

Museums as key sites to accelerate climate change education, action, research and partnerships

Non-party stakeholder submission to the Talanoa Dialogue from the 'International Symposium on Climate Change and Museums', Manchester (UK), April 2018

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At a glance

Museums represent key sites for climate change education, engagement, action and research. There are over 55,000 museums worldwide. They represent an existing infrastructure. Many museums are already connecting their work with climate change education, research and management. Museums are increasingly working together and with others to accelerate climate education and action. With greater networking, visibility, collaboration and co-ordination, they could contribute very meaningfully to multistakeholder partnerships, dialogue, and action. Many museums, museum workers, networks and partners are keen to collaborate to accelerate climate education, actions, research and partnerships.

About this submission

This submission is based on discussions at the 'International Symposium on Climate Change and Museums', held at the University of Manchester (UK), April 2018. Participants were an informal, open coalition of museums, museum workers, researchers, and representatives from related agencies (including UNFCCC and IPCC). The conference used the Talanoa process and spirit as a basis for presentations and discussions. We (references to 'we' throughout this submission relates to conference attendees and, where relevant, the networks they represent) explored the three Talanoa questions in workshops at the conference. This submission is based on those discussions, with additions based on further developments (e.g. museums' involvement at SB48 in Bonn in May 2018).

Background

Museums offer an existing global infrastructure, with over 55,000 museums worldwide, reaching many millions of people each year. They are intimately connected to local communities, networks and other sectors, including other cultural institutions, government, businesses, research organisations and NGOs; many have international connections. They present multiple opportunities to meet the climate challenge. They are uniquely placed to facilitate collective action by building networks, raising public awareness, and supporting research and knowledge creation. They can enhance sustainability and climate change education and resilience, working with and empowering communities to bring about change to ensure an equitable, habitable planet for the long term.

Where are we?

Currently,

- Museums enjoy a high level of public trust: higher in many cases (countries) than government, business, advertising or mass media. This trust can be put to good use to help people critically interrogate information on climate change they are presented in mass media or so-called fake news.
- Museums can provide arenas for dialogue around climate change. They provide opportunities for people to come together and explore alternatives beyond their daily lives and experience, and to gain perspectives on other people, communities, places and sectors.
- Museums can help people understand and explore the importance and impacts of climate change in a very wide range of heritage forms and sites– cultural, natural, in situ, ex situ.
- Museums are extremely diverse in terms of their size and collections, presenting great potential for a rich exploration of a wide range of social and environmental impacts of climate change.
- Museums have great freedom, and great ability to work with a very diverse set of stakeholders, connecting e.g. high-level policy work with people as individuals. They are able to work with e.g. UNFCCC, IPCC, and also with people as individuals and communities. Arguably, museums are able to bridge such differences more easily than any other kind of organisation.
- Collections document the natural environment, enabling researchers to understand, manage and mitigate impacts of climate change.
- Many museums and museum workers are interested in connecting with climate action, but are in need of support to build knowledge, confidence and networks.
- There are some excellent, and growing, networks of museums interested in contributing to the climate challenge.
- Museums are key sites for formal and informal education on a wide range of topics, including Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine, citizenship, Traditional and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge, arts, sciences, humanities, craft, military history and many more topics.
- Many museums have large environmental impacts themselves in the ways they run their buildings or in their operations.
- Museums have a key role in addressing a number of key policies and strategies, including Article 12 of the Paris Agreement (Action for Climate Empowerment), and a number of Sustainable Development Goal targets, notably:
 - 4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.
 - 11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.
 - 12.8 By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.
 - 13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries.
 - 13.2 Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning.

- 13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.
- 17.16 Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries

Progress made in terms of ‘where are we?’

- Increasing numbers of museums feature climate change in their activities (exhibitions, events, research on collections) and decision-making (see <https://mccnetwork.org/exhibitions/>)
- Museums’ work around climate change and sustainability is often not very obvious to the public or other sectors. Those active in this area want to talk more effectively about what has been, can be and will be done.
- Museums have come a long way even since the signing of the Paris Agreement and the establishment of the SDGs, and there is a long way to go yet.
- A growing number of networks are strengthening museums’ contributions towards climate change education and action, for example:
 - The Coalition of Museums for Climate Justice has nearly 900 members and participants. It mobilises and supports Canadian museum workers and their organizations in building public awareness, mitigation and resilience in the face of climate change.
 - ‘We Are Still In’ is the largest coalition, worldwide, of subnational supporters of the Paris Agreement. The US-based voluntary association has a growing Cultural Institutions sector that engages museums and museum associations in support of UNSDGs.
 - The Museums and Climate Change Network is an international community of interest, with 50 members.
- There are a large number of local and national networks and communities of interest that are working to support museums’ contribution towards a sustainable future.
- Museums have presented at UNFCCC Dialogues on Action for Climate Empowerment (2017) and at a one-day workshop to advance ACE in May 2018. Museums have been formally recognised by UNFCCC as key actors in climate education and empowerment (see <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/I03a2.pdf>). Collaboration with UNFCCC has been very constructive.
- International networks of science museums have acknowledged the part that they have to play in advancing climate action and the wider sustainability agenda, through, for example, the development of the Tokyo Protocol, which was formally launched at the Science Centre World Summit, in Tokyo in November 2017. The Summit was entitled ‘Connecting the World for a Sustainable Future’. The Tokyo Protocol (https://scws2017.org/tokyo_protocol/) is ‘on the role of science centres and science museums worldwide in support of the UN Sustainable Development Goals’. The Protocol acknowledged that nearly 3,000 science centres and museums influence over 310 million visitors each year, worldwide. The Protocol has yet to be adopted widely or consistently.
- The International Committee for Museums and Collections of Natural History (a standing committee of the International Council of Museums), with 400 individual and institutional members, has a working group exploring how museums with natural history collections can explore the concept of

