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Policy Brief

GreenHeritage

The Impact of Climate Change on the
Intangible Cultural Heritage

Ravello, May 2024

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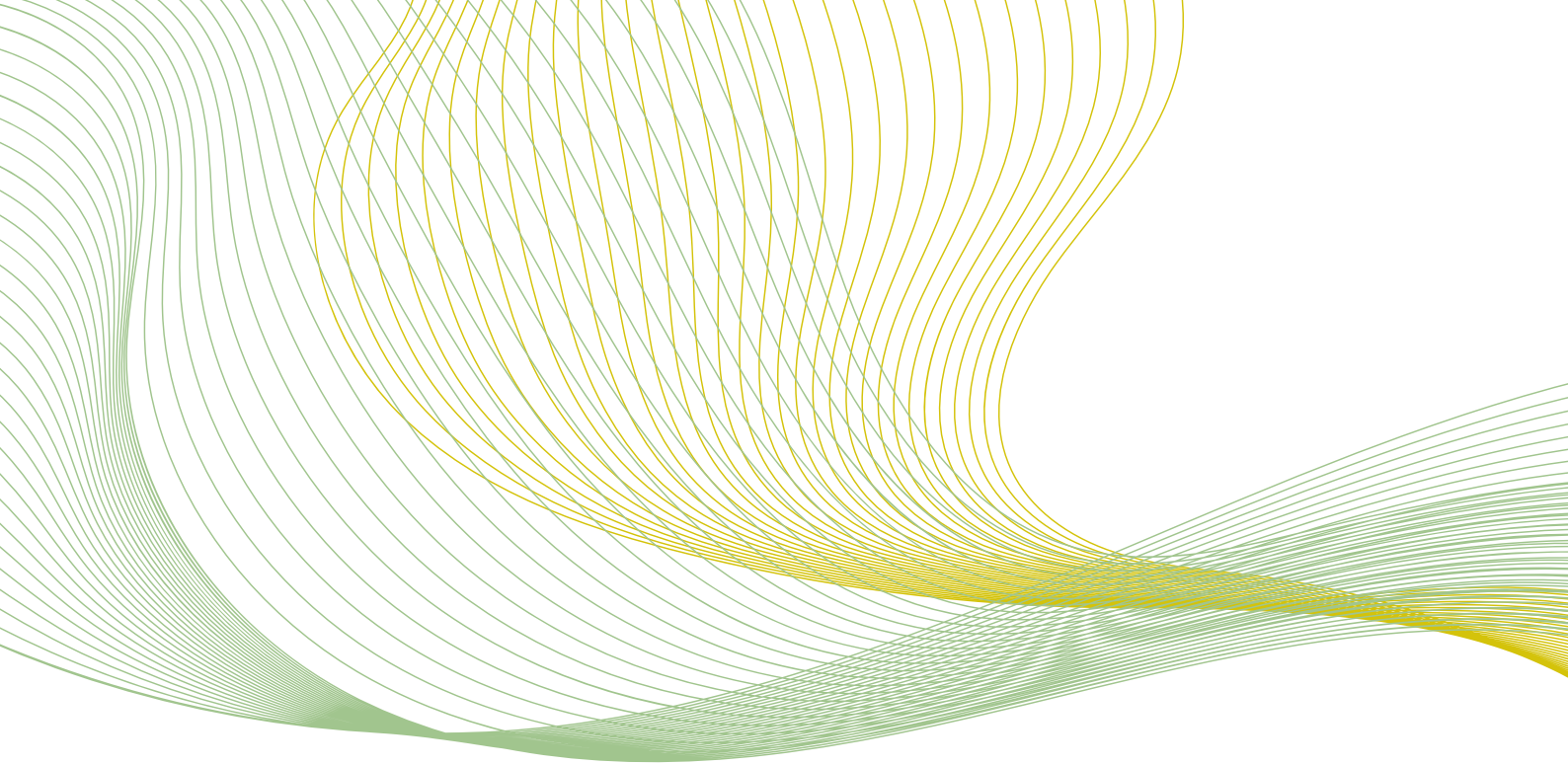
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1 - THE GREENHERITAGE PROJECT

The preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage also depends on the presence and availability of certain conditions and resources on which climate change is in fact producing important effects, albeit still to be explored and defined.

With this in mind, the GreenHeritage project “The impact of climate change on the Intangible Heritage” (<https://greenheritage-project.eu/>), aims to study how and to what extent the climate change may constitute a risk for the intangible cultural heritage. This is an Erasmus + project funded by the European Union that over three years (from December 2022 to November 2025), will act in synergy with professionals, educational centers, administrations, local stakeholders, and civil society.

