

THE WORLD ANTHROPOLOGICAL UNION (WAU) CONGRESS 2025 “UNEARTHING HUMANITY: CRITICAL AND URGENT EPISTEMIC REDEFINITIONS IN WORLD ANTHROPOLOGIES”, ANTIGUA, GUATEMALA, NOVEMBER 3–8, 2025

The World Anthropological Union (WAU) 2025 Congress, themed “Unearthing Humanity: Critical and Urgent Epistemic Redefinitions in World Anthropologies,” took place in Antigua, Guatemala, from November 3 to 8, 2025.

This event marked the second WAU Congress. In 2023, the WAU Steering Committee declared that, starting with the Johannesburg Congress in South Africa, the WAU Congress would serve as the successor to the longstanding IUAES Congresses, a tradition that began in 1934.

The WAU 2025 Congress issued its call for panels with the following invitation: “The World Anthropological Union (WAU) 2025 Congress, Unearthing Humanity: Critical and Urgent Epistemic Redefinitions in World Anthropologies, stands as a crucial intellectual gathering in an era marked by profound global transformations. As the boundaries of human experience continue to shift under the weight of technological advancements, environmental crises, and sociopolitical upheavals, anthropology is uniquely positioned to engage with the intricate dynamics of cultural, social, and ecological change. The WAU 2025 Congress invites scholars, practitioners, and activists to collectively interrogate and redefine the epistemic foundations of the discipline, addressing the urgent need for inclusive, ethical, and innovative approaches to understanding humanity in its diverse and interconnected forms.”

At the heart of the WAU 2025 Congress was a recognition of the uneven power dynamics that have historically shaped anthropological knowledge production. The emphasis on epistemic justice foregrounded the voices of those historically marginalized, advocating for methodologies that dismantle Eurocentric frameworks and integrate Indigenous, pluralistic, and localized

epistemologies. This endeavor was complemented by critical reflections on the discipline's colonial legacies, as explored in tracks such as "Decolonizing Methodologies" and "Histories of Anthropology." By embracing diverse ways of knowing and prioritizing collaborative approaches, the Congress sought not only to interrogate the past but also to envision a future in which anthropology serves as a tool for global equity and mutual understanding.

Simultaneously, the WAU 2025 Congress highlighted the interdisciplinary potential of anthropology in addressing some of the most pressing challenges of our time. Tracks such as "Anthropology of Climate and Environment" and "Global Challenges and Local Realities" underscored the role of anthropologists in navigating the tensions between global systems and localized experiences, while themes such as "Technology and Society" examined the anthropological implications of digital transformation. These discussions, enriched by the diverse perspectives of participants from around the world, expanded the discipline's theoretical and practical horizons. Unearthing Humanity thus called for a collective reimagining of anthropology's purpose and possibilities, emphasizing its role as a critical, reflexive, and transformative lens on the human condition.

The Congress was organized through the collaborative efforts of **leading universities and research institutions from Guatemala and Mexico, together with the World Anthropological Union (WAU)**, which comprises two chambers: the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) and the World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA).

The **World Anthropological Union (WAU)** serves as an inclusive and cooperative forum that energizes transnational anthropologies. It functions as an interface uniting the missions of the IUAES and the WCAA, fostering international scholarly dialogue and promoting collaboration among anthropological associations. As a member of the International Science Council (ISC) and the International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences (CIPSH), WAU upholds ethical and scientific values within the discipline and positions itself as a major international anthropological organization.

The Congress was convened by the **Organizing Committee chaired by Ricardo A. Fagoaga Hernández**, and the **Scientific Committee chaired by Alejandra Letona Rodríguez** (Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala), a young Guatemalan scholar. The **Anthropological Film Exhibition was chaired by Anais Taracena**, a Guatemalan documentary director and producer. The committees included representatives from institutions in Guatemala and Mexico, as well as from Portugal, Spain, and the United States. The Guatemalan and Mexican institutions represented included the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, Universidad del Valle de Guatemala (UVG), Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Universidad Iberoamericana Ciudad de México (UIA), Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), El Colegio

de México (COLMEX), Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS), and the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), among others. A full list of supporting individuals and institutions is available at <https://www.waucongress2025.org/directory/>.

The Congress website (<https://www.waucongress2025.org/>) provided a comprehensive resource with detailed information on the program and associated activities.

