

Heritage as Governance: Cultural Stewardship and the Intergenerational Imperative in the Post-Declaration Era

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ABSTRACT

The adoption of the United Nations Declaration on Future Generations on 25 September 2024 marks an inflection point in the normative architecture of intergenerational responsibility. Although the Declaration is not a treaty and does not create new binding international legal obligations, it articulates a normative and institutional framework that pledges Member States to integrate the interests of present and future generations into decision-making. This article develops the Heritage Stewardship Continuum (HSC), an analytical framework that connects cultural stewardship, intergenerational responsibility, and temporal governance horizons, and applies it to the Global Repository for Ancient Cultural Endeavours (GRACE) as an illustrative institutional case. Building on the scholarship of Giorgallis (2024) on cultural heritage and future generations, the article positions GRACE's stated preservation, transmission, documentation, certification, and restitution functions within the Declaration's normative commitments on cultural diversity, cultural heritage, and Indigenous Peoples. A GRACE–HSC–Declaration crosswalk is offered to make the analytical relationship explicit, and a restorative-justice domain is theoretically justified as a stewardship function linking historical dispossession to intergenerational repair. The HSC temporal horizons (0–25, 25–100, and 100+ years) are proposed analytical horizons rather than empirically established universal planning periods. The contribution lies in synthesising an integrated analytical lens for heritage governance in the post-Declaration era, not in claiming empirical validation or first-mover novelty.

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Heritage as Governance:

Cultural Stewardship and the Intergenerational Imperative in the Post-Declaration Era

An Analytical Framework Study on the Heritage Stewardship Continuum (HSC)

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Abstract

The adoption of the United Nations Declaration on Future Generations on 25 September 2024 marks an inflection point in the normative architecture of intergenerational responsibility. Although the Declaration is

not a treaty and does not create new binding international legal obligations, it articulates a normative and institutional framework that pledges Member States to integrate the interests of present and future generations into decision-making. This article develops the Heritage Stewardship Continuum (HSC), an analytical framework that connects cultural stewardship, intergenerational responsibility, and temporal governance horizons, and applies it to the Global Repository for Ancient Cultural Endeavours (GRACE) as an illustrative institutional case. Building on the scholarship of Giorgallis (2024) on cultural heritage and future generations, the article positions GRACE's stated preservation, transmission, documentation, certification, and restitution functions within the Declaration's normative commitments on cultural diversity, cultural heritage, and Indigenous Peoples. A GRACE–HSC–Declaration crosswalk is offered to make the analytical relationship explicit, and a restorative-justice domain is theoretically justified as a stewardship function linking historical dispossession to intergenerational repair. The HSC temporal horizons (0–25, 25–100, and 100+ years) are proposed analytical horizons rather than empirically established universal planning periods. The contribution lies in synthesising an integrated analytical lens for heritage governance in the post-Declaration era, not in claiming empirical validation or first-mover novelty.

Keywords: Declaration on Future Generations; cultural heritage; intergenerational justice; Heritage Stewardship Continuum; GRACE; restorative justice; temporal governance.

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1. Introduction

On 25 September 2024, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Pact for the Future, annexing the Declaration on Future Generations — a major consolidated intergovernmental statement on the responsibilities of present generations towards those yet to be born. The Declaration is not a treaty; it does not create new binding international legal obligations. What it provides is a normative and institutional framework of pledges, commitments, and calls for action that Member States may invoke, operationalise, and be held politically accountable against. In this post-Declaration moment, in which rhetoric has begun to harden into institutional expectation, the question of how cultural heritage is governed acquires a new and distinct urgency. (United Nations General Assembly, 2024).

Cultural heritage is, by its nature, an intergenerational object. A monument, an oral tradition, a manuscript, a sacred landscape, or a craft practice exists only because some previous generation chose to create, preserve, and transmit it, and it survives only insofar as the present generation chooses to do the same for those who will inherit it. Heritage is therefore not merely an inventory of artefacts but a chain of stewardship decisions stretched across time. Where that chain is broken — through war, dispossession, neglect, colonisation, or the slower violence of unconstrained development — the loss is borne not by those who caused it but by descendants who will never know what was taken from them. Any governance regime that purports to take future generations seriously must therefore take the governance of cultural heritage seriously, and vice versa.

This article argues that the Declaration on Future Generations and the cultural-heritage stewardship initiatives emerging around it can be read together through a single analytical lens, which we term the Heritage Stewardship Continuum (HSC). The HSC is offered as a theoretical and analytical framework — not an empirically validated model — that integrates four components: cultural stewardship as a practice, intergenerational responsibility as a norm, temporal governance horizons as an analytical device, and a concrete institutional case through which the framework can be illustrated. We apply the framework to the Global Repository for Ancient Cultural Endeavours (GRACE), a heritage initiative associated with the Advocacy Unified Network (AUN) whose stated mission centres on the preservation, transmission, documentation,

certification, and restitution of ancient cultural heritage. GRACE is treated throughout as an illustrative institutional case, not as proof that the framework holds across the cultural-heritage sector as a whole.

This is not the first work to connect cultural heritage and future generations. Giorgallis (2024), writing in the *International Journal of Cultural Property*, has recently examined this intersection, and his contribution is engaged with throughout. The contribution of the present article lies in the development of the HSC as an integrated analytical instrument that relates institutional practice (GRACE), theoretical categories (the HSC domains and horizons), and international normative texts (the Declaration) to one another within a single frame. The work is therefore synthesising and framework-building rather than empirical.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 sets out the post-Declaration context, locating cultural heritage within the longer arc of international governance. Section 3 reviews the relevant scholarship, with particular attention to Giorgallis (2024) and to adjacent literatures on intergenerational justice and temporal governance. Section 4 develops the HSC framework, including its stewardship domains and its proposed temporal horizons. Section 5 presents GRACE as an illustrative institutional case. Section 6 offers a GRACE–HSC–Declaration crosswalk. Section 7 theoretically justifies the inclusion of restorative justice as an HSC stewardship domain. Section 8 draws out the discussion and governance implications. Section 9 acknowledges limitations and identifies a future research agenda. Section 10 concludes. The analysis is based on evidence available up to 15 December 2024; developments after that date fall outside the evidentiary scope of the study.

2. The Post-Declaration Context

2.1 The Declaration on Future Generations: Architecture and Legal Character

The Declaration on Future Generations was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2024 as an annex to the Pact for the Future (General Assembly resolution 79/1; United Nations General Assembly, 2024). It is the product of a multi-year process initiated by the Secretary-General's 2021 report *Our Common Agenda* (United Nations, 2021), which proposed a declaration articulating the responsibilities of present generations towards the future and the appointment of a Special Envoy for Future Generations. The final text comprises a preamble, ten guiding principles, a chapter of commitments, a chapter of actions for implementation, and a follow-up and review section. The components perform different functions: the guiding principles articulate orienting norms, the commitments express pledges of action, and the actions specify concrete steps that States commit to take.

It is essential to characterise the legal nature of the Declaration accurately. The Declaration is a General Assembly declaration rather than a treaty; it does not create new obligations of the kind that a treaty in force would create. It commits, pledges, and calls for action; it provides a normative framework and an institutional framework; it does not establish duties that are binding and enforceable before an international court. The analytically useful chain of concepts is therefore: normative commitment, institutional mechanism, policy implementation, and — only as a distinct and further step — binding international law. The Declaration operates principally in the first three registers and reaches the fourth only where pre-existing treaty or customary obligations are independently applicable. (United Nations General Assembly, 2024).

