

Guest editorial: Climate-culture stories of the Net Zero Project

Journal of Cultural
Heritage
Management and
Sustainable
Development

765

Declaring a “code red for humanity”, the Sixth Assessment Report (2021) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that the impacts of climate change are widespread and intensifying (IPCC, 2021). These impacts may render significant portions of our planet unliveable, with wet regions becoming even wetter and dry areas becoming hotter and drier. Rising sea levels pose a severe threat to communities living in low lying and coastal areas, impacting some more severely than others. Historical cities such as Alexandria and Venice face the risk of extinction, while a severe shortage of food and freshwater resources due to cyclic floods and droughts will threaten lives, livelihoods and living cultures in various parts of the world.

The Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, 2023 (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2023) further accentuates the complexity of the situation, highlighting the emergence of compound risk events or “poly-crisis,” wherein bio-climatic hazard events interact with other threats such as conflicts, financial crisis or epidemics to cause large-scale destruction.

It is essential to acknowledge that climate change is more than just an environmental issue; it is a multifaceted crisis, rooted in historical inequalities, unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, and an associated culture of overconsumption often dating back to colonial times. Consequently, culture and heritage have an important role in addressing the climate crisis, offering insights and solutions that extend beyond traditional environmental conservation approaches.

By closely analysing the life ways and traditional practices of Indigenous communities living in some of the last biodiverse regions, we can discover innovative solutions for preserving eco-systems, managing natural resources, and adapting to a changing climate. Through their worldviews and heritage, we can better understand the interdependencies between human climate and human cultures.

Paradoxically, Indigenous peoples and traditional knowledge bearers, such as artisans, farmers, pastoralists and fishing communities, find themselves disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Despite their deep-rooted commitment to living in harmony with nature and giving back to the environment rather than simply taking from it, these communities face heightened susceptibility to the effects of global warming and environmental degradation due to multiple factors including their dependence on natural resources, continued marginalisation as well as globalisation.

Thus, addressing social inequality and preserving the living heritage of the Indigenous and knowledge bearing communities most impacted by the climate crisis, are crucial components of global efforts to tackle climate change.

To document Indigenous and traditional knowledge, as well as practices, ICCROM launched Net Zero: Heritage for Climate Action (ICCROM, n.d.), a thirty month pioneering capacity development project generously supported by the Swedish Postcode Foundation.

Conceived within the framework of ICCROM’s FAR (First Aid and Resilience for Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis) programme, the Net Zero: Heritage for Climate Action project was aimed at building a globally applicable foundation for assessing climate-related risks to



Journal of Cultural Heritage
Management and Sustainable
Development
Vol. 14 No. 5, 2024
pp. 765-766
© Emerald Publishing Limited
2044-1266
DOI 10.1108/JCHMSD-09-2024-227

The editors wish to thank and acknowledge all contributing authors, peer reviewers as well as project partners.

heritage and people, as well as leveraging Indigenous and traditional knowledge to develop integrated strategies for heritage safeguarding, climate action, disaster risk reduction and peacebuilding.

Embracing a people-centred approach that emphasises the interconnectedness of climate and culture, the Net Zero Project teams actively engaged Indigenous and local communities – the old city dwellers and keepers of water bodies in Jodhpur, India; the Bakonzo in Kasese, Uganda; the Quilombolas in Ubatuba, Brazil; the fishermen and farmers of Rashid, Egypt; the Taya practitioners of Tuti Island, Sudan – to enhance their disaster resilience and coping capacities, while addressing the cross-cutting issues of heritage protection, decarbonisation, upholding cultural rights and promoting sustainable development of vulnerable population groups.

This special edition of the *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development* features summaries of case studies from the five ‘innovation sites’ of the Net Zero Project. Supported by robust research, these case studies clearly illustrate that by cross-linking place specific Indigenous knowledge, as well as lived experiences of local communities, with climate and disaster sciences, we can develop innovative and joint strategies for disaster risk reduction and climate action.

In Jodhpur, India, a culture-based heat action plan has been developed by incorporating traditional knowledge to cope with extreme heat events. In Kasese, Uganda, flood risk mitigation is achieved through the planting of native species. In Al Rashid, Egypt, traditional knowledge was used to develop an early warning system for storms and floods. While in Ubatuba, Brazil, seed banks have been set up to enhance food security. Finally at Tuti Island in Sudan, *Taya*, a traditional community led system for flood risk management, has been documented and disseminated online with the aim to reduce the risk of flood related disasters and enhance community’s resilience amidst the ongoing conflict.

The centrepiece of the publication is the story from Australia of Martuwarra and its people, narrated by Dr Anne Poelina which underscores the interconnectedness of people, place, culture and nature. It makes a case for using the learnings from Indigenous world view to “move away from I to we and develop and inclusive culture of care” to tackle the climate crisis.

To explain how climate change is increasing disaster risk an invited paper from Sanjaya Bhatia, an area expert, complements the climate-culture case studies of the Net Zero Project of ICCROM.

Aparna Tandon

Senior Programme Leader, FAR-First Aid and Resilience for Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis Programme, Coordinator for activities on heritage-based DRM, Climate Action, Peacebuilding and Sustainable Digital heritage, ICCROM

References

- ICCROM (n.d.), *Net Zero: Heritage for Climate Action*. available at: [Net Zero: Heritage for Climate Action](#)
- IPCC (2021), *Climate Change 2021: the Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*.
- United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (2023), *GAR Special Report: Measuring Resilience for the Sustainable Development Goals*, Geneva.