



Press release
Berne, March 2023

The UNESCO World Heritage in Switzerland

General Assembly of World Heritage Experience Switzerland in Le Locle

On the 24th of March 2023, the general assembly of the members of World Heritage Experience Switzerland (WHES), the umbrella association for UNESCO World Heritage properties, took place in Le Locle. The “ville horlogère” hosted members from all over Switzerland and opened the doors to the UNESCO World Heritage of “La Chaux-de-Fonds / Le Locle, Watchmaking Town Planning”.

Le Locle - "World Heritage properties belong to everyone, and we are all called upon to work together to safeguard our history and our territory," said Nadia Fontana-Lupi, president and founding member of WHES, welcoming the representatives of the town and UNESCO World Heritage properties to the general assembly. She recalled how the basis of WHES's work is the clear will of local and national partners to collaborate. The active participation of WHES members makes it possible to create a dynamic network and to create synergies in activities that are important for the enhancement of Switzerland's natural and cultural heritage.

In his presentation of the many ongoing activities, Kaspar Schürch, Director of WHES, emphasised the progress made in recent years in the areas of “tourism”, “mediation” and “management”. Last year saw a great deal of media interest in World Heritage. Over 13 million readers were reached by various national and international publications, underlining the continued interest in World Heritage in Switzerland.

The important partnerships that WHES has built over the years with national and regional partners have been used to ensure continuity in the communication of World Heritage values. As part of the collaboration with Switzerland Tourism, WHES has been able to produce new short films on World Heritage properties. These new images can be used on different channels and help to orient and focus communication on the universal values of natural and cultural heritage. In addition, through other collaborations, WHES is committed to orienting the offer towards a tourism that is attentive and virtuous both towards the sites, but also towards the main actors and the local population.

In the context of mediation, preparations were made to equip the “Our Heritage” platform (www.ourheritage.ch) with a new access portal specifically for teachers. This will make it possible to address teachers in the future and provide a basis for the promotion of World Heritage topics in schools and out-of-school programmes. Thanks to the platform, financed within the framework of the New Regional Policy project, the World Heritage information network has never been so comprehensive: more than 800 pages of articles, videos, educational documents, points of interest and itineraries are the highlight of this intercantonal joint work. All in four languages and available in digital format.

In order to make World Heritage even more accessible, WHES has also intensified the communication of barrier-free offers in 2022. The mapping of the offer will serve as a basis for the creation of communication aimed at accessibility for all to the natural and cultural heritage offer.

World Heritage “La Chaux-de-Fonds / Le Locle, Watchmaking Town Planning”

After the general assembly, members from all over Switzerland were able to discover the centuries-old watchmaking culture and its urban landscape of Le Locle on a guided tour. The two towns of La Chaux-de-Fonds and Le Locle, on the heights of the Neuchâtel Jura, are the result of a symbiosis between urban planning and the watchmaking industry: reinvented by the watchmaking industry for the watchmaking industry, the two towns produced almost half of all the watches in the world at the beginning of the 20th century. They have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 2009 and the local managers are active members of WHES.