Of the Declaration's ten guiding principles, several bear directly on the analysis that follows. The principles address intergenerational solidarity, the need to safeguard the interests and rights of future generations, and the importance of respecting cultural diversity and the heritage of humanity. For the purposes of this article, two commitments are of particular importance. Commitment 15 addresses cultural diversity and cultural heritage, recognising the value of safeguarding the heritage of humanity and respecting cultural diversity for

present and future generations. Commitment 16 addresses Indigenous Peoples, acknowledging the importance of respecting, protecting, and safeguarding their rights in the interests of both present and future generations.

2.2 Cultural Heritage in International Governance

International governance of cultural heritage long predates the Declaration. The post-war regime begins with the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its protocols (UNESCO, 1954), which established that damage to cultural property belonging to any people is damage to the cultural heritage of all humanity. The 1972 World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 1972) globalised the catalogue of protected heritage and tied it to a list-based inscription system. The 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2001) addressed a lacuna concerning submerged sites, and the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003) marked a decisive conceptual shift by recognising that practices, knowledge, and performances — not only monuments and objects — are heritage requiring safeguarding. The 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (UNIDROIT, 1995) addressed the restitution dimension, providing mechanisms for the recovery of illicitly trafficked cultural property.

Layered upon these binding instruments are softer normative instruments. The 1997 UNESCO Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations (UNESCO, 1997) is the most direct precursor to the 2024 Declaration in the cultural-heritage field; its first article provides that present generations have the responsibility to identify, protect, and safeguard the tangible and intangible cultural heritage and to transmit that heritage to future generations. The 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and subsequent standard-setting instruments reinforced the principle that cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. The 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (United Nations, 2007) is particularly germane: Articles 11 and 12 provide for redress and restitution for cultural, intellectual, religious, and spiritual property taken without free, prior, and informed consent, and Article 12 affirms the right to the repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains. UNDRIP thus already embeds an intergenerational logic: the redress it contemplates is owed as much to descendants as to the dispossessed generation.

What the 2024 Declaration adds to this inherited architecture is not a new substantive heritage regime but a normative frame that pulls cultural-heritage stewardship into the broader governance of intergenerational responsibility. Commitments 15 and 16, together with the guiding principles and the implementation actions, position cultural heritage as one of the substantive domains in which present-to-future obligations must be discharged. The Declaration does not displace UNESCO or UNIDROIT; it sits above and alongside them, supplying a forward-looking rationale that can be invoked to interpret and energise the older regimes.

2.3 The Intergenerational Turn in Governance

The Declaration is the most visible product of what may be called an intergenerational turn in governance — a slow but discernible shift in which the time horizon of political and legal responsibility is being extended beyond the electoral cycle and beyond the lifespan of current decision-makers. The intellectual lineage of this turn is long. The Brundtland Commission's (1987) report *Our Common Future* defined sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, embedding intergenerational equity in the vocabulary of environmental governance. Brown Weiss's (1989) work *In Fairness to Future Generations* articulated a legal framework of intergenerational rights and duties, and the philosophical literature represented by Jonas's (1984) *Imperative of Responsibility* and by Rawls's (1999) just-savings principle supplied the normative foundations.

Institutionally, the turn is visible in the proliferation of bodies charged with representing future interests: the Hungarian Ombudsman for Future Generations, the Finnish Committee for the Future, the Welsh Future Generations Commissioner, and the path-breaking Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which requires public bodies in Wales to act in accordance with the sustainable development principle and to consider long-term impacts. The Declaration on Future Generations, together with the proposal to appoint a Special Envoy for Future Generations, represents the multilateral extension of this trend. It is within this intergenerational turn that the HSC framework and the GRACE case acquire their significance: cultural-heritage stewardship becomes not merely a conservation practice but a governance practice, a way of discharging obligations that span generations.

Figure 1 summarises the article's central analytical pathway. It distinguishes, on the left, what the 2024 Declaration itself establishes — a normative and institutional framework of pledges, commitments, and calls for action, together with the proposal to appoint a Special Envoy for Future Generations — and, on the right, what this article analytically develops through the HSC. The cross-arrow at the level of cultural stewardship indicates that the HSC is offered as an analytical interpretation of the Declaration's cultural-heritage provisions, not as something the United Nations adopted. The figure makes the asymmetry between normative text and analytical framework visible at a glance.

(a) What the Declaration establishes (b) What this article develops through HSC

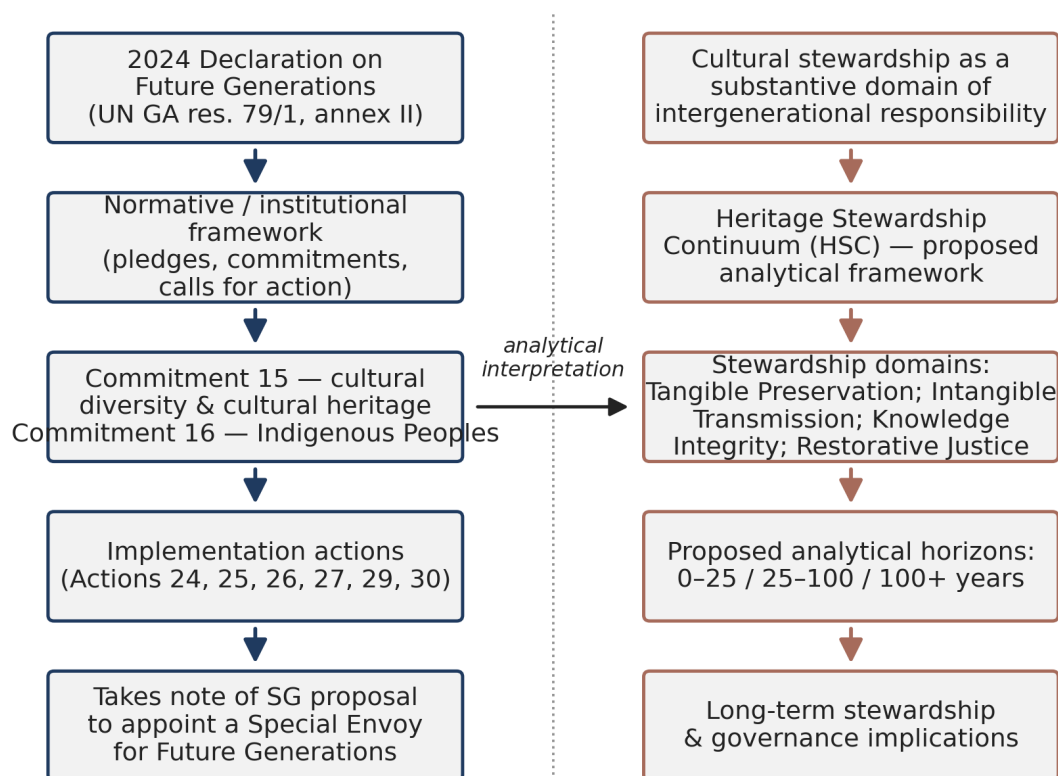


Figure 1. From the 2024 Declaration on Future Generations to intergenerational governance: an analytical pathway. The left column identifies what the Declaration itself establishes; the right column identifies what this article analytically develops through the Heritage Stewardship Continuum (HSC). Conceptual framework developed in this article; the figure does not imply that the United Nations adopted the HSC.

