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Intangible Cultural Heritage  
and Comparative Law



# Intangible Cultural Heritage and Climate Change

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# ICH, Sustainable development Goals (SDGs) and Climate Change

Climate change is a real and undeniable threat to our entire civilization.

The effects are already visible and will be catastrophic unless we act now. Through education, innovation and adherence to our climate commitments, we can make the necessary changes to protect the planet.

Local and indigenous communities around the world have learned to know and respect their environment and its climate. This holistic traditional knowledge shapes how natural resources are managed, and is transmitted through oral tradition, ritual practices and belief systems.



# Heritage and SDGs

Heritage is more than just monuments. Heritage—cultural and natural, tangible and **intangible**—is an evolving resource that supports identity, memory and ‘sense of place’, and has a crucial role in achieving **sustainable development**.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, is a plan of action for ‘People’, ‘Planet’, and ‘Prosperity’, which seeks to strengthen universal ‘Peace’ through the ‘Partnership’ of all countries and stakeholders (the ‘5 Ps’). Founded on the principle of human rights, this holistic plan connects all recent global agendas. **It sets out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, calling on the world to take the bold and transformative steps that are urgently needed to heal and sustain our planet, in the face of the interlinked challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, socio-economic disparities and health crises.



# Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



# SDGs, Climate and Heritage

The climate issue affects all sustainable development goals. It is a cross-cutting issue, just like the culture issue. Cultural heritage is one of the tools through which we ensure sustainable development, combat climate change and mitigate its devastating effects.

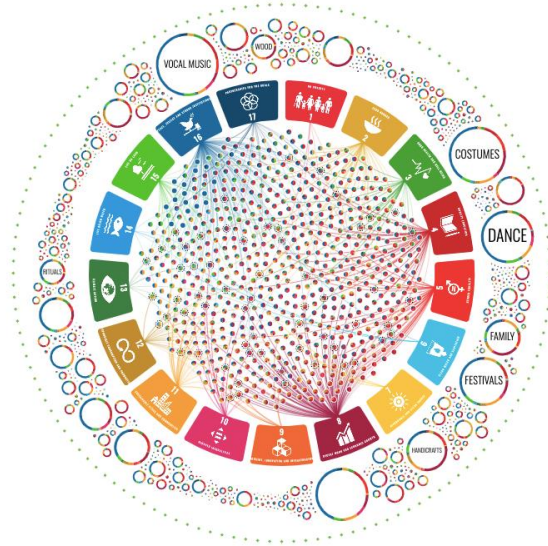
In all SDGs we find a clear reference to the function played by cultural heritage, including intangible heritage. For example:

- **Cultural diversity and intercultural understanding:** The Introduction refers to the need to respect cultural diversity (para. 8) and pledges member states to foster intercultural understanding, tolerance, and mutual respect, while acknowledging the natural and cultural diversity of the world, recognizing that all cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development (para. 36).
- **Education:** Under Goal 4 to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’, Target 4.7 stresses the need for education to promote ‘a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development’.
- **Creative economy and tourism:** Both under Goal 8 to ‘promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all’, and Goal 12 to ‘ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns’, Targets 8.9 and 12.b refer to the need to devise and implement ‘policies to promote sustainable tourism, including through local culture and products’, and the need to develop suitable monitoring tools in this area.
- **Urbanism:** Under Goal 11 to ‘make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’, Target 11.4 highlights the need to ‘strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage’. Target 11.4 distinguishes itself as the only Target dedicated to a cultural theme, thus serving as the anchor of much cultural heritage work, although this does not preclude the relevance of other targets in the full spectrum of the SDGs.



# ICH and SD in 2003 UNESCO Convention

From the **676** elements listed in the UNESCO lists of the **2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage**, almost all elements have *connections* or *strong relation* to at least one specific SDG.



<https://ich.unesco.org/dive/sdg/>

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)	Elements connected	Strongly connected
1 - No poverty	30	4
2 - Zero hunger	105	40
3 - Good health and well-being	96	26
4 - Quality education	<b>387</b>	47
5 - Gender equality	251	34
6 - Clean water and sanitation	12	4
7 - Affordable and clean energy	14	4
8 - Decent work and economic growth	<b>244</b>	<b>102</b>
9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	20	7
10 - Reduced inequality	72	14
11 - Sustainable cities and communities	136	30
12 - Responsible consumption and production	<b>156</b>	32
13 - Climate action	19	8
14 - Life below water	19	6
15 - Life on land	103	28
16 - Peace, justice and strong institutions	<b>514</b>	<b>134</b>
17 - Partnership for the goals	71	20

# How Intangible Cultural Heritage can contribute to SDGs?

Some Examples



# Goal 1 – No Poverty

Intangible heritage can contribute to **eradicating extreme poverty** for all. The undertaken in full respect of intangible heritage values can provide access to basic services and infrastructures, as well as access to traditional water and sanitation systems. Safeguarding ICH can support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation that make use of local resources and skills.