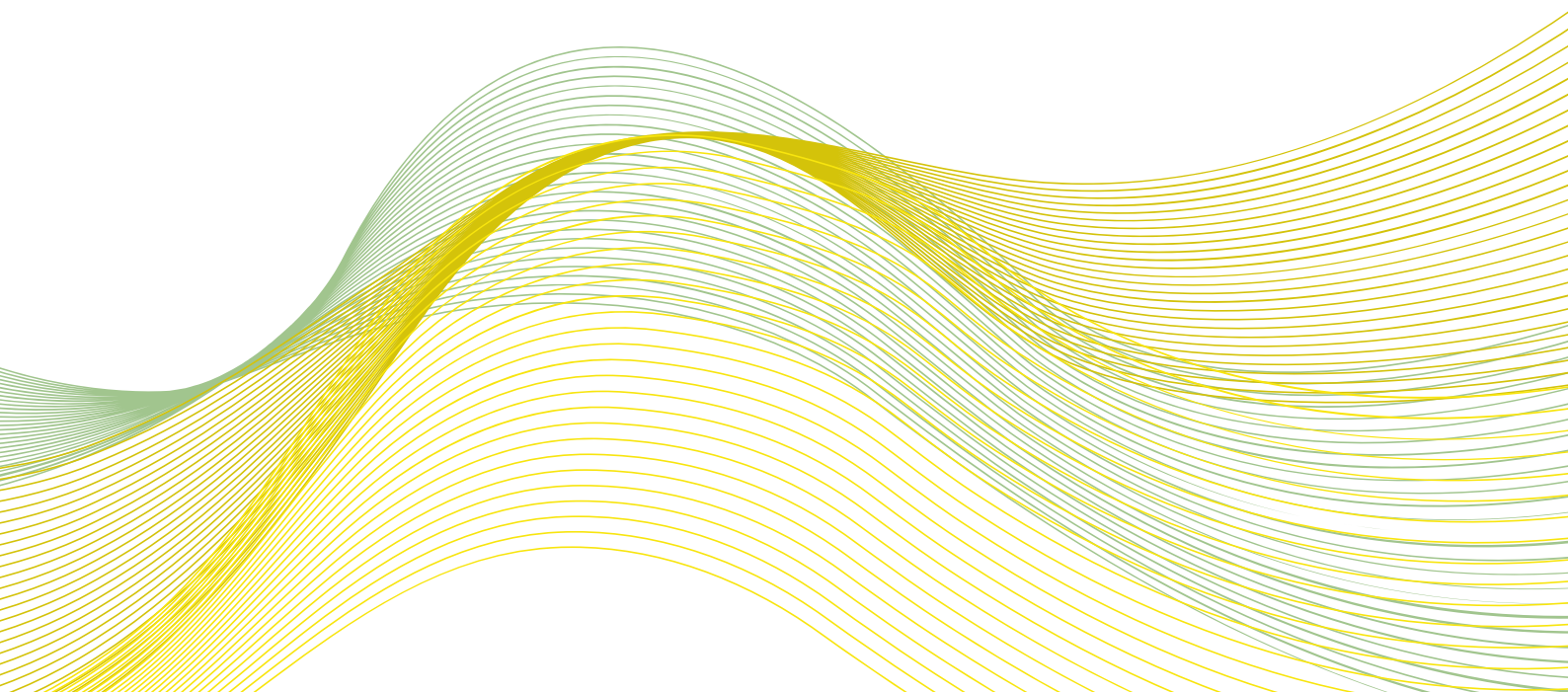
The objective is to develop a holistic, innovative, and inclusive approach to observe and assess the direct and indirect impact of climate change on intangible cultural heritage. Among the project’s aims are a series of actions, including a preliminary analysis of needs and practices for adaptation to climate change in the European Union and partner countries. Moreover, synergies between local communities, cross-sectoral researchers, professionals, policy makers and citizens are created, to exchange knowledge and discuss the most appropriate measures for the management and conservation of intangible heritage. An interactive map showing the areas and regions most at risk in Europe, will be also realised.

1 - THE GREENHERITAGE PROJECT

In the context of the GreenHeritage project, innovative training tools and methodologies able to promote adaptive and systemic approaches for better management of CC impact on ICH are proposed. The attention is paid even on those cultural sediments that so far have not received the right attention from political debate and collective actions. Instead, they represent precious chests at the foundation of the community's identity and an element of guarantee for their sustainable development.

Among the final outputs of the project, there is a series of tools and operational methods for impact analysis and a well-timed program of round tables to discuss what emerges from the dialogues with the communities, from the territorial analysis and the intangible heritage expressions.