3. Conceptual and Scholarly Foundations

3.1 Giorgallis (2024) on Cultural Heritage and Future Generations

The most directly relevant antecedent to the present article is the contribution of Giorgallis (2024), published in the *International Journal of Cultural Property* (vol. 32, Special Issue 1, 76–99; DOI 10.1017/S0940739124000171). Giorgallis examines the idea of protecting cultural heritage for the benefit of future generations in international cultural heritage law, situating the question within the broader field of international cultural heritage law and the law of intergenerational equity. His analysis predates and anticipates the adoption of the 2024 Declaration, and it provides one of the earliest sustained scholarly engagements with the cultural-heritage dimensions of the future-generations agenda. The present article builds directly on this contribution. Where Giorgallis offers a doctrinal and conceptual mapping, the present article offers a synthesising analytical framework — the HSC — and applies it to a concrete institutional case. The two contributions are complementary.

Three points from Giorgallis's analysis are particularly salient for what follows. First, the international legal regime for cultural heritage already contains intergenerational elements, even if these are not always articulated as such; the transmission of heritage across generations is implicit in the very concept of safeguarding. Second, the gap between the heritage regime and the future-generations regime is principally an institutional and conceptual gap rather than a substantive one: the materials needed to connect the two already exist in the instruments surveyed above, but they have not been drawn together into a single frame. Third, the appointment of institutional actors to represent future interests — a category into which the proposed Special Envoy falls — is a necessary but not sufficient condition for closing that gap; substantive analytical frameworks are also required to give content to what representation of future generations means in a given policy domain. The HSC framework developed below is offered as one such substantive framework for the cultural-heritage domain.

3.2 Adjacent Scholarship on Intergenerational Justice and Temporal Governance

Beyond Giorgallis, the article draws on three adjacent bodies of scholarship. The first is the philosophical and legal literature on intergenerational justice, which establishes the normative case that obligations can be owed to persons who do not yet exist. Rawls's (1999) just-savings principle holds that each generation has a duty to save for successor generations, and Jonas's (1984) imperative of responsibility argues that the unprecedented scale of modern technological power generates a corresponding duty to ensure the future existence and integrity of humanity. Brown Weiss's (1989) framework translates these philosophical positions into legal terms, identifying planetary trust obligations held by the present generation as trustee for future generations. Thompson's (2018) work on intergenerational justice and the edited volume by Gonzalez-Ricoy and Gosseries (2016) on institutions for future generations extend this analysis into questions of institutional design.

The second body of scholarship concerns the governance of cultural heritage as such, including the UNESCO-led regime and its critics. This literature emphasises that heritage is a process of selection, valuation, and transmission rather than a fixed stock of objects, and it foregrounds the politics of who gets to decide what counts as heritage and for whom. The critical heritage studies literature has insisted on the need to take community participation and Indigenous authority seriously — a point that bears directly on Commitment 16 of the Declaration and on the restorative-justice dimension developed in Section 7. The third body of scholarship concerns temporal governance more broadly — the institutional and analytical devices through which long-term consequences are brought into present decision-making, including strategic foresight, scenario planning, and intergenerational impact assessment. Actions 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, and 30 of the Declaration map directly onto this literature, providing the implementation architecture through which the normative commitments are to be operationalised.

Taken together, these three bodies of scholarship supply the conceptual materials for the HSC framework but do not, individually or collectively, integrate them into a single analytical instrument oriented to the cultural-heritage domain in the post-Declaration moment. The HSC is offered as a synthesising contribution in this space, building explicitly on Giorgallis (2024) as the most proximate antecedent.

4. The Heritage Stewardship Continuum (HSC) Framework

4.1 Conceptual Architecture

The Heritage Stewardship Continuum (HSC) is an analytical and theoretical framework designed to connect cultural stewardship, intergenerational responsibility, and temporal governance horizons, and to make visible the relationship between international normative texts and the institutional practices through which those texts are given effect. It is offered as a heuristic: a device that helps analysts ask productive questions about heritage governance in the post-Declaration era. The HSC rests on three architectural assumptions, each defensible on the basis of the scholarship reviewed in Section 3.

The first assumption is that cultural stewardship is a continuum rather than a discrete event. Stewardship does not consist solely in the act of preservation at a single moment; it comprises the linked and sequential practices of identifying, preserving, transmitting, documenting, certifying, and (where historical wrongs have occurred) restoring heritage across generations. The continuum metaphor captures the temporal and functional interdependence of these practices: preservation without transmission is sterile, transmission without documentation is fragile, documentation without certification lacks institutional anchoring, and any of the foregoing without a restorative dimension risks reproducing the historical injustices through which much heritage was originally dispossessed. The second assumption is that intergenerational responsibility is the norm that gives the continuum its coherence; without it, the practices are merely technical. The third assumption is that temporal horizons matter — that the time scale over which stewardship is planned and assessed shapes both the practices chosen and the institutions designed to carry them out.

4.2 Stewardship Domains

The HSC framework identifies four stewardship domains, understood as analytically distinct categories of stewardship practice. The first domain, Tangible Preservation, encompasses the physical safeguarding of monuments, sites, objects, manuscripts, and built environments. It is the domain most directly associated with the 1954 Hague Convention and the 1972 World Heritage Convention and corresponds, in the Declaration, to the cultural-heritage provisions of Commitment 15. The second domain, Intangible Transmission, encompasses the safeguarding of practices, knowledge systems, languages, oral traditions, and performing arts through their active practice and intergenerational teaching. It is the domain associated with the 2003 UNESCO Convention and corresponds, in the Declaration, to the cultural-diversity dimension of Commitment 15 and to the knowledge-and-information provisions addressed in Action 25.

The third domain, Knowledge Integrity, encompasses documentation, archiving, certification, and the maintenance of provenance and authenticity standards. It is the domain through which stewardship becomes verifiable and through which future generations can know not only what was preserved but how, by whom, and on what authority. It corresponds, in the Declaration, to the knowledge, information, and long-term stewardship provisions and to the data, statistics, and foresight provisions of Actions 24, 25, and 26. The fourth domain, Restorative Justice, encompasses restitution, repatriation, and the repair of historical dispossession. It is the domain most directly associated with UNDRIP Articles 11 and 12, the UNIDROIT 1995 Convention, and the practice of voluntary repatriation by museums and collecting institutions. It corresponds, in the Declaration, to the cultural-heritage provisions of Commitment 15, the Indigenous-Peoples provisions of Commitment 16, and the intergenerational-justice thrust of the guiding principles. The theoretical justification for treating restorative justice as a stewardship domain, rather than as a separate remedial field, is developed in Section 7.

Figure 2 represents the four domains as an integrated stewardship framework rather than four unrelated categories. The dashed connectors between the central hub and each domain indicate the functional interdependence emphasised in Section 4.1 — preservation without transmission is sterile, transmission without documentation is fragile, documentation without certification lacks institutional anchoring, and any of the foregoing without a restorative dimension risks conserving an inheritance that was unjustly assembled.

The figure is a conceptual framework developed in this article; it is not presented as an empirically validated or universally established model.

