

Biographies

European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018: International Perspectives

PALAIS DES ACADÉMIES, Brussels, 23 April 2018

Ms. Stefania Abakerli



Stefania Abakerli is a **Senior Urban Development Planner** trained in Brazil and U.K. with three decades of professional experience in the fields of development planning, municipal service delivery and urban poverty, participatory governance, inclusive tourism and cultural heritage stewardship.

Staff of the World Bank since 2002, she has managed and contributed to formulate and implement distinguished national programs, multi-sectoral investment projects, applied analytical work and institutional strengthening across Latin America, post-conflict Africa, Middle East, South and East Asia. She currently coordinates the largest regional program on Culture and Inclusive Tourism for Development at the World Bank.

Prior to joining the Bank, she advised national and state governments on inner city revitalization; lectured on the sociology of city planning and local development at University; and managed her own firm devoted to development planning and management of historic landscapes under rapid urbanization in Brazil.

Ms. Themis Christophidou

Themis Christophidou is a European public servant who became **Director-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission**, in March 2018. She is a civil engineer with 32 years of experience in private and public sector management. She joined the European Commission in 2001. Having held various positions in the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban policy, she worked as Deputy Head of Cabinet of Androulla Vassiliou, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism, Youth and Sport in 2010-2011. From 2011 to 2014, Themis Christophidou worked as Head of Cabinet of Maria Damanaki, Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, and from 2014 to 2018, she was Head of Cabinet of



Christos Stylianides, Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis management.

Themis Christophidou is an alumna of the civil engineering school of the Athens Polytechnic Metsovio, specialised in transport infrastructure and urban transport. Born in Famagusta, Cyprus, she is trilingual Greek, French, and English.

Ms. Birgit De Boissezon



Birgit de Boissezon is, since 2001, the **Head of Unit in the European Commission, currently for Sustainable Management of Natural Resources, DG Research & Innovation**. This Unit defines, implements, and monitors, supported by the EU Research and innovation (R&I) programme Horizon 2020, EU R&I objectives and priorities on systemic nature-based solutions and innovative cultural heritage based services which provide economic, social and environmental benefits to cities and territories. It promotes cities and citizens as actors of innovation and labs of co-design and co-creation. It contributes to Commission priorities and to international policy frameworks through the development and promotion of integrated and innovative solutions for re-naturing and re-generating cities, climate change resilience, combined energy and resource efficiency, disaster risk reduction, and biodiversity and ecosystems restoration.

She had previous assignments in the EC related to research strategy and policy, planning, implementation and evaluation of EU research framework programmes.

She is Research counsellor at the Danish Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels, negotiating EU research and education programmes. She also worked at the Danish Ministry of Research in charge of EU research programme coordination at national level and of dissemination and use of S/T results. She was the Head of the Information and Documentation Centre at the French dairy branch organisation CNIEL/CIDIL in Paris. She has a Degree (MSc+1) in biology from the University of Copenhagen followed by a grant from the Danish Research Council.

Ms. Claire Doole

As a former BBC correspondent and radio presenter, **Claire Doole** is skilled at driving conversations forward, ensuring editorial flow and generating audience interaction. **She is a sought after moderator and Master of Ceremonies**, having facilitated high-level international conferences attended by government ministers, business leaders and senior experts.

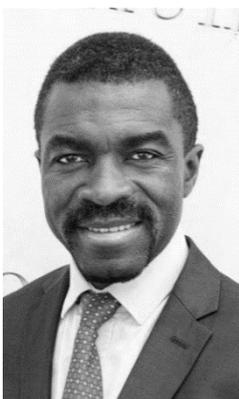
Career highlights include moderating a panel with French Presidential candidate, Emmanuel Macron, Canada's Minister for Women, Patty Hajdu and head of the International Trade Centre, Arancha Gonzalez at the Women's Forum for Economy and Society. She also moderated, among others, the Women's Forum for the Economy and Society and The International Film Festival and Human Rights Forum.

Familiar with the Brussels agenda, she has moderated panels and acted as MC for DG Trade, DG Neighbourhood, DG Budget as well as for trade federations, and companies on EU initiatives and policy.



