

Agency, participation and solidarity: people-centred sustainable development

A guide for museums and cultural institutions



Curating Tomorrow is a consultancy for museums and the heritage sector, helping them draw on their unique resources to enhance their contributions to sustainable development agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals, climate action, nature conservation, Disaster Risk Reduction and human rights. Curating Tomorrow also applies the museum-based skill of curating to thinking about and addressing real-world challenges, not necessarily involving museums or museum collections.

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“To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing”

Raymond Williams

“Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.”

Rio Declaration Principle 1

“We will protect and promote culture and sport as integral components of sustainable development”

Pact for the Future

CURATING TOMORROW

Curating Tomorrow supports the Sustainable Development Goals

TOGETHER WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL

The lessons of the two World Wars were that countries, governments, people and nature need peace to thrive. In a smaller and smaller world that is more connected than ever, solidarity with others, and addressing common challenges and opportunities, is essential for our common future.

Human rights were one of the greatest developments of the 20th century, yet they have been left behind by governments and authorities that find them too much trouble, and sectors (including museums) that didn't make much use of them. Environmental goals, too, give us a high ambition for us all to work towards to undo the problems created in the past, and to create a better world for people and nature.

When we stand together, when we use our voice for one another, when we go beyond empty talk to taking concrete actions, when we do not sit by in the face of massive injustice, when we do something and do not expect anything in return, when we look out for other people and for nature, when we recognise that none of us have all the answers but we all have some of them, we lift ourselves and our work up.

Just as people and countries need one another to thrive, museums too must be more than a sector of competing institutions.

When museums and museum workers stand together, when we speak of the value of museums generally, when we say that all museum roles are important, when we say that underserved communities should be prioritised when it comes to 'museum development', when we say that museum workers deserve decent pay and working conditions, and we support one another more effectively and in genuine ways, then we make a sector that is more than the sum of its parts.

Sustainable development provides us with many approaches that help make a difference in the world, and also to make museums and the museum sector more effective, resilient and inclusive.

> Human rights for everyone, and protecting and restoring nature.
> It is simple when we understand it, and even better when we do it.

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

People-centred sustainable development supports many SDG targets across the 17 SDGs



What is this?

This guide outlines some aspects of sustainable development, human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This guide aims to support and enable both bottom-up action and participation, and top-down action to create an enabling environment for sustainable development. It aims to help you understand and fulfil the potential of culture as an integral component of sustainable development.

It aims to support cultural institutions (notably museums) and decision-makers to understand the place of culture, cultural participation and cultural institutions in sustainable development; and point the reader towards good-quality information, guidance and opportunities to unlock this potential.

It also draws on the UN Secretary-General's vision for multilateralism set out in Our Common Agenda (2021), and the internationally agreed Pact for the Future (2024), and connects these with the work of museums.

- **Sustainable development approaches, used properly, are rights-based: respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights for all.**
- **They also seek to protect, restore and sustainably use nature, including climate, biodiversity, land, seas and oceans; and to share the benefits of the use of natural resources more fairly.**
- **Sustainable development is not a 'steady state': it is a dynamic, inclusive direction of travel. The level of benefit created is dependent on the amount of effort and work we put into it. The work is never finished.**
- **Sustainable development approaches are not incremental, but are goal-based, inclusive, aspirational and transformational. They not only 'stop harm' but are about unlocking potential to 'do more good': larger freedom for people, and protecting and restoring nature too.**
- **In a world of many challenges - and opportunities - there is a massive need and great public demand for transformative action for better futures. The time for change is now.**
- **Sustainable development is new for many cultural institutions, so they need to be able to learn fast to contribute to it effectively. There are plenty of good tools and frameworks to help with this: no-one needs to 'reinvent the wheel'.**
- **Sustainable development done in the wrong way - whether understood incorrectly or applied in a shallow way - doesn't achieve the changes that are required to build a better, fairer world for all on a healthy planet.**

Who is it aimed at?

This guide is written for museum workers in any role, in any country, who are interested in putting their organisation - and themselves - to work for sustainable development. It is also aimed at students interested in working in museums and wanting to make a difference. That is, anyone interested in enabling change for a world where all people live in dignity, where people are genuinely empowered to shape their own future, and where nature is protected and restored.

Every museum worker has roles to play in this work, and this guide aims to help them understand and unlock the potential of museums to support transformative change, and to avoid some of the pitfalls of museum work that undermine sustainable development.

Sustainable development approaches mean we do not need to become experts in everything, and we certainly avoid hero and saviour mentalities, which are opposed to sustainable development principles.

