

Dr. Luis Méndez Rodríguez
Universidad de Sevilla, España

Dr. José Francisco Román Gutiérrez
Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, México

English

Culture and Education for a World in Crisis
MONDIACULT side event

30 September 2025, 18h00 – 19h00 (CEST)
Barcelona, Spain

ENCATC, Republic of Colombia, KACES, Republic of Korea, SMG Foundation and SM Foundation, Consortium of Universities: Universidad de Sevilla, España; Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, México; Universidad de la Laguna, Tenerife, España; Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano, Colombia; Universidad Politécnica Salesiana y Universidad de Cuenca, del Ecuador.

Consortium of Universities of Seville (Spain), Zacatecas (Mexico), La Laguna (Tenerife), Bogotá (Colombia), Salesiana and Cuenca (Ecuador)

The consortium of universities, comprised of the universities of Seville, Zacatecas (Mexico), La Laguna, Tenerife (Spain), Salesiana and Cuenca (Ecuador), and Bogotá (Colombia), has been working since 2024 on a set of actions related to culture as a global public good. In April and July, the International Conference "Proposals from Academia towards Mondiacult 2025" was held, bringing together experts, researchers, and cultural managers to analyze the sector's challenges and opportunities.

This conference is a key prelude to Mondiacult 2025, the global forum on cultural policies promoted by UNESCO. The OEI joins this initiative, reaffirming its commitment to promoting culture as a pillar of sustainable development in Ibero-America. This conference promotes dialogue and cooperation between academia, institutions, and professionals in the cultural sector. Zacatecas, Mexico – April 9-11, 2025. Ecuador – July 14-16, 2025. Organizers will be invited to participate in scheduled presentations to present the results of Mondiacult at upcoming conferences, and the possibility of publishing the results in the proceedings of these academic meetings will be available:

- Tenerife, Spain – November 25-27, 2025
- Guatemala – February 18-20, 2026
- Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic – May 20-22, 2025

Areas of research and participatory action

Addressing the Crisis in Culture and Education: A University Perspective

Universities are addressing the following issues:

In the educational field, efforts are being made to minimize the following:

1. Erosion of democratic values

Universities are observing a worrying decline in citizen participation, especially among young people. This includes less interest in voting, distrust in public institutions, and a lack of commitment to the common good. Without informed and engaged citizens, democracies weaken. Universities, as a space for critical education, have the responsibility to cultivate these values.

2. Polarization and misinformation

The rise of social media has facilitated the spread of false information and created ideological bubbles. This generates intensified social conflicts, difficulty in establishing constructive dialogue, and rejection of diverse thought. Universities respond by fostering critical thinking, teaching media literacy, and promoting spaces for pluralistic dialogue.

3. Crisis Identified

Universities are increasingly recognizing the erosion of democratic values and civic engagement as a pressing crisis. This includes a decline in democratic participation among youth, rising polarization and misinformation, and the loss of shared cultural narratives. These challenges threaten the foundation of informed citizenship and social cohesion.

In the cultural sphere, the universities that make up this Consortium are committed to maintaining Cultural Initiative Centers. These spaces offer high-quality, diverse, open, inclusive, critical, and contemporary cultural programming.

These spaces are also located in historic centers experiencing gentrification and touristification, and therefore serve a dual function: offering comprehensive training to the university community, especially to students who participate and program activities. Furthermore, in addition to leisure activities, these Centers offer quality programming, including music, performing arts, art and exhibitions, conferences, workshops, and special attention to the heritage that defines the universities.

How Universities Are Responding

To address these issues, universities are implementing several initiatives:

- Curriculum Reform: Emphasizing civic education, ethics, media literacy, and interdisciplinary studies.

- Campus Culture Initiatives: Creating spaces for dialogue, supporting student activism, and fostering civic responsibility.
- Community Engagement: Partnering with local organizations and promoting service learning.
- Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking: Teaching students to critically navigate digital media and raising awareness around AI ethics and data privacy.

Potential Future Directions

Looking ahead, universities may further integrate experiential learning, expand global cultural exchange programs, and invest in technologies that support inclusive education. These efforts aim to strengthen democratic values and prepare students to be thoughtful, engaged citizens in a rapidly changing world.

4. Cultural Fragmentation

Globalization and digitalization have transformed cultural identities, which can lead to the loss of local traditions and values, difficulty in building common narratives, and cultural isolation between social groups. Universities promote intercultural programs, integrate diversity studies, and foster empathy and mutual understanding.

