

COP26 and Climate Policy: A Guide to the Cultural Dimensions

UNFCCC COP26 marks an important milestone, falling just as State Parties have been communicating new or updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in support of the Paris Agreement. As Parties convene in Glasgow to finalise the outstanding rules, procedures, and guidelines necessary for the operationalisation of the Paris Agreement, the Climate Heritage Network has prepared this Guide to help cultural actors understand and connect with some of the key political and policy issues on the COP26 agenda. This Guide does not form a part of the Manifesto “Accelerating Climate Action through the Power of Arts, Culture and Heritage:


Need for urgent and ambitious global climate action

The need for urgent and ambitious global action to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions involving all sectors and actors is clearer today than ever before.

- The latest science published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2018 and 2019 – the Special Reports on Global Warming of 1.5°C, on Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate, and on Climate Change and Land – underscore the seriousness of the threat that climate change poses to natural and human systems across the world.
- The IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C indicates that for many natural and cultural systems, adaptation in the face of climate risks is expected to be more challenging at 2°C of global warming than at 1.5°C. In view of this, the implementation of a precautionary approach that pursues pathways limiting global warming to 1.5°C, with no or limited overshoot, is the most effective approach for the safeguarding of people and planet, and the protection and conservation of the earth’s cultural and natural heritage.

NDC implementation and culture-based solutions

Each Party to the Paris Agreement is required to submit Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to outline and communicate their post-2020 climate actions, to ensure the world achieves global peaking and rapid reductions of GHG emissions as soon as possible. The latest UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2020 reveals a very significant gap between the current commitments expressed by State Parties in their NDCs to date, and what is needed to keep global warming to well below 2°C and 1.5°C. And yet, many NDCs fail to leverage culture-based solutions.

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HOW | According to UNEP, collective ambition must increase more than fivefold over current levels to deliver the cuts needed over the next decade to achieve the 1.5°C goal. Arts, cultural, and heritage-based solutions must be deployed to support NDCs and help close the emissions gap.

Addressing climate change impacts on culture and cultural and natural heritage

Climate change is one of the most significant and fastest growing threats to people and their culture and heritage worldwide. This was clearly recognised at the UN Climate Action Summit held in September 2019 in New York, where a proposal of Greece on ‘Addressing climate change impacts on cultural and natural heritage’ was launched with the support of UNESCO and the WMO. The UN Secretary General has included the initiative in the ‘Report on the 2019 Climate Action Summit and the Way Forward.’

HOW | The Greek initiative must be supported and research on, and practical actions for, effective protection of people’s culture and of cultural and natural heritage from the impacts of climate change must be urgently promoted and accelerated at all levels in resilience, disaster risk reduction and adaptation planning, and through a precautionary approach that delivers the emissions reduction needed to reach a 1.5-degree Celsius pathway.

Culture-based solutions are critical for addressing climate change

Culture-based strategies and solutions 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.

- In 2020 the UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights, Karima Bennouna, issued a Report on climate change, culture and cultural rights, later presented to the UN General Assembly. The report concluded that cultures and cultural rights ‘offer a set of crucial tools for implementing climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies’ and are ‘vital for enabling the necessary societal transformation called for by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to meet the 1.5°C degree target.’

- The 2020 UNEP Emissions Gap Report found that major reduction of emissions requires changes to patterns of consumption and behaviours which ‘operate within broader contexts that enable or constrain action – including ...cultural conventions, social norms and financial and policy frameworks... Changes to underlying social and cultural norms are more difficult to accomplish than transitory behavioural changes, but once established they are likely to be more durable and to support a wider range of low-carbon lifestyles.’


HOW | Incorporate culture-based strategies and solutions into climate adaptation and mitigation planning at local, regional and national levels.

Mitigation, Greenhouse Gas Reduction and Energy Transition

Culture informs our understanding of wellbeing, a holistic concept that encompasses emotional, social, cultural, spiritual, and economic needs. Cultural knowledge guides the provisioning strategies people use to satisfy human needs, while cultural values mediate perceptions of the success of these efforts. Today, traditional lifestyles developed over centuries of slow co-evolution of human communities and their environment compete with less place-adapted and more carbon-intensive contemporary patterns of living. A cultural lens reveals the need for a more multidimensional approach to supporting a circular economy, emphasising environmental, cultural and social sustainability.

