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Roundtable III: Climate Change Adaptation of Cultural Heritage

Gül Aktürk, Sandra Fatorić

Date: 26 November 2019, 11.00

Moderator: Sandra Fatorić (TU Delft, The Netherlands)

Catalysts:

Ana Carolina Brugnera (RWTH Aachen University, Germany)
Erik de Maaker (Leiden University, The Netherlands)
Barbara Lubelli (TU Delft, The Netherlands)
Linda Shetabi (University of Glasgow, UK)
Deniz Ikiz Kaya (Eindhoven University of Technology, The Netherlands)

Rapporteur:

Gül Aktürk (TU Delft, The Netherlands)

SUMMARY

A roundtable on Climate Change Adaptation of Cultural Heritage brought together scholars with diverse expertise, such as architecture, anthropology, cultural heritage, and policy, to identify current knowledge needs and gaps related to: (A) methodological approaches to assessing heritage values and significance for the climate-adaptation decision-making process; (B) climate change impacts, risks, and vulnerability of heritage; (C) management and preservation preparedness for climate change impacts; and (D) climate adaptation interventions for diverse cultural heritage types.

Catalysts highlighted the importance of using participatory methods and qualitative research methods to involve various stakeholders, including indigenous people and scholars, in assessing cultural heritage values and significance, as well as in climate change adaptation planning. Local and indigenous knowledge is needed for a more inclusive and bottom-up approach in assessing values and integrating them with climate change adaptation. Despite the growing body of research on how to preserve both tangible and intangible cultural heritage (e.g. traditional practices, oral histories) there is a lack of studies and policy developments focusing on how to protect heritage fabric and associated values and significance from the impacts of climate change. Catalysts also stressed the need for new methods for monitoring material decay and heritage loss. Industrial-technological and digital solutions were perceived as emerging approaches for documenting the loss of cultural heritage (e.g. it can preserve memories using audio-visual technology).

When asked about the climate change impacts, risks, and vulnerability, catalysts commonly stressed that climate-induced changes have become a serious challenge for management, particularly of impacts from sea level rise, coastal erosion, and fluvial flooding. Furthermore, aside from the direct impacts of climate change, such as physical degradation and damage, there are also indirect impacts such as loss of jobs, culture, and history. Catalysts stressed that there is a growing need for an increase in funding to assess and reduce climate change impacts.

Next, catalysts noted that existing heritage management is not prepared for changing climate conditions and associated impacts on the various forms of heritage. Interestingly, climate-associated relocation and migration were perceived as a particular challenge for historic preservation of tangible heritage. As some cultural heritage assets may be lost, power factors may influence decisions regarding which and whose heritage could be lost. Multidisciplinary methods, knowledge exchange, and financial resources were found to be crucial for increasing resilience and adaptation of heritage, especially in developing countries. Catalysts also remarked that transdisciplinary work between diverse disciplines can provide more integrated solutions by bringing more human-centered approaches to environmental science.

Lastly, climate adaptation interventions and post-disaster recovery plans focusing on developing transparent and robust models were considered crucial for advancing cultural heritage and climate adaptation discipline. Also mentioned were challenges related to the feasibility of climate adaptation strategies for various heritage types, and the mismatch with current preservation guidelines. As such, many catalysts noted that climate adaptation planning for cultural heritage has been reactive rather than proactive in most developed and developing countries. Catalysts concluded that climate-friendly interventions such as adaptive reuse of historic buildings can contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions (i.e. climate change mitigation).