We cannot achieve sustainable development if people's rights are not properly respected, protected and fulfilled, as they are a huge part of sustainable development. Museums need to understand how their actions support and impede human rights for all, and to take action to 'do more good' and 'do less harm'.

'Used' properly, sustainable development approaches help ensure that culture is appropriately considered not only as an 'enabler of sustainable development' but as a fundamental aspect of rights-based, inclusive, responsive and transformative sustainable development, as an "integral component" (as stated in the Pact for the Future).

Policy makers, funders and other decision-makers can also create an enabling environment that ensures peoples' rights - cultural and otherwise - are respected, protected and fulfilled through cultural institutions, as a crucial part of these institutions' contributions to sustainable development. They can also ensure that museums' efforts are recognised in national reporting for sustainable development and the SDGs.

This guide is also aimed at policy makers and others, as they consider the roles of culture and cultural activity in the post-2030 Agenda (the 'next SDGs').

Why is it needed?

‘Sustainability’ is a rather vague concept that means many things to different people. It is often conflated with sustainable development, as if they are the same thing. They are not. This guide should help you understand the differences, and how you can mobilise yourself as an actor for sustainable development, and support others through your work. In this guide we will focus on sustainable development, as the action-focussed activity that works to achieve positive outcomes for people and nature.

The world is not on a path to sustainable development: too many people are denied lives of dignity, there is far too much inequality, and nature is being destroyed. We need to change course, and that includes in institutions such as museums.

Sustainable development, properly understood, is not just about ‘using’ the Sustainable Development Goals to continue to do what you are already doing.

Nor is it about simply delivering governments’ priorities through cultural institutions.

It is about transformative change: goal-based, progressive, ongoing, for a better world for all, rooted in the challenges and opportunities of the real world.

It is about building a fairer world where everyone has a decent standard of living and opportunities, protecting and restoring nature, promoting peace and social justice, and strengthening collaboration and solidarity.

Sustainable development recognises that challenges are interconnected, so responses have to be connected too, for a better world that works for people and nature, together.

Sustainable development is also dependent on the participation of people and communities in determining their own pathways to desirable futures.

It is about building the future together, today.

That means institutions cannot simply provide the answers to society (even if they think they can), but they can work with people and groups as they determine their own futures.

Some readers may find some of the assertions and recommendations idealistic, but what is wrong with a bit of idealism? Surely it is better than the nihilism that people are faced with in mass media, which can distract and paralyse the actions that we are able to take. Let us not sit on the sidelines and complain about the state of the world, as that is to throw away our agency and responsibility. Sustainable development is based on action and, wherever we are, there are abundant opportunities to put our shoulder to the wheel to understand and unlock this potential. Not only will it achieve positive outcomes in the wider world, you can also say ‘I tried’.

Being pragmatic, some of the recommendations would be difficult to achieve in some contexts, and it would be very naïve to think that they could be achieved everywhere. But many, indeed most of the recommendations and ideas, would not be difficult or impossible in most contexts. In fact, many of the recommendations could be done with no extra funding: they are easy, and all they take is a bit of time and a commitment to do them. If museums want to, there is a great deal that they can do for people-centred, rights-respecting sustainable development.

This guide is not a recipe book or a checklist, and if you have your own ideas, then please, do put them into action. Don’t wait.

Sustainable development approaches are here to help individuals, communities, organisations, towns, countries and nature too. Let’s use them.

Museums also face many challenges, as we will explore, and they have found themselves rather poorly equipped to face current situations, of which a few could be said to be:

- Museums and museum organisations making statements about some current crises (notably wars and conflicts), but not others, leading to criticism and suspicion about their motives, impartiality and transparency
- Museums may be used as sites of protest, and museums sometimes act in ways that undermine people’s right to protest as they don’t fully understand their responsibilities
- Museums may repress freedom of speech as they do not understand its limits
- Shrinking public funding, from political choices, is a great challenge to museums in many (but not all) countries
- Market-based approaches to museums undermine workers’ rights and people’s cultural rights
- Market-based approaches also cause conflict when museums enter into relationships with controversial and/or undesirable partners, notably fossil fuel companies
- Museums are not a ‘one size fits all’, but the big ones, that tend to get more attention, have particular problems that smaller museums don’t face in the same ways
- The growth of museums and museum visits can have high environmental costs, that also need to be addressed in many contexts
- Museum collections include objects that communities and countries wish to see returned or repatriated, but the pace is extremely slow
- Some museums struggle to survive, while others (mostly bigger museums) monopolise funding, and new museums and other cultural institutions are built that put further strain on shrinking budgets
- ‘Short-termism’ and project-based funding undermine long-term resilience and relevance, as well as undermining sustainable development of places and nature
- Museums and collections will be impacted by climate change if they aren’t already
- Conflict and war threaten collections, buildings and people. They should be addressed and prevented as far as possible

Sustainable development points us to good tools and approaches to address all of these challenges:

Human rights can be seen as one half of sustainable development: they give us a normative framework and help us identify what we should be doing in situations, how, and why. They are more than normative, they are aspirational. They help us make and justify transparent decisions, promoting trust and accountability. They have legal standing in many places, promote international solidarity, and they have moral standing everywhere. They help us promote and achieve social justice as well as putting people at the centre of our concerns.