In Geneva, she is known for stimulating lively discussions on issues relating to the Sustainable Development Goals with heads of UN agencies, and moderating panels at the annual International Film Festival of Human Rights. As a former actress, she is passionate about cinema, theatre and the performing arts.

Mr. Lazare Eloundou Assomo



Lazare Eloundou Assomo is the current **Deputy Director of the Division for Heritage and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre**. He is trained as an architect conservator and town-planner specialized in earthen architecture and cultural heritage.

He was UNESCO Head of Office and Representative in Mali and main responsible for coordinating UNESCO's actions to rehabilitate Mali's cultural heritage and ancient manuscripts damaged by the 2012 armed conflict. In that capacity he has coordinated the rapid reconstruction of the destroyed mausoleums in Timbuktu by violent extremist groups, in close cooperation with MINUSMA, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mali. Among his major actions in favor of the protection of Malian cultural heritage, are the fundraising of 4 million dollars to implement the UNESCO-Mali Action Plan, the realization of a Heritage Passport of North Mali, the leading of the first UNESCO assessment mission in Timbuktu in June 2013.

Previously, Lazare was the Chief of Unit for Africa at the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, where he was in charge of coordinating cooperation between UNESCO and African Member States for issues related to World Heritage. He conducted several major conservation projects in Mozambique, Uganda and Benin, and designed the World Heritage Earthen Architecture Program. He was also one of the key players for the establishment of the African World Heritage Fund, now a UNESCO Category 2 Centre. He is the author of the book "African World Heritage, a remarkable diversity" published by UNESCO in 2012.

Mr. Norton Ficarelli

Norton Ficarelli serves as **Project Manager of Instituto Pedra**, a São Paulo based non-profit association that develops projects in the cultural heritage sector related to architectural restoration, historical and social research, book and video documentary publication, art exhibitions, cultural program curatorship and public policies promotion. With his bachelor's degree in Public Relations and a Master's degree in Cultural Management from the University of Barcelona, he also worked within the marketing and communication departments of other institutions such as São Paulo State Orchestra or the Cisne Negro Dance Company and Formarte – Projects and Advisory. Norton was a participant in the 2017 edition of the Global Cultural Leadership Programme.



Mr. Silvio Gonzato



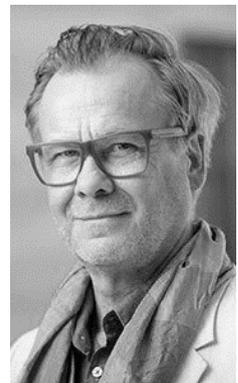
Silvio Gonzato was appointed as **Director for Strategic Communication, Parliamentary Affairs, Inspection, Audit and Legal Affairs at the EEAS** in September 2015. He was previously director for Human Rights and Democracy. His responsibilities cover the strategic communication for the HRVP, relations with the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, the inspection of EU delegations around the world (139 delegations and offices), internal audit and the provision of legal advice to the HRVP.

In his previous capacity he was responsible for the organization and contents of all HR-related dialogues and consultations between the EU and partner countries (over 40 of them), the development of policy guidelines, and guidance to EU bilateral and multilateral delegations in matters pertaining to HR and democracy support. Previous to his appointment in the EEAS, Mr. Gonzato was Head of the Secretariat of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs chaired by Mr Brok, where his responsibilities covered among others, advice to the chair regarding the organization of the activities of the committee, contacts with other EU Institutions, with the European External Action Service and with diplomatic missions in Brussels.

During his career at the European Parliament, Mr. Gonzato was working in different committee secretariats, covering both internal and external policies, including as interim Head of the Subcommittee on Human Rights. He has also covered, in particular, the countries of the Western Balkans and the EU enlargement strategy.

Mr. Christer Gustafsson

Christer Gustafsson is a **Full Professor in Conservation** at Uppsala University, Sweden, a Professor (hon.) at Nanjing University in China and a Faculty member at IPMI International Business School, Jakarta, Indonesia as well as Turin Faculty of Development. He is a member of the Scientific Board of Cultural Industries and Complexity Observatory at IULM University, Milano, Italy. His research is focusing on cultural heritage as a driver for sustainable growth and heritage-led innovation-driven regional/urban development.



