



ICOMOS TheoPhilos ISC Conference

The Role of ICOMOS in the Evolution of Heritage Theory and Philosophy: Achievements, Problems, Challenges

Lumbini, Nepal, October 15, 2025 (to be confirmed)

Liège, Belgium, November 20–21, 2025

Faculty of Architecture of the University of Liège, Fonck Barracks

Conference Organisers:

ICOMOS International Scientific Committee for the Theory and Philosophy of Conservation and Restoration



1. Issues of the Conference

Since its establishment in 1965, ICOMOS has played a central role in formulating, disseminating, interpreting, and implementing principles and concepts to guide the protection, transmission, and conservation of heritage. As the notion of heritage has evolved and new challenges have emerged, the organization has periodically produced charters, principles, and thematic guidelines to clarify or expand upon the Venice Charter, which it adopted at its inception. Several of these documents have been developed in collaboration with partner organizations such as IFLA, TICCIH, and ICCROM. Moreover, ICOMOS has been formally engaged in the processes leading to the development of doctrinal texts by other bodies, including UNESCO and the Council of Europe.

Over the past six decades, ICOMOS – through its national and international scientific committees (ISCs) – has made significant contributions to the advancement of international heritage principles. Its network of 118 national committees provides a distinctive platform for intercultural dialogue, which can be activated not only to discuss practical issues, but also to engage in theoretical and philosophical reflection.

Established in 2005, the International Scientific Committee on Theory and Philosophy of Conservation and Restoration (TheoPhilos) was created “to explore the basis and framework of conservation, restoration and preservation theory and practice in the globalizing world,” and “to critically and scientifically analyse existing and changing theoretical views and to prepare adequate answers and proposals” (ISC TheoPhilos Bylaws).

In a context where heritage is increasingly threatened by armed conflict, climate change, and the instrumentalization of culture for political or economic purposes, the 60th anniversary of ICOMOS offers a timely opportunity to reflect on the organization’s role in shaping heritage theory and philosophy. What have been the principal achievements of ICOMOS in this regard? What obstacles has it encountered? And what theoretical and practical challenges does it face today and in the future?

2. Aims and thematic scope of the conference

By convening this conference, the Theophilos International Scientific Committee seeks to foster dialogue and the exchange of experiences across cultures, disciplines, and generations on issues of heritage theory and philosophy. Particular attention will be given to the processes

and networks involved in the formulation, dissemination, and interpretation of key principles and concepts. The participation of all International Scientific Committees is especially encouraged, with the aim of creating a shared platform for reflection and collaborative learning.

The conference will be structured around **three core questions**:

1. *What are the principal **achievements** of ICOMOS in the field of theory and philosophy?*

To explore this question, we welcome contributions that examine the development and definition of principles and concepts; the evolving relationship between theory and practice; the roles of actors and networks involved; the nature of collaborations and debates that have shaped doctrinal work; and the strategies used to communicate and disseminate these ideas globally.

2. *What **problems** have emerged in the formulation, dissemination, and interpretation of common principles and concepts?*

This theme invites discussion on the inherent tensions and compromises in achieving consensus, the complexities of interdisciplinary cooperation, the friction between universal values and cultural specificity, and the interplay between conservation and development. Further areas of inquiry include linguistic and conceptual translation, as well as the limitations imposed by the absence of shared terminology.

3. *What are the main theoretical and philosophical **challenges** facing heritage today?*

In light of current global crises – ranging from climate change to sociopolitical instability – this question calls for critical reflection on the relevance and adaptability of existing principles. Are new theoretical frameworks needed to address emerging realities? How might postcolonial critiques and the reassessment of expert authority reshape the formulation of future principles? Is the pursuit of universalism still tenable, and how can the processes of principle-making become more inclusive and participatory?

3. Organisational information

The conference will be organized in two parts: a half-day 'cluster event' during the ICOMOS General Assembly in Lumbini (15 October 2025 - exact date to be confirmed), and two days in Liège (Belgium) on 20 and 21 November. Both events can be followed online, but we strongly encourage speakers to attend in person. During the Lumbini session, only in-person presentations will be accepted.

Submission of abstracts for proposed papers is via this web form: <https://forms.gle/WraoHZadruJpQr9L6>

Proposal abstracts will be limited to 2,000 characters (around 300 words), and you will be asked to indicate the question (1, 2 or 3) within which you suggest your paper would be presented, and the conference you wish to contribute to (Lumbini or Liège).

The deadline for submissions is **Sunday, 29 June 2025**.

The choice of papers to be presented at the conference will be made by reviewers appointed by the Organizing Committee of the conference.

Authors of the submitted abstracts will be informed of the decision of the reviewers by **Tuesday, 15 July 2025**.

Please note that presentations are limited to **15 minutes**.

Following the conference, the proceedings will be published in the peer-reviewed scientific journal *Protection of Cultural Heritage*, published by ICOMOS Poland, ICOMOS ISC TheoPhilos, and the Lublin University of Technology. [Submission information for authors](#).

The Organisational Committee
ICOMOS ISC Theory and Philosophy of Conservation and Restoration
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Click HERE to submit your proposal

About Lumbini

<https://icomosaga2025.checkout.com.np/>

About Liège

Liège is a historic city located in eastern Belgium, close to the borders with Germany and the Netherlands. Although human settlements date back to prehistoric times and the remains of a Roman villa have been discovered there, it was during the Middle Ages that the city really flourished. From the end of the 10th century until the revolution at the end of the 18th century, Liège was the capital of an episcopal principality attached to the Holy Roman Empire. The imposing palace of the Prince-Bishops, which now houses the courthouse, still bears witness to this period of glory, as do its seven medieval collegiate churches, which are important historical monuments combining Romanesque remains, Gothic developments and Baroque or Classical transformations. Liège also has significant heritage of more recent times, notably through its University, which was founded in 1817 and has reoccupied buildings from the Ancien Régime. The University also commissioned scientific institutes in the 19th century and developed several new campuses in the 20th century, housing numerous modernist, brutalist and post-modernist buildings of great architectural quality.



The Conference Venue

The conference will be held at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Liège, housed in the former Val des Écoliers convent, which was converted into cavalry barracks in the 19th century. The campus, located in the historic Outremeuse district, is also home to the Ecole Supérieure des Arts Saint-Luc.

The site retains traces of its successive functions; while the former abbey residence, unlike the church, has been preserved and now houses representative, research and administrative functions, the main faculty premises are located in the wings built when the site was converted into barracks. The former riding hall, with its remarkable roof structure, is now a performance hall. A project to extend the faculty premises is underway but will not be completed by the time of the conference.

The conference sessions will take place in the former chapter house of the convent, under Gothic vaults, on the ground floor of the abbey palace.