Prior to the Congress, a series of **pre-Congress activities** were held in **Guatemala City**, including workshops at the Centro Cultural de España en Guatemala and the Biblioteca Nacional de Guatemala “Luis Cardoza y Aragón,” as well as five workshops hosted by the Universidad Rafael Landívar with the support of its Department of Architecture. An additional pre-Congress workshop was held at the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala (UVG). Pre-Congress activities also included film screenings with public discussions and outreach activities designed to engage local audiences.

The **WAU 2025 Congress** took place from November 3 to 8 in the town of Antigua, known for its historical and cultural significance and its designation as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site in 1979. The six-day international program was held across six venues: Casa Herrera, Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA), Hotel Porta, Colegio Mayor Santo Tomás de Aquino of the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, Casa del Mango, and Innova.

The event welcomed anthropologists from across all continents and was conducted in a hybrid format, allowing for both on-site and online participation. Of the more than 2,138 registered participants, 1,319 attended onsite and 819 participated online. In addition, approximately 200 further online attendees joined selected sessions that were made accessible for broader public participation. The program featured 264 thematic panels, 26 roundtables, 15 workshops, 20 book seminars, and 49 book presentations. All scientific events are available in the Congress program at <https://system.waucongress2025.org/tools/timetable.html#top>.

The Congress also included an **Anthropological Film Exhibition**, which received approximately 779 film submissions from around the world. The selection process resulted in the screening of 11 feature-length films and 17 short films. Most film screenings took place at the Centro Cultural Santo Tomás de Aquino of the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala. A major open-air screening with a public question-and-answer session was held on Thursday, November 6, in the patio of Casa Herrera, featuring *Sugar Island* (directed by Johanné Gómez Terrero, Dominican Republic).

In addition, a **book fair** was organized at Casa Herrera, bringing together local bookstores and independent publishing houses. The fair highlighted anthropological, historical, and social science publications that are often difficult to access through major international book fairs, emphasizing local

and regional editorial production and fostering direct exchange between authors, publishers, and Congress participants.

The **Congress opened** on the evening of November 3. Rather than a traditional inaugural keynote lecture, the opening featured a non-traditional intervention by the Laboratorio de Arte Social y Divulgación Científica “Antropomorfosis,” composed of the anthropologists Mónica Durán Galván and Anayansi Bañuelos Ledesma (Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro) and the ethnomusicologist Cristo Esenio Rubio Rodríguez. Their theatrical performance Ajolóntropo offered a creative and reflexive opening to the Congress. A keynote lecture was later delivered on November 7 by Irma A. Velásquez Nimatuj, entitled “Hacia una antropología regenerativa: alternativas epistémicas desde los pueblos indígenas.”

The parallel panels, roundtables, workshops, film screenings, and book presentations covered a wide range of themes. While many activities were organized by IUAES Commissions and WCAA Task Forces, others were curated by individual co-organizers from two or three different countries. English and Spanish were the official languages of communication throughout the Congress. A large team of volunteers from different countries played a key role in supporting the organization and ensuring the smooth operation of the Congress across its multiple venues and activities.

The **World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA)** sponsored two events during the Congress. Lía Ferrero and Clara Saraiva organized a roundtable titled “**Reinventing Anthropology in Times of Crisis.**” The event took place within three sessions (on November 5 and 7), featuring 13 participants, namely: Gordon Mathews (Hong Kong SAR of PRC), Anna Pilarczyk-Palaitis and Ugnė Barbora Starkutė (Lithuania), Leonardo Schiocchet (Brasil/Czechia), Francesca Declich (Italy), Lía Ferrero (Argentina), Andrea Chamorro (Chile), Juan Francisco Olsen (Argentina), Verónica López Tessore (Argentina), Helen Macdonald (S. Africa), Vesna Vucinic Neskovic (Serbia), Clara Saraiva (Portugal), and Gabriel Gyang Darong (S. Africa) (the names are listed according to the initial Program). The **WCAA Roundtable “The Future of Anthropology / Anthropology of the Future”** took place on November 7, from 8:00 to 10:00. The event was organized by Gordon Mathews (HKSAR) and Gang Chen (China), with Francesca Declich (Italy) and Silvia Hirsch (Argentina) joining them as discussants.

The WCAA Global Cultural Policies Task Force played a pivotal role in co-organizing three Congress events.

The first event co-organized by the **WCAA Global Cultural Policies Task Force** was a panel titled “**Festivals as a Site of Contesting Heritagisation: Contending Local Aspirations and Governmental Authorizations**” organized by Greg Acciaioli and Vesna Vučinić Nešković. It was part of the track called “Heritage and Memory: Preserving Tangible and Intangible Culture”.