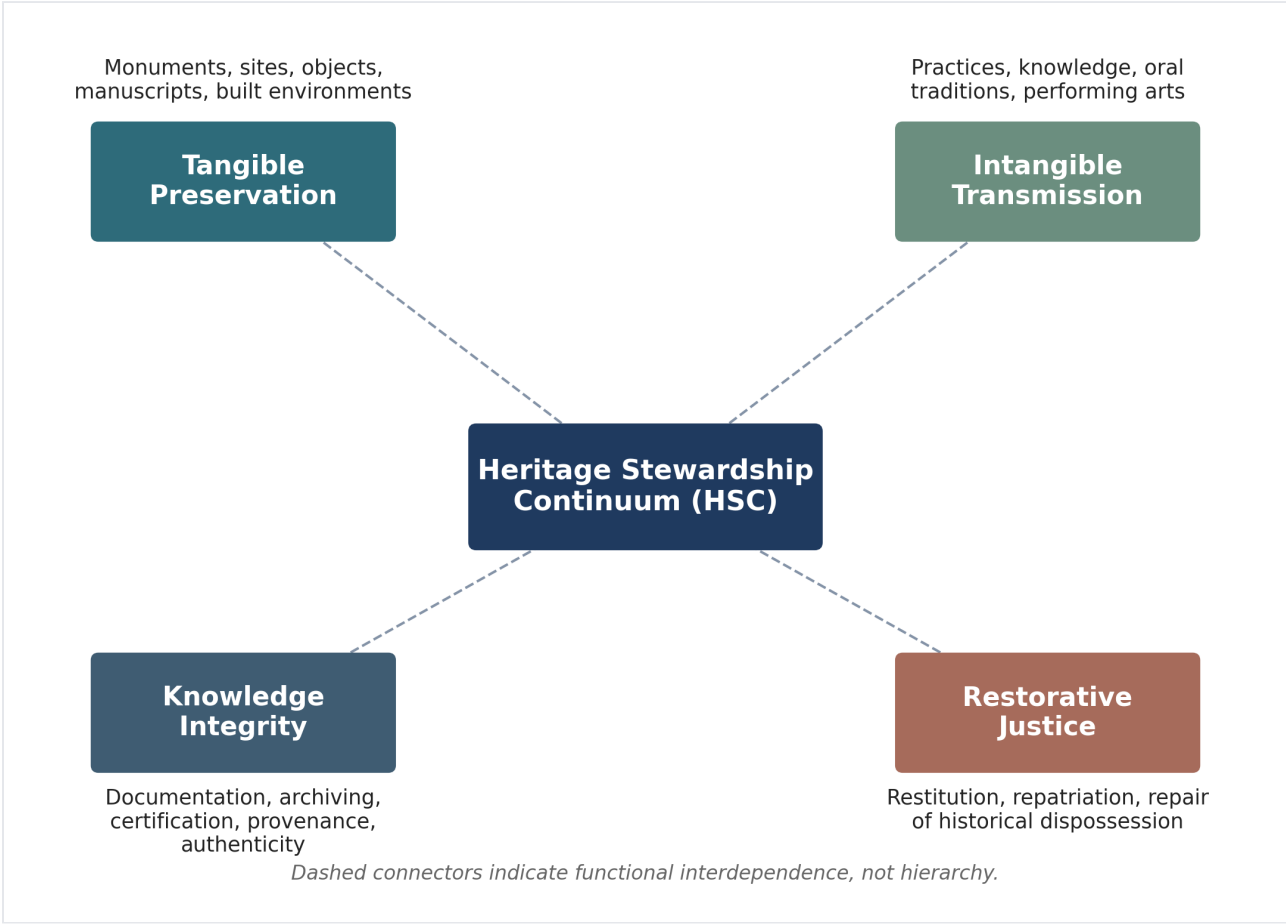


Figure 2. The Heritage Stewardship Continuum (HSC): four stewardship domains as an integrated framework. Conceptual framework developed in this article. Dashed connectors indicate functional interdependence, not hierarchy. The HSC is a proposed analytical framework, not an empirically validated universal model.

Table 1 distils the four domains into the governance question each raises and its intergenerational relevance, offering a concise analytical complement to the prose above.

HSC domain	Core stewardship concern	Governance question	Intergenerational relevance
Tangible Preservation	Safeguarding of monuments, sites, objects, built environments	What is to be kept, by whom, and on what authority?	Present-to-future duty to keep the inherited material record intact
Intangible Transmission	Safeguarding of practices, knowledge, oral traditions, performing arts	How are living traditions kept alive across generations?	Continuity of practice and meaning for descendant communities
Knowledge Integrity	Documentation, archiving, certification, provenance and authenticity standards	How can future generations verify what was preserved and how?	Verifiable record and accountable stewardship over time
Restorative Justice	Restitution, repatriation, repair of historical dispossession	How is unjustly assembled inheritance to be repaired?	Repair of intergenerational dispossession; legitimacy of stewardship

Table 1. HSC stewardship domains, governance questions, and intergenerational relevance. Author's analytical synthesis of the framework developed in Section 4.2.

4.3 Temporal Horizons: Proposed Analytical Horizons of the HSC

The HSC framework proposes three temporal horizons as an analytical device for distinguishing among stewardship obligations and practices of different reach. The horizons are: short (0–25 years), corresponding approximately to a single institutional generation and to the planning cycles of most public bodies; medium (25–100 years), corresponding to the horizon at which present decisions begin to shape the options of generations not yet in positions of responsibility; and long (100+ years), corresponding to the horizon at which stewardship must reckon with deep uncertainty, with the climate and ecological transformations already in train, and with the rights of generations who will live in materially different worlds. These horizons are proposed analytical horizons of the HSC, not universally established temporal categories. They should not be presented as empirically validated planning periods, and they are not derived from a settled body of evidence.

The analytical rationale for the proposed ranges is threefold. First, the 0–25 year horizon captures the operational reality of most stewardship institutions, whose planning, funding, and accountability cycles are measured in years and decades rather than centuries; it is the horizon at which implementation of the Declaration's Actions 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, and 30 will principally be assessed. Second, the 25–100 year horizon captures the period over which the consequences of present decisions become irreversible for the next decision-making generation; it is the horizon at which foresight, scenario planning, and intergenerational impact assessment (Actions 26 and 27) become indispensable. Third, the 100+ year horizon captures the deep-time character of much cultural heritage — the millennial horizons over which cathedrals, sacred landscapes, and oral traditions have endured — and the corresponding duty not to foreclose the options of distant descendants. The horizons are analytically separable but practically intertwined: a decision taken in the 0–25 year horizon can determine what is or is not possible in the 100+ year horizon. The framework

invites analysts to make these temporal interdependencies visible rather than collapsing them into a single undifferentiated present.

Figure 3 represents the three horizons as a continuum along a present-to-distant-future timeline. The banner above the horizons restates the qualifying condition: these are proposed analytical horizons of the HSC, not universally established or empirically validated planning periods.