He is also a Secretary-General for ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Economics of Conservation, the vice chairman of the expert panel for European Heritage Label (appointed by the European Commission) and Member of the Board of Directors for Cultural Heritage without Borders. He is currently member of the international expert group working with incorporate cultural heritage issues in the next round of the United Nations' Sustainability Goals and the expert panel for evaluating new Flagships in Horizon 2020.

He has been a member of the European Commission's expert panel for a European Agenda for cultural heritage research and innovation ("Getting Heritage to Work for Europe"), the expert panel to analyse of the potential future European Institute for Innovation and Technology thematic areas, societal challenges and their innovation potential; and their suitability for a EIT's Knowledge and Innovation Community, several expert panels of the European Commission's concerning research and innovation, culture and cultural heritage issues, e.g. EU-China Mayors Forum, EU-Africa Summit.

Dr. Markus Hilgert



Prof. Dr. Markus Hilgert is a specialist in Ancient Near Eastern Studies and Cultural Heritage Research. He is the **current Director of the Ancient Near East Museum at the Pergamonmuseum** in Berlin. From 2007 until 2014, Hilgert held a chair for Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Heidelberg University.

Hilgert is the coordinator of the national research alliance ILLICID focusing on the illicit traffic with cultural property in Germany and the director of the “Center for Digital Cultural Heritage in Museums” (CEDICUM) at the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation. In addition, Hilgert is the coordinator of the national program “museum4punkt0 – Digital Strategies for the Museum of the Future” under the auspices of the Federal Commissioner for Culture and Media. Hilgert is a member of the German Commission for UNESCO (since 2016), the Foundation Board of the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH; since 2017), the Advisory Group of the Cultural Protection Fund of the British Council (since 2017), and the Disaster Risk Management Committee of the International Council of Museums (since 2017).

He was named the “National Correspondent for the Blue Shield in Germany” and elected founding President of Blue Shield Germany in 2017. He is also the Vice President of the German Association for Archeology. Hilgert holds honorary professorships at Heidelberg University, Marburg University, and Berlin University (Freie Universität).

Mr. Toshiyuki Kono

Toshiyuki Kono is a **Distinguished Professor at Kyushu University, Fukuoka, Japan.**

He currently serves as the president of the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), an advisory body of UNESCO, since 2017. He was a vice president of ICOMOS from 2014 to 2017. He is in charge of, among others, World Heritage issues. He has been active in UNESCO as an independent expert as well. For example, he served in 2010 as the Chairperson of the 3rd General Assembly of the State Parties of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Chairperson of the Legal Committee of the 34th UNESCO General Conference in 2007. His recent publication in the field of international heritage law includes “Authenticity, notions and principles”.¹



In the field of private international law, he gave special lectures on “Efficiency in Private International Law” at the Hague Academy of International Law in 2013. He was chosen as one of three lecturers who are invited to publish lectures in its Pocket Book series in 2014.

Besides his presidency of ICOMOS, he is among others, Vice President and Titular Member of the International Academy of Comparative Law; the Chairman of the Committee for Intellectual Property and Private International Law at the International Law Association.

¹ Change over Time, Fall 2014, Vol. 4, No.2, pp.436-460.

Mr. Stefano Manservisi



Stefano Manservisi is the **Director-General for International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO) at the European Commission** since May 2016. An Italian national, he previously served as Head of the Private Office of Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Commission Vice-President. In 2014, he was the Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Turkey.

Before that, he held other positions at the Commission, including as Director-General for Migration and Home Affairs and Director-General for Development and Relations with African, Caribbean, and Pacific States. He has also headed the Private Offices of the Commission's President Romano Prodi and Commissioner Mario Monti and served in the Private Offices of the Commission's Vice President Filippo Pandolfi and of Commissioner Francesco Vanni d'Archirafi. A lawyer by training, he enjoys teaching and has been a visiting professor at the University of Bologna, University of Roma III, and the College of Europe.

