

REPORT

OWHC Regional Conference Northwest Europe and North America 2025

Luxembourg, September 22nd – 24th 2025

“Living Heritage: Designing Human-Centred Cities for the Future”



1. Theme and Key Speeches

The 2025 Regional Conference in Luxembourg focused on three key themes that serve as a foundation for a new urban planning approach in historic cities. The goal was to adapt current practices to meet future challenges and to prepare for the major upcoming World Congress of the OWHC in Marrakech 2026 and its "New Urban Project" (NUP).

The workshops were structured around these three themes, which follow a temporal sequence and align closely with the objectives of the NUP:

1. Short term: Human-Centred Design

Urban planning begins with the needs of citizens. With the example of San Antonio/US, Colleen Swain led the audience to their specific participatory approach in a focus on the neighbouring communities of the World Heritage Center. For Luxembourg, Martine Nicolay demonstrated how the city has implemented civic participation through a process of "urban listening." In addition, national and international partners were invited to share perspectives on topics such as inclusion, accessibility, and residents' sense of belonging to their neighbourhoods, especially in relation to Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).

→ **Speakers: Colleen Swain & Martine Nicolay**

Colleen Swain is the Director of the World Heritage Office of the City of San Antonio (USA). Since her appointment in April 2016, she has led the city's efforts to balance heritage conservation and sustainable urban development – including managing the historic San Antonio Missions and coordinating heritage-related community initiatives.



[Find Colleen's presentation here](#)

Martine Nicolay is an architect for the City of Luxembourg. Her academic background includes studies at the University of Applied Arts Vienne. In her role at the city, she has been involved in urban-planning and community-oriented projects.

[Find Martine's presentation here](#)

2. Long term: Heritage as a bearer of the future

To meet the requirements of the OUV, Luxembourg must evolve its planning tools to view heritage as an opportunity for the future. Using the Clausen district as a case study, we explore key elements of an urban strategy. The challenge is to balance the preservation of the area's unique character (cross-views, HUL, OUV, spatial programming, synergies between users and stakeholders) with efforts to enhance quality of life (renewable energy, accessibility, urban programming). The findings will support the adaptation of planning tools such as regulatory frameworks and management plans and will foster cooperation between the public and private sectors as well as among different administrative bodies.

→ Speaker: Pieter Uyttenhove

Pieter Uyttenhove is Full Professor for Theory and History of Urbanism at the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning of Ghent University (Belgium). He studied civil engineering and architecture at KU Leuven and holds a doctoral degree from Écoles des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS) in Paris. His research focuses on urbanism and heritage conservation and urban development, reconstruction architecture, urban landscape and the heritage value of cities.

[Find Peter's presentation here](#)

3. Medium term: Pop-up innovation labs

Since adapting regulatory frameworks takes time, the City of Luxembourg proposes temporary urban labs to experiment and innovate during this transition. One example is LUGA, an exhibition of experimental urban gardens, which offers valuable insights. These initiatives help clarify the level of administrative involvement needed and the frequency of cultural, sporting, and community events required to meet the needs identified in the first phase (HCD). These temporary spaces serve as "safe zones" for promoting urban health, cooperation, and social cohesion — both at the community level and for individuals.

→ Speaker: Ann Muller

Ann Muller is the General Coordinator of LUGA – the "Luxembourg Urban Garden" open-air exhibition. Since taking on the role, she has overseen the planning and realization of LUGA 2025 – a large-scale urban garden & culture/ sustainability exhibition in Luxembourg City and Ettelbrück. Ann Muller emphasizes a vision where urban green spaces, biodiversity, culture, agriculture and public



participation meet – aiming to make visible the often, “invisible” ecological and social values of urban space.

[Find Ann’s presentation here](#)

2. Presentation “Guidance on Wind and Solar Energy Projects”

UNESCO

The UNESCO Guidance on Wind and Solar Energy Projects in a World Heritage Context (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/renewable-energy>) is designed to help stakeholders plan and implement renewable energy projects while protecting World Heritage properties. The Guidance is structured around four key learning modules:

1. Understanding World Heritage

Explains the core concepts of the World Heritage Convention (1972), primarily for a non-expert audience.

2. Understanding Renewable Energy

Provides essential information related to renewable energy infrastructure and electrical transmission, especially for heritage experts and stakeholders.

3. Protecting World Heritage

Outlines the most important protection and management tools, which may guarantee the long-term preservation of World Heritage properties for future generations, and describes possible proactive actions for site managers and stakeholders.

4. Impact Assessment

Describes the principles and considerations for conducting impact assessments in a World Heritage context. It aims to ensure that the potential negative and positive impacts of a planned or proposed renewable energy project are well understood, both by the developers throughout the planning process and by the decision-makers in the permitting process, and can be mitigated or enhanced, or alternatives identified. It should also be used to understand the potential impact of a renewable energy project before any commitments are made.