the Anthropocene “to stimulate a vital conversation of how museums, as unique resources in a civil society, can best champion a cause of unprecedented urgency – namely, the future of Planet Earth and all of its life.”

- Existing collections will need to be developed in order to enable specialists to use them to explore a changing natural environment.

Quantitative impact in terms of ‘where are we?’

In terms of the wider museums sector and climate change:

- Museums and museum networks have participated in two UNFCCC events and the Global Action Summit 2018.
- Recognition of the key role museums have to play was recognised in 2018 by UNFCCC, and will be incorporated into Article 12, Action for Climate Empowerment.
- At least three networks for museums working with climate change have been established (Canada, US and international).
- At least four conferences recently organised to support museums connect with climate change (Workshop on the Anthropocene (Pittsburgh), Climate Change Communication and Climate Change in Museums in Manchester, Science Centre World Summit in Tokyo).
- The Coalition of Museums for Climate Justice has organized and delivered special climate change sessions at six provincial and national museum conferences, as well as developed a peer learning circle among museum educators.
- In the US, 26 museums are signatories to the ‘We Are Still In’ initiative
- Environmental reporting has been incorporated into museums’ funding requirements in a number of countries (including the UK, Japan and Australia).
- Museums dedicated to climate change have been developed in Hong Kong (Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change, 2013), Bremerhaven (Germany, Klimahaus 8° Ost 2013), Low carbon science and Technology Museum in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, and another is due to open in Oslo (Klimahuset, opens 2019). Other museums dedicated to wider sustainability issues include the award-winning Museo de Amanã (Museum of Tomorrow) in Rio de Janeiro (2015). Many other museums worldwide support an understanding of the impacts and importance of climate change; for example, in China, large energy enterprises have their own museums, to popularize energy and environmental protection knowledge, and new museums are being developed in industrialised provinces.
- The Climate Museum (founded in 2015) is preparing to launch a museum in New York, and has held exhibitions. A mobile museum dedicated to climate change (ClimateMuseumUK) was launched in the UK in 2018.
- Many museum have staged exhibitions dedicated to climate change, and many more have staged exhibitions that connect with climate change in more or less overt ways (see <https://mccnetwork.org/exhibitions/>)
- Museums who are connecting their work with climate change are currently engaging millions of people with the subject worldwide. Many more are already engaging millions with climate change information and action in some form more without even realizing it.
- At least six books have been published to help museum workers connect with climate change.
- Julie’s Bicycle’s ‘Creative Climate Leadership’ course has supported 50 cultural leaders (36 UK, 24 elsewhere) working with climate change in some way.

Where do we want to go?

The world needs museums that provide cultural frameworks to identify and challenge the myths and misperceptions that threaten all of us. Public dialogue and participation in imagining and creating positive futures is much needed, as are effective multistakeholder partnerships. Museums are also essential research resources for the understanding, appreciation and conservation of cultural and biological diversity, in a rapidly changing world.

Our vision is of a near future where museums are contributing as constructively and effectively as possible to meeting the many challenges posed by climate change, and wider sustainability issues. We recognise that we have a unique part to play, drawing on collections and working with people as individuals, groups and communities, and that only by working openly and with others will we be able to succeed. We also recognise that we have a responsibility to do so. We want to support one another, other museums and other sectors, to support the achievement of this vision.

In this near future,

- Museums provide visitors and other users with the support that they want and require to make the positive changes that they want to make, supporting constructive thinking, feeling and doing.
- Museum match challenge with support.
- Museums are not 'only' providers of expert opinion, but facilitators, catalysts and platforms.
- Conversations and partnerships happen at all levels, locally, nationally and internationally.
- Museums are part of a resilient network of institutions and organisations that support people's ongoing understanding and appreciation of the past, present and future in the context of a rapidly changing world.
- The museum sector speaks with both one voice, and many voices
- Museums support the transition towards green energy sources and sustainable society.
- Communities and societies recognise museums' role in facilitating and supporting a fair and equitable society.