Ms. Angela Mwai

Angela Mwai is the leader of the Gender Equality Unit at UN-Habitat global headquarters in Nairobi. She is UN-Habitat's gender focal point and her responsibilities include gender mainstreaming in all policies, programmes and projects in UN-Habitat, raising awareness and capacity building on gender issues, for both internal colleagues and external partners, gender tool development, engaging colleagues and partners to ensure gender perspectives are well included in all their activities. She is also involved with other UN Agencies and partners on advocacy events on gender and women's issues in international forums around the world. In addition, she is also responsible for corporate reporting on all the other cross cutting issues which are youth, human rights and climate change.



She has been working at UN-Habitat in various positions from 2007. Prior to that, she was a seasoned banker, with 21 years' experience in various international financial institutions. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics from York University in Canada and a Master's degree in Organizational Leadership from Azusa

Mr. Ratish Nanda



Ratish Nanda, a Conservation Architect, is the **India CEO for the Aga Khan Trust for Culture**. In his role, he heads the multi-disciplinary AKTC teams presently undertaking the two major urban conservation projects in India: the Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative, Delhi and the Qutb Shahi Heritage Park Conservation in Hyderabad. Both these projects have received support of the TATA Trusts. For AKTC, he was earlier responsible for the Baghe Babur restoration (2002-2006), in Kabul, Afghanistan

He has served as an ICOMOS expert to missions in Iran, Turkey and Nepal and lectured in over 20 countries including at ICCROM, Rome. He has authored over 100 articles and

his major publications include, 'Delhi, the Built Heritage: A listing' - released by the Prime Minister of India; Delhi: Red Fort to Raisina; Conservation of Historic Graveyards (Scotland) and Rethinking Conservation: Humayun's Tomb.

Awards received by him include the Communal Harmony award (2014), Eisenhower Fellowship (2007), the Sanskriti Award for Social and Cultural Achievement (2004), the 'Urban Hero' title by Prince Claus Fund, the Charles Wallace Conservation Fellowship (1997), among others.

Mr. Tibor Navracsics

Tibor Navracsics took up office as **European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport** on 1 November 2014. Before becoming Commissioner, he held ministerial posts in successive Hungarian governments: as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Administration and Justice from 2010 to 2014, then as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade from June to September 2014. Tibor Navracsics was a member of the Hungarian Parliament from 2006 until he became European Commissioner. He led the Fidesz Group between 2006 and 2010. He holds a law degree and a doctoral degree in political science.



In the 1990s, Tibor Navracsics started to teach at the University of Economics in Budapest. From 1997 until taking up office as European Commissioner, he taught at the Eötvös Loránd University's Faculty of Law and Political Sciences in Budapest, where he became an associate professor in 2001.

Ms. Sana Ouchtati



Sana Ouchtati, as an **independent cultural relations consultant**, is steering important initiatives dedicated to external culture relations. She is the Team Leader of the Cultural Diplomacy Platform and is also coordinating, among others, *MORE EUROPE – external cultural relations* initiative since 2012.

She has two Master's degrees, in European Union policies and in International Relations & Business Administration. In 2001-2011, she worked at the European Institutions in Brussels, mainly on trade multilateral and bilateral agreements and has been responsible for the cultural dimension of the EU external relations mainly with ACP Countries, Neighbourhood Countries and Emerging Countries before becoming an independent consultant. She has a thorough knowledge of the cultural field, international relations as well as EU processes, policies and instruments dedicated to external relations, culture and intercultural dialogue. She has a thorough knowledge and experience in MENA region.

Mr. Andrew S. Potts

Andrew S. Potts is a partner in the Tax Credit Finance & Syndication practice of Nixon Peabody LLP where he structures and closes financing for historic preservation and other community-based development projects. He works with a diverse range of clients in a practice centered on the use of federal and state historic tax credits (HTCs), new markets tax credits (NMTCs), HUD programs, grants and conventional finance.



After working as a heritage lawyer for twenty years, Andrew served as the Executive Director of US/ICOMOS from February 2015 to August 1, 2016. As Executive Director, his focus was implementing US/ICOMOS's KnowledgeExchange strategic plan. The plan aims to increase the connectivity of US historic preservationist to the international cultural heritage in areas like Climate Change, Disaster Risk Reduction and Sustainable Development. He continues to serve as the volunteer Coordinator of the ICOMOS Working Group on Climate Change and Heritage.