HOW | Cultural and heritage strategies should be integrated into decarbonisation initiatives across all sectors of the economy to support the profound changes required for green transition, including land use and territorial planning, energy, mobility and transport, agriculture, buildings and cities, tourism and aviation. Two key themes are Human Settlements and Food and Agriculture.

- **Human Settlements:** Incorporate culture into the Human Settlements climate action pathway of the Marrakesh Global Partnership for Climate Action, which focuses on (1) buildings and infrastructure projects, and (2) waste and consumption. Because culture is embedded in dominant consumption patterns, culture-based strategies and the social sciences should be harnessed to increase education and mobilization in support of reducing energy consumption and promoting circular economy. For example, the adaptive reuse of existing buildings should be emphasised while improving energy efficiency, acknowledging the specific context presented by traditional building systems and the co-benefits associated with the conservation of heritage values. Energy retrofit should consider buildings as holistic systems: solutions need to balance



the long-term sustainability of physical components (including those of historical and/or cultural significance), energy performance, and socioeconomic function.

- **Food and Agriculture:** The negative effects of climate change on agricultural production and livelihoods of farmers, foresters and fisher folk are already being felt in many places. Agriculture and food are closely tied to culture, heritage and livelihood, to nature cycles, seasonality, local consumption and traditional cooking. At the same time, large scale agriculture sectors contribute to climate change due to their emissions of greenhouse gases. The UNFCCC's Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture (KJWA) recognizes the role of agriculture in tackling climate change. The FAO's Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems is another key entry point.

Adaptation and Resilience

Adaptation capacities can be strengthened by transferring lessons of resilience learned from the past, empowering people and communities by building on traditional sustainable environmental management practices while supporting low carbon and nature-based solutions. Strong social networks, social capital, and place attachment, all play roles in a community system's ability to cope with stress and change. Diversity of knowledge systems, languages, livelihoods, functions, worldviews and belief systems support resilience as does inter-cultural dialogue and exchange, which fosters interconnectedness, but also local self-sufficiency, use of local materials and know-how. Culture-based approaches can address gender considerations; social roles in resource use, sharing and management; and political and economic relations and legal institutions. Protecting people, places and economies through adaptation and resilience must be paired with supporting sustainable development of more just and durable systems, recognition of cultural rights and approaches rooted in human rights and the mobilization of values and methodologies that support the practice of justice and inclusion. Adaptive learning and the ability to navigate diversity, including the role of creativity and inspiration in adaptation and innovation is also key.

HOW | Seize the opportunity presented by the ground-breaking inclusion of culture-based strategies in the new Race to Resilience and by building upon the recent incorporation of culture into the Action Table of the Adaptation and Resilience Pathway of the Marrakesh Global Partnership for Climate Action (MGPCA). Integrate culture-based strategies into the Nairobi Work Programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change. Building upon the meeting of the G20 Culture Ministers and support the integration of arts, culture and heritage into the Adaptation Communications of all State actors.

Nature-based Solutions and the Oceans

Integrating cultural knowledge and practice, drawing on cultural ecosystem and landscape management, Indigenous People's ways of knowing and intangible traditional knowledge, deepens the impact of nature-based solutions and supports the protection, sustainable management and restoration of natural and modified ecosystems and preservation of bio-cultural diversity.

HOW | Advance work on linkages between Nature and Culture in the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework; emphasise cultural aspects of Ocean conservation as part of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.


Education, Training and Public Awareness

Arts, culture and heritage is a powerful vehicle to empower all members of society to engage in climate action, through education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information, and international cooperation. Arts, culture and heritage can play a key role through the ability to mobilize collective engagement, to outreach to communities and to influence action-taking and behavioural changes; enabling active citizenship and implementing educational programs to support knowledge on climate risks and mitigation actions; and using evidence from the recent and distant past, including memory institutions (such as archives, libraries, and museums) and archaeology, to communicate the changing story of humans through time giving context to present-day and future transformations. Strategies based in arts, culture and heritage have the capacity to create a vision for a more just and sustainable future that can mobilize and inspire.

HOW | Cultural dimensions and the contributions of culture institutions should be better integrated into the next cycle of the UNFCCC's Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE).

Loss and Damage, Migration, Displacement, and Human Mobility,

Strengthen the role of arts, culture, heritage, indigenous or local knowledge, in addressing loss and damage, migration, displacement, and human mobility, and their discriminatory trends, associated with impacts of climate change, including extreme events and slow onset events, in particular for non-economic losses including societal or cultural identity and loss of knowledge and practice. Culture can be a powerful asset to leverage diversity as a vector of innovation and social inclusion.