The consortium that gives life to GreenHeritage is made up of: National Research Council (IT) (coordinator); CUEBC European University Center for Cultural Heritage (IT); CMCC Foundation Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change (IT); ReadLab P.C. Research, Innovation and Development Laboratory (GR); ILFA LU Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia (LV); UAEGEAN University of the Aegean (GR); CANDIDE International (BE), ELORIS S.A. Research, Education, Innovation and Development Society of the Northern Aegean Region (GR); ALLI Athens Lifelong Learning Institute (GR). The project is co-financed by the European Union, through the Erasmus + programme.



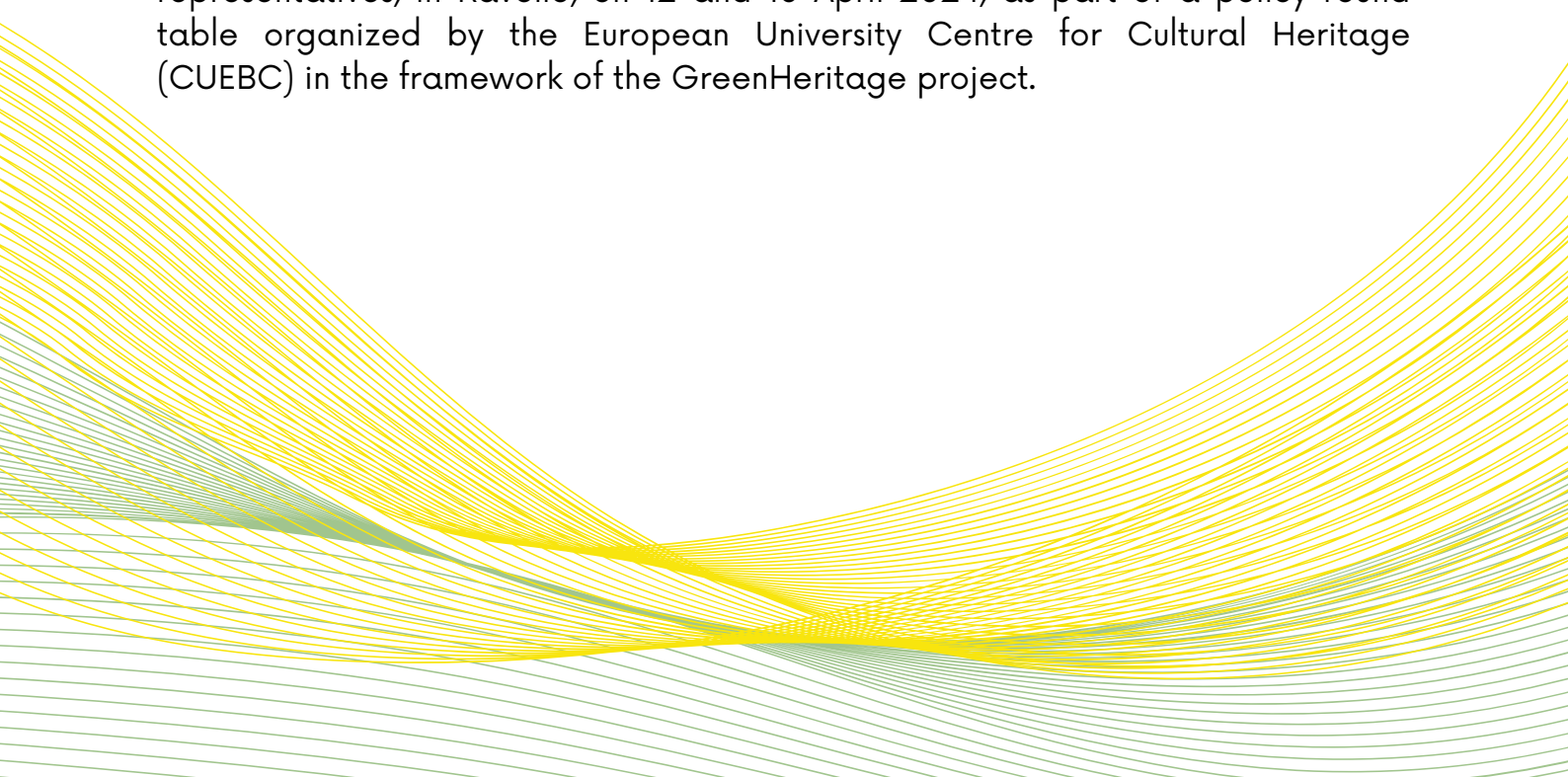
2 - CLIMATE CHANGE (CC) AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE (ICH): CASE STUDIES

The issue of climate change calls for international public attention and is undoubtedly one of the cornerstones of the political agenda today. Furthermore, the importance and the cogency of the issue makes it desirable, to have an increasingly lively and widespread interest among institutions, associations, sector bodies and communities. It is true that there has been and there is a lively debate around the environmental, social, and economic implications of climate change, that understandably produces a certain apprehension. Nevertheless, it should be noted that some less evident aspects (at least the indirect ones) still remain in the background, waiting for new attention and sensitivity to catch them.

