

Climate impacts and heritage vulnerability

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Firstly, allow me to thank the organisers for inviting me to address this panel today. Following the academic tradition for such events, I will be delivering a paper without slides but will make it available to anyone who wants it.

My name is Dr Will Megarry and I am the ICOMOS Focal Point for Climate Change and also Senior Lecturer in Archaeology at Queen's University in Belfast, Northern Ireland. As such, I am speaking to you today wearing two different hats. The first is my role as climate change (or climate action) Focal Point for ICOMOS, which focuses on promoting climate awareness and action within the heritage sector, and working with the wider ICOMOS community to achieve this. This is the main reason why I am speaking to you all today. My second hat is as an educator. In my 'day job', I teach and supervise undergraduate and graduate students on a wide range of topics from island archaeologies to archaeological practice. While not immediately evident, more and more I find that these two roles connect and this connection is becoming clearer every year as the climate crisis escalates. As both a cultural heritage researcher and an educator, the intersection between climate action and learning is very close to my heart and this is why this event is so important, and why I am so pleased to speak with you all today.

In preparation for today's panel, we were asked to address three broad questions on the topic of climate impacts and heritage vulnerability. **The first of these focused on capacity building** which is a very appropriate place to start. I have never been a huge fan of the term 'capacity building' as it tends to have top-down connotations which are sometimes unhelpful, but I think that it can be used when discussing this subject. My main point would be that while there is a need to build capacities to assess climate impacts and vulnerability, there is very little point in doing this unless they are built on a firm foundation.

The speed at which the climate crisis has escalated has caught most people off guard, and the heritage sector is no exception. We lack basic carbon and climate literacy. This includes a basic understanding of terminology (like global warming, carbon mitigation, and even the terms central to our discussion today - impacts and vulnerability). How many of us here really know where and in what proportions carbon and other greenhouse emissions come from? Can we highlight areas in our own lives or organisations which produce a lot of greenhouse gases, and do we understand the relationship between these and impacts, globally? What about weather events? Can we speak with authority about the difference between these and climatic change? Until we master these basics, we will remain quite limited in building meaningful capacities.

To provide a current (and ongoing example). In my own University in Belfast, starting just this year, we offered carbon literacy training, on an elective basis, to all our first year students. This is accredited by an outside body - The Carbon Literacy Project - and is not focused on any specific discipline. Over 400 students completed this and have their accreditation. Our next challenge is to build more disciplinary specific climate awareness and training into exciting educational programmes. This can be a challenge with many diverse subjects and disciplines where degree programmes are built around accreditation concerns. My own school includes five accredited subjects: archaeology and palaeoecology, geography, architecture, planning and civil engineering, all of which have unique roles to play in responding to the climate emergency. We are now exploring ways to make basic carbon literacy mandatory to incoming first years within the school, and then identifying and embedding disciplinary specific training within existing degree pathways, creating a climate thread which runs from Week 1 in first year through to graduation.

For existing professionals, carbon literacy can and should be a core part of continual professional development and should be part of annual and periodic professional certification requirements. Central to building capacities is creating carbon literate professionals through diverse and inclusive educational pedagogies.

The second topic we were asked to consider can be summarised under **the topic of inclusivity and involvement**. Specifically, it asks what disciplines, stakeholders, rights holders and other voices need to be involved in climate education. This is a key question and the answer is bound to differ depending on who and what is being taught. Rather than getting bogged down in these details and who we should include, I will use this topic as a means to explore the existing climate science platform and who has not been included,

often to the detriment of the planet. As educators, we believe in the transformative power of knowledge and hold important and privileged roles within society. As Cardinal John Newman wrote, '*A university training is the great ordinary means to a great but ordinary end; it aims at raising the intellectual tone of society*'. Yet I fear that we have become quite blinkered in our teaching and research, elevating ourselves above the ordinary and failing to raise the tone of society. We have limited our worldviews to the overly quantitative and failed to acknowledge the plurality of values and knowledge systems present within our own societies and globally. This is very clear in climate science. Recent research has shown a huge discrepancy in understanding climate impacts and responses. This is caused by many factors, some of which are simple - like an over reliance on anglophone research or research published in 'high-impact' journals - while others are more complex, like the systemic inequalities and multi-generational impact of colonialism in the global south. Climate change is a predominantly western, cultural phenomenon yet its impacts are disproportionately felt by communities in these places and indigenous cultures in particular. I would propose that this discrepancy lies at the heart of the global failure to address climate change as we are trying to fix a complex problem without using all the necessary tools. We need a more inclusive educational pedagogy which understands and respects a plurality of knowledge systems and is built on consensual knowledge exchange rather than just knowledge transfer. As Kyle Whyte from the University of Michigan has noted, reflecting the position of many Indigenous Peoples, we cannot solve the problem using the same tools which have caused it

The final topic I would like to address is about **examples, formats for teaching and resources available to support heritage education**. I have already referred to some of these. Basic carbon literacy training resources exist and there is no need to 'reinvent the wheel'. For those interested, I would strongly suggest looking up the Carbon Literacy Project, although I am sure similar organisations exist this side of the Atlantic. Increasingly, climate responses must and will become part of professional accreditation requirements for many disciplines but as Universities, I feel like it is our duty to lead on this rather than just responding to it. ICOMOS is currently producing toolkits exploring different themes and one of our primary aims for the next few years is a website which brings these, and other resources together.

It is an overused maxim that learning should be about '*transforming information into knowledge*'. Climate change is not an abstract or theoretical concept. It is an urgent and real challenge impacting almost all aspects of our lives and universities and professional

bodies must imbed this reality into their educational pedagogies. For example, it is unlikely that traditional assessment methods like exams or even essays will be effective in promoting real change. Projects, reports, media and web-based assessments like stroymaps or blogs may be more effective.

I firmly believe that our response needs to be multipronged, reflective and diverse. We do not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater, abandoning decades of amazing climate science which has allowed us to understand the crisis and develop response strategies. But we do need to be more inclusive and take a truly multi-disciplinary approach which respects plural knowledge systems and engages with all stakeholders in an inclusive and respectful way. Climate change is a cultural and human issue and culture and humanity lies at the heart of our response.

Thank you very much.

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