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Policy Brief

GreenHeritage

The impact of Climate Change on
Intangible Cultural Heritage

Rome, January 2024



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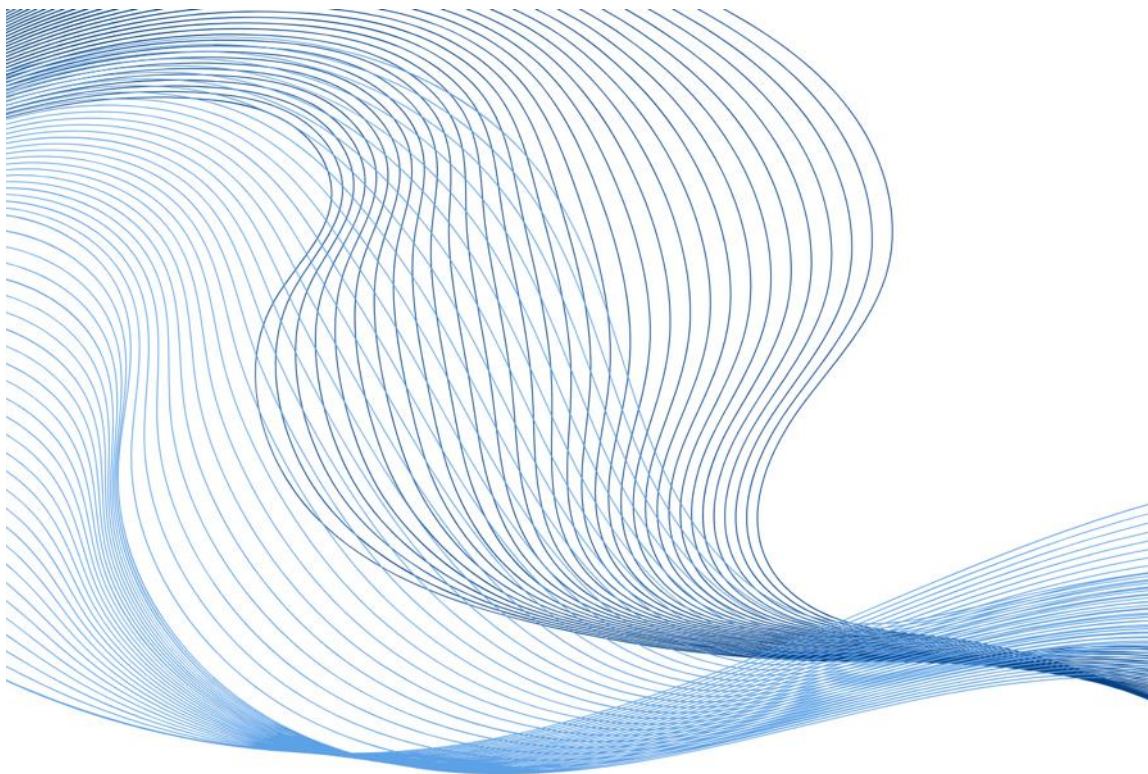
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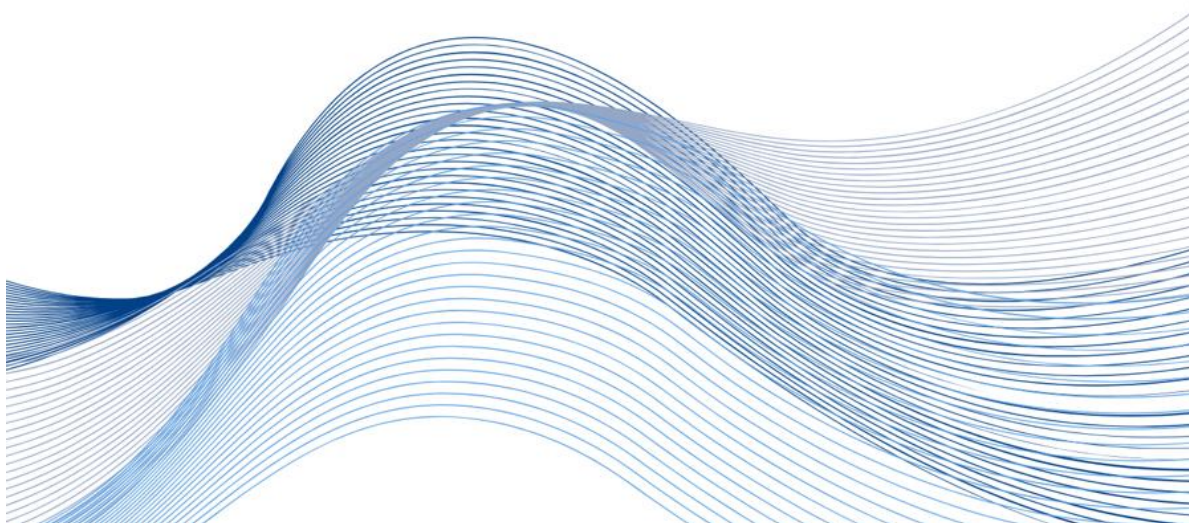
1 - THE GREENHERITAGE PROJECT