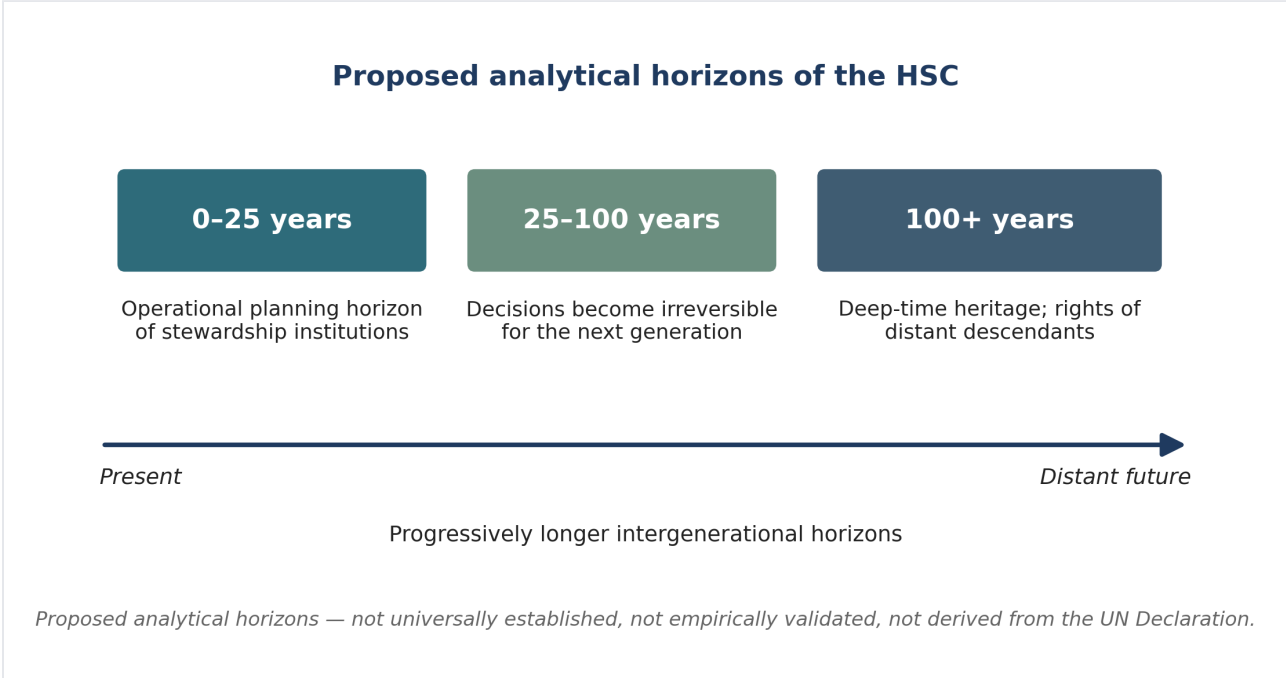


Figure 3. Temporal horizons of stewardship: 0–25, 25–100, and 100+ years as proposed analytical horizons of the HSC. Conceptual framework developed in this article; the horizons are not universally established, empirically validated, or derived from the UN Declaration.

Table 2 sets out, for each horizon, the characteristic governance orientation and stewardship implication, again on the explicit understanding that the horizons are analytical rather than established categories.

Horizon	Approximate period	Characteristic governance orientation	Stewardship implication
Short	0–25 years	Operational planning; implementation of Declaration Actions 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30	Discharge of immediate present-to-future stewardship duties within existing institutional cycles
Medium	25–100 years	Strategic foresight; intergenerational impact assessment; irreversibility thresholds	Responsibility to the next decision-making generation for options not yet foreclosed
Long	100+ years	Deep-time stewardship; rights of distant descendants; uncertainty management	Duty not to foreclose the options of generations living in materially different worlds

Table 2. Proposed analytical horizons and associated stewardship responsibilities. Author's analytical synthesis; the horizons are proposed analytical horizons of the HSC, not internationally standardised or empirically validated planning periods.

5. GRACE as an Illustrative Institutional Case

5.1 Methodology and Scope

GRACE — the Global Repository for Ancient Cultural Endeavours — is treated in this article as an illustrative institutional case or application of the HSC framework. The analysis is not an empirical validation of the HSC. A single institutional case cannot establish the general validity of an analytical framework across the global cultural-heritage sector, which comprises thousands of institutions of widely varying mandate, scale, geography, and legal form. The use of GRACE as a case is justified by three considerations: the relative accessibility of its stated model through its 2024 publication, the explicit breadth of its stated mandate across preservation, transmission, documentation, certification, and restitution, and the analytical convenience of an initiative whose stated functions map onto all four HSC domains. The case is therefore selected for analytical illustration rather than statistical representativeness.

For evidentiary discipline, the article draws a strict distinction among three categories of GRACE material. The first is GRACE's stated objectives and model — the self-description of its mission, conceptual framework, preservation approach, documentation and certification principles, restitution stance, cultural ownership position, and community engagement commitments — as set out in the 2024 publication *GRACE: Timekeepers of Ancient Cultural Legacy* (Oliviera, Banerjee, Polkar, Adebayo, & Yokuba, 2024; Opus Publica, 12 September 2024; paperback ISBN 9798227366276; e-book ISBN 9798227567499). The second is GRACE activities demonstrably documented by the 15 December 2024 evidentiary cutoff. The third is GRACE developments occurring after 15 December 2024. Only the first two categories are used in this article; the third is excluded. Statements about GRACE's intended activities are not treated as proof of completed implementation.

5.2 GRACE's Stated Model

According to its 2024 publication (Oliviera et al., 2024), GRACE is positioned as an international platform dedicated to the documentation, preservation, and dissemination of ancient cultural heritage, with a stated mission of safeguarding humanity's precious heritage in the face of global challenges such as urbanisation and of ensuring that the stories and wisdom of ancient cultures endure to inspire future generations. The book describes GRACE's approach as combining documentation and certification processes intended to establish standards for the recording of heritage with a stated commitment to preserving ancient cultural heritage, and it addresses GRACE's role in the development of international cultural guidelines and in bringing governments and communities into engagement around heritage stewardship. The stated model is explicitly intergenerational in framing: the purpose of preservation and transmission is cast in terms of responsibility to those who will inherit the cultural record. The publication also addresses GRACE's stance on restitution and repatriation, on cultural ownership, and on engagement with communities of origin. The book articulates a stated position rather than documenting completed implementation of that position in every respect. The present analysis relies on the dated 2024 publication (Oliviera et al., 2024) as its principal source for GRACE's stated model and stated activities.

Mapped against the HSC domains, GRACE's stated model touches all four. Preservation is addressed through the stated documentation of tangible heritage. Intangible transmission is addressed through the stated commitment to disseminating the stories and wisdom of ancient cultures. Knowledge integrity is addressed

through the certification and documentation standards GRACE articulates. Restorative justice is addressed through the stated commitments on restitution, repatriation, and cultural ownership. The crosswalk presented in Section 6 makes these mappings explicit and identifies them as analytical interpretations rather than as claims about GRACE's self-understanding.

5.3 GRACE Activities Documented by 15 December 2024

The evidentiary record available by 15 December 2024 establishes the following. The book *GRACE: Timekeepers of Ancient Cultural Legacy* (Oliviera et al., 2024) was published by Opus Publica on 12 September 2024 (ISBN 9798227366276 in paperback; ISBN 9798227567499 as e-book) and was publicly listed and available through retail channels by the cutoff date. The dated evidentiary record for GRACE's stated model and stated activities accordingly rests on the 2024 book. No quantitative operational statistic — concerning the number of countries, continents, certifications, or digitisation totals as of the cutoff date — is reported in this article, because no dated primary source verifying such a figure by 15 December 2024 could be independently confirmed. Specific operational claims that appeared only on undated affiliated-platform pages (including any claim that GRACE operates across a specified number of countries using particular technologies) have been excluded, because the dated pre-cutoff availability of those pages could not be independently established.

The article therefore makes no quantitative claim about GRACE's scale of operations as of 15 December 2024. It reports only what can be verified from a dated source available by the cutoff: the existence and content of the 2024 publication (Oliviera et al., 2024), which sets out GRACE's stated mission, stated functions, and stated approach. This evidentiary discipline is essential to the integrity of the analysis.

