



# Heritage, Climate Justice and Equity

## What is the problem?



Rice Terraces, Old Kiyangan Village, Ifugao. Photo by John Peterson

**T**he subject of climate justice and equity brings together a range of topics relating to human and cultural rights. Specifically, it refers to the **unfair or unequal distribution of climate change impacts and responses**. These usually affect the poor and vulnerable who are experiencing greater social and economic disadvantage and an erosion and marginalisation of their individual and collective human and cultural rights. These experiences can be further exacerbated by oppression, discrimination, racism, sexism, homophobia and xenophobia. The promotion of equity involves acknowledging how these inequalities operate in practice and working to address them. More specifically, it requires us to acknowledge that:

- While climate change has been caused by wealthier high income countries, its impacts are most acutely felt by those in poorer low and middle income countries. This is particularly the case for indigenous cultures, traditional rural and coastal communities.
- These impacts span the intangible and tangible cultural heritage of these countries and communities, which are disproportionately vulnerable to climate change hazards. In most cases, they also have less resources to adapt to these impacts.
- The global response, including climate finance, to this loss and damage is often based on an incomplete understanding of the scale of impacts. This extends to cultural and heritage inventories in many countries.
- Existing practices and power structures in both climate science and heritage practice have further exacerbated these inequalities, marginalising communities and cultures at the coalface of climate change. Their voices are not heard and their experiences are often ignored. The over reliance on scientific approaches and research above other knowledge systems, living heritages and lived experience has further perpetuated existing inequalities while simultaneously undermining the considerable contribution culture can make to climate action.

# Why does it matter?



The Gereza Fort at the Ruins of Kilwa Kisiwani and Ruins of Songo Mnara World Heritage Property. Photo by William Megarry

**E**ngagement with climate justice matters as it is about protecting and safeguarding individuals and communities' human and cultural rights. As ICOMOS members engaged in the safeguarding of heritage, we have a responsibility to ensure how we operate is **both fair and equitable**. We should and must demonstrate sensitivity and commitment to protecting human rights in all our activities by making links between the rights of people and a human-centred development approach aimed at the protection of the basic rights of the most vulnerable groups and the sharing of both the burdens and benefits of climate change. As part of this, we should and must actively enable communities to be in charge of defining, implementing and contributing as an equal partner to climate actions which protect their own interests, livelihoods, economies, cultural heritage, and rights.

Attention to climate justice matters as it is also good for **heritage practice**. Respecting and valuing local and indigenous knowledge systems for example will require the framing of new approaches and the development of new tools and methodologies which centre different world views and other ways of knowing in an honest, transparent and consensual manner. This may require a fundamental rethink of historic and current power dynamics and control to promote inclusive and bottom-up approaches which respect all knowledge systems and have the trust and informed consent of affected communities. This will result in both better heritage practice and also more effective climate action.