HOW | Support engagement by cultural actors in the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM) and The Santiago Network. Emphasise culture-based actions to migration, displacement and human mobility, including as part of the WIM's new Task Force on Displacement.

Importance of ensuring environmental integrity

As Parties finalise the outstanding rules necessary for operationalising Article 6 of the Paris Agreement which mandates a new global carbon market system for countries, it is important to ensure that adequate safeguards are in place to prevent any adverse environmental or social consequences of the application of the mechanisms, rules and procedures developed. This should include environmental and social safeguards that protect Indigenous Peoples and culture and heritage. Actors in arts, culture and heritage sectors can promote the transnational solidarity required to protect vulnerable people and places.

HOW | Support the protection of Indigenous Peoples in the Article 6 rulebook and incorporate culture heritage safeguarding into environmental integrity principles, beginning with the San Jose Principles for High Ambition and Integrity in International Carbon Markets.

Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples (LCIP) Platform

Indigenous Peoples and local communities are at the forefront of climate change, often facing its worst impacts. They also play a critical role as stewards and guardians of the world's ecosystems and in delivering practical and effective culture- and nature-based solutions to climate change on the ground. It is essential, therefore, that their views, concerns, rights and contributions are fully acknowledged and taken into account while developing and implementing climate policy and action across all levels in support of the Paris Agreement, including in NDCs.

HOW | Leverage the power of cultural institutions to support implementation of the two-year work plan of the Facilitative Working Group of the LCIP Platform and to support climate action by Local Communities, including listening to the voices of the most affected and the solutions they offer, integration with local adaptation techniques which reflect and respect cultural knowledge and experience to create more effective and lasting solutions that protect cultural rights.

Gender and Climate Change

The Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) and its Gender Action Plan (GAP) are critical enablers of gender-responsive climate policy and action. Progress made to date includes substantively integrating gender considerations in various UNFCCC processes through the work of constituted bodies. The COVID 19 pandemic has underscored the importance of essential workers including 'care work' associated with women across the globe, providing insights in relation to planetary stewardship and a regenerative economy.

HOW | Going forward, incorporate cultural institutions and actors in order to ensure the further strengthening and continuance of the LWPG and the GAP to deliver successful gender-responsive policy and action in support of the implementation of the Paris Agreement, both internationally and at national levels.


Climate Finance

The magnitude of the investment challenge posed by the green transition requires mobilising both the public and private sectors with focussed attention on the principles of "equity and common but differential responsibilities" as stated in the Paris Accord. Arts, culture and heritage can help convey the necessity for different approaches from the global north and global south, while conveying the reasons for their disparate experiences of climate change, GHG use and energy transition.

HOW | Financing of pilot projects and other initiatives that address the cultural dimensions of ecological transition and build on the craft and other capacities of local communities and regions. The better incorporation of culture-based strategies into project finance via global climate finance and taxation mechanisms is needed. International cooperation is a critical enabler for developing countries and vulnerable regions to strengthen resilience for heritage sites and cultural communities. Scaling up 'triple bottom line' and 'social investment' models that link communities, their traditions, livelihoods and cultural heritage to the ambitions of the Paris Agreement is one way forward.

Just Transition

Transformative climate action must be inclusive and pay attention to the regions, industries and workers who will face the greatest challenges. Including culture, heritage, creative industries, and craft, in just transition measures will help assure community-led processes, wider acceptance of change, and reskilling and with durable and more effective outcomes. Just

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transition strategies must also take into account both historical harms and the hyperglobalised context in which they operate. Actors in the arts, culture and heritage sectors can reinforce the importance of understanding the international stakes of local climate challenges and the importance of addressing conditions in marginalised communities. As the world has learned from COVID 19, climate disasters, like viruses, don't respect state boundaries and must be addressed with growth models that aim for both climate and economic justice.

HOW | Incorporate the potentials offered by cultural heritage and the creative industries into work of the Katowice Committee of Experts on the Impacts of the Implementation of Response Measures and other mechanisms, by supporting the scaling up of climate ambitions and societal transformation informed by cultural traditions and knowledge of past changes, utilizing the immense potential of cultural heritage, creativity and craft. Promote education and culture as priorities to guarantee the mainstreaming of funding for job creation and the up skilling of workers, citizens and future generations, including funds at national and regional levels to support the adaptation of the heritage and cultural sectors and practices. This while also taking into account 2021 as the UN International Year for Creative Economy for Sustainable Development.

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