



Bremerhaven Declaration on the Role of Museums in Addressing the Climate Crisis

Society stands at a fork in the road, with one fork headed to a future of fear, want and inequality, in a climate-compromised world. The other fork leads to a future where people – as individuals, communities and together – thrive in a sustainable environment, with a stable climate. We must help society to create and follow the latter path. The map of that path exists in the form of the Paris Agreement, but the path itself does not yet exist: we must create it together, and with greater speed and greater ambition, to minimize the scale and impacts of climate change.

Museums, science centres and exhibition centres (referred to as ‘museums’ hereafter) – large, small, wherever they are, and of whatever subject matter – can all play a distinctive role in achieving the aims of the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement through the six elements of Action for Climate Empowerment: education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information and international co-operation, as well as by reducing their own carbon footprints.

We welcome the formal recognition of the key role that museums play in achieving the goals of the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, by the members of the United Nations at COP24 (2018) and COP25 (2019).

We also acknowledge that the members of the world’s science museum and science centre networks, and of the International Council of Museums, have already resolved to take up the Sustainable Development Goals, as a blueprint to address climate change and other sustainability issues.

We recognize the widespread interest in and concern about climate change across society. We hear the increasing calls for support and empowerment from communities everywhere, to enable people to know what they can do, have the motivation to act, and the skills and opportunities to act to address climate change, in their own lives and with others. We acknowledge that, in 2019, museum professionals working with climate change have informed the United Nations of ten key lessons learnt by museums during 2016-19:

- (1) The importance of acting now: there is no time to waste.
- (2) The importance of confident and competent staff.
- (3) The great importance of reliable, up-to-date information and science, including basic information on climate change.

- (4) The great importance of a focus on solutions, not problems.
- (5) The importance of making climate change and climate action personal and relevant, as well as understanding the big picture.
- (6) The importance of acknowledging people's emotions and feelings.
- (7) The importance of community, and empowering people to participate fully in society.
- (8) The importance of engaging everyone.
- (9) The importance of co-ordination and collaboration between museums and partners.
- (10) The need for support from governments, government agencies and funders.

Having explored these points in Klimahaus® Bremerhaven 8° Ost at the international symposium *'How To...? From Climate Knowledge To Climate Action'* we wish to make the following recommendations to museums everywhere.

The Sustainable Development Goals are an unprecedented opportunity, for institutions, communities and other stakeholders to identify the challenges most relevant to their context and that draw most effectively on their strengths to meet these challenges.

Science, art and the humanities are all crucial for understanding and addressing climate change. Scientists, curators, designers, artists, authors, philosophers, historians, geographers, communities and people as individuals, all have a role to play in this endeavour. Their voices must be heard, and they should be empowered to use them. Climate change requires radical creativity and radical collaboration, everywhere.

Museums are stronger and more effective when they **make a collective impact**, working with one another and other sectors, and empowering communities and young people. Existing movements such as Fridays for Future, and annual dates such as Earth Day or International Museum Day, are ready-made opportunities that can help museums to collaborate with one another, and with their communities, in a joint effort to amplify voices and climate action.

Museums only exist within the context of their communities. **Forming strong connections** with individuals, groups and all of society, and listening to and addressing people's concerns, is crucial. Museums and communities can be equal partners in imagining and working towards shared goals, ambitions and visions, and help share and create rich, powerful stories. They should also lead by example, and embrace climate action across their institutions.

Effective climate education has to provide all of the necessary knowledge, motivation and practical skills. **Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)** offers such an approach,

embracing the importance of a positive relationship as part of the natural world; respect for others, diversity and difference; human rights; and citizenship. ESD recognises that learning is lifelong, and happens in many locations, including museums. Making ESD a core approach in museums can help museums become effective resources for lifelong learning, and to connect with people's heads, hearts and hands, to address climate change in their own lives.

Museums can help people to **imagine a better future**, focussing on creative, imaginative, collaborative and hopeful – rather than fearful – experiences, to help address climate change. Climate education and empowerment can be made to be enjoyable and fulfilling, turning concerns into meaningful, everyday action.

We need to **create and support sustained dialogue**, among museums, with policy workers, with other sectors, with communities and people as individuals . This involves careful listening, to understand and address the interests, concerns, needs and suggestions of people, and a commitment to climate action every day, everywhere. We need to share our experiences and ideas with one another, and develop our climate responses together.

The need for support from governments, government agencies and funders

Society must expect us to provide and support climate change education, awareness, participation, access to information and co-operation as a priority. While we acknowledge that museums can already offer a great deal to climate education and action, we also recognize that they must be empowered to play these roles in society. Museums need support and guidance from policy makers, local and national governments, through effective climate change education policies, plans, financial and other resources. We would welcome mechanisms that can help us share and tell our collective story. We stand ready to play our part, and we ask our funders, stakeholders and potential partners to play theirs to help us to do so, as we commit ourselves to addressing the defining challenge of our times, together.

The international symposium **'How To...? From Climate Knowledge To Climate Action'** was held at Klimahaus® Bremerhaven 8° Ost on 24th and 25th September 2020.

Further reading and links:

[Tokyo Protocol](#)

[ICOM Resolution on Sustainability and Agenda 2030, Transforming Our World](#)

[UNFCCC \(2018\). Decision 17/CMA.1, Report of COP24](#)