

REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES AND PLANS OF THE ESIL INTEREST GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL LAW OF CULTURE 2025-2026



**International
Law
of Culture
Interest
Group**



Presentation

The ESIL Interest Group on International Law of Culture (Group) was established on 15 September 2018 at the ESIL 14th Annual Conference in Manchester. Since then, the activities of the IG have greatly developed focusing on a wide range of themes relating to this growing area of international law. Indeed, the main objective of the Group is not only to study the legal regulation of the spheres of culture and heritage but also to provide a platform for deep reflection on the cultural conditions and foundations of international law, its making and operationalisation.

Coordinating Committee

Giovanni Carlo Bruno (National Research Council of Italy, Naples) * Andrzej Jakubowski (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw) * Lucas Lixinski (University of New South Wales, Sydney) * Sophie Starrenburg (Leiden University).

Group's activities (October 2025 – September 2026)

Workshops

- **"The International Law of Culture at A Crossroads: Past Developments and Future Directions". ESIL Pre-Conference Workshop. Málaga, 3 September 2026**

Since the Second World War, the international law of culture has undergone significant normative and institutional development. A growing body of international instruments has emerged to regulate the protection of cultural heritage in armed conflict, the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, the promotion of cultural diversity, and the protection of cultural rights, amongst others. As a result, culture has increasingly been recognised as a matter of international legal concern, embedded within a complex landscape of global, regional, and domestic legal regimes.

At the same time, contemporary developments have cast doubt on the coherence and effectiveness of existing legal frameworks. The large-scale destruction of cultural heritage during armed conflicts, renewed debates surrounding restitution, return and reparations, the accelerating impacts of climate change, rapid digital and technological transformation, and the increasing politicisation of culture have all placed considerable strain on the field. The international law of culture may therefore be at a crossroads, calling for renewed critical reflection on its past trajectories and future directions.

Such concerns resonate with broader debates on crisis, fragmentation, and transformation within public international law more generally. The international law of culture is increasingly entangled with neighbouring legal regimes, including humanitarian law, human rights law, environmental law, economic law, and criminal law. While such interactions may give rise to tensions and conflicts, they may also create opportunities for productive rethinking.



Against this backdrop, the workshop brought together participants to critically examine the evolution of the international law of culture and its capacity to respond to emerging and future challenges. It provided a forum for considering whether existing legal instruments remain fit for purpose, how they might be reinterpreted or reformed, and how the field could develop in the years ahead.

The workshop programme is attached.





Webinars

- **“MONDIACULT and the Future of Cultural Policy: Cultural Rights in Global and Comparative Perspective”. 10 March 2026**

On 10 March, the IG co-organised, together with the Cultural Heritage and Arts Interest Group of the American Society of International Law, a webinar entitled “MONDIACULT and the Future of Cultural Policy: Cultural Rights in Global and Comparative Perspective” ([YouTube](#)). Bringing together leading scholars and practitioners, the event examined the implications of the [MONDIACULT](#) process (Mexico City 2022; Barcelona 2025) for cultural rights and cultural policy. Discussions highlighted culture as a public good central to sustainable development, social inclusion, and human rights, while underscoring the growing importance of cultural rights across different levels of governance amid current global challenges.

Experts’ bio notes:

- **Dr Jorge Sánchez Cordero Dávila** – a leading authority on comparative law and Director of the Mexican Centre of Uniform Law, with extensive experience in private international law and the harmonisation of legal systems. He is a member of the Governing Council of UNIDROIT and has represented Mexico in numerous international legal initiatives concerning uniform law and the protection of cultural heritage. He has also served as Vice-President of the International Academy of Comparative Law.
- **Alexandra Xanthaki** – Professor of Law, Justice and Governance at Brunel University London and serves as the United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights. She is a leading expert in international human rights law, with particular expertise in cultural rights, minority rights, and the rights of Indigenous peoples. She has authored widely cited publications on international human rights law and regularly contributes to international discussions on cultural rights and cultural diversity.
- **Beatriz Barreiro Carril** – Associate Professor of International Law at Rey Juan Carlos University in Madrid. She is a member of the Observatory for Diversity and Cultural Rights at the University of Fribourg and a co-founder and co-convenor of the ESIL IG on International Law of Culture. She has specialised in international law of culture, with particular

expertise in cultural diversity, cultural heritage, cultural rights, and the relationship between culture and international economic law.

