.