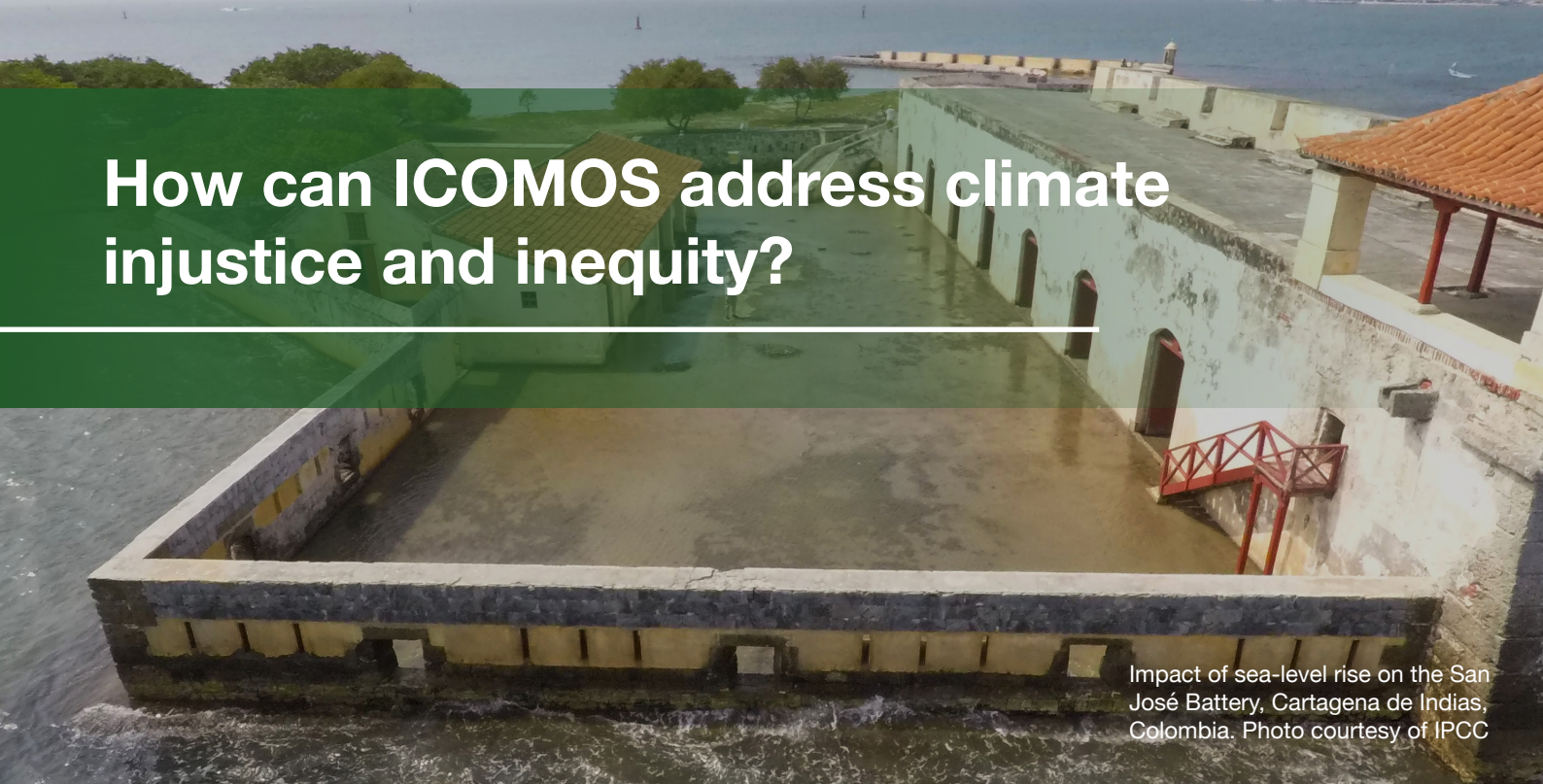
## Case Study: The Climate Heritage Network and the Madrid to Glasgow Action Plan

The goal of this action plan was to produce tools to help eliminate barriers to engagement in climate action by cultural actors and this resource library collects the tools that were produced under the action plan. It fits within the concept of Climate-Resilient Development Pathways (CRDPs), which attempt to address the climate emergency in a way which acknowledges the complex intersection between sustainable development and climate action. It is meant to be of use both to culture advocates and climate advocates looking to advance sustainable development, eradicate poverty and reducing inequality in a warming world, and contains over 33 case studies including many from ICOMOS members.

For more information: [The Role of Culture in Climate Resilient Development: Strategies for Strengthening Sustainable Development While Promoting Transformative Climate Action Report \(with case studies\)](#)

**The Role of Culture in Climate Resilient Development: Strategies for Strengthening Sustainable Development While Promoting Transformative Climate Action**

# How can ICOMOS address climate injustice and inequity?



Impact of sea-level rise on the San José Battery, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. Photo courtesy of IPCC

ICOMOS must adopt an inclusive and ethical approach to climate action which should treat people justly (**justice**). It should also be fair, sharing the burden and responsibility, including its costs and benefits across society (**equity**).

ICOMOS has been at the forefront of climate action within the heritage sector and its efforts. We have repeatedly emphasised the importance of climate justice and equity. This resource is an extension of our work to date and focuses exclusively on issues of human and cultural rights. Specific previous actions include:

- [ICOMOS Resolution 20GA/15 declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency](#) and called for the the ICOMOS community to implement heritage responses to climate change that, *'recognise equity and justice as fundamental to understanding and addressing the challenges of climate change, including through solidarity with Indigenous Peoples and vulnerable and frontline communities; participatory climate governance; and gender-responsive, human rights and rights-based approaches.'*
- [ICOMOS Resolution 20GA/19](#) declares that People-Centred Approaches to Cultural Heritage are to be promoted so that the diverse cultural, environmental, and socio-economic concerns of people and communities are taken into account when local, national and international heritage policies and practices are developed. Specifically, it encourages the ICOMOS community to, *'Promote people-centred approaches, the connections of people with heritage and places; intercultural dialogue and understanding, sustainability and well-being when addressing local, national, and international heritage policies and practice. This will better realise the full potential of cultural heritage to deliver climate-resilient pathways to strengthen sustainable development, while promoting a just transition to low-carbon futures.'*
- The [ICOMOS Future of our Pasts](#) report notes that, *'Climate Justice links Human Rights and development to achieve a human-centred approach to climate action, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable; taking into account the needs of those at greatest Risk, particularly the poorest and the most vulnerable; and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and their resolution in an equitable and just manner.'*
- The ICOMOS Advisory Committee and the Scientific Council 2021 unanimously resolved to adopt the [Triennial Scientific Plan 2021-2024 Cultural Heritage and Climate Action](#), recognising the engagement of all ICOMOS national and scientific committees and Working Groups to actively support the Climate Action Working Group in its implementation, through a resource portal and capacity building plan. This is the first time ICOMOS has harnessed the energies and commitment of all 10,000+ members on a single issue: climate change action.



# United Nations Human Rights

## CULTURAL RIGHTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS BY THE  
SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR IN THE FIELD OF  
CULTURAL RIGHTS, KARIMA BENNOUNE

**Case Study:** ICOMOS Climate Change Working Group Contribution UN Special Report on Cultural Rights and Climate Change.

In 2020, the ICOMOS Climate Change working Group, in close cooperation with several other ICOMOS working groups, made contributions to the UN Special Report on Cultural Rights and Climate Change. This noted that, *‘Culture is closely connected to ecosystems, especially for indigenous peoples, rural and “traditional” populations. Both cultures and the environment are often place-based... Concern for the welfare of future generations is already explicitly environmental; it should also be cultural’* (Article 18). It also called on organisational like ICOMOS to *‘Adopt a human rights-based global action plan to save the cultures of humanity and protect cultural rights from the climate emergency’* (Article 81)

For more information: [See the ICOMOS Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights on Cultural Rights and Climate Change](#)

**Case Study:** The ICOMOS Sustainable Development Working Group (SDGWG) and the Integration of Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Action at World Heritage Sites

In 2021, working together with the US/ICOMOS IEP, the SDGWG responded to the call of ICOMOS for the Climate and Ecological Emergency by developing the pilot phase research entitled, *“Integration of Climate Action and the Sustainable Development Goals in World Heritage Sites.”* The research recognised that climate change is among the most substantial threats the globe faces, which will affect every aspect of human life and have significant impacts on the implementation and outcome of all the SDGs.

The research seeks to develop best-practice guidelines that could be used at the site and others to examine how climate action and the SDGs are being implemented at World Heritage Sites. A pilot phase has examined four World Heritage Sites in Canada, France, Australia and Peru and how they integrated both the SDGs and climate action. Management plans were reviewed and key stakeholder interviews were undertaken This research is continuing with a focus on Asian or African case studies of World Heritage Properties.

For more information: [Heritage and the Sustainable Development Goals: Policy Guidance for Heritage and Development Actors](#)

### HERITAGE AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: POLICY GUIDANCE FOR HERITAGE AND DEVELOPMENT ACTORS



**Case Study:** ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee and the International Charter for Cultural Sustainable Heritage Tourism (2021)

Participation in cultural life with access to cultural heritage is a human right. However, some evolved aspects of tourism have constituted fundamentally unsustainable uses of planetary resources, including cultural and natural heritage. This calls for a charter that advocates responsible and diversified cultural tourism development and management contributing to cultural heritage preservation; community empowerment, social resilience and wellbeing; and a healthy global environment. Amongst other things, the Charter stresses the crucial role of capacity development, risk assessment, strategic planning and adaptive management. This emphasizes a shift of the ICOMOS doctrine from sustainable development to a wider consideration of people’s wellbeing as a priority which cultural heritage protection and enjoyment can help to achieve.

The charter also stresses that strategies must consider traditional ownership, knowledge and practices. Communication, information, heritage interpretation, education and training must increase the awareness about the climate emergency and its consequences for natural and cultural heritage, especially where communities and destinations are at risk. The presentation and interpretation of heritage places open to the public must also contribute to these tasks including messages about climate impacts on preservation and the environment. This invites the consideration of innovative technologies that can be used for these purposes.