5. Inequality in Access to Education

Although higher education has expanded, economic, social, and technological barriers persist that exclude many. Universities are taking action through scholarships, inclusion programs, virtual education, and academic equity policies.

6. The Future of Education: Where Are We Going?

Universities are exploring new forms of teaching such as experiential learning, the use of educational technologies like artificial intelligence and augmented reality, and global citizenship education. These innovations seek to develop individuals who are aware of global challenges.

7. What can we do at universities?

One of the activities is the meetings organized for Mondiacult, which have been held prior to this event and continue afterward.

The Academy organizes discussion forums on the management of cultural and natural heritage, the importance of education accessible to all, open and inclusive cultural participation, and the promotion of democratic values and a culture of peace.

The meetings are serving to share experiences, develop common tools and methodologies, and create working forums for the development of a culture of peace.

Area to explore further

This leads us to reflect on the need to establish spaces for debate and networks that strengthen culture and education. Academic frameworks are creating contexts and experiences that are being carried out at the university level in urban and rural settings. The Seville Declaration on Heritage and its Social Function, and the Puebla Declaration on the University District, are a result of this.

Similarly, the Ibero-American University Chair on Cultural Heritage, Routes, and Itineraries, created by the Autonomous University of Zacatecas in 2024, is uniting the efforts of a large group of researchers and professors from the region, focusing on the role of education and cultural and natural heritage to promote the Sustainable Development Goals.

For its part, the University of La Laguna in Tenerife, Spain, is in the process of creating an Ibero-American Chair to coordinate the efforts made at the region's universities on cultural heritage and its impact on society.

Likewise, the creation of an Ibero-American cultural heritage network strengthens the collaborative work of universities, as researchers and universities linked to Mondiacult are already doing in academia.

It is necessary to prioritize research that reinforces content, as well as management efforts that can establish clear experiences that benefit the population in rural and indigenous communities, as well as in depressed areas.

On the other hand, it is important to reach young people and educate them in democratic values and a culture of peace, and this can only be achieved by strengthening education.

To achieve this, cultural and heritage content must be cross-cutting in universities, in addition to promoting a complementary curriculum that seeks the comprehensive development of individuals, beyond the specific competencies of their degree

One thing we are committed to exploring further...

One thing we are committed to exploring further is the continuity of the Mondiacult Project from the academic perspective. It represents an excellent opportunity to seek out encounters and shared experiences, as well as serving as a critical forum for work.

Through this, we seek to promote an education connected to the values of democracy, justice, inclusion, and the pursuit of peaceful coexistence.

But we also do so to achieve a more comprehensive cultural management that serves communities and connects three fundamental values within society: education, culture, and heritage.

This perspective allows us to recover traditional knowledge that has been part of daily life in the countryside and the city; crafts whose results, over the course of history, have given rise to monuments, movable property, civil and religious practices—among many other manifestations—maintaining the identity and memory of all types of cultural communities.

In the face of the great challenges of our time, university teaching, research, dissemination, and outreach are the best alternative for promoting capacity building, generational renewal, sustainable development in accordance with environmental conditions, and the social appropriation of culture.

Conclusions

A fundamental task of universities is to contribute to the protection of cultural and natural heritage, through its sustainable use, to achieve integral human development. Education and culture take on their true dimension when they contribute to the social appropriation of heritage and are deployed as a survival strategy.

#UniversitiesandMONDIACULT2025forDevelopment

Ways of life, individual and collective values, knowledge and techniques are some of the areas in which universities actively contribute. Today, without delay, they can and must make a commitment: to make culture a global public good, with concrete actions, in accordance with the needs of the environment and within the framework of international cooperation.

#UniversitiesandCulturelikeaGlobalPublicGood

Cooperation among Ibero-American universities is contributing a valuable array of ideas and initiatives for the protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, the preservation of nature, and placing integral human development at the center of attention. The experience of communities and individual actors, whose historical practices (social, economic, cultural) have been linked to survival and whose results we now consider culture and cultural heritage, find in universities a powerful ally to strengthen both the evident aspects of their tangible results—the protection and conservation of heritage—as well as the intangible aspects, ranging from the formation of values to ways of thinking and understanding the world.

#UniversitiesforHeritageandSustainability