



UN
2023 WATER
CONFERENCE

NEW YORK
22-24
MARCH
2023

UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

Learning from the science of the past to inform the science of the future

Wednesday 22nd March 2023. 11 am New York. Online event.

Organized by:

ICOMOS International Committee on the Underwater Cultural Heritage

ICOMOS Sustainable Development Goals Working Group

ICOMOS Japan

UNESCO

Ocean Decade Heritage Network

Research Chair in Ocean Cultures and Heritage, Nelson Mandela University

The Ocean Foundation

Maritime Archaeology Trust

Background on the event

Listening only to the science of the future, runs the risk of forgetting the lessons from the past. Climate change will not only affect Earth's biodiversity, landscapes and ecosystems, but also have a significant impact on humanity with economic, political, cultural, health and identity implications. How such changes might affect lifestyles – empathy, symbolism and community well-being – needs to be better understood. In many places – particularly small island developing states – rising sea level and storms will inundate coastal towns and heritage on the coastal margins, threatening the very existence of entire communities. Heritage is already considered vulnerable to natural disasters, and water-related cultural heritage is no exception.

Water Action Agenda

Strengthen dialogue between water professionals, heritage experts, policy makers, scientists, spiritual leaders and the youth in capacity building and co-creating ideas of valuing water management strategies (material, governance and spiritual) built up over millennia.

Key Issues discussed

- Humanity has lived on and around water, leaving traces of in/tangible heritage
- This heritage is an instrument of knowledge
- The water issues we face today are not necessarily unique to modern-day society
- Indigenous and local communities have faced many challenges in relation to water
- The ways they overcome the challenges can help guide today's societies

Key recommendations for action

- Treating water only as a tangible resource can bring negative consequences to its use and consideration
- The contribution to sustainability through underwater cultural heritage could become an exciting focus, where reflection on its potential could have a significant impact on the present and the future
- Learning from hidden underwater cultural heritage sites can help to understand the motives behind situations that are currently occurring and reshape the actions of individuals and communities
- The water bodies' tangible and intangible heritage can make a unique contribution as a new tool for sustainability goals
- Entangling the past with global challenges will allow researchers to understand the social and mutual human–water association in order to understand water resources from a stance of respect.