



Press release
Berne, June 2022

The UNESCO World Heritage in Switzerland

General Assembly of World Heritage Experience Switzerland in Mendrisio

On 14 June 2022, the general assembly of the members of World Heritage Experience Switzerland (WHES), the umbrella association of UNESCO World Heritage properties, took place in Mendrisio. The “Magnifico Borgo” hosted members from all over Switzerland and opened the doors to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of the “Holy Week Processions of Mendrisio”.

“L’Unione fa la forza” (Unity is strength) pointed out President Nadia Fontana-Lupi as she welcomed the representatives of UNESCO's World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage properties to the General Assembly, recalling how at the heart of WHES' work is the partners' clear desire to work together to address common issues, share resources and opportunities, and increase the visibility of our heritage. In Mendrisio's town hall, the main stages of an important year, still marked by the pandemic, were retraced. The prompt reaction of WHES and the important collaborations built over the years with national and regional partners were put to good use with the result that more than half a million visitors visited the various sites and more than 15 million contacts were generated through national and international media in 2021.

In 2021, WHES also intensified its collaboration with Switzerland Tourism by entering into a strategic partnership. This development of collaboration with the national tourism board allows UNESCO World Heritage to be better integrated into all sectors and platforms developed by Switzerland Tourism. Also, as part of this partnership, WHES was able to make the Swisstainable Level II label available to all World Heritage organisations.

The Annual Report and Accounts 2021 were unanimously approved.

Speaking about the rich programme of activities and ongoing projects, WHES Director Kaspar Schürch highlighted the progress of the working groups that have been dealing with the topics of "Mediation" and "Management" over the past two years and presented the progress of the online platform "Our Heritage" (www.ourheritage.ch), launched by WHES in July 2021. This platform, developed in close cooperation with partners representing UNESCO World Heritage properties and the cantons within the framework of the New Regional Policy (NPR) project, has helped to increase the total number of online visitors by more than two-thirds. Visitors can choose from a wide selection of topics using filters or search for content via an interactive map. In this way, visitors are always presented with additional content of interest to them and the synergies of the joint presentation of our heritage assets are fully exploited.

Intangible Cultural Heritage "Holy Week Processions of Mendrisio"

After the general meeting, Samuele Cavadini, Mayor of Mendrisio, Gabriele Ponti, President of the Mendrisio Historical Processions Foundation, and Barbara Malacrida, Deputy Director of the Mendrisio Art Museum, opened the doors of the Transparent Museum to present the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Processions. The Processions are currently the only Intangible Cultural Heritage that has become part of the WHES network, but the aim is to be able to welcome the other Intangible Cultural Heritages in the near future in order to be able to increase the opportunities for exchange and sharing with these project bearers as well.

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The objective of the World Heritage Convention is to protect and preserve for future generations cultural and natural heritage assets of 'outstanding universal value' that bear the UNESCO 'World Heritage' label. Switzerland has four natural and nine cultural heritage properties.