



World Heritage Young Professionals Forum 2019 Declaration

We, the participants of the UNESCO World Heritage Young Professionals Forum 2019 “World Heritage: Local Insights for Global Challenges”, would like to extend our sincere thanks to the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr. Abulfas Garayev, Chairperson of the 43rd session of the World Heritage Committee and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Furthermore, we are grateful to the Ministry of Culture for organising and financing the Forum. Our heartfelt thanks go to the executive and volunteer teams for their support, and the groups of experts for their enriching insights and mentorship. We have examined three aspects of heritage in Azerbaijan, including the urban context in Baku, cultural landscapes in Gobustan and the intangible heritage, through local insights for addressing global challenges. Building on the declarations of the previous youth fora, this examination has led us to express the following:

We as young people see the attraction of urban life as a magnet for innovation, creativity and new ways of living. However, on-going uncontrolled development in urban centres worldwide is completely unacceptable, leading to the erosion of distinct character and identity of the place.

Sustainable development and the improvement of cities’ socio-economic vitality and livability are needed for robust place-based, integrated strategies, to help reinforce rural-urban linkages. By involving local stakeholders through a participatory and multi-stakeholder partnership approach, we can achieve the UN SDGs and the New Urban Agenda and realise the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

We recognise the importance of defining place-sensitive indicators to monitor the effective implementation of the SDGs and their effects over time. By only focusing on the total expenditure of the preservation, protection, and conservation of heritage, the social, cultural and economic values are not fully captured. This risks irreplaceable harm to heritage assets and its transmission to future generations. New indicators should be established to better monitor and evaluate the qualitative needs of the future. We require urgent action as failing to do so would be irresponsible.

The multi-layered concept of the cultural landscape, in which the local communities play a central role in the human society-nature interaction, is frequently reduced to the aesthetic aspects of the landscape, thereby diminishing its inherent diversity. Inclusive strategies that incorporate community-centered management are needed, that span beyond the realm of tangible and intangible heritage to incorporate all aspects of life.

We call upon all stakeholders to ensure the engagement of locals, especially youth and minorities, so they can contribute with their knowledge and experience. We stress

the importance of a thoughtful and efficient management system that looks out for the interests of the community and its well being and fosters education in order to secure long-term conservation.

Intangible heritage is fundamental to preserving diversity and local identity in both, urban and cultural landscape contexts. The threat to social and cultural diversity due to migrations, urbanisation and globalisation is deeply concerning, and we urge all local stakeholders to establish both local and global connections for the exchange of knowledge and foster intercultural dialogue.

Digital technologies have an increasing role as a tool to interpret and disseminate multiple values of heritage. The younger generations should not be ignored, but included in the utilisation of these technologies as they are at the forefront of this advancement.

We sadly witness how economic and political interests get in the way of pursuing sustainable protection of both people and the environment. World Heritage is more than just a beautiful postcard picture and the status should not be used solely as a tourism promotion label but as a tool for its protection and enhancement.

We, young professionals from all over the world, commit ourselves to pursue UNESCO's mandate of building peace in the minds of humankind in our practice of heritage management. Our recommendations are built upon the belief in the unifying power of heritage, freedom of expression, and the force of cultural and natural diversity in attaining sustainable development.

In this time of rising political tensions and polarisation, we emphasise the need for respectful dialogue based on mutual understanding. The challenges we have highlighted require action today and not be left for future generations to resolve. Let's work together to respond to the global challenges of our time before it's too late.

Thank you.