Sponsored by the WCAA Global Cultural Policies Task Force and the IUAES Commission on Anthropology and the Environment, the panel took place in two sessions, on November 7 (15:30–17:30), and November 8 (8:00–10:00). The event featured eight speakers: Waldemar Kuligowski, Greg Acciaioli, Roberto Rizzo, Zuo Rui, Marta Neskovic, Patrícia de Gomensoro, Vesna Vucinic Neskovic, and Thomas Reuter (discussant). Details on paper topics are available at: <https://system.waucongress.org/tools/timetable.html#monday>.

The panel “Festivals as a Site of Contesting Heritagisation” explored the political and cultural dynamics through which festivals and related forms of public cultural performance become subject to processes of heritagisation. The discussion highlighted how state and supranational heritage frameworks increasingly shape local practices, transforming vernacular rituals and celebrations to fit governmental visions of cultural identity, tourism, development, and national cohesion. Presenters examined how local actors negotiate — and sometimes resist — these imposed parameters, demonstrating how festivals become arenas where competing aspirations, aesthetic values, and political interests meet. The panel underscored the need to understand festivals not only as cultural expressions but also as contested sites where communities navigate shifting forms of authorization, representation, and cultural policy.

The second event co-organized by the WCAA Global Cultural Policies Task Force was a panel titled “**Transmission of Transdisciplinary Knowledge within Large Scientific Infrastructures: Anthropological Perspective,**” organized by Marta Neskovic and Barbora Bruant Gulajeva. It was presented within the track called „Interdisciplinary Approaches: Bridging Anthropology with Other Sciences“.

Sponsored by the WCAA Global Cultural Policies Task Force, the panel took place on November 7 from 13:00 to 15:00. The event featured five papers, presented by: Marta Neskovic and Vesna Vucinic-Neskovic, Aleksandra Kolakovic, Anqi Zhu, Elena Badawy, and Barbora Bruant Gulejova.

This panel addressed how Large Scientific Infrastructures (LSIs) cultivate, sustain, and transmit transdisciplinary knowledge across scientific, technological, and social domains. Presentations examined how interdisciplinary collaboration in LSIs requires new pedagogical models, institutional strategies, and organizational cultures capable of bridging scientific research, technological development, and societal needs. Special emphasis was placed on mechanisms of intergenerational knowledge transfer and the preservation of expertise in rapidly evolving scientific environments. Drawing on anthropological perspectives of learning and knowledge transmission, the panel illuminated how LSIs operate as dynamic sites of collaboration where scientific, educational, and governance practices intersect, and where cultivating transdisciplinary competencies becomes central to advancing both scientific innovation and sustainable development.

The third was the roundtable titled “**The WAU and UNESCO BRIDGES Overlap: How Can Humanities-led Transdisciplinary Sustainability Projects Contribute to a Safer World?**” co-organized by Vesna Vucinic Neskovic and Fadwa El Guindi.

Sponsored by the WCAA Global Cultural Policies Task Force, the IUAES Public Policy and Development Practice Commission, and the UNESCO-BRIDGES Coalition, the session was held on November 8, from 13:00 to 15:00 and featured three speakers, namely Luci Attala (University of Wales Trinity Saint David, UNESCO-BRIDGES UK Hub Director), Márnio Texeira-Pinto (Federal University of Santa Catarina), and Thomas Reuter (University of Melbourne, Past WCAA Chair, Past IUAES Senior Vice President, Deputy Chair of the Anthropology, Public Policy and Development Practice Commission). The event was moderated by Vesna Vučinić Nešković (University of Belgrade, WCAA Global Cultural Policies Task Force Chair, WAU Liaison with UNESCO-BRIDGES), and Fadwa El Guindi (University of California, Los Angeles, Founder of El Nil Research, Deputy Chair of the Commission on Theoretical Anthropology).

The roundtable examined the synergies between WAU’s global anthropological networks and UNESCO BRIDGES’ humanities-led, transdisciplinary approach to sustainability. Through case studies from multiple world regions, participants reflected on how community-grounded humanities research can strengthen societal resilience, support equitable policy-making, and address crises such as displacement, ecological degradation, and cultural loss. The discussion stressed the importance of integrating local knowledge systems with broader strategic frameworks, demonstrating how anthropological fieldwork and ethical engagement can contribute to shaping sustainable and socially just futures. The roundtable highlighted anthropology’s growing role in global sustainability debates, particularly within collaborative initiatives that bridge research, policy, and community action.

