WATER, HERITAGE & CLIMATE MITIGATION/ADAPTATION: CONNECTING PAST KNOWLEDGE & FUTURE RESILIENCE 28.7.2026 CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

ICOMOS General Assembly (Kuching, Malaysia 16-24 October),
COP31 (Antalya, Türkiye 11-15 November) and
UN Water Conference (Abu Dhabi, UAE 8-10 December) Symposia and Side Events

The ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Water and Heritage (ISC Water) proposes to co-organize three official Side Events and Symposia in partnership with affinity organizations and partners including ICOMOS Malaysia, ICOMOS Türkiye, ICOMOS SDG Working Group, ICOMOS Climate Action Working Group, The International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage, the Politecnico di Milano WatHer Project, the Universita di Sapienza Roma, The University of Reading, World Monuments Fund, The Future Food Institute, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization Globally Important Agriculture Heritage Systems, Wageningen University (*list in formation*) to occur at the 2026 ICOMOS General Assembly (Kuching, Malaysia), COP31 in (Antalya, Türkiye) and UN Water Conference (Abu Dhabi, UAE). These Symposia and Side Events are anticipated to occur in close proximity to the conference venues; the format is anticipated to be in person or hybrid (in-person attendance with remote access).

These events will build upon momentum established by "Water Heritage and Culture: Past, Present Future" Side Events at the 2023 Water Action Decade Midterm Review in New York; the 2024 Pune Scientific Symposium; the 2025 Montepaldi Scientific Symposium; 2026 UN ECOSOC Partnership Forum SDG6 Action Segment Panel; the 2026 Venice Climate Week; the 48th UNESCO World Heritage Committee Meeting in Busan; and the 2026 Future Food Institute's Planet Aqua Planet Peace events at the 2026 New York Climate Week. The theme of the proposed 2026 Symposia and Side Events, "Water, Heritage + Climate Mitigation/Adaptation: Connecting Past Knowledge + Future Resilience," will catalyze critical, strategic and action-oriented dialogues about the resiliency and cost effectiveness of traditional water management systems; the need to include these systems in water and land management policies; the role of these systems as real instruments of peace building; and how these systems and stewardship practices can help to meet water needs of today and tomorrow.

Water connects people, landscapes, ecosystems and cultures - it is life giving and life sustaining. Communities worldwide have engineered traditional water management systems to live with changing climate, water scarcity and flooding, and managed water for domestic purposes, and agricultural and industrial uses. Inspiring examples include terraced irrigation, aflaj and karez, khettaras and qanats, water meadows and rainwater harvesting, as well as governance and stewardship practices. These traditional water management systems represent embodied carbon footprints, and evidence centuries or millennia of accumulated knowledge, social cooperation, traditional land management and regenerative food, environmental adaptation and resilience. Despite these achievements, the authenticity, integrity and purpose built use of historic water-related tangible and intangible heritage are frequently threatened by demographic, socio-economic and climate crisis as well as environmental degradation. These threats may be mitigated for UNESCO World Heritage listed and eligible heritage due to income from cultural heritage tourism. But the livelihoods of communities that rely on non-designated heritage are frequently left to market forces, which can lead to water and food insecurity, loss of cultural heritage landscapes, loss of traditional water and land management systems, loss of biodiversity, and loss of indigenous knowledge and stewardship practices. In addition to these threats, water related heritage is also vulnerable due to its absence in the UN Water agenda. ISC Water calls for the re-assessment of historic water related tangible and intangible heritage as living assets, sustaining livelihoods and essential to meeting SDG6 targets, to help confront climate crisis, demographic changes, and global

water bankruptcy.[1] ISC Water advocates for the ensemble of engineering, cultural, socioeconomic, and environmental significance of water-related heritage to provide water safety and water security of communities, ecosystems and fragile cultural heritage landscapes.

ICOMOS General Assembly Side Event co-organized by ICOMOS Malaysia and ISC Water and Heritage including a Scientific Symposium and Annual General Meeting. The theme of the Symposium will focus on traditional water and land management systems, sustaining socio-economic livelihoods, and climate adaptation/mitigation. The Annual General Meeting will include updates on the work of the ISC Water, including the activities of the Working Groups.

COP31 Side Event co-organized by ICOMOS Türkiye, Climate Action Working Group, ISC Cultural Landscapes, Rights-Based Approaches Working Group, Sustainable Development Goals Working Group, ISC Risk Preparedness, ICOMOS Transhumance Initiative, ISC Water, Heritage Adapts!. The "Water, Heritage and Climate: Connecting Past Knowledge with Future Resilience" session will highlight how traditional water management systems and intangible stewardship practices are inherently resilient and part of climate mitigation/adaptation strategies.