Among these aspects to explore, there is certainly the impact of climate change on the intangible cultural heritage, consisting of practices, rituals, stories, languages, songs, dances, traditions, food, skills that communities recognize as fundamental elements in the construction and representation of the collective identity. These are cultural traces that, precisely because of climate change, present an increasing degree of vulnerability, although the association between climate change and vulnerability of the intangible cultural heritage is not easily and directly detectable. In fact, environmental disasters, and extreme weather events (floods, fires, high temperatures, droughts), can have a profound impact on the lifestyles of populations, on agricultural, livestock or production habits, as well as on traditions, on community customs and practices.

Moreover, it should be noted that communities are the last custodians and preservers of intangible cultural heritage and that they often do not possess the skills, tools and strategies needed to mitigate the negative effects.

This matter was discussed, in the presence of experts, technicians and community representatives, in Ravello, on 12 and 13 April 2024, as part of a policy round table organized by the European University Centre for Cultural Heritage (CUEBC) in the framework of the GreenHeritage project.



2 - CLIMATE CHANGE AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: CASE STUDIES

The discussion has led to the definition of this policy brief, which contains specific guidelines and recommendations to prevent, where possible, and/or mitigate the effects of climate change on intangible cultural heritage.

Specifically, the European University Centre for Cultural Heritage invited experts, local administrators, research bodies, companies and associations to dialogue and exchange views within two thematic round tables.

Knowledge and techniques

- **The art of dry stone walls on the Amalfi Coast**

The Amalfi Coast is an exceptional example of this traditional construction technique. The profound knowledge of the particular hydro-geological and natural characteristics of the ecosystems of the Amalfi coast, together with the particular microclimate has, over the centuries, become a consolidated heritage of the local community. To encourage the cultivation practices and water regimentation, the local community has developed the technique of dry walls (here called macere) creating a balance between human needs and nature that conceptually and practically goes beyond the simple terracing technique.

The skills and knowledge underlying the management of the territory, traceable in the technique traditionally learned and handed down, are now threatened by abandonment phenomena that worsen the harmful effects of climate change. Among them, more evident, there are certainly abundant rains and long droughts that affect the outcome of harvests and also affect the precarious balance of dry stone walls, making them first swell and then collapse, generating landslides of stones downstream, in the absence of the traditional garrison represented by the constant and widespread presence of farmers.



2 - CLIMATE CHANGE AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: CASE STUDIES

Traditions, Rituals and Cults

- **The feast of Madonna Avvocata**

The feast of Our Lady Avvocata (Madonna Avvocata) is one of the most heartfelt festivals and celebrations of the intangible heritage of the Amalfi Coast, which in the past has also played an important role in raising awareness of the local community in relation to the maintenance and management of the site, including the artificial water system and that of dry stone walls. It is a very ancient and complex ritual, which consists of a pilgrimage, which takes place once a year and which ascends from the villages downstream often along the water channels and then through the forest, in a procession at the top and then in a festival, during which the communities of farmers, sailors and shepherds traditionally meet to sing and dance accompanied by the sound of dozens of tammorre , a traditional drum with tin belts .

Interviews conducted as part of the GreenHeritage project demonstrated how climate change is directly influencing pilgrimage, procession, and celebration. This is not only due to the harmful effects of heavy rains that cause landslides of the paths, but also to the severe drought that deprives the springs and the large cistern next to the church on top of the mountain. Moreover, climate change, combined with the abandonment of the fields, leads to a progressive collapse of the terraced system of dry stone walls and "erases" in many places the ancient ritual paths, effectively blocking the ascent to the mountain.

This entails the risk that pilgrims can no longer climb to the Sanctuary of Avvocata from the side of Maiori, and thus lose in fact the vision and understanding of the structure and state of the anthropized cultural landscape, whose awareness is a founding element of the spirit of the community. It traditionally took place during the ascent through a trans-generational narration linked to the spiritual event.