How do we get there?

To begin to achieve this vision, we commit to:

AMBITION

- Focus where possible on leading around climate change and sustainability, rather than reacting.
- Work with high aspiration and awareness.
- Consider the positive and negative impacts of our activities, reducing unnecessary negative impacts where possible.

INCLUSION, DIVERSITY AND COLLABORATION

- Be part of a global story of partners, individuals and communities, exploring pasts, presents and futures.
- Become a global network of co-ordinated collaborators, supporting relevant international events (e.g. World Environment Day), and collaborating on a global Climate Conversations Day.

- Join and strengthen cross-sector alliances that can scale-up change, working for common purpose with UNFCCC, IPCC and many others, locally and globally.
- Place less emphasis on polished finished products, and more emphasis on using museums to facilitate constructive change as a work in progress.
- Support one another, and others in museums and other sectors, as we work towards the goal of meeting the climate challenge.
- Invite others to join us.
- Be listeners and facilitators rather than solely providers of information.
- Work in interdisciplinary ways wherever possible.

CARE AND ATTENTION: CONNECTING WITH THE BIG PICTURE, AND THE PERSONAL

- Considering our work in terms of the Sustainable Development Goals, and promoting an understanding of the goals locally and globally.
- Participate in and support holistic, connected thinking.
- Supporting wellbeing of individuals, communities and the environment.

IMAGINATION

- Doing things that work, trying things out, expanding our own and others' range of possibilities: not just doing things as they have been done before.
- Work with imagination to explore pasts, presents and possible futures, locally and globally.

FOCUS ON RESULTS

- Work to raise visitors' and other users' awareness of local and global issues and their links to their everyday lives and experiences, focussing on solutions rather than problems, and promoting empathy for those with little or no voice.
- Recognise that information alone does not necessarily inspire or achieve action. We will pay attention to the needs of visitors, researchers and other users, and provide them with the support, information, encouragement and sign-posting that they need to make and take positive steps.
- Recognise that museums evoke awe and wonder, feelings have been found to be particularly important in connecting information with action. Inspiration is the feeling that moves us to action.
- Working to reduce our own emissions where possible.

SELF-DEVELOPMENT

- Draw on, and develop, our resources – people, collections, facilities – to understand and address the many challenges posed by climate change.
- Draw on latest research, in science, social sciences and more, and support others to do the same.

Collaboration models to support the achievement of this vision

- Working with UNFCCC in 2017 and 2018 has been extremely positive, and has helped lead to the recognition of the role of museums in Article 12 of the Paris Agreement. This is a foundation that we want to build on.
- Open models of collaboration through peer-support and online platforms has been extremely supportive.
- The learning outcomes for Education for Sustainable Development developed by UNESCO and UNFCCC are a useful template for museums to use, as are the SDGs.

- Many museums, museum workers and museum networks wish to work with other sectors and agencies (e.g. IPCC, UNFCCC, other relevant UN agencies, as well as more local partners) to support work that aligns with the above vision, and to promote their work for mutual, collective and public benefit.
- Securing funding through, e.g. Global Challenges Research Fund, connecting with research grant-holders whose work connects with climate change and wider sustainability, creating opportunities through funding schemes based on academic–non-academic collaboration, and securing funding for networks rather than individual organisations, will help this work.
- An initiative, ‘Museum partnerships for future earth’, has been registered on the UN SDG online platform. This is available to promote the work of museums and related networks.
- Greater connection and online platforms to simply demonstrate existing collective impacts of museums, with opportunities for new partners to join in, would be very supportive.

Through these actions:

- More, and more kinds of, people will be engaged with the sustainable development agenda constructively.
- More, and more kinds of, people will have had the opportunity to connect with, and in some cases influence, policies and strategies that will impact on their lives, imagining, constructing and designing the future that they want.
- Community cohesion and social inclusion will have been supported, by addressing both immediate, local challenges presented by climate change, and by connecting local and global dimensions.
- Researchers will be able to use material culture to support the understanding and management of cultural and natural heritage in an ongoing way.
- New solutions will be stronger and longer-lasting because they embrace collective, interdisciplinary and synergistic design.
- Multilevel partnerships will have created new, unforeseen opportunities to support the move towards a more sustainable future.
- Society, the natural environment, and museums themselves will be more resilient and resistant to shocks.
- Public funding will have been used to support the public good.
- Museums will be able to say in 2030 that they did what they could in support of the Sustainable Development Goals and Paris Agreement.
- Museums will be more relevant, more trusted and more effective.

Key links:

Association of Science and Technology Centres

<http://www.astc.org/professional-development/science-center-networks/>

Coalition of Museums for Climate Justice

<https://coalitionofmuseumsforclimatejustice.wordpress.com>

Museums and Climate Change Network

<https://mccnetwork.org>

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