Among the activities of other WCAA task forces, it is worth mentioning two events sponsored by the **Anthropological Education and New Audiences Task Force and IUAES Anthropology and Education Commission**. The first one is a panel entitled „Building Bridges in Education between Anthropology and New Audiences: Local and International Partnerships as Crossroads of Disciplines and Technologies“ organized by Roberta Bonetti, Shelene Gomes, Giovanna Guslini and with Mary Hallin as discussant (November 4, 13:00–15:00). The second event was the roundtable „Anthropological Education and New Audiences – How to Engage Non-Anthropologists?“ (November 8), organized by Giovanna Guslini and Roberta Bonetti, and with Leonardo Campoy, Alexander Cordoves, Shelene Gomes, Anita Nudelman, Yashmine Tabasoom, Mimina Pateraki, and Manuela Tassan as participants. These activities present a continuation of the efforts of the WCAA in the 2014–2016 period, chaired by Vesna Vucinic Neskovic, to enhance non-university anthropological education.

Business meetings formed an integral part of the Congress agenda. The **IUAES General Assembly**, which took place on November 6, provided an overview of key activities since the WAU 2024 Congress in Johannesburg, South Africa. The **IUAES Council of Commissions Meeting**, gathering commissions' leaderships, was organized on November 7. The WAU Constituency Meeting did not take place. The Congress suggested that the next WAU Congress take place in Lisbon, Portugal, in 2027.

The **WCAA-related meetings**, namely the **panel “Reinventing Anthropology in Times of Crisis,”** (November 5) and the **WCAA Delegates Meeting** (November 4), were held in Casa Herrera, the principal Congress venue in Antigua. Both were three-session events conducted in a hybrid format, with around 20 participants in total, the majority of who were delegates, Organizing Committee and Advisory Board members attending on-site.

The WCAA Delegates panel addressed a variety of issues related to how anthropologists deal with polycrisis in the present world, featuring 12 paper presentations. The WCAA Delegates Meeting was chaired by Clara Saraiva (the upcoming WCAA Chair) and Lía Ferero (the outgoing WCAA Org Comm member). The first part of the meeting featured reports from the Chair, Secretary, Task Force Coordinator, Deja Lu Editors, and Webinar Organizers. The subsequent discussion focused primarily on the currently conducted elections of the new WCAA Organizing Committee members as well on problems in communication and decision-making between the two WAU chambers. It was also observed that new developments in WAU seek changes in the WAU Constitution and its Operational Guidelines and Rules.

It was reported that **WCAA task forces** continued their active engagements. The current task forces include the Global Cultural Policies Task Force, Academic Precarity Task Force, WCAA Publishing Council, and the Anthropological Values Task Force, the Ethics Task Force, as well as the most recently founded Associations and World Anthropologies: Strengthening Dialogues, Fostering Joint Activities and Social Solidarities Task Force, and Anthropological Education and New Audiences Task Force.

The discussion also addressed the need to identify new task forces that may be required in the future. Additionally, the meeting highlighted the ongoing success of WAU Webinars as a vibrant platform for engaging with intellectually and politically relevant anthropological issues. Delegates were invited to suggest new webinar topics and organize webinar sessions, in order to engage collaboratively and proactively in tackling emerging concerns.

In addition to the academic sessions and business meetings, the WAU Congress in Antigua, Guatemala, provided numerous opportunities to engage with local history and culture. Having been one of the early Spanish colonial capitals of the Captaincy General of Guatemala, and yet with a strong presence of the indigenous Mayan communities and their traditions, Antigua was a wonderful setting for an anthropological meeting. Anthropologists from

around the world could enjoy the traditional sacral and civil architecture that survived three strong 18th century earthquakes, as well as the archaeological sites in which ruined Catholic convents and churches were turned into open-air museums. The beauty and historical significance of this town has been acknowledged internationally when in 1979, it became the UNESCO World Heritage Site. This Mayan town also showcases traditional hospitality in its small hotels, restaurants, bars and clubs with live music, Guatemalan coffee and cacao shops, as well as plentiful artisans' markets, with products representing their cultural heritage, including traditional hand-made textiles.

The WAU Congress 2025 can be considered a successful international anthropological event. Conducted in a hybrid format, it posed challenges for the organizers and technical staff, who had to coordinate both physical and online events. Despite these complexities, participants attending in person, had the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the Congress's intellectual and social context. This experience clearly highlights the advantages and benefits of hosting congresses in a live format.

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