2 - CLIMATE CHANGE AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: CASE STUDIES

Traditions, Rituals and Cults

- **Festa of the Ceri of Gubbio**

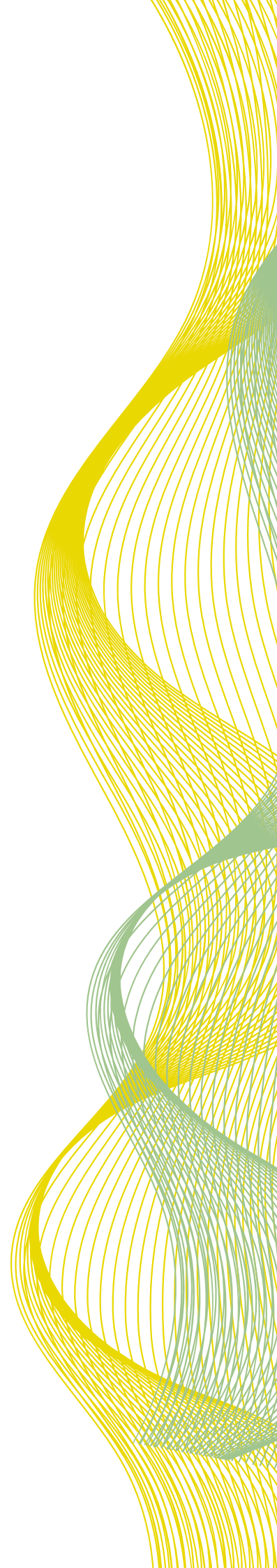
The Feast of the Ceri of Gubbio (Umbria) was selected due to its historicity which makes it one of the most ancient and popular ritual festivals in Italy, as evidenced by the "Iguvine Tables" dating back to the III-I centuries B.C. The Feast of the Ceri takes place in Gubbio on May 15 of each year and consists of the transport in race of three Ceri crowned by statues of saints: Saint' Ubaldo (Patron Saint of Gubbio), Saint Giorgio and Saint' Antonio the Abbot. Therefore, Gubbio and its cultural heritage represent a case of exceptional interest, creating a connection between the tangible and intangible nature of cultural heritage. The importance and popularity of the event at the regional level are such that since 1973 the three Ceri are representing the symbol of the Umbria Region and appear in its banner and official flag. However, in Gubbio, it is very clear, that in recent decades the weather conditions have changed greatly.

Temperatures in Gubbio from 2011 to 2021 show a clear linear growth. Similarly, there is a positive and worrying trend of increased rainfall. Extreme climatic events could produce structural instabilities due to hydrogeological problems for the entire historical area, as evidenced by the slow and progressive deformations and cracking patterns affecting ancient structures. This could also produce damage to the streets where the unbridled race of the Ceri takes place and landslides on the mountain path that represents the final part of the race, material and ideal path to the Basilica of the Patron Saint of the city.



2 - CLIMATE CHANGE AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: CASE STUDIES

From the discussion of the case studies, consideration was given to the possible forms of vulnerability of intangible cultural heritage in the face of climate change, on risk mitigation strategies and before that on actions to generate awareness and proactivity in communities.



3 – TARGET AUDIENCE

The policy brief is the result of listening and dialogue between experts, professionals and communities who have shared skills and experiences. This produced a document addressed to local, regional, national, and European administrations, containing a series of recommendations aimed at guiding the decision-making processes in this field. However, the document can be useful for anyone interested in the subject and its implications. In fact, a fundamental aspect of the project concerns the communication and sharing of research results since, among its main objectives, there is the development of new awareness both within the reference communities of the case studies, and of other communities that present the same vulnerabilities, as well of associations, sector bodies, foundations.



4 – RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussion in the panels gave rise to a series of policy recommendations to focus on in the medium and long term.

These recommendations have been divided into **fourteen macro-themes**, reported and detailed below:

1. Involvement of local communities and stakeholders
2. Regulation (to be considered, from local to European level, in support of the community managing the ICH)
3. Governance and planning of direct and indirect risk management interventions (strategic actions)
4. Education and training
5. Information and awareness raising
6. ICH Conservation and proper management methods
7. Infrastructures Supporting ICH
8. Targeted research/actions (potentially preliminary shared and implemented by all actors)
9. Sustainable capitalization on the ICH event values and good practices
10. Green solutions (potentially implemented by all actors)
11. Take into consideration and highlight the link between intangible cultural heritage and its spiritual dimension
12. Importance of safeguarding the spontaneity of ICH manifestations and of evaluating the danger due to "abundance"
13. Identity and protection of the ICH
14. Role of consultants/experts



4 – RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Involvement of local communities and stakeholders

- Involvement of local communities and stakeholders in decision-making and management processes.
- Listening and involvement through the commitment of all the direct protagonists of the ICH and its space/territory to define the problems and needs and to correctly act in the transdisciplinary process of knowledge, valorisation, and integrated management of the ICH.
- Organization and planning of ad hoc initiatives for knowledge, awareness, and sustainable valorisation (at various levels).
- Intangible heritage derives from the relationship between dynamic variables (culture, nature, and CC): it is important that the relationship between community and territory remains consistent with the values it expresses (community spirit/identity) even in the presence of CC.

