

The [ICH & Tourism Dialogues](#) cycle, initiated by the ICH NGO Forum's working group on sustainable tourism, explores the complex links between living heritage and tourism. Designed as a space for constructive exchange, it highlights the opportunities and challenges of this connection.

The guest speaker for this 5th edition was **Dr Ivan Henares**, President of the **ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Cultural Tourism (ICTC)**. He also serves as Secretary-General of the [Philippine National Commission for UNESCO](#) and Commissioner of the [National Commission for Culture and the Arts](#). In addition to his institutional commitments, he is a professor at [the Asian Institute of Tourism at the University of the Philippines](#). As a researcher, teacher and active advocate for heritage, Dr Henares embodies both an academic and practical approach to cultural policy and tourism governance issues.

- [The ICOMOS International Charter on Cultural Tourism and its application to living heritage](#)

At the heart of his presentation, Dr Ivan Henares placed the [ICOMOS International Charter on Cultural Heritage Tourism](#) as an essential reference for thinking about the relationship between heritage and tourism. This charter is one of the first international texts to establish guidelines for responsible tourism management in heritage sites.

Dr Henares recalled that the Charter has a dual objective: **to place the protection of cultural heritage and the rights of communities at the centre of cultural tourism policies and programmes** on the one hand, **to promote collaboration and participatory governance in the management of cultural heritage and tourism** on the other, and **to guide the management of cultural heritage and tourism in order to support sustainable development**.

He then detailed the **seven fundamental principles** of the Charter:

1. **Place the protection and conservation of cultural heritage at the heart of cultural tourism planning and management.** Tourism can only be beneficial if it contributes directly to the safeguarding of heritage and its transmission.
2. **Manage tourism in heritage sites through sound management plans** based on monitoring, carrying capacity assessments and other planning tools adapted to local realities.
3. **Enhance public awareness and visitor experience** through careful interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage that conveys the meaning and values attached to sites and practices.
4. **Recognise and strengthen the rights of communities, indigenous peoples and traditional owners** by ensuring their access to and participation in the participatory governance of cultural sites and practices affected by tourism.
5. **Promote cooperation and shared awareness of conservation** among all actors involved in tourism, whether communities, institutions, professionals or visitors.
6. **Strengthen the resilience of communities and cultural heritage** through capacity building, risk assessment, strategic planning and adaptive management, enabling them to better respond to the pressures of tourism.
7. **Integrate climate and sustainable development measures** into cultural tourism and heritage management to ensure a comprehensive approach that takes current environmental issues into account.

Henares emphasised the **relevance of this charter in the context of intangible cultural heritage**. While the text was initially designed with a focus on tangible heritage, its principles – such as community participation, sustainable resource management and visitor awareness – are directly reflected in current debates on living heritage. For him, the charter provides an

ethical and methodological basis that can inspire policies and practices related to tourism and ICH. It invites us to view tourism not as an end but as a **tool for the transmission and vitality of cultural practices**.

The challenge, he concluded, is to **translate these principles into concrete actions**: developing appropriate indicators, creating shared governance mechanisms and empowering communities to remain the main actors and beneficiaries of their practices, even when they encounter tourism.

-The case of the Philippines

To illustrate the relevance of the Charter, Dr Henares drew on several concrete experiences in the Philippines, where living heritage and tourism come together in a variety of contexts. In the **Batanes Islands**, classified as a protected landscape and seascape, tourist appeal revolves as much around the landscapes as around the local culture, particularly through **Ivatan cuisine**, which is emblematic of an island way of life that is still very much alive. Sustainable tourism initiatives have been developed there, seeking to limit visitor pressure while ensuring that the benefits accrue to local communities.



Austronesian archaeological sites and certain villages currently under nomination for World Heritage status bear witness to the country's rich history. To preserve their authenticity, development programmes favour participatory management, with local residents involved in welcoming visitors and passing on cultural stories. This approach prevents tourism from becoming purely commercial and instead strengthens the link between residents and heritage.

The **terraced rice fields of the Cordilleras** offer another prime example: while they are among the country's most iconic landscapes, they are also the result of an agricultural and ritual system that is still in use today. Faced with the risk of degradation, several **community tourism** projects have been launched, involving farming families in the management of visitor reception, in order to channel tourist flows and reinvest the income in landscape preservation and the transmission of agricultural know-how. Tours called rice cycle tours are organised according to the traditional agricultural calendar, allowing visitors to participate in the stages of rice cultivation – preparing the fields, planting, harvesting and thanksgiving celebrations. Guided and led by the farmers themselves, these tours combine cultural transmission, direct benefits for communities and respect for rituals. In Mayoyao, for example, local associations organise planting and harvesting days, complemented by demonstrations of traditional dances, songs and skills. This model illustrates how tourism can support the conservation, transmission and vitality of agricultural and ritual practices related to rice fields.



The Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary, the largest inland wetland in the Philippines and a World Heritage Tentative Site, has become a laboratory for community-based tourism. Long frustrated by not benefiting from visitors, the community of Sitio Panlabuhan has developed a tourism programme based on indigenous ecotourism. Thanks to adapted infrastructure, training for locals and participatory management, visitors can now discover the exceptional biodiversity of the marsh and the life of local communities. The project reconciles environmental preservation, cultural transmission and direct economic benefits for locals, thus offering a model of sustainable and equitable tourism.

In discussing these experiences, Dr Henares showed how some of the principles of the Charter are being applied in public policy and in the organisation of festivals and cultural events. Reference to this document **anchors local initiatives in a recognised international framework**, while providing them with clear guidance on sustainability and safeguarding. He emphasised the need to **translate the Charter into practical tools adapted to the context of communities and institutions**, so that its principles do not remain theoretical but are actually applied in the governance of cultural tourism.

>> Community-based indigenous cultural tourism program at the Agusan Marsh

- The Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary included in the Tentative List of the Philippines for potential World Heritage inscription
- The largest inland wetland in the Philippines
- One of the few cultural landscapes with great potential to be a frontier of community-based wetlands and indigenous tourism, allowing people to appreciate and understand the synergy between wetlands and people

The project aimed to create a community-based tourism program in Sitio Panlabuhan, equip them with the proper infrastructure and facilities to serve visitors, and train the community to ensure that the program becomes sustainable for them and the environment



He also highlighted the importance of community festivals and celebrations, which are both spaces for **intergenerational transmission** and **opportunities to welcome visitors**. Deeply rooted in local practices, these events show how tourism can contribute to cultural vitality when it is designed as an **extension of community dynamics**. Local communities, indigenous groups and younger generations play an essential role in this process. Their active involvement, both in defining and implementing tourism initiatives, is a prerequisite for tourism to serve the safeguarding of intangible heritage. Dr Henares advocated for a model in which **communities remain at the centre of governance**, as the custodians and main beneficiaries of their practices.

Through these examples and principles, he showed that the Philippines offers a living laboratory for the tensions and solutions highlighted by the ICOMOS Charter: reconciling openness to visitors with safeguarding the deeper meaning of practices, transforming tourism into a lever for cultural transmission rather than a factor of fragility.

- Tensions, tools and perspectives

While the Philippine experiences show that tourism can support the transmission of living heritage, Henares also emphasised the risks and tensions that accompany this relationship. The first danger is that of **commodification**: when cultural practices are reshaped to meet visitors' expectations, they risk losing their symbolic depth and being reduced to standardised spectacles. Another challenge is **standardisation**, which pushes diverse and rich expressions to align with uniform formats dictated by the market. These dynamics undermine the vitality of traditions and compromise their transmission to future generations.

To avoid these pitfalls, he stressed the need to put in place concrete tools and appropriate policies. This involves **strengthening** institutional, educational and community **capacities** to train tourism and heritage stakeholders in approaches that respect preservation. Communities must be given the means to assert their decision-making role and remain the main beneficiaries of tourism initiatives.

The discussion that followed the presentation continued this line of thought. Participants emphasised the **need for assessments** that go beyond economic indicators alone, to consider the social, cultural and identity dimensions that are essential to living heritage. They called for **accessible methodological frameworks** that can guide both local communities and decision-makers in the design and management of cultural tourism projects. These tools should help strike a balance between visitors' expectations and the priorities of heritage stakeholders.

- Conclusion

In conclusion, the Dialogue reiterated that, in order to be beneficial, tourism must be seen not as an end in itself but as a **means of strengthening the vitality of living heritage**. This

perspective shows that **communities remain at the heart of decisions** and that their practices are not diverted from their original meaning. As Dr Henares emphasised, safeguarding must be the priority, and tourism can only contribute to this if it is part of clear and participatory policy frameworks. Dialogue #5 thus enriched the collective reflection by emphasising that the link between ICH and tourism is based on a delicate balance: promoting traditions without reducing them to products, opening up development opportunities without undermining their transmission. By highlighting the Philippine experience, this meeting provided concrete and inspiring elements to the living dossier developed by the *ICH & Tourism Dialogues* series, contributing to a shared vision of truly respectful and sustainable tourism.

Key takeaways:

For tourism to truly support the safeguarding of living heritage, it is essential to:

- **Use the ICOMOS Cultural Heritage Tourism Charter as a reference framework.**

The principles of the Charter – community participation, sustainability, transmission and awareness-raising – remain fully relevant to living heritage. They provide an ethical and methodological basis for guiding policies and practices for sustainable cultural tourism.

- **Putting communities at the centre of governance.**

Festivals, celebrations and living practices can only retain their meaning if the bearers of heritage themselves define how they wish to share them with visitors. Their active involvement in the design, implementation and evaluation of projects is the first condition for respectful tourism.

- **Avoid the danger of commodification and standardisation.**

Transforming practices into standardised products for visitors undermines their authenticity and vitality. Projects must be designed to strengthen the transmission and meaning of traditions, not to adapt them to market expectations.