The European GreenHeritage project, started in December 2022, aims at **developing a holistic, innovative, and inclusive approach to address the direct and indirect impacts of Climate Change on Intangible Cultural Heritage**. Therefore, it seeks innovative tools and methodologies capable of promoting adaptive and systemic approaches to better manage climate change issues and effects. It also wants to represent an urgent reminder that this issue is extremely present and timely, affecting both directly and indirectly all aspects of Europe's heritage.

It is co-funded by the European Union through the Erasmus+ programme and implemented in **5 European countries (Belgium, Greece, Italy, Latvia and Spain)** by the following consortium: CNR-Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche-Leader (IT); CUEBC-Centro Universitario Europeo per i Beni Culturali (IT); CMCC-Fondazione Centro Euro-Mediterraneo sui Cambiamenti Climatici (IT); FSMLR-Fundación Santa María la Real del Patrimonio Histórico (ES); ReadLab P.C.-Research Innovation and Development Lab (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 Company of the North Aegean Region (GR); ALLI-Athens Lifelong Learning Institute (GR). One of the challenges of the project is to suggest and promote policies enabling to address the needs derived by climate change, that policymakers can consider in the design or adaptation of policies from both national and EU levels.

1 - THE GREENHERITAGE PROJECT

One of the challenges of the project is to suggest and promote policies enabling to address the needs derived by climate change, that policymakers can consider in the design or adaptation of policies from the national to the EU levels. To address this challenge, GreenHeritage is developing, among other activities, **5 policy roundtables**, leading to **5 policy briefs** and a **final handbook** on the impact of Climate Change on Intangible Cultural Heritage at the national and EU level, including key findings of the project and the final recommendations for policy change.

