

FINAL (August 2019)
CLIMATE HERITAGE NETWORK
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)

I. Background

A. Climate change is one of the most significant and fastest growing threats to people and their cultural heritage worldwide. Scientific evidence shows unequivocally that increasing concentrations of Greenhouse Gases (GHGs), driven by human activities such as burning of fossil fuels and deforestation, are accelerating climate change and its impacts, including sea level rise and coastal flooding, drought and extreme heat, and increased frequency and intensity of severe weather events.

B. Human activities have already warmed the planet about 1°C (1.8°F) since the pre-industrial era. The resulting impacts are currently displacing populations and damaging infrastructure, ecosystems, and social systems – including cultural heritage – that provide essential benefits and quality of life to communities, necessitating urgent efforts to reduce disaster risk, strengthen resilience and enhance adaptive capacity.

C. The recent IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C establishes that every additional increment of warming is of consequence. While 1.5°C of global warming will severely damage our natural and cultural heritage, the impacts of 2°C warming will be significantly worse. In order to limit global warming to 1.5°C, global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) would need to fall by about 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching ‘net zero’ around 2050. This would require ‘rapid and far-reaching’ transitions in land use, energy, industry, buildings, transport, and cities, the IPCC authors found.

D. The 2015 Paris Agreement represents a global consensus on how to combat climate change and accelerate climate response. Arts, culture and heritage offer an immense and virtually untapped potential to drive climate action and support a just and equitable transition by communities towards low carbon, climate resilient development pathways. There are significant cultural dimensions to every aspect of climate action covered by the Paris Agreement, including heightening ambition to address climate change, mitigating climate change by reducing GHG emissions, enhancing adaptive capacity to moderate the harm of climate impacts and, where losses and damages are inevitable, helping communities plan for them.

E. This Paris Agreement’s decarbonization imperative exists alongside the global aspiration for sustainable development embodied in the 17 U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs embrace the reality that we live in a world of complex, interdependent systems and acknowledges the role of cultural heritage in the resiliency of these systems (e.g. SDG 11.4). Realizing this potential in the era of climate change requires further elaborating the role of arts, culture and heritage in delivering climate-resilient development pathways that also strengthen sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities.

F. Cultural heritage is a composite of human experience. It is a source of creativity and inspiration for action. It connects people to place, anchors identity and community and embodies our understanding of change through time in ways that make it uniquely suited to communicate climate impacts and stress urgency. Evidence of past adaptation to climate and landscape change, from agriculture and land-use to the use of material culture, together with the diversity of living cultures today, form an essential basis for understanding how the environment has been shaped by people. Identifying the consequences of this for past and present communities is important not only for explaining and communicating the changes and challenges we face but also in adapting to them.

G. Arts, culture and heritage-based climate change responses and solutions support sustainable development and circular economy approaches (i.e. approaches aimed at minimising waste and making the most of resources) that create jobs, economic opportunities and community benefits. “Win-win” strategies strengthen climate action while safeguarding and promoting the culture and heritage of communities.

H. The cultural values carried by the planet’s land and seascapes are closely interlinked with its natural values (and affiliated bio-cultural practices). Integrated nature-culture approaches can advance sustainability objectives including responses to climate change and biodiversity loss by improving conservation outcomes, fostering bio- and cultural diversity, and supporting the well-being of contemporary societies and future generations.

I. The IPCC Special Report makes clear that the built environment, including the building and construction supply chain, must decarbonise. Studies indicate that global energy-related emissions from building operations are responsible for approximately 28% of energy-related carbon emissions, with a further 11% incurred through the materials and construction process. The relevance of the heritage sector in this area varies by region and includes: (1) The GhG emissions associated with the historic built environment. While the contribution of the historic built environment to building sector GhG emissions differs by region, in many areas it is considerable. As a result, developing policies and strategies to pursue deep cuts in emissions as well as gains in energy efficiency across the historic built environment is critical. At the same time, interventions must ensure traditional climate-friendly features remain intact, and don’t compromise the building’s longevity and resiliency; (2) the ‘avoided’ or ‘embodied’ carbon associated with historic built environment through the sustainable reuse of existing buildings as opposed to constructing a new; and (3) the contribution of traditional and historic building materials and design to inform modern and future construction. It is important to recognize that many traditional building practices, materials and designs are inherently sustainable, energy efficient and can inform the design of new buildings that are adapted to a future climate.