2

Regulation (to be considered, from local to European level, in support of the community managing the ICH)

- Community guidance implementation is the basis for Regulation.
- Integrated prevention methodologies and precautionary principle of preventing the risk of assets loss should be implemented.
- Transversality in understanding awareness policy strategies and actions about climate change. CC should be prioritized regardless of political alignment.
- Simplification of bureaucracy in case it hinders immediate CC resilience interventions thus affecting the ICH, linked to management processes.

3

Governance and risk management planning (policy actions)

- Territorial climate committees to safeguard the ICH and its associated areas against the CC: 1) Definition of a control room according to the quadruple helix model. 2) Creation of transdisciplinary community networks between stakeholders for the conservation of the territory and the tangible and intangible heritage
- Policies for the conservation of cultural landscapes: develop policies that protect areas of cultural and ecological value, balancing interventions to implement renewable energy with the conservation of ICH. Establish regulations that consider the impact on communities, ritual spaces, and cultural practices.
- Inclusion of ICH in climate change policies: recognize the importance of ICH in climate change adaptation and mitigation policies.
- Recognize the role of ICH in transferring useful knowledge to address environmental and social challenges.
- Active involvement of communities and stakeholders.
- Integration of the bottom-up/top-down approaches.
- Implement prevention: from extraordinary maintenance to routine scheduled maintenance of sites of reference for ICH practices and rituals.
- Planning interventions aimed at land management (not only in emergencies).





4

Education and Training

- Education to values which are the basis/guarantee for the transmission of ICH to future generations (in the hands of communities).
- The intergenerational transmission in its unity of ICH forms and ICH contents is fundamental.
- Planning and reformulation of school education (awareness raising campaigns): 1) Geographical, environmental, climate and civic education. 2) Field experiences.
- Continuous training for the professional adaptation of people operating in the cultural system.
- Academic and research institutions training aimed at creating professionalism capable of ensuring the resilience of events, traditions, skills.
- Strengthening of training courses for professionals and specific skills related to ICH (public and private sector).
- Integration between scientific-technical and humanistic approaches (trans-disciplinarity).
- Revaluation of traditional skills and professions also within the broader territorial and socio-economic systems of reference: promoting the revaluation of traditional skills and professions through training programs, financial support and promotion of local production.

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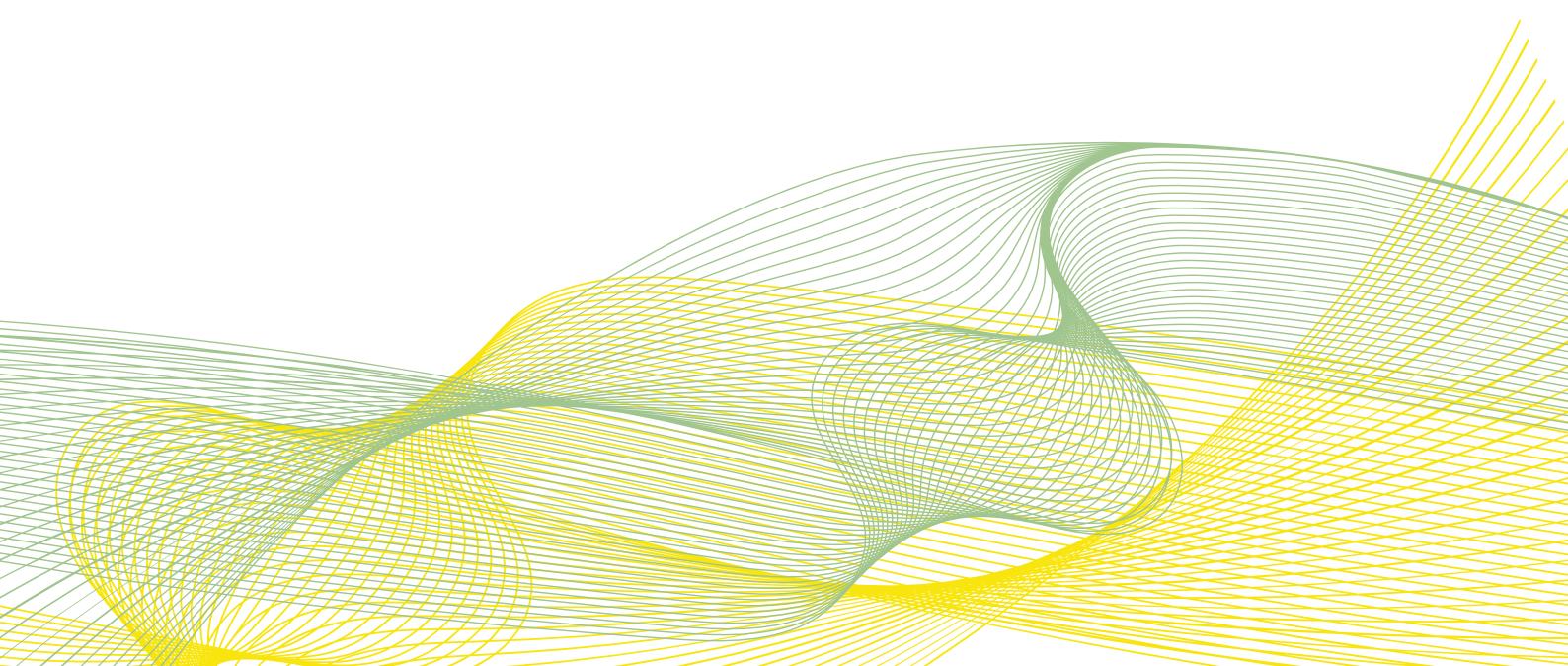
Information and awareness raising