**Intangible heritage, including Indigenous knowledge and local skills, can help to reduce exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other environmental shocks and disasters.**





# Case / Copper craftsmanship of Lahij - Azerbaijan

Copper craftsmanship of Lahij is the traditional practice of making and using copperware concentrated in the Lahij community in the Caucasus (Azerbaijan). The copper-smelting master coordinates the entire process and is accompanied by an apprentice who learns the necessary techniques while helping the master.

The master is responsible for **selling** the copperware in the workshops and remunerating the work of the other craftspeople involved

Numerous families in Azerbaijan come to buy copperware in Lahij and use it in their daily lives believing it **improves the health benefits of food**.

For artisans, the tradition represents **a major source of living** and provides a strong sense of identity and community pride.



## Goal 2 – Zero hunger

**The diversity of intangible heritage serves as a cornerstone, essential for the sustenance and resilience of global human life.** Food security takes multiple forms, including traditional farming systems, Indigenous agricultural and fishing systems, and the traditional knowledge associated to herbs and medicines. **All these sustainable practices support biodiversity, aid in adaptation to climate change.**

These intangible heritages are threatened by modern, intensive, agriculture and animal farming, and unsustainable development infrastructure.

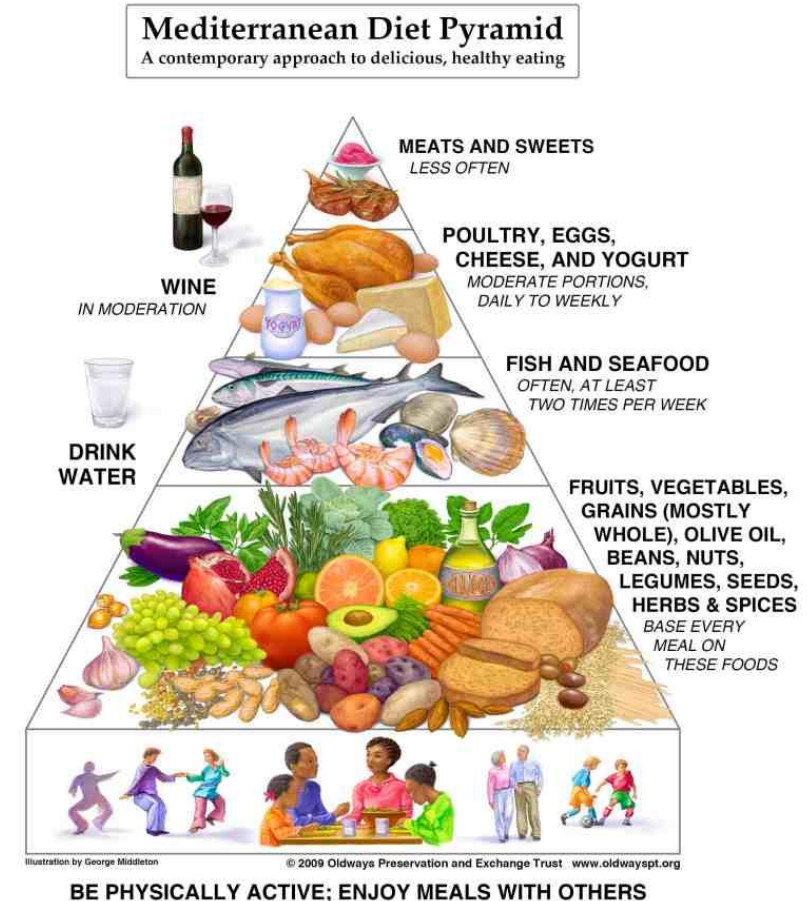


# Case / The Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean diet involves a set of skills, knowledge, rituals, symbols and traditions concerning crops, harvesting, fishing, animal husbandry, conservation, processing, cooking, and particularly the sharing and consumption of food. **Eating together** is the foundation of the cultural identity and continuity of communities throughout the Mediterranean basin. It was recognized by UNESCO in a multinational nomination: **Italy, Spain, Greece and Morocco (2010)**, and then **Portugal, Croatia and Cyprus** were added in 2013.