J. While arts, culture and heritage institutions are important to most communities, they often are not directly engaged in climate action (although there are a growing number of notable exceptions). Despite profound connections between climate change and culture, today there are thousands of arts, culture and heritage actors and advocates whose talents have not yet been mobilised on climate change issues, including administrators, anthropologists, archaeologists, architects, artists, conservators, curators, historians, librarians, musicians, urban planners, site managers, as well as scientists, researchers, teachers and scholars and carriers of indigenous knowledge and local wisdom.

II. Expression of Commitment

The signatories to this MOU (hereinafter referred to as “the Parties”) commit to strengthening their efforts to address climate change and support communities in achieving the decarbonization goals and other ambitions of the Paris Agreement, emphasizing (i) that arts, culture and heritage are both impacted by climate change and an asset for climate action; and (ii) that arts, culture and heritage (including sites and landscapes, institutions and collections as well as creativity, intangible heritage, traditional ways of knowing and practices) constitute an invaluable resource to help communities reduce GhG emissions and strengthen adaptive capacity, even while the risks to those resources from climate impacts must also be addressed.

III. Areas of Action, Coordination and Cooperation

The Parties agree that for actions related to this MOU, coordination and cooperation will be beneficial and will strengthen the efforts of participants. The Parties agree to work together through a voluntary, mutual support network to be known as the Climate Heritage Network (“CHN”). Illustrative Parties include:

A. How arts, culture and heritage actors can inform climate policies and help jurisdictions meet their GHG reduction goals including through sustainable consumption and production patterns; clean energy; and land use and resource efficiency.

B. Supporting arts, culture and heritage offices and agencies to understand their role in deep decarbonization pathway planning, including the role of reducing the carbon footprint of the historic built environment, in line with the Paris Agreement goal of keeping the rise in global temperature well below 2°C of warming. Addressing real and perceived tensions between heritage conservation standards and climate mitigation and adaptation efforts and showcasing win-win solutions.

C. Scaling innovative policy solutions: replicating and spreading better practices and new approaches to arts, culture and heritage that activate cultural heritage-based climate action, communication and education strategies.

D. Connecting arts, culture and heritage actors at the local, regional and national levels to climate change experts and government peers around the world. Supporting climate change engagement by cultural heritage officials and promoting solidarity with arts, culture and heritage offices and agencies in frontline and underserved communities.

E. Providing opportunities for members to learn from one another, raising awareness of what has and hasn’t worked in different parts of the world. Facilitating participation by arts, culture and heritage leaders in regional and international forums, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meetings and other UNFCCC platforms as well as global professional efforts.

G. Emphasising the role of arts, culture and heritage actors in promoting integrated nature-culture approaches that highlight the linkages between the ecological and social values and functions of land and other natural resources, and the connections between production and consumption, in ways that promote low carbon, healthy lifestyles in harmony with nature.

H. Sharing best practices in modeling and assessment to understand projected climate impacts, especially at the regional and local scale, and better practices in integrating these findings into planning and investment at all levels.

I. Building metrics and indicators that can help to track progress in reducing GhG emissions and the risk of climate change to communities and their cultural and heritage systems.

J. Sharing innovative models for financing and supporting climate adaptation, including public-private partnerships, resilience funds, and competitive approaches.

This MOU is neither a contract nor a treaty, but a voluntary commitment by signatories and endorsers to join the Climate Heritage Network and to strengthen their efforts to aid their communities in achieving the decarbonization goals and other ambitions of the Paris Agreement. The work of the CHN is carried out by the Parties with facilitation from the CHN secretariat pursuant to a companion Terms of Reference (TOR).

The final products, services and outputs of the CHN will be available to all members on equal terms, as provided in the TOR.