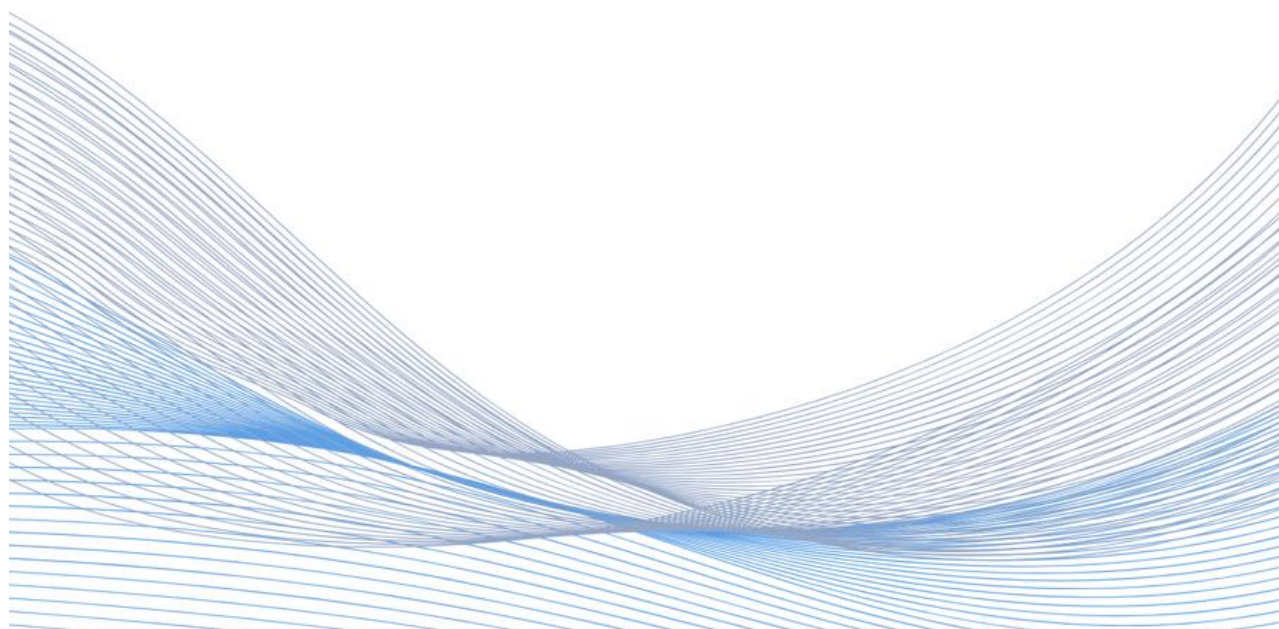


2 - IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE (ICH) AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE (CC): THE CASE STUDIES IN ITALY

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is a critical component of cultural diversity and sustainable development, encompassing practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills passed down through generations. Unlike tangible cultural heritage, ICH is dynamic, continually reshaped by the environment, history, and social structures, subject to a continuous evolution, interpretation and transmission. Its preservation and adaptation are essential not only for maintaining cultural identity but also for fostering resilience in the face of global challenges, particularly that of climate change which, by disrupting traditional weather patterns, biodiversity, and land use, threatens the survival of cultural practices and knowledge systems that have evolved in harmony with these environments.

To deepen the analysis of the interactions between climate change and intangible cultural heritage and to consequently propose strategies and actions to protect it in a changing climate, several stakeholders with diverse skills, backgrounds and experiences gathered in **Rome on 20 December 2024**, at the Central Institute on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Ministry of Culture, as part of the **Policy Round Table organized by the Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Climate Change (CMCC)** in the framework of the GreenHeritage project. The discussion led to the definition of this Policy Brief, which contains specific recommendations to foster collaborative and concerted efforts on the nexus between climate change and intangible cultural heritage.

Within the Policy Round Table, the impacts of climate change on **specific manifestations of ICH in Italy and the adaptation measures being implemented have been discussed.**



2 - IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE: THE CASE STUDIES IN ITALY

Traditions, religious rituals and festivals

- **The big shoulder-borne processional structure festivals in the municipalities of Nola, Sassari, Palmi, and Viterbo**

Catholic processions featuring big shoulder-borne processional structures take place throughout Italy, but particularly in four historic city centres: in **Nola**, a procession of eight wood and papier mâché obelisks commemorates the return of St. Paolino; in **Palmi**, bearers carry a complex processional structure in honour of Our Lady of the Holy Letter; in **Sassari**, the “Discesa dei Candelieri” (Descent of the Candlesticks) involves the votive transportation of wooden obelisks; and in **Viterbo**, the “Macchina di Santa Rosa” (Tower of Santa Rosa) commemorates the town’s patron saint. The coordinated and equitable sharing of tasks in a common project is a fundamental part of the celebrations, which bind the communities together through the consolidation of mutual respect, cooperation and joint effort. The festive communities rely on the informal transmission of these techniques and knowledge to recreate the structures every year, a process that aids cultural continuity and reinforces a strong sense of identity.



2 - IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE: THE CASE STUDIES IN ITALY

The Element has been declared by the Intergovernmental Committee of the UNESCO Convention 2003, 'example, model and source of inspiration'. It was also included - within the List for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage - in the special group of 'good practices' together with 33 other elements out of 788 recognised by the ONU agency.

The impacts of climate change have been putting the implementation of these celebrations at risk: rising temperatures and increasing frequency and intensity of heavy rainfalls have led to changes in the procession routes or even rescheduling of the celebrations, thus impacting traditions and sense of communities that these festivals entail. Significant heatwaves have also increased the number of illnesses among the participants of the celebrations, especially in the vulnerable groups (e.g., children, elderly people). Knowledge, techniques and craftsmanship

- **The art of dry-stone walls of the National Park of Cinque Terre, UNESCO site**

In the National Park of Cinque Terre, inscribed on the World Heritage List as 'cultural landscape', which is one of the smallest in Italy and spreads over five villages (Riomaggiore, Manarola, Corniglia, Vernazza and Monterosso al Mare) several initiatives have (and are) been implemented to protect the art of the dry-stone walls and promote climate-resilient actions.