Andrew holds a J.D. from Indiana University. He previously served as Associate General Counsel of the US National Trust for Historic Preservation. He served as Vice President of the Historic Tax Credit Coalition and outside counsel on climate change and energy efficiency policy for the National Trust. He is the recipient of the National Trust's John H. Chafee Trustees Award for Outstanding Achievement in Public Policy. Andrew is a member of the ICOMOS international committee on heritage Law, Administration and Finance (ICLAFI) and also served as ICOMOS Focal Point for the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Process.

Mr. Christophe Rivet



Christophe Rivet has over 20 years of practice in heritage conservation as **an archaeologist, planner, and policy advisor**. He worked for Parks Canada, leading multi-disciplinary projects at national historic sites and national parks as well as developing the pan-Canadian conservation standards for archaeological sites. He worked for Environment Canada where he led the development of initiatives in environmental conservation, represented the government of Canada on international committees with the United States and France, and provided strategic advice to the department on regional issues.

Christophe has also been actively involved in World Heritage matters, including as the project manager for the successful nomination of the Landscape of Grand Pré WHS. Christophe has extensive hands on experience working with communities, various levels of government and Indigenous peoples, especially in planning and conserving landscapes and complex protected areas. He currently heads Cultural Spaces Consulting, a firm that specializes in planning, policy and project advice for the sustainable development of communities.

He served as an officer of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management. He has been active in the national committee, holding twice the position of Vice-President for Scientific Committees. He currently serves as the President of ICOMOS Canada. Under his leadership, the national committee has focused on articulating positions on climate change related matters, cultural landscapes, and Indigenous heritage. He holds a doctorate from the University of Leicester, a master's in

heritage conservation from the Université de Montréal, and a bachelor's in anthropology/ archaeology from McGill University.

Ms. Erminia Sciacchitano

Erminia Sciacchitano is **Policy Officer at the European Commission**, DG for Education and Culture, and **Chief Scientific Advisor of the Task force for the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018**. Since 2014 she contributes at cultural heritage policy development, bringing her experience on cultural cooperation, while enriching her knowledge of the EU institutions and their working methods. Among her activities, she has curated the OMC Working Group on participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage and contributed to the negotiations on latest cultural heritage policy documents, including the Council Conclusions on participatory governance of cultural heritage of November 2014. In the Italian Ministry for Heritage, Culture and Tourism, she previously held positions of Head of Unit for research and international affairs.



Her work focuses on diverse dimensions of cultural policies, from artists' mobility and creativity to inclusive access to cultural heritage and its social values, from creative economy to participatory and sustainable management of cultural resources and landscape. She had opportunities to nurture ideas and strategies offered by several European think-tanks, including the Reflection Group EU and Cultural Heritage and the Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape of the Council of Europe, chaired in 2013. She was involved in the work that led to the signature by Italy of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro 2005).

She is graduated in Architecture, and holds a PhD in Historic Buildings Survey and a Master in European Studies and International Negotiations.

Ms. Jermina Stanojev



Jermina Stanojev, PhD, is a **researcher and independent expert in the field of cultural heritage and development**. Her work and research focuses on participatory and integrated governance of cultural heritage with an evidence-based policy approach at international scale. She is an advisor to cultural organisations in the Western Balkans on the role of cultural heritage within the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance and a cofounder of the Centre for Promotion of Culture and Art in Serbia working on capacity building of local governments and communities in the field of cultural heritage and cultural policies for the accession of Serbia to the EU.

Jermina is currently involved as an expert in the implementation of the Cultural Diplomacy Platform and as a researcher under a H2020 project about circular models leveraging investments in cultural heritage adaptive reuse. She was a participant in the Structured Dialogue with the European Commission and contributing to the OMC working group of Member States' experts on Skills, Training and Knowledge Transfer: traditional and emerging heritage.