Finally, the Charter sustains that all cultural tourism stakeholders must take action to mitigate, reduce and manage climate impacts. Actions should enhance the ability of communities to generate, retain and maintain sustainable benefits from cultural tourism. At the same time, tourism activities must minimize their greenhouse gas emissions.

For more information: [The ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee Homepage](#)

# What can we do now?



Fish Pond on the Big Island of Hawaii. Photo by Akifumi Iwabuchi

**A**ttention to climate justice and equity can include both individual and collective actions. These might include:

## 1 Focusing on issues of inclusivity and maximising collaborative efforts when organising projects, meetings and events.

### Why is this a climate justice issue?

Research and projects on climate change are predominantly funded and led by agencies and researchers in high income countries. This has created a long-standing division between those doing climate science and those experiencing the most acute impacts of climate change. Globally, frontline communities are often marginalised from wider discussions and debates and this is particularly the case for indigenous communities. Inclusive, bottom-up and people-centred approaches to organising events create real and meaningful relationships and ensure that all voices are heard.

### How do I do this?

- Work with local communities to co-organise events.
- Partner with National Committees from other countries to organise an event emphasising the importance of listening and knowledge sharing.
- Ensure that events are as inclusive and accessible as possible. This might include hybrid events with in-person and online attendance.
- Explore the motivations behind projects which work with marginalised groups or communities, with a particular focus on timeframes and benefits.

# What can we do now?

## 2

### Reducing your personal carbon emissions through individual and collective action.

#### Why is this a climate justice issue?

1% of the world's population produces more than half of the world's carbon emissions. This is both unfair and inequitable and is incompatible with sustainable development. Carbon mitigation is the only long-term way to protect cultural heritage and is central to climate equity. As individuals and as an organisation we must take both personal and institutional responsibility and action to reduce the amount of carbon we produce.

#### How do I do this?

- Calculate your individual carbon footprint and identify ways to reduce it. Set a target and repeat this process annually.
- Encourage all members of your National, International Scientific Committee and/or Working Group to calculate their individual carbon footprints. Compare these carbon footprint with global average CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per capita. Think about ways to reduce this annually as a national or international scientific committee and TAKE ANNUAL ACTION.
- As a last step, identify ways of offsetting unavoidable carbon emissions. Committees and members should offset their carbon footprints from ICOMOS meetings and other activities. To address Climate Justice funds could go towards localising work programmes or activities focused on equity and adjusting historic legacies to the benefit of the most affected and vulnerable communities.



**Tools for Action:** The AdCom Sustainability and Communications Task Force (SCTF) (Climate Action Toolkit)

Having declared a Climate Emergency in 2020, ICOMOS also aims to better manage its own organisational sustainability and communications, and aspires to be a net zero carbon organisation by 2030. To support this vision, an AdCom Task Force is preparing a framework of Tools empowering ICOMOS members to be at the forefront of climate action while ensuring inclusiveness and diversity-organisationally and personally. These include a Responsible Meetings & Events Checklist (A-C below) and a Carbon Calculator tool - see links below:

A: Online meeting - How to organize inclusive online meetings

B: Hybrid meetings - How to organize inclusive hybrid meetings with minimal carbon footprint

C: How to organize a physical meeting with minimal carbon footprint

For more information on specific tools: 1) [The \(SCTF\) Carbon Calculator Tool](#), and 2) [The Responsible Meeting and Events Checklist](#)

# What can we do now?

## 3

### Ensure that all ICOMOS work is viewed and undertaken through Rights-Based-Approaches.

#### Why is this a climate justice issue?

Climate Change is already impacting communities, culture and cultural rights globally. Disadvantaged and vulnerable populations, some indigenous peoples, and local communities dependent on agricultural or coastal livelihoods are disproportionately at risk. Cultural heritage places are living landscapes. They allow people to participate in and contribute to cultural life and are an expression of their cultural identity. Often, they are also the sole source of work or food for communities and are therefore essential to their survival. When such places are at risk, the existence of associated communities is threatened. On the other hand, resilience and creativity embedded in the culture and heritage of local communities gives all of society hope for the future. Arts, culture and heritage are sources of creativity and inspiration that can help influence the acceptability of policy or system change. Local knowledge and heritage communities support contemporary mitigation options, from low-carbon, locally adapted approaches to decarbonizing buildings and cultural landscapes, through pointing the way to low-carbon settlement patterns for developing peri-urban areas, to the role of indigenous science in climate-smart agriculture.