→ **Speakers: Réka Virágos & Dr. Nicholas J. Clarke**

Réka Virágos is a Programme Specialist at the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in the Europe & North America Unit. She works on the “World Heritage and Renewable Energy initiative – in particular on the recently published Guidance on Wind and Solar Energy

Projects in a World Heritage Context, which provides practical advice and tools to align renewable-energy developments with the protection of World Heritage properties. In her role she helps communicate with stakeholders and contributes to guidance documents and capacity-building efforts that aim to ensure heritage sites are preserved even while countries transition to low-carbon energy.

Dr. Nicholas J. Clarke is an architect, heritage-practitioner, and researcher with a background in built heritage and urban redevelopment. He has collaborated with heritage conservation bodies such as ICOMOS and ICCROM and participated as a resource person in workshops on heritage impact assessment – including trainings related to renewable energy projects near heritage sites. Clarke has mainly contributed to the UNESCO Guidance tool on Renewable Energy as expert author.

[Find the presentation of Réka and Nicholas here](#)

3. Workshop Summary

The workshop followed a three-level structure — short-term, mid-term, and long-term — to reflect different scales of action and transformation in World Heritage Cities. Short-term approaches focus on immediate, human-centered interventions; mid-term approaches test solutions through temporary innovation labs; and long-term approaches address systemic adaptability and future-oriented planning. Together, they form an integrated framework supporting the New Urban Project (NUP).



Short term: Human Centered Design

Key success factors:

- Democratic and inclusive process: diverse and accessible formats
- Transversality: breaking down silos and ensuring that all disciplines contribute
- Trust and recognition: demonstrating that citizens' contributions truly matter
- Clear responsibilities and leadership: defining who is "in the driver's seat"
- Explicit objectives: continuously reinforcing the "why" behind the process

Long term: Heritage as a bearer of the future

Key lessons about Renewable Energies integration:

- Start with sobriety: renewable energy is a second step, after reducing demand
- Design for reversibility: installations must not "lock in" future choices

- Use renewable energy as a learning lever: visible pilots (solar tiles, solar trees, lighting installations) raise awareness and strengthen legitimacy
- Integrate renewable energy into systemic visions: it only makes sense when connected to mobility, biodiversity, comfort, and social inclusion
- Plan for crises: renewable energy is not only about carbon neutrality; it also contributes to resilience during shocks



Medium term: Pop-up innovation labs

Reimagined Public and Social Spaces

- Giving Space Back to People
- Activating Underused Areas
- Creating New Hubs

Services and Community-Building Activities

- Stakeholder Facilitation
- Community-Driven Programming
- Cultural and Social Events

Solutions to Urban Challenges

- Mobility and Traffic Management
- Shifting Neighborhood Rhythms
- Connecting Divided Neighborhoods

A Process of Experimentation and Learning

- Temporary Interventions
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Empowering Residents

[Find the complete report on the workshops and all results here](#)

Framework Programme Summary

The “cadre” programme provided participants with a diverse range of activities designed to combine professional exchange with cultural and physical engagement. The programme began on **Monday, 22nd September 2025**, with guided visits to the **Pétrusse Casemates** and the **Lëtzebuerg City Museum / UNESCO Visitor Center**, including a guided UNESCO tour that introduced participants to Luxembourg City’s heritage. The day concluded with a welcome dinner at Brasserie Restaurant l’Hêtre.



On **Tuesday, 23rd September**, participants had the option to start the day with a “**Running for Heritage**” session or **yoga**, promoting wellness and informal networking.



The day ended with an official opening dinner at Cercle Cité. As a side kick, artist Étienne Duval was present with his participatory and fun tool “Quartier Maton”, designed to explore visions of the neighbourhood of the future. All OWHC guests were invited to try out and answer five questions and thus generate an individual vision of their personal Quartier Maton.

You can find the summary of all results under this link [“Quartier Maton”](#)



Wednesday, 24th September continued with optional morning wellness sessions.

Participants who did not attend the regional meeting had the opportunity to explore the **Luxembourg Urban Garden (LUGA)**, gaining hands-on insights into urban greening and sustainable heritage practices.



The day concluded with a closing dinner at Servior Op der Rhum.

The optional programme on **Thursday, 25th September** offered guided tours of the fortress and suburbs of Luxembourg City, including visits to the **Bock Casemates**, **Mansfeld sites** (→ as discussed during the international workshop of the Marrakesh network 2024), **Muerbelsmillen** (→ as discussed during the international workshop “Protecting and strengthening the residential function of the city’s historic centers” of the Brussel network 2024), **Panorama Elevator in Pfaffenthal**, and various urban garden projects. These excursions allowed participants to observe firsthand the integration of cultural heritage, urban development, and community engagement.



Overall, the cadre programme successfully blended heritage education, professional learning, and wellness activities, fostering collaboration among participants while highlighting Luxembourg City’s rich historical and cultural environment.

This event was organised in the framework of the OWHC Regional Secretariat Northwest Europe and North America

<https://www.ovpm.org/secretariat/northwest-europe-and-north-america/>

The Regional Secretariat Northwest Europe and North America is hosted by the World Heritage Management unit of the City of Regensburg <https://www.regensburg.de/welterbe>

We would like to thank the City of Luxembourg, Mme Mayor Lydie Polfer, and the team of site manager Shaaf Milani-Nia for hosting this conference and welcoming us in their wonderful world heritage city!

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