*5 November 2026*

# Emerging Voices for Living Heritage Beyond 2030

## Shaping New Research Agendas for Intangible Cultural Heritage

**Young Academics Forum, UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks on Intangible Cultural Heritage**

10 November 2026 · 12:30–14:30 (Paris time) · Online

### Background and rationale

Over recent years, academic research has expanded our understanding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and its connections with a range of important issues, including sustainable development, climate change, digital transformation, youth participation, gender equality, cultural diversity, education and community resilience. This growing body of scholarship has generated evidence and critical perspectives capable of informing cultural policies and safeguarding approaches, while highlighting the importance of recognizing communities as the primary bearers, practitioners and transmitters of living heritage, and as key agenda in defining and shaping safeguarding. As international discussions turn towards the framework that will succeed the 2030 Agenda, a central question is not only how existing knowledge can inform global priorities, but which new research questions and knowledge gaps should be addressed beyond 2030.

This forward-looking reflection is especially timely in light of the UN International Decade of Culture for Sustainable Development (2027–2036), which seeks to strengthen the role of culture in sustainable development and bridge the current and future global agendas. This perspective also aligns with UNESCO's efforts to strengthen young people's meaningful engagement in the safeguarding and transmission of living heritage as well as with the priorities under the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. In particular, Funding Priority B ("Refining approaches for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage") provides an opportunity to explore how emerging academic research can contribute to identifying knowledge gaps, developing innovative methodologies and informing future safeguarding approaches.

Young academics have an important role to play in shaping future research on intangible cultural heritage and contributing fresh perspectives to its safeguarding. UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks are well placed to contribute to this reflection. The UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme is UNESCO's network for inter-university cooperation, bringing together the expertise of higher education and research institutions to help address the complex challenges facing the world today. Created in 1992, it promotes integrated approaches to research, training and academic activities across diverse fields by strengthening university networks, fostering institutional capacities, and facilitating the international exchange of knowledge and expertise in line with UNESCO's mandate. Today, the Programme has grown to include around 1100 Chairs and 50 networks across 130 countries, of which around twenty focus on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

The Young Academics Forum brings together emerging scholars from this group of chairs and networks. They come from different regions, disciplines and research traditions can help identify overlooked questions, challenge established approaches and imagine new interdisciplinary and research pathways which recognize and strengthen the agency of communities in safeguarding their living heritage.

In preparation for the Second Annual Forum of UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks on intangible cultural heritage, the Young Academics Forum will create a dedicated space for these perspectives to shape the academic discussion from the outset.

## Objective

The Forum aims to critically reflect on the role and future directions of academic research on intangible cultural heritage in the post-2030 period, drawing on the perspectives of a new generation of scholars. Moving beyond existing research agendas, participants will be encouraged to challenge established assumptions, identify thematic and methodological gaps, and explore how interdisciplinary approaches, cross-sectoral collaboration, diverse cultural perspectives and ways of knowing can reshape knowledge production. Particular attention will be given to how research can better recognize and support the agency of communities in safeguarding and transmitting their living heritage, including by strengthening their participation in defining research priorities, shaping research processes or reshaping existing frameworks.

The discussion will also consider the capacity of research not only to respond to contemporary challenges, but also to anticipate emerging ones, envision alternative futures and rethink established frameworks and approaches.

The Forum seeks to articulate a shared, forward-looking vision of how academic research can contribute to shaping more inclusive, innovative and transformative pathways for the safeguarding of living heritage beyond 2030.

## Participants and format

The online Forum will bring together PhD, young researchers and academics affiliated with UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks active in intangible cultural heritage hosted by universities and institutions in ten countries: Argentina, Canada, the People's Republic of China, Estonia, France, Gabon, Italy, Mexico, Poland and Türkiye. The Forum is co-organized by the UNESCO Chair on Intangible Cultural Heritage and Comparative Law at UnitelmaSapienza University of Rome and the Secretariat of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The meeting will be opened by Fumiko Ohinata, Secretary of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Culture Sector, UNESCO, followed by welcoming remarks by Pier Luigi Petrillo, Chairholder of the UNESCO Chair on Intangible Cultural Heritage and Comparative Law. An interactive academic dialogue will then enable participants to present perspectives and insights drawn from their research, identify gaps and emerging issues, and explore cross-cutting questions and opportunities for future research and collaboration.

## Guiding questions

### 1. Challenging the status quo: What are we missing?

Drawing on your experiences as young researchers what are the most significant blind spots in current intangible cultural heritage research on intangible cultural heritage? Where do these lie –in terms of the questions we ask, the methodologies we use, the assumptions we take for granted, the forms of knowledge we recognise, the extent to which communities have a voice in defining research priorities and shaping research processes?

**2. Rethinking research: How can we move beyond existing boundaries?**

In an increasingly interconnected world, where challenges cannot be addressed from a single disciplinary or cultural perspective, how can we rethink the way academic research is conducted? How can we bring together different disciplines, sectors, cultural perspectives and ways of knowing to generate new approaches and collective solutions, while fostering equitable partnerships with communities and recognizing their knowledge, priorities and agency?

**3. Imagining futures: What should academia become beyond 2030?**

Rather than simply responding to today's challenges, what role should academic research play in anticipating and shaping possible and preferable futures for living heritage beyond 2030, in light of the UN International Decade of Culture for Sustainable Development (2027–2036)? How can academia contribute to futures in which communities has to remain at the center of safeguarding, with their agency, aspirations and capacity to shape the transmission of their living heritage fully recognized? What bold research directions, new forms of collaboration or alternative approaches should the new generation of scholars begin developing today?

## Expected outcome

The principal outcome will be an academic research agenda synthesizing the emerging priorities, key research questions and knowledge gaps, and highlight promising interdisciplinary directions and new opportunities for collaboration identified by the young researchers.

Particular attention will be given to research approaches that recognize and strengthen community agency, support community participation in knowledge production and contribute to safeguarding processes shaped by the needs, priorities and aspirations of communities themselves.

The academic research agenda, rather than seeking to establish a definitive or exhaustive agenda, will offer a common foundation for further reflection and an initial set of perspectives and proposals.

The outline of this research agenda will serve as the starting point for discussion among UNESCO Chairholders at the Second Annual Forum of UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks on intangible cultural heritage, taking place, as a side-event, in Xiamen, the People's Republic of China, in the context of the twenty-first session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (21.COM). This will link the perspectives of emerging researchers with those of established scholars and supporting a broader collective reflection on the knowledge and research partnerships needed to advance the safeguarding of living heritage in the post-2030 period.