#### How do I do this?

- Promote rights-based and people-centred approaches in heritage management; the connections of people with heritage and places; and intercultural dialogue and understanding, sustainability and well-being when addressing local, national, and international heritage policies and practice. This will better realise the full potential of cultural heritage to deliver climate-resilient pathways to strengthen sustainable development, while promoting a just transition to low-carbon futures.
- In your daily ICOMOS work, make continuous efforts to implement rights-based perspectives that ensure the rights of individuals and groups to enjoy their own culture, places and monuments. Embrace the principle of free, prior and informed consent of source communities, before adopting measures concerning their specific cultural heritage and offer all possible assistance so that communities and right holders are consulted and invited to actively participate in the whole process of identification, selection, classification, interpretation, preservation and safeguarding, as well as the stewardship and development of cultural heritage.
- Take cultural rights and cultural impacts into consideration in responding to all aspects of climate change and in climate action. Prioritise the need for an especially urgent, effective and concerted global effort to prevent the cultural extinction of heritage and related communities facing particular threats from the climate emergency, such as those in polar and coastal regions, including indigenous peoples and those living in Small Island States heritage.



# What can we do now?

## Case Study: ICOMOS Our Common Dignity Initiative - Rights Based Approach (OCD - RBA), chaired by ICOMOS Estonia Webinar on Coastal Heritage Communities and Climate

The Heritage Thursdays webinar was organised by OCDI - RBA in cooperation with partners focused on coastal heritage, communities and climate change to get a deeper understanding of the variety of issues heritage is tackling in face of rapid climate change via very concrete coastal communities perspectives, their knowledge, practices and livelihoods. The webinar concentrated on holistic approaches to coastal heritage – tangible and intangible, movable and immovable heritage, landscapes and spaces, land and water. The webinar series has been dedicated to the ICOMOS Resolution on People-Centred Approaches to Heritage and the webinar resonates with the voices of heritage communities of European coasts.

The webinar included stories about and from communities in Bryggen, a sinking harbour site, the preservation of the traditional environment in Finno-Ugric context, and climate resilience embedded in traditional coastal architecture and crafts in the Arctic Circle.

For more information: [The ICOMOS “Our Common Dignity Initiative” - Rights-based Approaches homepage](#)

Heritage Thursdays  
Jueves de patrimonio  
Les Jueidis du patrimoine



## Coastal heritage, communities and climate

THURSDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2021 | 12:00-14:00 CET

Chair and introduction: Aivi Pius  
«Coasts of the Baltic Sea»

Daire MacDermott  
«Symposium 'Living Heritage and Climate Change' and a coastal village in Ireland»

Nils Ahlberg  
«Water Heritage – a Vital Concern for Everyone»


Bente Mathisen  
«Bryggen, a sinking harbor site»

Dimitri Haralab-Zaltsav  
«Iriglians and Velians: new historical stage»

Arminia Bekke  
«North of the Arctic Circle - Climate resilience embedded in traditional coastal architecture and crafts»

Nicole Franceschini & Francesco Marchese  
«Panorama and coastal heritage»

Register to join us on ZOOM @ icomos.org  
FACEBOOK LIVE: <https://facebook.com/OurCommonDignity>

ICOMOS    [@OurCommonDignity #HeritageThursdays #ICOMOS](#)



## Case Study: ICOMOS UK and Promoting Cultural Heritage as a key driver for local Climate Action

ICOMOS-UK wished to create a national response for a global crisis focusing on the role of communities in research, policy making and the development and implementation of climate actions. Including and hearing from communities, who have often been at the periphery of research, policy and strategies was central to this. For example, the loss of villages, local shops, farms and animals and urban spaces in the UK and in neighbouring countries are leaving some communities devastated, helpless and struggling to regain their normality.

This workshop engaged with a wide range of stakeholders including community and civil society groups to explored ways to bring communities into the heart of the politically and agencies led deliberations and actions, and how cultural heritage might drive this process. Key themes included equity and hearing from a range of voices, the need to simplify language to improve collaboration and what ethical considerations associated with climate change need to be factored into conservation practices?

For more information: [The ICOMOS UK Homepage](#)



Global climate change demonstration in Nürnberg, Germany. Photo by Markus Spiske

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