



UN
2023 WATER
CONFERENCE

NEW YORK
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UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

Water and Heritage

20-21 March, 9-5, Harlem Stage, Columbia University, Water Angel

Organized by: ICOMOS (ISC Water and Heritage, NL and US), the UNESCO Chair on Water, Ports and Historic Cities, the engineering firm Witteveen+Bos and the Water Authority Amstel, Gooi en Vecht (AGV), and supported by the Union of Water Boards, The Netherlands, the Icomos International Scientific Committee on Underwater Cultural Heritage (ICUCH), the Icomos Sustainable Development Goals Working Group (SDGWG).

Background on the event

The Dushanbe Declaration of 2022, "Water for Sustainable Development", states that we need to "accelerate our efforts for coherent implementation of water-related goals and achievement of targets of the 2030 Agenda and aim at strengthening political and technical dialogue on water, including at the highest level." This urgent call for action happens on the brink of the UN Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development" convened in New York from 22 to 24 March 2023.

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

The two-day side event "Water and Heritage: Connecting Past, Present and Future", took place in the Harlem Stage and at Columbia University, New York City on March 20th and 21st. The conference brought together a diverse and interdisciplinary group of professionals and academics from the water, culture, and heritage fields with the goal to bridge mandatory, disciplinary and institutional divides, and a wide audience, including heritage and water professionals, researchers, decision makers, public servants, spatial planners, Indigenous people, young professionals, artist and activists, approximately 120 participants from about 20 nations around the world. It was complemented by a ceremony at the Water Angel on 21 March (14th). Encouraged by the recommendations of the Tokyo symposium we acknowledge that culture and heritage are now on the agenda of the UN 2023 Water Conference. The participants express a deep conviction that culture and heritage are important pillars for sustainable development, inform climate change mitigation and adaptation, and improve current and future water management, planning, practices, awareness and engagement.



ICOMOS
International Scientific Committee on
Water and Heritage



Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

The side event called "Water and Heritage: Connecting Past, Present and Future" brought together a diverse and interdisciplinary group to discuss concepts, methodologies and case studies. We challenge governments, Indigenous peoples and local communities, community-based organizations, environmental and conservation groups, historical and cultural organizations, women's and gender organizations, youth organizations and groups, and academic and research institutions to voice their knowledge and experience on past and present water management.

Our collective insight into functional, spatial, temporal, material and immaterial dimensions of water set the scene to develop new integrated perspectives on water and living heritage for the future. It provides diverse insights into new concepts, methodologies and international case studies to better understand historical context, governance and culture. And most importantly, it triggers the movement to understand and build on the past together to embed heritage into sustainable development firmly.

Key recommendations for action

Create an international platform on water, culture and heritage to connect knowledge and practices through time and space in a structured way for relevant institutions, professionals, and stakeholders, contributing to mitigation, adaptation and water-related challenges in support of sustainable development.

This water, culture and heritage platform should:

1. Promote research, such as national compendia and international thematic studies on the enduring significance and values of tangible and intangible aspects of water, culture and heritage including as living assets for livelihoods;
2. Develop a shared and comprehensive historical understanding of water systems in political, societal, economic sustainable development;
3. Initiate and carry out cross-sectorial, multi-stakeholder dialogues that connect water and heritage professionals, scientists, decision-makers, local councils, Indigenous people, activists and other organisations at local, national and international levels;
4. Include water-related culture and heritage into the Valuing Water Concept and the Valuing Water Journeys;
5. Document, synthesise and utilise traditional best practices, management systems, knowledge and skills through open access publication;
6. Promote the significance of water-related culture and heritage into the SDG 6 on water and other water-related goals and targets;
7. Introduce living water-related heritage into policies for water management, such as Integrated Water Resources Management, the Valuing Water Concept as well as in relevant heritage concepts;
8. Include the rich history of water, culture and heritage, into capacity building programmes at universities, practical training and other means;
9. Develop educational and public awareness-raising tools and programmes using visual aids and contemporary media.