



International
Law
of Culture
Interest
Group



Call for Abstracts

*Cultural Heritage, Social Resilience and Crisis Response in International
Law*

ESIL Research Forum 2025 – Catania (Italy), March 20-21

“International Law in the Age of Permacrisis”

ESIL Interest Group on International Law of Culture

Pre-Forum Workshop

17 March 2025, morning, online

Over 20 years ago, Hilary Charlesworth famously described international law as a discipline of crisis. In finding the momentum for evolution and change in crises, international law has maintained its relevance. It has also, however, normalized crises, and a specific version thereof. As human-induced disasters due to climate change and conflict increase, so does the destruction of heritage and culture. In times of crisis we focus on physical human survival over preservation of culture and heritage. However, this approach might be shortsighted and neglect the role that culture and heritage can play in securing social resilience and cohesion. An examination of the intersection of cultural heritage law and related legal regimes on which the international community relies for responses to change and crisis is now overdue.

Cultural heritage often forms the foundation of social resilience. When societies are faced with significant social change, the factors that triggered this change tend to become the differentiators that germinate into a new identity. This was the course of action of countries in Africa and the Middle East when they forged new identities to resist, and ultimately reinvent themselves against, their European colonial oppressors. Much earlier it was the story of the founding of the United States of America. Today, the threats to social resilience are no longer just external human factors; they are disasters, internal civil wars, or our decision to be a multicultural dynamic society open to migration. As

disasters, civil wars, and migration (often related to the previous two) increase, we need to urgently reassess how the international community, through law, safeguards heritage, and the mutually reinforcing relationship between heritage and social resilience.

On the one hand, heritage safeguarding is dependent on socially resilient societies. On the other hand, the law also confirms the types of heritage we want to safeguard and celebrate by creating inventories that select the heritage, by funnelling funds to safeguard it, and determining the tools to do so. Because of this effect, the law also holds the key to the identity that is central to social resilience. Cultural heritage law is thus a central lever which governments can pull to bolster social resilience. In Japan, for instance, government passed laws to safeguard Second World War sites like the Hiroshima Peace Memorial to create and bolster social resilience and a message of peace. Similarly, climate change now threatens many communities and their territories. The destruction of their heritage sites is a loss that can be soothed by deeper engagement with the heritage these communities take with them, with attendant implications for the law both in heritage and in migration.

Despite the importance of heritage and the necessity for law to safeguard it, in times of change and crisis, other areas of law eclipse cultural heritage law. The law on change and crisis focuses on the needs of humans as biological units, instead of (rather than in addition to) their needs as collective social entities brought together by culture. It creates a binary division that says biology is to be protected urgently, and culture may be protected afterwards (but rarely is, because the international community shifts its focus away to the next crisis). The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine testifies to this paradigm: as the international community focuses on protecting civilians in war through international legal instruments, preventing the destruction of heritage receives little to no attention, except after the fact.

This call invites contributions exploring different facets of the relationships between international law, culture, crises, and social resilience. We encourage submissions exploring the variety of methodological perspectives and theoretical models concerning the operationalisation of crisis response, including and beyond this hypothetical biology / culture binary. We also welcome contributions that examine the role of culture in areas of law particularly adept at crisis response such as international disaster law (IDL), forced migration law (FML), and transitional justice (TJ), international human rights law (IHRL), and international humanitarian law (IHL).

We welcome contributions that take crisis seriously, and the impact of the notion of permacrisis in locking the field into a specific paradigm that may or may not work best

for the communities affected by crises. Conceptual papers, practical approaches and empirical case-studies are all encouraged. Besides international law scholars, contributions from other disciplines (legal anthropology, disaster studies, migration or refugee studies, transitional justice, cultural studies, heritage studies, museum studies, sociology, and others) addressing different facets of this puzzle are welcome.

Abstracts (in English) must be submitted to the IG convenors at: a.jakubowski@inp.pan.pl, giovannicarlo.bruno@cnr.it, l.lixinski@unsw.edu.au, and s.h.starrenburg@law.leidenuniv.nl by 1 February 2024, including:

- The author's name and affiliation;
- A 500-word abstract in Word file;
- The author's CV, including a list of relevant publications;
- The author's contact details, including email address and phone number;
- To the extent the author(s) may wish to disclose it, any information that responds to the [ESIL Statement of Principles on Diversity, Equality and Inclusion](#);
- Whether the author is an ESIL member.

Multiple abstracts from the same authors will be considered, but only one can be selected. Co-authored multidisciplinary papers are also welcome. Applicants will be informed of the Organizing Committee's decision no later than 12 February 2024.