Here, for more than a thousand years, man has modified the natural environment, cutting into the steep slopes of the hills to create strips of cultivated land, supported by kilometers of dry-stone walls. This is the true identity of the Cinque Terre, an atypical and strongly anthropized landscape, which has been declared a **World Heritage Site**. Indeed, it represents the harmonious interaction between man and nature to create a landscape of exceptional scenic quality, illustrating a traditional way of life that has existed for more than a thousand years and continues to play an important socio-economic role in the life of the community.

However, the rising temperature and the increased intensity and frequency of rainfalls, leading to extreme events such as floodings and landslides, combined with the geomorphological conditions, land parceling, limited accessibility and new employment opportunities, have negatively impacted the local agricultural practices, the conservation of the dry-stone walls and the transmission of the traditional ecological knowledge.

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Nonetheless **dry-stone walls are not only environmentally relevant, as they can increase the area's resilience to climate change, but they also have a social and cultural value** since they foster the creation of new professional figures, the so-called “maintenance workers”, which have made it possible to transmit and preserve local techniques and knowledge, while contributing to the climate resilience of the territory and population.



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After the insights given on these case studies, an interactive session has started among the stakeholders. A group of 16 people consisting of representatives of different stakeholders' groups (government and local policy-makers, representatives of research institutions, members of the business sector and of civil society) participated both online and in presence, to discuss the nexus between climate change and intangible cultural heritage and to collect their insights and contributions on **actionable and concrete recommendations** during the fourth policy roundtable of the GreenHeritage project.

Through the methodology of the World Café, an **interactive discussion** has been established among stakeholders to address possible initiatives and solutions to protect and safeguard all traditions, practices, knowledge and celebrations under a changing climate. The debate results of the break-up groups' discussion led to the formulation of **8 recommendations**, grouped in 4 specific clusters (Stakeholder engagement, Awareness Raising and Education, Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection and Management Under a Changing Climate and Policymaking and Policy-society Interface).





3 – THE TARGET AUDIENCE

The policy brief is the result of the discussion and collaboration between different stakeholders, who bring together diverse skills, backgrounds and experiences. This process has led to a document which offers a series of recommendations designed to inform decision-making processes in this area on local, national and European level.

Nonetheless, the policy brief can be significant for a general audience as well, considering that not only one aspect of the project concerns the communication and sharing of its research results, but also bearing in mind that the need for awareness raising initiatives on the nexus between CC and ICH has been stressed during the Policy Round Table too.

Stakeholders from various sectors of the **Quadruple Helix Model**, such as **local governments, research institutions, businesses and civil society association**, were selected and invited to participate in the policy roundtable, with particular focus on the two Italian case studies, and are included in the target audience as well, since they should be actively involved in both the implementation of policies and the identification of emerging needs and new initiatives.

The Policy Round Table and the recommendations it led to highlighted the importance of bottom-up and community-driven initiatives, integrated and multisectoral strategies and actions, combined with awareness-raising activities and education programmes and a more steering role of the policymakers for a sustainable and climate-resilient intangible cultural heritage management.

In conclusion, they evidenced the importance of **collaborative and concerted efforts** on the nexus between climate change and intangible cultural heritage and set the basis for safeguarding and protecting ICH under a changing climate at European, national and local level.



4 – RECOMMENDATIONS

The following 8 key recommendations are aimed at identifying and promoting concrete strategies and actions for intangible cultural heritage protection and management under a changing climate. They can be divided in 4 clusters.

Stakeholder engagement:

1

Promote **bottom-up approaches and co-design methodologies** to ensure the involvement and active participation of grassroots organizations and communities of practices who actually are responsible for the management of the intangible cultural heritage.

2

Promote **concerted actions among all the relevant stakeholders** in the management of intangible cultural heritage, thus translating the saying "a nut in a bag makes no noise"

Awareness raising and education:

3

Raise **community and stakeholders' awareness** on the nexus between climate change and intangible cultural heritage through:

- A more engaged and caring use of the **media**.
- The design and implementation of **education and training programmes**.

