



“Traditional Water and Land Management Systems”
2025 ICOMOS ISC Water Scientific Symposium, Annual General Meeting, Master Class
& the World in Florence
in collaboration with
Future Food Institute, Villa Montepaldi Living Lab, International Commission on Irrigation and
Drainage, and Fondazione Romualdo del Bianco

Symposium, Master Class Planning Roundtable and Annual General Meeting, Florence, 24 November 2025
The World in Florence, 26 - 28 November 2025

Concept Note: Valuing the cultural, social and economic significance of water-related heritage and agricultural production for sustainability and livelihoods.

Water is life. Civilizations have been managing water for thousands of years, constructing drinking water supply and bath complexes, laying out irrigation structures and retention dams, constructing terraced agricultural fields, fountains and gardens, establishing water governance protocols, and integrating water into religious and spiritual traditions. It follows that many of the 1,500 listed UNESCO World Heritage sites are water-related. However, water managers are not aware about the significance of water related heritage for today's and tomorrow's water safety and water security. Water managers may view world water heritage sites as interesting for tourism. Fortunately, these perceptions are beginning to change. The Global Commission on the Economics of Water's (GCEW) November 2024 *Report* articulates the importance of restoring sustainable, traditional techniques in agriculture and water/land management. (1) The GCEW's call to action aligns with the mission of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Water and Heritage (ISC Water) which aims to inform water management professionals of the value of water-related heritage in meeting the livelihoods of local communities and the world's water needs of today and tomorrow.

The vision of ISC Water, formally established by ICOMOS Secretariat in December 2024, is to articulate the significance of water-related heritage for present and future water and land management challenges and strengthen social and economic livelihoods of communities worldwide. The ISC Water aims to contribute to climate mitigation and resilience efforts, ensuring preservation and sustainability of water related cultural assets for future generations, as expressed in the 2025 ICOMOS AGA Ouro Preto Proceedings.(2) While the relevance of the ISC's mission on the world stage is clear, the complexity and ambition of the mission must confront the fundamental disciplinary, institutional and regulatory divides that separate the water management and heritage communities. Historic preservation experts promote long-term stewardship of heritage sites, preserve character-defining features and integrity, help owners in making informed decisions, work with interdisciplinary teams to plan for responsible change, and guide managers of cultural heritage tourism sites. Water managers provide socio-economic and ecological livelihood to societies and ecosystems. In addition to these professional “silos”, the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID) asserts that the strengths and weaknesses of traditional water-related agricultural systems are inadequately understood.

The Future Food Institute exists to make exponential positive change to sustainably improve life on Earth through education and innovation in global food systems, connecting stakeholders, training and empowering a new breed of change-makers, and transforming food systems. The Future Food Institute's global network of partners includes UNESCO, UN FAO, Food for Climate League, Google Food, UN FAO Learning Academy, Youth Climate Leaders, among others. The Institute's deep commitment to sustainable agriculture and heritage, coupled with its Water Safety and Security, Climate, and Blue Communities initiatives, reinforces synergies with ISC Water's mission and vision. The Romualdo Del Bianco Foundation is a non-profit organization based in Florence, dedicated to promoting intercultural dialogue and enhancing cultural heritage as tools for peace and understanding among peoples.

The ISC Water along with the Future Food Institute, the Villa Montepaldi Living Lab, the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage, and the Fondazione Romualdo del Bianco, seek to foster dialogues between farmers, heritage



experts, water management professionals, policy makers, designers, researchers and activists at the forthcoming 2025 Symposium, Master Class Planning Roundtable and Annual General Meeting. The November 2025 events build upon prior symposia, side events and webinars organized by ISC Water and its affinity partners such as the Taiwan Conference (2019), Tokyo Symposium (2020), UN Water Conference Side Event in New York (March 2023), Ribeira Sacra Conference (November 2023) and the Pune Scientific Symposium (August 2024).

The 2025 Scientific Symposium, Master Class Planning Roundtable and Annual General Meeting (24 November) will be held at the Villa Montepaldi in a hybrid format to encourage inclusive participation (in person and online). Proposed affinity organizations (*list in formation*): United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); United Nations Development Program; UNESCO (World Water Development Program, International Hydrological Program, IHE Delft), ICCROM, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); Global Commission on the Economics of Water (GCEW); Laudato Si Movement; International Water Association (IWA); WWC, WHP; ICOMOS (ISC Cultural Landscape, ISC Theophil, ISC Cultural Tourism); ICOMOS Working Groups and Focal Points (SDG Working Group, Indigenous Heritage Focal Point), ISUWH, World Monuments Fund, WAMUNET; BVDU Pune, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the University of Florence.

The 2025 ICOMOS ISC Water Symposium provides a timely opportunity to connect the global dialogue on water related heritage with practical, systemic initiatives underway in the Mediterranean and beyond. Alongside our collaboration with the Future Food Institute and Villa Montepaldi Living Lab, we are excited to share and highlight the following contributions, each backed by a growing network of academic and institutional partners. These initiatives also open up **new angles** to enrich the global understanding of water as *living heritage* and water related heritage as *living assets*:

- **Water and Territorial Governance:** Exploring how water heritage can inspire innovative, inclusive governance models for rural and coastal landscapes.
- **Water and Public Health:** Integrating One Health approaches to show how the health of ecosystems and communities is deeply intertwined with water access, quality, and traditional food systems.
- **Water and the Regeneration of Marginal Areas:** Demonstrating how water-centered cultural practices can unlock sustainable development and resilience in peripheral regions often left behind by mainstream policy.