- Correct transfer of information and knowledge through media dissemination (communication).
- Dissemination and communication: use of audiovisual media, social networks through clear messages that generate interest and awareness on the importance of ICH and its relationship with CC.
- Scientific publications: 1) on issues related to the relationship between climate change and cultural heritage; 2) on research results in the field (monitoring results).
- Citizen Science Initiative can help to improve collective awareness in relation to the effects of CC on ICH.
- Awareness raising strategy on the values of sustainability.

6

ICH conservation and correct management methods

- Support at various levels (local/regional/national/European) for interventions aimed at real risk prevention of the ICH loss (both tangible and intangible) including ICH related values (through monitoring, maintenance, awareness raising, information actions, etc.).
- Targeted financial support (deductible bonuses, structural funds, green investments, etc.).
- Management of water resources generally related to ICH (and their related distribution and disposal systems).
- Management of hydrogeological problems generally related to ICH.
- Trademark to encourage identification of the territory and the ICH itself (where applicable).
- Systematize useful support actions.



4 – RECOMMENDATIONS

7

Infrastructures supporting ICH

- Structured communication strategies.
- Widespread observatory for permanent territorial monitoring actions at a local level that considers realities and experiences and involves the protagonists and all local actors in this monitoring (interdisciplinary approach+Citizen Science).
- Design and project management support.

8

Targeted research/actions (potentially preliminary shared and implemented by all actors):

- New monitoring management models (shared with communities).
- Monitoring of risk areas.
- Integration between technical-scientific and humanistic approaches
- Scholarships and research training Funding.
- Networks of national and international partnerships for the exchange of know-how, planning of activities and fundraising.
- Urgent optimization of water resources and the water system (result of anthropization) in compliance with the ICH reference structures.
- ICH Priority management in case of hydrogeological risk.

9

Sustainable capitalization on the ICH event values and good practices

- Role of events as a driving force to stimulate public awareness around the topic, taking care not to distort them in the service of tourism (sustainability).
- Role of events to also transmit new values (greater attention to the environment, sustainability, territories, stimulating foresight and a sense of responsibility, the promotion of an environmental culture; living traditions capable of updating themselves).
- Exchange of good practices between different territorial realities (at the level of communities involved).