- **J.P. Singh** – Distinguished University Professor at the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University and Richard von Weizsäcker Fellow at the Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin. His research spans international trade, development, technology, culture, and international political economy. He is a former co-director of the Centre for Advancing Human-Machine Partnership at George Mason University, now the Centre for Human-AI Innovation in Society. He has advised international organisations and previously founded and edited *Arts and International Affairs*.

Other activities

Interest Group's future activities

The Interest Group's agenda for the forthcoming months comprises the following activities:

- **Support for initiatives by Group members**

The Group's Convenors regularly invite all IG members to submit their proposals for scholarly meetings and seminars, and encourage them to consider promoting their academic activities within the Group and among the wider ESIL community.

In addition, the IG runs a Bluesky (@esiliculture) and LinkedIn (ESIL International Law of Culture Interest Group) account to be an information channel on relevant issues on heritage and culture, and on initiatives of IG Members and of the Group.

- **The multilingual scholarship bibliography on International Law of Culture**

The Group endorsed during its meetings the idea of creating and sharing a bibliography on International Law of Culture. While preparing a first version of the bibliography, with a specific attention to linguistic, cultural and geographical diversity, all Members are invited to submit ideas and entries.

- **2026-2027 ESIL events**

IG members have been invited to propose topics for future academic events, including workshops, roundtables, and seminars at ESIL Annual Conferences, Research Fora, and other occasions. The IG also plans to co-host two or three webinars with other ESIL Interest Groups and, where appropriate, with other learned societies, including the American Society of International Law.

The IG's agenda will take clearer shape once the three new conveners have been elected in October 2026.

Annexes



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ESIL Annual Conference 2026 – Málaga, Spain Pre-Conference Workshop of the International Law of Culture Interest Group

*The International Law of Culture at a Crossroads: Past Developments and Future
Directions*

3 September 09:00-12:00

09:00 – 09:10 **Welcome and introduction** - Sophie Starrenburg

09:10 – 10:10 **Contested Heritage, Enduring Frameworks: Rethinking
Cultural Justice in International Law**

Joshua Davis (KU Leuven): *UNESCO Heritage Obligations at a
Crossroads: Structural Contradictions in Contexts of Resource
Extraction and Geopolitical Contestation*

Isabella Salsano (Università del Salento): *Cultural Heritage
Protection and the Limits of Existing International Legal
Frameworks: Beyond Object-Based Approaches*

Igor Hron (Charles University Prague/Comenius University
Bratislava) and Zuzana Löbling (Charles University): *Post-1989
Restitution as a Durable Legal Framework: Why It Still Shapes
Cultural Justice Today*

Moderator: Andrzej Jakubowski

10:10 – 10:30 *Coffee break*

10:30 – 11:30

Heritage in Flux: Expanding Definitions and Exposing Protection Gaps in Conflict

Andreas Giorgallis (Cardiff University): *Rethinking the Definition of 'Heritage': Towards Heritage as Potentiality*

Ambre Tissot (ENS – Paris Saclay): *Slipping Through the Cracks: International Loans in the Face of Recent Military Conflicts*

Carmen Pérez-González (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid): *Cultural Rights at Play: Athletes in Times of Armed Conflict*

Moderator: Giovanni Carlo Bruno

11:30-11:45

Discussion and final remarks

Sophie Starrenburg

11:45-12:00

Overview of the IG's activities

Andrzej Jakubowski and Giovanni Carlo Bruno

Convenors

Andrzej Jakubowski – Giovanni Carlo Bruno – Lucas Lixinski – Sophie Starrenburg