The Mediterranean diet emphasizes values of **hospitality, neighbourliness, intercultural dialogue** and **creativity**, and a **way of life guided by respect for diversity**. It plays a vital role in cultural spaces, festivals and celebrations, bringing together people of all ages, conditions and social classes.

It is a lifestyle that is also based on seasonal and zero-kilometre products. **This heritage avoids the intercontinental travel of food with large CO2 emissions into the atmosphere, one of the causes of climate change. It is the sustainable lifestyle by definition.**



## Goal 3/ Health and well-being

**Intangible Heritage plays a fundamental role in ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages.** It acts as complex resources for (re)constructing personhood. Access to and engagement with intangible heritage have salubrious effects, which can help to address mental health issues, reduce social isolation, provide a sense of place and community-belonging, or create opportunities that enhance the meaning and value of life.

Intangible heritage practices can also help to health and look for the harmonious connections between body and mind.



# Case / Yoga

Yoga consists of a series of poses, meditation, controlled breathing, word chanting and other techniques designed to **help individuals build self-realization**, ease any suffering they may be experiencing and **allow for a state of liberation**, practiced in India.

It is practised by the **young** and **old** without discriminating against gender, class or religion and has also become popular not only in India, but in other parts of the world.

Nowadays, yoga ashrams or hermitages provide enthusiasts with additional opportunities to learn about the traditional practice, as well as schools, universities, community centres and social media. Ancient manuscripts and scriptures are also used in the teaching and practice of yoga, and a vast range of modern literature on the subject available.



# Goal 6 / Clean Water and Sanification

Water-related ecosystems and environments have always provided sites for human settlements and civilizations. Over millennia, people have created varied and often interconnected systems to manage water and support sanitation.

Some of the knowledge associated to these resilient systems and strategies — today recognized as intangible heritage for their historic and technological significance — are still vital, functional, and closely linked with the traditions, rituals, and narratives of everyday life.



# Case / Al Aflaj, traditional irrigation network system in the UAE

Al Aflaj and the related oral traditions, knowledge and skills of **construction**, **maintenance** and **equitable water distribution** are a source of pride for the associated communities.

Al Aflaj is a **traditional irrigation system** which uses an underground tunnel to conduct water over long distances from an underground source to a basin, where the community can access it.

Community members contribute to maintaining Al Aflaj and clearing the tunnels of mud. This knowledge and experience has been passed down for **3,000 years**. Related knowledge is transmitted through instruction and shared experience as well as by other means such as field trips for school students.

Throughout the centuries, the Al Aflaj have served to **provide drinkable water for humans and animals** and to **irrigate farms in an arid environment**, demonstrating the **community's creativity** in the face of water scarcity and the desert environment.



# Goal 13 / Climate Action

Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related disasters; integrate climate change measures into policies and planning; build knowledge and capacity to meet climate change: these are the main target of the Goal 13

As the global community faces the realities of climate change, it stands to benefit from local communities' understanding of the climate, ways of mitigating disasters, and adapting to environmental change.





# Agriculture practice in Pantelleria

The Traditional agricultural practice of cultivating the 'vite ad alberello' (head-trained bush vines) of the community of Pantelleri, a small Island in the South of Mediterranean Sea, was inscribed in 2014 in the ICH UNESCO List.

Vines are grown in bushes in the ground 20 centimetres deep because there is no water and there is a lot of wind.

This cultivation technique, in addition to the dry stone wall technique (also ICH LIST), serves to keep the agricultural landscape intact and to counteract hydrogeological disruption.

**In 2020 and 2022, the island was hit by an abnormal typhoon in the Mediterranean Sea. Land cultivated using this method was not swept away by the typhoon, while land abandoned or cultivated using modern techniques was completely destroyed by the typhoon's fury.**



# Living Heritages are our lifeline.

The living heritage tells where we come from and describes who we are; at the same time, it outlines the road we will travel, defining our future. It is a heritage made of knowledge, rituals, practices that bind each of us to our community.

In a globalised world, where it is possible to produce, sell or buy the same products everywhere, living heritage teaches us that there are still traditions that make us different. But **this cultural diversity is a point of strength and not of division: it is from the richness of this cultural diversity that we can and must learn.**

The constant pursuit of richness has made many governments lose sight of the goal of ensuring a sustainable life for us and for the ecosystem that has welcomed us.

**Living heritages are our lifeline:** through knowledge of the diversity of these heritages, we can find the recipe to counter climate change and ensure the sustainability of our lives. This is why governments need to adopt specific policies to protect living heritages, to ensure the transmission of knowledge about them, especially to the young, and to support and promote them.

**Because if we do not protect our past, we will have no future.**