5.4 Scope of the Single-Case Analysis

Three features of the GRACE case analysis should be acknowledged. First, a single institutional case cannot establish the empirical validity of the HSC framework across the cultural-heritage sector; the framework is offered as an analytical instrument and the case as an illustration of its application, not as a test of its truth. Second, the evidentiary record for GRACE's documented activities by 15 December 2024 is limited, and the article therefore relies more heavily on GRACE's stated model than on independently verified outcomes; readers should weigh the analysis accordingly. Third, the institutional affiliation of the authors with the Advocacy Unified Network (AUN) — the network with which GRACE is associated — is transparently noted and should be considered in evaluating the case selection. The case is offered because its stated functional breadth makes it analytically illuminating for the purpose of illustrating the HSC, provided that the illustration is not mistaken for endorsement or validation.

6. The GRACE–HSC–Declaration Crosswalk

To make the analytical relationship among GRACE, the HSC, and the Declaration explicit, this section presents a crosswalk table mapping GRACE's stated functions to the HSC stewardship domains and to the relevant Declaration provisions. The crosswalk is an analytical interpretation: it reflects the article's reading of GRACE's stated model and of the Declaration's text, and it should not be read as a claim that GRACE itself frames its work in HSC terms, that the Declaration's drafters had GRACE in view, or that the UN Declaration formally adopted the HSC or GRACE. The crosswalk makes visible the structural correspondences that justify using GRACE as an illustrative case of the HSC within the Declaration's normative frame.

GRACE Function (stated)	HSC Domain	Declaration Context
Preservation (tangible heritage safeguarding through stated documentation methods)	Tangible Preservation	Commitment 15 — cultural diversity and cultural heritage
Transmission (dissemination of the stories and wisdom of ancient cultures to future generations)	Intangible Transmission	Commitment 15 — cultural diversity, heritage and knowledge; Action 25 — access to knowledge, science and information
Documentation and certification (stated standards for recording and certifying heritage)	Knowledge Integrity	Actions 24, 25, 26 — knowledge, information, data, statistics and long-term stewardship
Restitution and repatriation (stated commitments on cultural ownership and community engagement)	Restorative Justice	Commitments 15 and 16 — cultural heritage, Indigenous Peoples and intergenerational justice

Table 3. GRACE–HSC–Declaration crosswalk. The mappings are analytical interpretations offered by this article; they are not claims about GRACE's self-description, about the Declaration's drafting intent, or that the UN Declaration formally adopted the HSC or GRACE. Source for GRACE stated functions: Oliviera, F., Banerjee, P., Polkar, S., Adebayo, C., & Yokuba, A. (2024), *GRACE: Timekeepers of Ancient Cultural Legacy* (Opus Publica). Source for Declaration provisions: UN General Assembly resolution 79/1, annex II (Declaration on Future Generations), adopted 25 September 2024.

Three features of the crosswalk deserve emphasis. First, each HSC domain is anchored both in a GRACE stated function and in a Declaration provision, which is what makes the crosswalk a coherent three-way mapping rather than three separate bilateral mappings. Second, the Declaration provisions invoked are the cultural-heritage and Indigenous-Peoples commitments (15 and 16) and the knowledge, information, and foresight actions (24, 25, 26, with 27, 29, and 30 in the implementation background); these are the provisions identified in the final adopted text. Third, the crosswalk is deliberately conservative: it maps only the four HSC domains to the four GRACE functions and does not force additional correspondences where the evidence does not support them. Where GRACE's stated model is silent or qualified, the crosswalk is silent accordingly.

Figure 4 visualises the crosswalk as a four-column matrix that adds, to the three columns of Table 3, an explicit intergenerational-implication column. The figure is an analytical crosswalk constructed by this article; it does not imply that GRACE formally adopted the HSC, that the United Nations formally adopted the HSC, that the Declaration formally endorses GRACE, or that the article empirically validates the HSC through GRACE. The arrows across each row indicate analytical correspondence, not institutional causation.

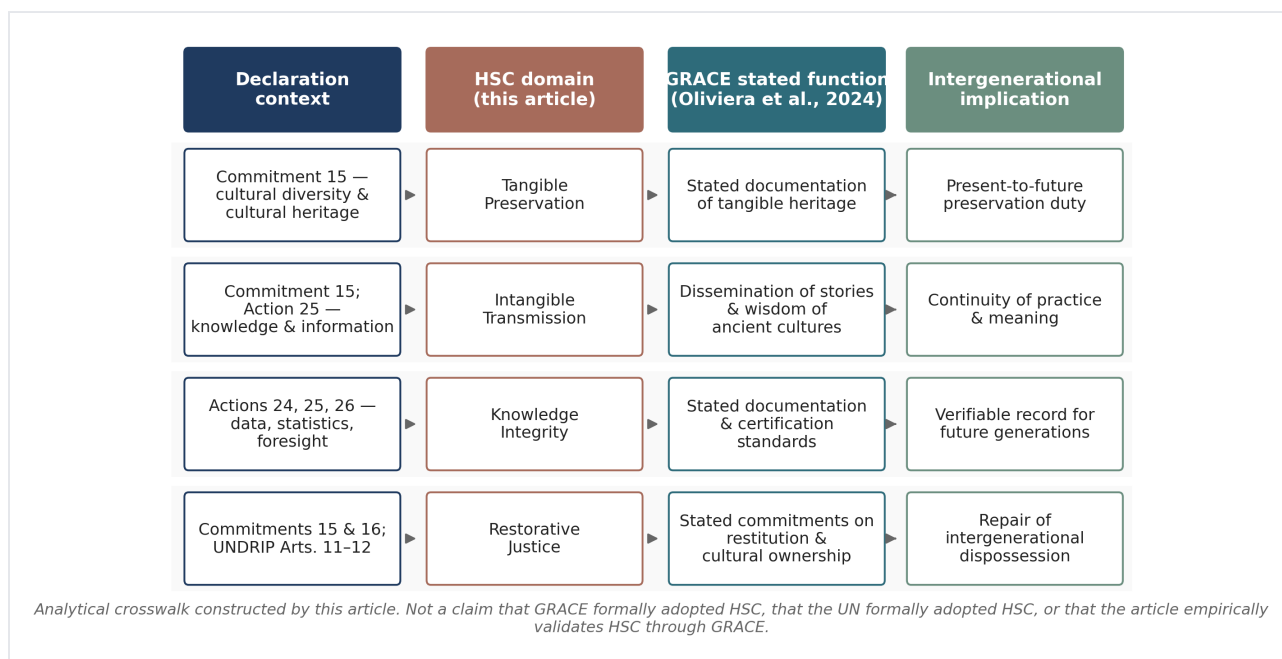


Figure 4. The GRACE–HSC–Declaration analytical crosswalk. The four columns map, left to right: the Declaration provisions relevant to the article; the HSC stewardship domains developed in this article; GRACE's stated functions as set out in Oliveira et al. (2024); and the intergenerational implication. Analytical crosswalk constructed by this article; not a claim that GRACE formally adopted the HSC, that the UN formally adopted the HSC, that the Declaration formally endorses GRACE, or that the article empirically validates the HSC through GRACE.