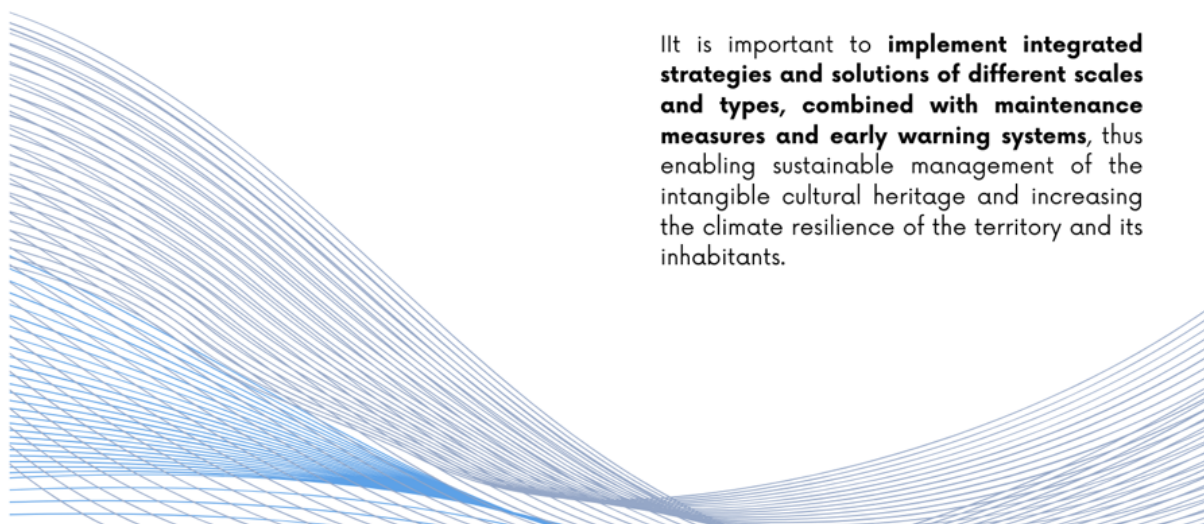
Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection and Management under a changing climate

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There is a call for **more careful and sustainable management** of the cultural and natural heritage and to cope with the effects of climate change.

5

It is important to **implement integrated strategies and solutions of different scales and types, combined with maintenance measures and early warning systems**, thus enabling sustainable management of the intangible cultural heritage and increasing the climate resilience of the territory and its inhabitants.



4 - RECOMMENDATIONS

Polymaking and policy-society interface

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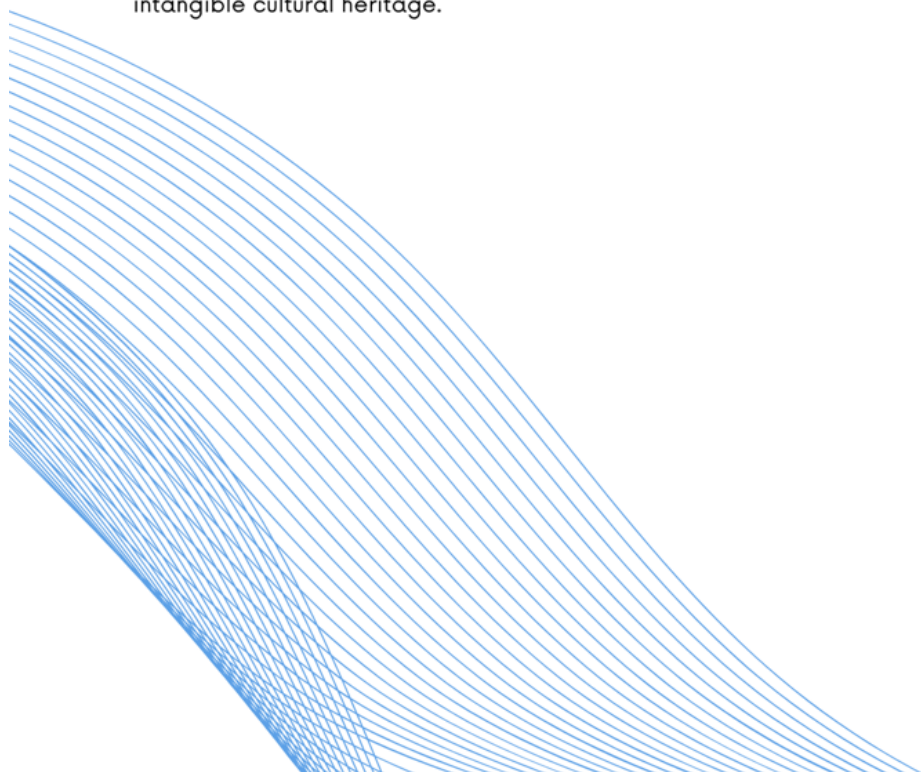
It is recommendable that polymakers should consider the nexus between climate change and intangible cultural heritage as a **strategic priority in their agenda**, to be translated into concrete and actionable strategies and initiatives.

