



## CDCPP THEMATIC SESSION

**CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT AS RELATED  
TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY,  
and specifically, culture, heritage and landscape  
resources**

### Finnish contribution

Climate Change and  
Sustainable development  
thematic debate

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## Climate Change and Sustainable development thematic debate

Cultural heritage is a result of the ways in which we use (have used) natural resources and it reflects our conceptions of nature. When we think of this, we realise that climate change or climate crisis, sustainable development and heritage are in a paradoxical relation to each other. On one hand, our heritage reflects the ways in which we have damaged, even destroyed our climate, and on the other hand, the ways in which we safeguard and maintain our cultural heritage are one of the means to mitigate climate change. Sustainability and the long-term use of materials are important themes, and also one of the solutions to the crisis.

A new government has just recently been formed in Finland. Climate change and sustainable development are among the main pillars of the new government programme. Heritage does not have a major role in the programme but it does play a role both as a resource, an asset towards these sustainability goals, and an object on which the climate actions have an effect on. Climate impact forms a central challenge to the heritage sector: on one hand, we need to take a critical look at the ways in which we operate, are they sustainable? And on the other hand, we need to be able to present evidence and argument on the ways heritage can be part of the solution, not just part of the problem – not forgetting that the climate crisis poses great threats to heritage as well.

One of the questions to think about is: are there conflicts between climate mitigation and adaptation and cultural heritage, e.g. how do we as heritage professionals relate to urban densification and historical townscape, solar panels in historical buildings, wind mills in valuable landscapes? Is there a conflict or is it more a question of values: can we see ecological sustainability as one of the criteria of valuable landscapes, its beauty even? Can we think of climate action as a significant part of our time and a valuable contemporary layer to our heritage and landscape?

### A brief description of some relevant challenges and points of view:

**Firstly, integrating heritage and landscape as part of climate policy in our country is a very current issue** – to integrate it more clearly as a part of the solution, not only the problem. The idea that maintaining and using built heritage, with all the natural resources already consumed in its creation, is in itself sustainable and climate-wise, **is not** as visible and evident in climate policy and discourse as are e.g. circular economy or energy efficiency.

Heritage can teach us ways to mitigate and restrain climate change, e.g. the use of unprocessed, traditional materials and techniques in construction. There is clearly a movement – at least in our country – among architects saying that we should go **back to basics** in construction, that is starts to use again simple building techniques as they are more ecological and sustainable.

**Secondly, integrating climate policy implications and ecological sustainability in heritage management and policy.** That means also taking a critical look at heritage management. E.g. is the preservation of late 20th century buildings with problematic building techniques and materials sustainable? Do we need more information on this?

**Thirdly, promoting adaptive reuse of existing buildings as a priority in contrast to the volume of new construction.** Taking that as a starting point.

And **fourthly** also, **highlighting even more cultural and social sustainability** when we talk about sustainable development. By strengthening communities' and individual citizens' possibilities to participate in decisions on their heritage and close environment as well as their competences for democratic culture (democracy). Here we come close to the Faro Convention.

**How have we addressed these questions in Finland? Some examples:**

- We've enhanced sustainability in our argumentation toolkit on the benefits of heritage preservation and developing guidance on continuous and subtle maintenance of valuable heritage, for instance.
- But to be on a solid ground, **we need more evidence and research.** As part of the national Cultural Environment Strategy, a mapping of existing research in Finland on cultural environment and climate mitigation was executed. The results of the mapping show that there exists scattered information and research but there is a need to connect the goals of research on cultural environment – and the same goes for heritage – more closely and clearly with climate impact and mitigation. We need to integrate heritage and climate research. Multidisciplinary research is needed starting from the most evident questions such as *existing buildings as resource in climate change mitigation*.
- We have also suggested that e.g. calculation models on the carbon footprint of buildings and construction should be more comprehensive. They should take into account the climate impact of the production of building materials and construction work, the use and repair history, the climate impact of possible deconstruction, circulation of material etc and replacement with a new construction.
- We also need evidence on which is more sustainable: energy efficiency repairs or continuous maintenance and upkeep of built heritage?
- There are also numerous needs for research on the sustainability of the ways we use heritage, e.g. sustainable tourism and heritage as resource for that. As examples I just want to mention the Sustainable Tourism Strategy of the WHS Suomenlinna in Helsinki. It stresses culturally sustainable tourism, low consumption and returning the income to the preservation of the site. Another example is a research project by the Universities of Lapland and Jyväskylä in which indicators for sustainable tourism in cultural environments will be developed, the point of view being esp. that of cultural and social sustainability.

- As a tool we can in the future use even more the Faro Convention which entered into force in Finland last year.

Finally, how the CDCPP could follow up with these activities:

Highlighting the theme in the existing tools – which provide a solid ground for that:

- e.g. Strategy21 good practice,
- taking the sustainable use of heritage as a theme in the future Faro Way meetings organised as part of the EU Joint Project,
- or taking up them in one of the coming Landscape Convention Workshops or conferences.