7. Restorative Justice as a Stewardship Domain

The inclusion of restorative justice as a stewardship domain in the HSC framework, rather than as a separate remedial field external to stewardship, requires explicit theoretical justification. The justification advanced here is an analytical synthesis advanced by this article, not an automatically established legal rule; it runs through a five-step chain: historical dispossession, restitution and repatriation, institutional repair, intergenerational justice, and stewardship. Each step is supported by scholarship and legal materials available before 15 December 2024.

The chain begins with historical dispossession. A number of cultural objects held in major museums and collecting institutions were acquired under conditions of colonisation, war, coercion, or unequal exchange that would not satisfy contemporary standards of free, prior, and informed consent. The existence of this pattern is reflected in the restitution and repatriation provisions of UNDRIP Articles 11 and 12 (United Nations, 2007) and the UNIDROIT 1995 Convention (UNIDROIT, 1995), and has been widely discussed in the scholarly literature on colonial-era cultural appropriation and on contested collections. The relevance to the HSC is that dispossession is not merely a past event; it is an ongoing condition that shapes what present and future generations of source communities are able to inherit, practice, and transmit. A stewardship framework that abstracts from this condition risks treating the inherited distribution of heritage as neutral, which it is not.

The second step is restitution and repatriation. The normative case for restitution rests on multiple instruments. UNDRIP Articles 11 and 12 affirm the right to redress for cultural, intellectual, religious, and spiritual property taken without free, prior, and informed consent and the right to repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains. The 1995 UNIDROIT Convention provides a private-law mechanism for the restitution of stolen or illegally exported cultural objects. Beyond binding instruments, the practice of voluntary repatriation by museums has accelerated in the years preceding the cutoff date, reflecting a

shifting ethical consensus. Restitution and repatriation are the operational mechanisms through which the condition of dispossession begins to be addressed.

The third step is institutional repair. Restitution is not merely a transfer of objects; it is a reconfiguration of the institutional relationships through which heritage is governed. When a museum returns objects to a source community, it does more than move material: it acknowledges that authority over the heritage in question rests with the community of origin, it opens a relationship of potential collaboration rather than custodial extraction, and it repairs (imperfectly and partially) the institutional asymmetry that dispossession created. The conception of repair at work here draws on the broader account of moral repair developed by Walker (2006), in which the repair of relationships and institutional standing after wrongdoing is itself a constitutive part of justice rather than a supplement to it. Institutional repair is the dimension of restitution that connects the remedial act to the ongoing practice of stewardship.

The fourth step is intergenerational justice. The repair effected through restitution is owed not only to the generation that suffered the original dispossession but to the descendants whose heritage was thereby diminished. UNDRIP's restitution provisions are, in this sense, intergenerational in structure: they repair a chain of transmission that was broken, so that the chain can be resumed. The fifth and final step is stewardship itself. Once restitution has repaired the institutional relationship and the chain of transmission has been restored, the resulting practice is stewardship: an ongoing, accountable, intergenerational responsibility for the heritage in question. Restorative justice is therefore not external to stewardship but is one of the conditions of legitimate stewardship in a world shaped by historical dispossession. It belongs in the HSC as a domain in its own right because, without it, the other three domains risk conserving an inheritance that was unjustly assembled. This chain is offered as the article's analytical synthesis; it is not presented as an automatically established legal rule.

Figure 5 represents the broader intergenerational movement of heritage, knowledge, memory, and stewardship responsibility across present, near-future, and distant-future generations. The figure makes visible the article's governance argument: stewardship is not a one-time act by the present generation but a chain of receipt, practice, documentation, repair, and transmission in which each generation both inherits and forwards. The horizontal arrows along the bottom indicate that what is transmitted — heritage, knowledge, memory, and the responsibility to steward — moves across generations rather than resting with any one of them. The figure is a conceptual model developed in this article; it introduces no empirical claims and assigns no numerical values.

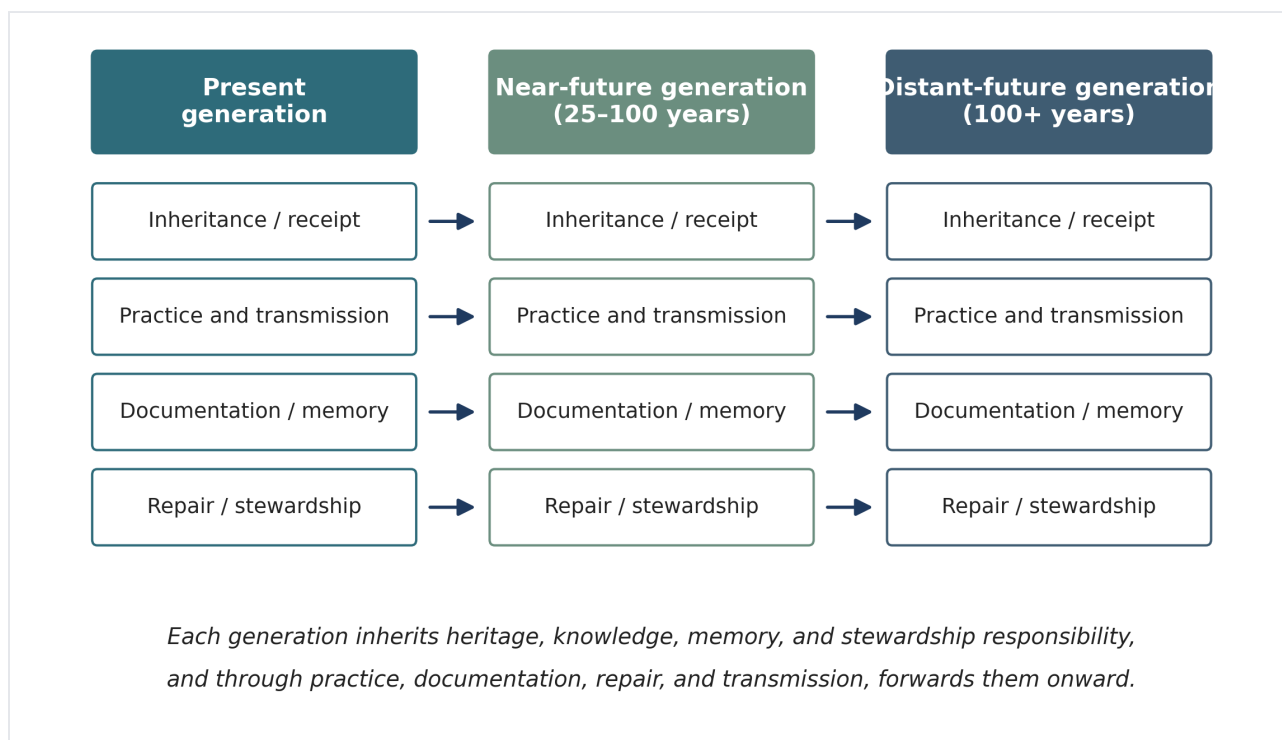


Figure 5. Intergenerational stewardship model: the movement of heritage, knowledge, memory, and stewardship responsibility across present, near-future, and distant-future generations. Conceptual model developed in this article; no empirical data are represented.

8. Discussion and Governance Implications

The Heritage Stewardship Continuum, applied to GRACE and situated within the normative architecture of the Declaration on Future Generations, yields three governance implications for the post-Declaration era. The first is that cultural heritage should be treated, in implementation of the Declaration, as a substantive domain of intergenerational responsibility rather than as a specialist subfield external to the future-generations agenda. Commitments 15 and 16, read with the guiding principles and with Actions 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, and 30, supply the textual foundation for such treatment, and the HSC framework supplies one analytical instrument through which it can be operationalised.