UN Water Conference Side Event (co-organized by (list in formation ICOMOS SDG Working Group, ICOMOS ISC Water, ICOMOS CAWG, Universita Sapienza Roma, Future Food Institute, World Monuments Fund).
Achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation is critical to progress on the 2030 Agenda. As we enter the final 5 years of the 2030 Agenda, investment, innovation and political will must accelerate implementation of SDG 6. ISC Water calls for the re-assessment of value, investment in, and renewal of traditional water management systems as essential for meeting SDG6 targets where no options are left on the table. The Side Event will foreground examples of traditional water management systems rehabilitation and cyclical maintenance as cost-effective and climate-resilient, livelihood sustaining, promoting peace and prosperity, and advancing food and water security. The event will include a dialogue on preparing a joint Policy Paper, and a Statement and Commitments with implementation recommendations.

The underlying goals of the side events and symposia are outlined below:

- **Launch an International Water, Heritage and Culture Platform** (IWHCP) In 2023, the ISC Water and partners Statement to the UN acknowledged the fundamental significance of water-related heritage and culture and proposed the IWHC Platform. In 2026, ISC Water launched a database to catalog cases of traditional water management system rehabilitation, as an evidence-based tool to advocate for investment in rehabilitation and cyclical maintenance.

- **Highlight the role of traditional water management systems in achieving SDG 6:** These systems, that sustain farming communities worldwide, are living assets rooted in stewardship and deep understanding of local physical, climatological and ecological conditions. The Global Commission on the Economics of Water[2] acknowledges the relevance of restoring these systems to mitigate water and climate change crises.

- **Include water-related heritage in global conversations about water, water management and policy.** The IPWHC (described above) will build bridges between science and public policy to enhance effective and equitable water management through a multidisciplinary approach that links cutting-edge research with practical implementation. The Platform will connect evidence based data on traditional water

[1] Madani, K. 2026. *"Global Water Bankruptcy Report: Living Beyond our Hydrological Means in the Post-Crisis Era."* United Nations University, Institute for Water, Environment and Health. January.

[2] The Global Commission on the Economics of Water. 2024. *The Economics of Water: Valuing the Hydrological Cycle Report.*

resources management with local governance, policymakers and civil society, and demonstrate that preserving water-related heritage can be economically viable and socially advantageous, fostering informed decision-making and sustainable solutions.

We particularly encourage submissions from emerging professionals, Indigenous communities, local practitioners, scholars from underrepresented regions and hydrological systems and those involved with stewardship practice knowledge transfer to youth. The themes of the Side Events and Symposia will include:

- Traditional water and land management systems rehabilitation and cyclical maintenance
- Climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience through water related heritage
- Terraced agriculture and mountain irrigation systems
- Qanats, khettaras, aflaj, karez, foggaras and arid-region water systems
- Floodplain, water meadows and wetland management systems
- Coastal, delta, riverine and lagoon cultural landscapes
- Riverine settlements and waterfront heritage
- Traditional fisheries and aquatic livelihoods
- Rainwater harvesting traditions
- Historic waterways, canals and ports
- Water governance, institutions, management and policy frameworks
- Indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge and stewardship practices
- Water rituals, beliefs and spiritual dimensions of water
- Youth and empowering the future generation of water managers
- Water heritage and regenerative food systems
- Methodologies for assessing water heritage values
- Community participation including youth and gender and living heritage approaches

Important Information and Dates

- Online submissions to be made to the following email: **icomoswaterabstractsposters@gmail.com**
- Please indicate in the header/title of your email submission, which of the events you wish to participate in
- Abstract Submission deadline for events/symposia: 15 August
- Notification of acceptance: 15 September
- Submission of final materials: 15 January 2027
- **Contribution Formats**
  - **Oral Presentation**: 15-minute presentation followed by 5 minutes discussion and questions.
  - **Poster Presentation**: To create opportunities for scholarly discussion and networking.
  - **Hybrid Participation**: On-site presentations or pre-recorded presentations for contributors unable to attend in person. Pre-recorded contributions will receive equal consideration and will be integrated into the symposium programme and proceedings.
- **Submissions for abstracts and/or posters** to include:
  - Title
  - Author(s) and Affiliation(s)
  - Presentation preference (Oral and/or Poster)
  - Attendance (in person or online)
  - Abstract (maximum 300 words)
  - Five keywords
  - Email address and Physical Address
- **Proceedings:** Accepted abstracts to be considered for publication in an online proceedings volume.

Please fill in the following table and include a screen shot in your abstract submission:

EVENT	Selection of the event(s) - can be more than one	Presentation preference (Oral and/or Poster)	Attendance (in person or online)
ICOMOS General Assembly (Kuching, Malaysia) Symposium			
COP31 (Antalya, Türkiye) Side Event			
UN Water Conference (Abu Dhabi, UAE) Side Event			