

Recommendations on Climate Action for Heritage Conservation

The participants of the 4th Huangshan Dialogue on UNESCO-designated Sites and Sustainable Development recognize the severity of risk posed to both cultural and natural World Heritage sites, Biosphere Reserves and Geoparks, (UNESCO-designated sites) resulting from the accelerating impacts of global climate change. Rising mean temperatures, extreme weather events, more frequent floods, droughts, desertification, wildfires, rising sea levels and melting glaciers all have many complex direct and indirect impacts on heritage security and some serious losses have already been experienced. Intangible heritage will also be affected as agricultural and other adaptations to changing climate will affect many traditions and practices. Bespoke values-based and climate science-informed risk assessments are essential.

The participants also wish to recall the IPCC report that nature-based solutions such as reducing the destruction of forests and other ecosystems, restoring them and improving the management of working lands, such as farms, are among the top five most effective strategies for mitigating carbon emissions by 2030. All measures to preserve and restore biodiversity should be encouraged, including preserving and creating connectivity pathways to enable species to adjust their spatial distribution.

The participants further note the potential of cultural heritage - including both tangible and intangible heritage and local communities' knowledge and practices - to contribute to transformative change, drive GHG mitigation and climate adaptation, and deliver climate resilient pathways that strengthen sustainable development.

In view of our shared concerns the participants:

1. Appreciate the efforts made for the implementation of the Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Convention on Biological Diversity, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and other international landmark agreements to protect UNESCO-designated sites;
2. Emphasise that carbon mitigation remains the only globally effective approach to preserve both cultural and natural UNESCO-designated sites;
3. Stress that Earth observation satellite technologies, spatial data and analysis tools have tremendously improved over the past decades and that they provide powerful additional means for decision-makers and stakeholders to find comprehensive solutions to today's global challenges for UNESCO-designated sites, such as climate change.
4. 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 approaches.
5. Call on the managers of UNESCO-designated sites to undertake risk assessments of their properties and use a precautionary approach to take appropriate contingency measures using the best available technology and climate science to design climate strategies and improve resilience and adaptation of sites in ways that do not negatively affect their 'authenticity' and 'integrity'.

6. Call on the scientific institutions to continue developing better technology, including remote sensing and space technology, for such adaptation planning and their respective governments to make available the necessary funds and other resources needed for this.
7. Urge States Parties to develop appropriate national level climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies to help apply the best practices available to safeguard their heritage properties, including training and awareness actions.
8. Encourage UNESCO and relevant stakeholders to develop a risk assessment classification of all UNESCO-designated properties in terms of such risks as proneness to flooding, earthquakes, land-slides, cyclones, droughts, changes in hydrology, changes in sea level, changes in humidity and indirect threats arising from increased animal pests or human impacts. Such a rating system would be similar to the Red Listing applied to individual species by the IUCN.
9. Urge those agencies with transformative high-tech capacity to bring to bear their remote sensing and space technology tools to assist UNESCO in such a risk rating to assist in the development of risk assessments and contingency action plans.
10. Urge academics and climate scientists to create and make available increasingly refined and downscaled models to predict and anticipate the future changes to global climate and its impacts on human livelihoods, agriculture and natural ecosystems
11. Encourage States Parties and other stakeholders to utilise the SDG-CASEARTH and PANORAMA Solutions platform to share information, case studies and to learn from each other in responding to climate change risk.
12. Encourage the World Heritage Committee consider including a climate risk assessment as a requirement for documents submitted as part of the World Heritage application process and for the management plans of existing sites.
13. In addition to measures to reduce and limit damage to heritage properties, urge the managers of such properties to themselves reduce their carbon footprints by reducing energy consumption and employing low impact technology in all construction or other developments. Appropriate ways need to be used to avoid wastage, littering and pollution.