The second implication is that the implementation architecture of the Declaration — particularly the foresight, data, and impact-assessment provisions — should be applied to cultural heritage with explicit attention to temporal horizons. The HSC's proposed horizons (0–25, 25–100, and 100+ years) are offered as one way of structuring that attention, on the understanding that they are analytical rather than empirically established categories. The point is not to fix the horizons but to ensure that some horizon-structured analysis is performed, so that the long-term consequences of present heritage decisions are not lost in short-term planning cycles.

The third implication is that restorative justice — restitution, repatriation, and institutional repair — is an integral rather than peripheral component of heritage stewardship. A stewardship framework that conserves an unjustly assembled inheritance without addressing the dispossession that assembled it does not discharge the Declaration's intergenerational commitments; it merely transmits an unresolved injustice forward in time. Reading Commitments 15 and 16 together with UNDRIP Articles 11 and 12 makes this clear: intergenerational responsibility for cultural heritage is not separable from intergenerational responsibility for the repair of cultural dispossession.

Figure 6 synthesises the article's overall conceptual progression. Each stage reframes the previous one: preservation becomes stewardship once temporal responsibility is added; stewardship becomes governance once it is institutionalised across generations. The figure is a conceptual progression developed in this article; it is not an empirical sequence, and the stages are analytical distinctions rather than discrete institutional phases.

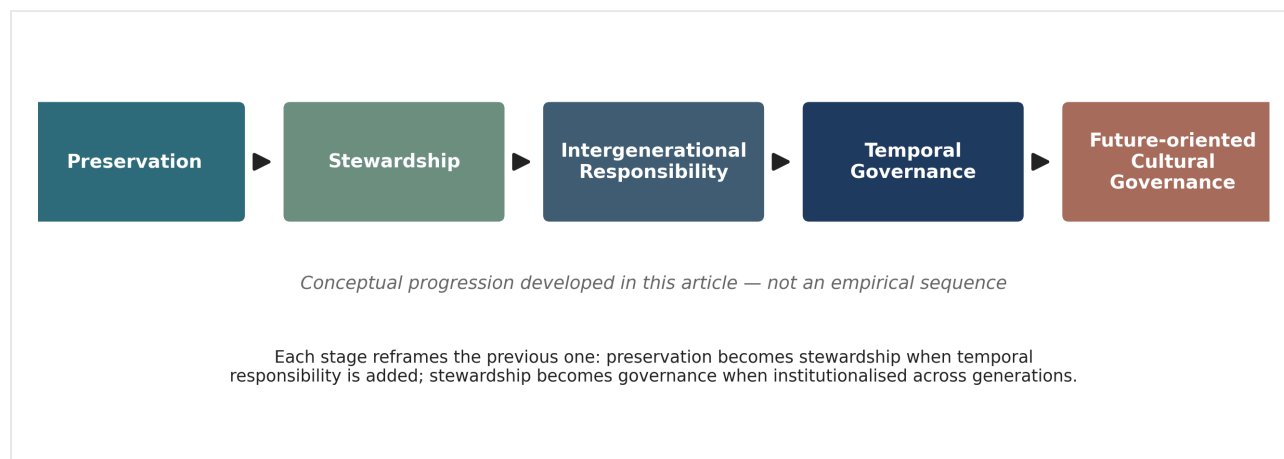


Figure 6. From heritage preservation to future-oriented cultural governance: a conceptual progression. Conceptual framework developed in this article; not an empirical sequence. Each stage reframes the previous one rather than displacing it.

9. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations qualify the analysis and point to a future research agenda. The first concerns the legal weight of the Declaration. Because the Declaration is not a treaty, critics may object that the entire HSC exercise rests on a normative instrument too soft to bear the analytical weight placed upon it. The response is that the HSC framework does not require the Declaration to be legally binding; it requires only that the Declaration supply a normative and institutional frame that actors can invoke, interpret, and operationalise, which it does. The analytical value of the framework is independent of the coercive force of the text it interprets.

The second limitation concerns the single-case character of the GRACE analysis. A single institutional case, especially one drawn from an initiative with which the authors' institutional context has a relationship, is vulnerable to selection bias and to the accusation that the framework has been tailored to fit a congenial example. The article meets this objection by treating GRACE strictly as an illustrative case rather than as empirical validation, by disclosing the institutional affiliation, and by framing the HSC as an analytical heuristic whose worth should ultimately be judged against a wider range of cases than this article can provide. A programme of comparative case research — extending to national heritage agencies, community-led stewardship initiatives, and international organisations — would be the appropriate next step.

The third limitation concerns the proposed HSC temporal horizons. The 0–25, 25–100, and 100+ year ranges are not derived from an established empirical literature and should not be treated as natural kinds. Alternative horizonisations — for example, a single intergenerational horizon set at approximately 30 years, or a finer-grained set of horizons keyed to specific heritage materials — could be defensible. The article's defence of the proposed ranges is that they are analytically productive, that they correspond to identifiable decision-making and irreversibility thresholds, and that they are explicitly flagged as proposed rather than as established. The horizons are a tool for thought, not a finding.

The fourth limitation concerns the evidentiary record for GRACE. Because independently verifiable, dated documentation of GRACE's operational outcomes by 15 December 2024 is limited, the analysis necessarily leans more heavily on GRACE's stated model than on verified performance. The article does not convert stated objectives into claims of achievement, and it explicitly excludes post-cutoff developments. Readers seeking a performance evaluation of GRACE will not find it here; readers seeking an illustration of how a stated institutional model can be analysed within the HSC and the Declaration's frame will.

The fifth limitation is disciplinary. The article synthesises materials from international law, heritage studies, intergenerational justice, and temporal governance; each of these fields has its own internal debates and refinements that the article can engage only at the level of synthesis. Specialists in any one of these fields may find the treatment of their domain oversimplified. The article's ambition is integrative rather than exhaustive, and the syntheses it offers are intended to be transparent enough that specialists can trace the omissions and contest them.

10. Conclusion

This article has developed the Heritage Stewardship Continuum as an analytical framework connecting cultural stewardship, intergenerational responsibility, temporal governance horizons, and an illustrative institutional case, and has situated the framework within the normative architecture of the Declaration on Future Generations. The HSC is a proposed analytical and theoretical framework, not an empirically validated model; the four stewardship domains (Tangible Preservation, Intangible Transmission, Knowledge Integrity, and Restorative Justice) and the three proposed temporal horizons (0–25, 25–100, and 100+ years) are offered as analytical instruments for heritage governance in the post-Declaration era. GRACE has been treated as an illustrative institutional case, not as proof that the framework holds across the cultural-heritage sector as a whole.

The agenda that follows from this synthesis is substantial. Comparative case research applying the HSC across a range of institutional types is needed to test the framework's analytical reach and to refine the temporal horizons. Worked examples of heritage-focused intergenerational impact assessments, undertaken in the spirit of Actions 26 and 27, would help translate the framework into operational practice. Engagement between heritage institutions, future-generations bodies, and the proposed Special Envoy for Future Generations — which the Declaration takes note of the Secretary-General's proposal to appoint — would help ensure that the cultural-heritage dimensions of the future-generations agenda are not lost in the broader implementation of the Declaration. None of this requires the Declaration to be more than it is: a normative and institutional framework of pledges and commitments. It requires only that actors take the framework seriously and develop the analytical instruments — of which the HSC is one modest contribution — needed to give it content.

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