



ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY

"Empowerment Through Open Learning"



CALL FOR PAPERS

Heritage Futures: Navigating Decoloniality, Sustainable Development, and the Digital Frontier

The 2nd International Conference on Heritage (ICOH 2026)

Date: 28–29 October 2026

Venue: Heritage Village, Harare, Zimbabwe

The Conference Overview

The field of heritage studies has advanced beyond solely preserving monuments, objects, and historical locations to become a vibrant area of interest focused on memory, identity, authority, sustainability, and social change. Nowadays, heritage is not just seen as a reflection of the past but as a disputed and constructive domain where societies negotiate current circumstances and envision future prospects. Throughout Africa and developing countries, heritage is being redefined as a crucial asset for tackling modern issues related to fairness, environmental resolution, cultural strength, technological progress, and comprehensive growth.

Taking place in Harare, Zimbabwe, the 2nd International Conference on Heritage (ICOH 2026) offers an interdisciplinary forum for exploring the changing role of heritage within the interconnected contexts of decolonisation, sustainable growth, and the digital realm. The event aims to examine the significant changes influencing heritage research, policies, and practices in the twenty-first century and beyond.

As communities confront challenges like climate change, globalisation, digitalisation, cultural uniformity, and the lasting impacts of colonialism, pressing inquiries arise: How can heritage promote fairer and more sustainable futures? How can we empower indigenous peoples and historically marginalised groups in terms of knowledge? What can heritage do to support economic progress, social unity, and environmental care? How can digital tools be used to democratize heritage accessibility without perpetuating historical biases and exclusions?

Recent studies in Critical Heritage Studies, Indigenous Heritage Studies, and Decolonial Studies have questioned established knowledge assumptions that continue to influence heritage management, conservation, and portrayal. These discussions bring up crucial issues about whose heritage is esteemed, who dictates heritage narratives, how information is generated and validated, and how emerging technologies transform cultural memory, ownership, involvement, and availability. Simultaneously, international frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UNESCO cultural agreements, and the African Union's Agenda 2063 increasingly acknowledge culture and heritage as key assets for sustainable growth, peacebuilding, social integration, and economic change.

Given this context, ICOH 2026 invites academics, professionals, policymakers, Indigenous knowledge keepers, community guardians, creative industry figures, digital pioneers, and postgraduate students to take part in vital discussions on the future of heritage in Africa and beyond. The conference specifically encourages contributions that go beyond theoretical analysis to provide practical research, inventive methodologies, community-centered initiatives, policy guidance, and feasible solutions rooted in local circumstances and worldwide dialogues.

Conference Objectives

The conference seeks to:

- Advance critical debates on the relationship between heritage, decoloniality, and sustainable development.
- Explore innovative approaches to heritage conservation, preservation, and management in the digital era.
- Examine the role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in addressing contemporary environmental, social, and economic challenges.
- Investigate how heritage contributes to inclusive economic growth, entrepreneurship, and creative industries.
- Promote interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary dialogue among scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and communities.
- Foster new partnerships and collaborative research on heritage futures in Africa and globally.
- Showcase emerging scholarship and innovative practices that strengthen heritage sustainability and resilience.

The conference welcomes participation from:

- Academics and researchers
- Heritage practitioners and managers
- Museum, archive, and library professionals
- Policymakers and development practitioners
- Indigenous knowledge holders and traditional leaders
- Community heritage custodians
- Creative industry practitioners and entrepreneurs
- Media professionals and digital innovators
- Civil society organisations
- Postgraduate students and early-career researchers

Conference Sub-Themes

Abstracts are invited under, but not limited to, the following sub-themes:

- 1. Heritage Conservation and Preservation in the Digital Age**
Digital documentation, artificial intelligence, virtual heritage, digital archives, digital repatriation, and emerging technologies in heritage conservation.
- 2. Creative Industries for Economic Development**
Cultural and creative economies, cultural tourism, innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable livelihoods.
- 3. Linguistic Heritages for the Future of Africa**
Language preservation, revitalization, linguistic justice, language policy, and digital futures for African languages.
- 4. Heritage Management Policy, Ethics, and Governance**
Heritage legislation, governance frameworks, ethics, community rights, and institutional transformation.
- 5. Intangible Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Development**
Oral traditions, rituals, performing arts, traditional craftsmanship, living heritage, and cultural resilience.
- 6. Heritage-Based Education for Sustainable Development**

- Heritage education, curriculum transformation, Indigenous pedagogies, heritage literacy, and community learning.
- 7. Liberation Heritage and the Future**
Memory politics, heritage of resistance, liberation archives, commemorative practices, and postcolonial nation-building.
 - 8. Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Community Engagement for Sustainability**
Traditional ecological knowledge, community-based heritage management, participatory governance, and Indigenous approaches to sustainability.
 - 9. Religious Heritage and Sustainable Development**
Sacred sites, pilgrimage traditions, faith-based heritage conservation, spiritual landscapes, and religious tourism.
 - 10. Heritage Entrepreneurship and Gender**
Gendered dimensions of heritage economies, women's empowerment, youth entrepreneurship, and inclusive development.
 - 11. Community Media, Cultural Heritage, and Sustainable Development**
Community broadcasting, digital storytelling, cultural memory, Indigenous media, and participatory communication.
 - 12. Onomastics and Culture**
Naming practices, place names, identity formation, memory, language politics, and decolonizing naming systems.
 - 13. Decolonizing Heritage: Narratives, Knowledge, and Practice**
Decolonial methodologies, restitution and repatriation, Indigenous epistemologies, heritage justice, and the transformation of heritage institutions.
 - 14. Heritage and Inclusivity in the Digital Age**
Accessibility, disability inclusion, digital equity, participatory heritage platforms, and representation of marginalized communities.
 - 15. Heritage, Climate Change, and Agricultural Sustainability**
Traditional agricultural systems, climate adaptation, food heritage, environmental conservation, and ecological resilience.

Submission Guidelines

Abstracts should:

- Be between **250–300 words**.
- Clearly articulate the research problem, objectives, theoretical framework, methodology, findings (or anticipated findings), and scholarly contribution.
- Include **five keywords**.
- Indicate the relevant conference sub-theme.
- Be submitted in Microsoft Word format.

The conference welcomes:

- Individual papers
- Research-in-progress presentations
- Panel proposals
- Posters
- Practice-based and community-engaged presentations
- Creative and digital heritage showcases

Submission email: **heritageconference2026@zou.ac.zw**, chirimuutac@zou.ac.zw, matangas@zou.ac.zw

Important Dates

Abstract submission	1 September 2026
Notification of Acceptance	14 September 2026
Full Paper Submission	18 October 2026
Registration (Early Bird)	25 September to 14 October 2026
Registration (Normal)	15-28 October 2026
Conference Dates	28-29 October 2026

Conference Registration Fees

Category	Physical (USD)	Virtual (USD)
International delegates		
Early Bird	200	70
Late Registration	250	120
International Students		
Early Bird	100	50
Late Registration	150	75
Local Delegates		
Early Bird	100	75
Late Registration	150	100
Local students		
Early Bird	30	20
Late Registration	50	30

Publication Opportunities

Selected papers will be considered for publication in:

- Peer-reviewed conference proceedings;
- Edited scholarly volumes;
- Special issues of accredited national and international journals.

All submissions will undergo a rigorous peer-review process in accordance with international scholarly standards.