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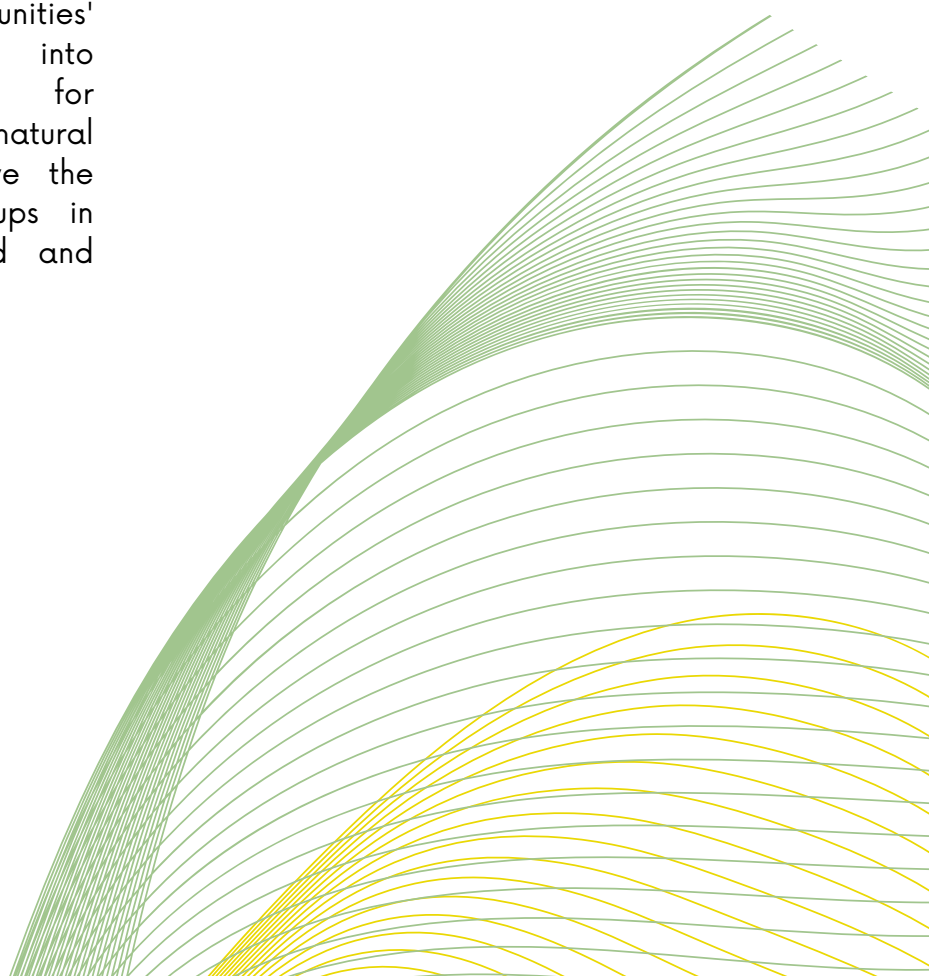
Green solutions (potentially implemented by all actors)

- Actions to increase the resilience of the events.
- Actions to reduce the impact of the event on the ecosystem.
- Promote economic diversification: Laws should promote economic diversification in rural areas by supporting ICH-related activities. This would include supporting artisans, promoting cultural events and traditional activities that can generate sustainable income in communities affected by climate change.
- Inclusion of traditional knowledge in environmental policies: Legislation can integrate communities' traditional knowledge into environmental policies for sustainable management of natural resources. This could involve the participation of local groups in decision-making about land and resource use).

11

Take into consideration and highlight the link between intangible cultural heritage and its spiritual dimension

- Include and highlight the SPIRITUAL DIMENSION (where present) and the values that underlie the ICH event: These are the vital values inherent in the event which have guaranteed its correct transmission through generations and centuries, and which also play an important educational function on what it is important in the lives of men and communities, also activating resilient behaviours. The Defence of Creation is directly linked to climate change, brotherhood, sharing, support/help, etc.



12

Importance of safeguarding the spontaneity of ICH manifestations and of evaluating the danger due to "abundance"

- The spontaneity of the manifestations of intangible heritage must be respected and safeguarded.
- External policies aimed at causing a loss of spontaneity through excessive control and regulation, harnessing the spontaneity of tradition, are strictly to be avoided.
- ICH feasts, events, practices may suffer/die for abundance: the abundance of goods, the abundance of personalisms, of individual attention-seeking behaviours. Too much attention, too much celebration, too many awards in a framework of too many changes are harmful for ICH demonstrations.

13

Identity and protection of ICH

- Intangible cultural heritage is strongly connected with the identity of a community, with strong spatial references (be they territorial or even more ritual and spiritual spaces). This heritage must be left and protected as such.
- Intangible heritage derives from the relationship between dynamic variables such as culture, nature, CC and others: it is important that the relationship between community and territory remains consistent with the values it expresses (community spirit/identity).

14

Role of consultants/experts

- This role should be reconsidered because of the observations emerged from the communities: if foreseen for various needs, the Consultant/Expert must provide useful information to support the ICH event/practice in various ways, while avoiding assuming reference roles with respect to the communities themselves.
- The consultant/expert is useful in the role of assisting the communities and has never to replace them or take on different roles.
- The role should consist of supporting the ICH event/practice exploitation and should be exclusively of service.
- The role of the disseminator and the promoter at the service of what is being disseminated is important. To this end, those who disseminate should live the traditions to spread them better, avoiding the dangers of interpretations and subjectivity.





Thanks.

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