Together, these perspectives reinforce the relevance of the Mediterranean as a **living lab** for the regenerative future we aim to build—ecologically grounded, culturally rich, and socially just.

SYMPOSIUM THEMES

1. Preserving terraced agriculture and water-related heritage for water safety, water security and sustaining the livelihoods of communities for today and tomorrow

Theme: Traditional farming practices and systems, water management and communities

Relevance: Valuing the knowledge and practices of traditional agrarian communities, including water governance, land use protection and conservation, raising public awareness of water-related heritage to help meet the water needs of today and tomorrow, including sustainable food and water systems

Proposed Partners and Affinity Organizations:

Institutional: Future Food Institute; Villa Montepaldi Living Lab; ICID; FAO, ICCROM, OECD, GECW, ICOMOS Indigenous Heritage Working Group, UNESCO WWDP, UNDP + Hyundai, FRDB

2. Defining the significance of water-related heritage as living heritage in the context of terraced agriculture and climate change



ICOMOS
International Scientific Committee on
Water and Heritage



**FUTURE
FOOD
INSTITUTE**

**Villa
MONTEPALDI**



Theme: Developing assessment methodologies for water-related heritage (theory and practice)

Relevance: Building bridges between water management and heritage practitioners; international case studies (national and local levels)

Proposed Partners:

Institutional: UNESCO (World Heritage Convention, Venice Charter), ICOMOS, Historic Urban landscape approach, Integrated Water Resources Management Valuing Water Principles and Ecosystems Services approach.

3. Exploring opportunities for integrating water-related heritage in university curricula for water management, engineering, architecture, landscape architecture and historic preservation

Relevance: how are we inculcating the values of water-related heritage in the young leaders of tomorrow?

Proposed Partners:

Academic: Universities of Florence, Bologna, Venice, Pune, etc.

4. Future Lands / Terre Future

Theme: Regenerative land governance and bio-cultural resilience

Relevance: Supports objectives on landscape preservation, traditional practices, and livelihood-centered land use

Proposed Partners:

- *Academic:* Wageningen University (NL), EPFL (CH), University of Naples "Federico II", IIASA
- *Institutional:* UNESCO, Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change (CMCC), Local municipalities

5. Venice Water Declaration

Theme: Shared water governance and planetary water consciousness

Relevance: Direct alignment with the Symposium's conceptual foundation ("Water is life") and cultural-political framing

Proposed Partners:

- *Academic:* IUAV Venice, UNESCO WWAP, TU Delft, Stanford University (Atkinson Center)
- *Institutional:* UNESCO-IHP, UN FAO, OECD Water Division, City of Venice, BlueMed Initiative

6. Blue Communities Initiative

Theme: Distributed coastal regeneration and adaptive governance

Relevance: Operationalizes the concept of water-related heritage as "living heritage" for community resilience

Proposed Partners:

- *Academic:* Universities of Florence, Bologna, Venice, Naples; University of Plymouth (UK – Blue Communities SE Asia)
- *Institutional:* Comune di Pollica, ANCI, IUAV, IUCN, ICCROM, UNESCO, FAO

7. BlueEra (Blue Era – The Regenerative Age)

Theme: Artistic-scientific engagement platform on oceanic futures

Relevance: A powerful communications and mobilization moment to promote symposium outputs and policy alignment

Proposed Partners:

- *Academic:* Center for Ocean Solutions (Stanford), University of Michigan (Planet Blue), Ocean Frontier Institute (Canada)
- *Institutional:* UN Ocean Decade, Food for Climate League, FAO, Future of Food Global Alliance

8. HOHLI – Healthy Oceans, Healthy Lives Initiative

Theme: One Health integration of marine ecosystems, nutrition, and reproductive health

Relevance: Strengthens interdisciplinary pillars of the symposium, notably in the domains of research, health, and food systems

Proposed Partners:



- *Academic:* University of Basilicata, Stanford University (Naylor, FSE), Crops for the Future (Malaysia)
- *Institutional:* WHO, UNDP, FAO, BlueMed, EcoFoodFertility

9. World Heritage Irrigation Structures (WHIS)

Theme: The International Committee on Irrigation and Drainage launched a process for recognizing historical irrigation structures similar to World Heritage Sites as recognized by UNESCO.

10. Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS)

Theme: The United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) honors living heritage systems inhabited by communities, marked by agro-biodiversity, traditional knowledge, intangible heritage, and cultural heritage landscapes that support livelihoods and food security.

CONCLUSION

By incorporating these initiatives into the 2025 Symposium's programming, publication outputs (online open access format), and side events, ICOMOS ISC Water can:

- Bridge disciplines and institutional silos;
- Ground the conceptual objectives in operational, place-based strategies;
- Expand outreach across education, youth, civic, gender, and cultural sectors;
- Catalyze scalable models for inclusive water heritage governance.

These initiatives align not only with the **core objectives** of the Symposium but also with future-facing agendas such as the 2025 ICOMOS General Assembly (Nepal), 2026 Venice Water Week, and the 2026 UN Water Conference (UAE).

An invitation to submit abstracts for presentations (online and in person), posters and sessions will be sent to all ISC Water and other ISCs Expert Members, FFI partner organisations, ICID members and FRDB contacts as well as affinity organisations, links will be posted on the respective websites..

Endnotes

1. <https://economicsofwater.watercommission.org/report/economics-of-water.pdf>
2. Van Schaik, Hunter and Prothi (2025). Proceedings of the ICOMOS Annual General Meeting and Symposium, Ouro Preto, Brazil.