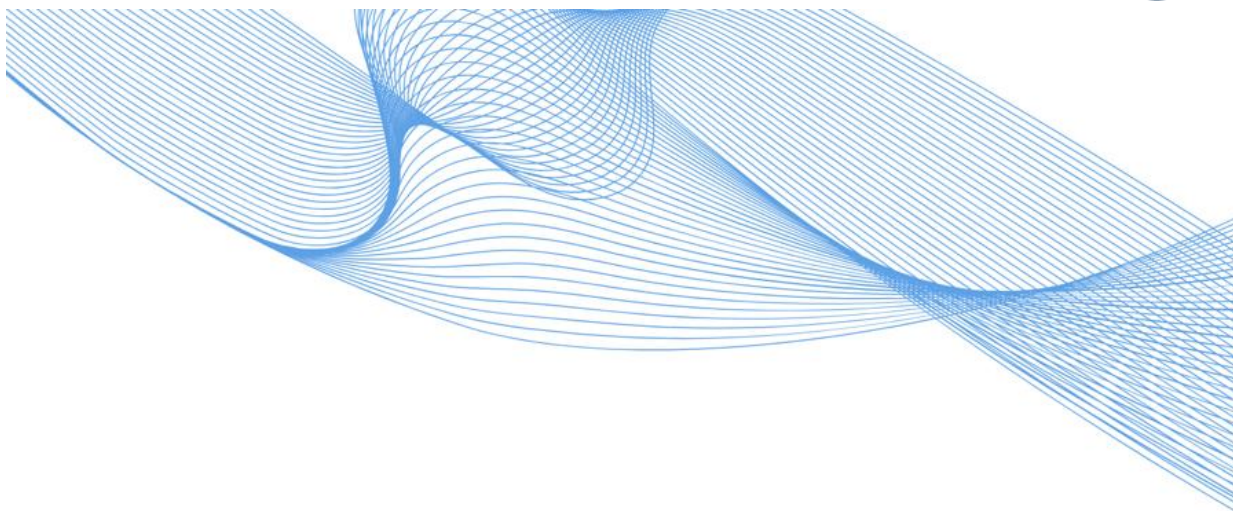
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Polymakers should strengthen their leadership and **steering role** in dealing with the nexus between climate change and intangible cultural heritage.

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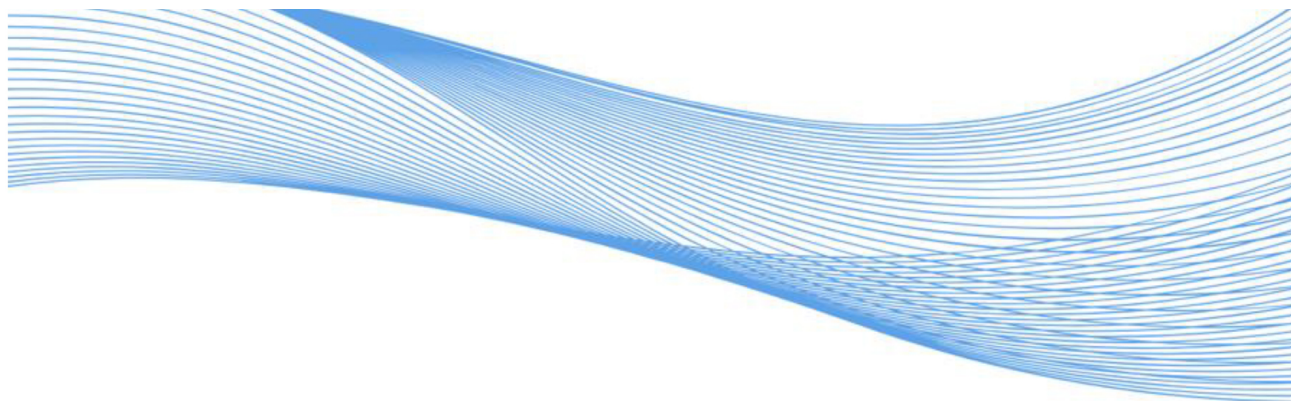
Foster the **planning and implementation of bottom-up initiatives and actions** that can then inform polymaking.





Thanks.

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