She has established competences and wide experience in the field of cultural heritage and cultural relations working in different organisations – Uppsala University, Politecnico di Milano, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture, European Cultural Centre Foundation, Commission of the Republic of Serbia for UNESCO, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

Ms. Aishwarya Tipnis

Aishwarya Tipnis is the **principal architect of an eponymous architectural practice** based in New Dehli, India. She is the recipient of the highest civilian honour in the culture sector, the insignia of *Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres* (Knight of the Arts and Letters), by the government of France in 2018 for her outstanding commitment to preservation of French Heritage in India.



An alumna of the School of Planning and Architecture New Dehli, she holds Masters Degree in European Urban Conservation with distinction from the University of Dundee, Scotland. She is the recipient of the UNESCO Award for Heritage Conservation in the Asia-pacific Region (Award of Merit: Mahidpur Fort and Honorable Mention for Doon School, Dehradun) in 2016 and the recipient of Commonwealth Professional Fellowship 2011. Her work is largely centered around *shared built heritage*, she had pioneered the Dutch in Chinsurah and Heritage and People of Chandernagore Project.

She is currently the coordinator of the National Scientific Committee on Shared Built Heritage for ICOMOS India and has served as a consultant to UNESCO, Asian Development Bank, World Monuments Fund New York as well as Vieille Maison Française, Paris, Embassy of France in India, Embassy of Kingdom of Netherlands in India. She is also a visiting faculty professor to Department of Urban Design at the School of Planning and Architecture New Delhi and the author of “Vernacular Traditions: Contemporary Architecture”. Aishwarya was a participant in the 2016 edition of the Global Cultural Leadership Programme.

Mr. Jasper Visser



Jasper Visser is an **international consultant, facilitator, and social and cultural innovator**. He helps organizations (re)connect with their audience, develop strategies for the digital age, and facilitates community and cocreation processes, with a focus on the cultural and heritage sectors and social institutions. Jasper is senior partner at the consultancy boutique VISSCH+STAM.

Jasper has a background in educational design and community-driven development. He started his career as an independent consultant and designer of (educational) programmes and projects for organisations such as the World Bank and the UNDP, as well as NGOs and social initiatives. In 2009 Jasper joined the National Museum of History of the Netherlands as project manager new technologies and media.

Recently, Jasper has worked internationally on strategy development and audience engagement projects for a wide range of clients including the European Parliament, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, the National Arts Centre of Canada and Philips.

Jasper developed Cards for Culture and *Wie is de leraar?* (Who's a teacher?) together with Erik Schilp. He codeveloped the Digital Engagement Framework, is a blogger at The Museum of the Future, associated lecturer at the Reinwardt Academy and expert advisor for various projects.

Ms. Belinda Yuen

Dr Belinda Yuen, BA (Hons), MA (Town & Regional Planning), PhD (Environmental Planning), FSIP, MRTPI, MPIA, is a **qualified urban planner**. She is Professorial Fellow and Research Director with the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, Singapore University of Technology and Design where she leads the Lee Li Ming Programme in Ageing Urbanism. Belinda's research focuses on spatial planning and urban policy analysis, most recently on planning liveable, sustainable cities.



She is interested in understanding the interactions between the urban built environment and its social, cultural and environmental dynamics. Belinda has served on various Singapore urban planning committees including as Planning Appeals Inspector, and on numerous international advisory committees and editorial board of international scholarly journals. She has been elected to President, Singapore Institute of Planners (2005-08), and Vice-President, Commonwealth Association of Planners (South-east Asia) (2006-08; 2010-12; 2014-16). She has served as a Juror, Shaikh Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa Habitat Award, 2008-09, and science reviewer of international pluridisciplinary research centre/programmes.

Mr. Walter Zampieri



Walter Zampieri is the Head of Unit for Cultural Policy, DG Education and Culture of the European Commission. Before taking up his current post, he was deputy head of the coordination unit and assistant to the Director General for education and culture; among his previous positions there is also the secretariat of the Social Protection Committee. Before joining the European Commission, Zampieri was Assistant Professor at University of Central Florida and Visiting Professor and Lecturer at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA. He holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from The University of Connecticut and attended University of Padua, Italy.