Environmental goals can be seen as the other half of sustainable development - they give us a normative framework that recognises that people and nature are interconnected. Acting for biodiversity, climate action and pollution is a matter of social justice and legal compliance, as well as respect for nature and a recognition that it is the very basis of our lives.

However, human rights are a small part of museum thinking, not factored into governments' requirements of museums, or museums' requirements of themselves. As evidence of this, when it was the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 2023, very few museums took part in the initiative, although they could have done so and benefitted too.

Similarly, environmental goals - as in the Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity - are not really factored into the work of the museum sector. There is a long way to go with this, but there are readymade frameworks and opportunities that museums can pick up off the shelf, as we shall explore.

The ICOM Code of Ethics, which is intended to guide ICOM members and museums everywhere, didn't include much mention of human rights when it was revised in 2004, and didn't refer to either the Paris Climate Agreement or Convention on Biological Diversity although these were already more than ten years old when the Code was last revised. Museums' concerns have not attended too well to the world's challenges and opportunities.

Museums need to be transparent, effective and collaborative. Otherwise, they may act in self-interested ways that will ultimately undermine public trust in them and erode the museum sector as a whole. Sustainable development helps us build a sector (not just a group of separate, competing institutions) fit for the present and the future, while contributing to addressing social and environmental challenges at the same time.

If museums are to contribute effectively to sustainable development, it is imperative that they get beyond thinking of sustainability as meaning simply 'careful use of natural resources'. That is part of it, but not all of it. Peace, justice and strong institutions - as opposed to conflict, injustice and weak institutions - are also part of sustainable development. We also recognise that people and nature are interdependent, and protecting and restoring nature is also, or can be, very good for people too.

Ensuring everyone can live a life of dignity, in peace, with justice, on a healthy planet - the motto of the United Nations - is an excellent basis for sustainable development. It could easily be factored into the work of museums.

Following the goal-based approach of the Sustainable Development Goals also helps to propel action forward, and to collaborate with other sectors. That helps us learn fast, act fast, and communicate effectively as we take part in this transformative programme of action.

So, if you are interested in museums 'beyond' destructive economic thinking and are curious about how to reposition museums so that they are part of sustainable development - inclusive, forward-facing, and transformative, guided by human rights and environmental goals - this guide is for you.

As will be mentioned many times, sustainable development is not about talk or concepts. It is about action.

This guide is very practical. You will be pointed to concrete, practical actions, some small, some large, to help you along. You have already started with sustainable development, let's help you keep going, grow the speed, confidence, relationships and momentum, and mobilise ourselves and our work to take part. You will find this rewarding. Like riding a bike, the more you practice this, the better you will get at it. It is easy when you know how, and with a bit of practice you can go a really long way.

Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet. How wonderful would that be! And, then what would we do?

THIS GUIDE IS IN TWO PARTS:

A

Exploring sustainable development outlines:

- The context for sustainable development (Section 1)
- Culture and sustainable development (Section 2)
- Human rights and environmental goals for sustainable development (Section 3)
- Common concerns and public goods (Section 4)
- Monitoring and reporting culture and participation (Section 5)

B

Strengthening multilateral action for sustainable development outlines how museums can connect with the purpose and actions of Our Common Agenda and the Pact for the Future.

HOW MUSEUMS AND MUSEUM WORKERS CAN USE THIS GUIDE

Museum curators can use Part A to understand how collections, curation, interpretation and participation relate to sustainable development and human rights.

Museum conservators can use Part A to understand how cultural heritage relates to human rights, in terms of access to and use of cultural heritage.

Museum educators can use Part A to understand how education relates to human rights, and the importance of active, free and meaningful participation in all activities. It can also help them to understand the responsibilities of museums to respect, protect and fulfil freedoms of expression and to participate in public affairs.

Museum managers can use Part A to understand the public duties of museums regarding various human rights, to guide their decisions and how to allocate resources.

All museum staff can use Part B to identify opportunities to focus their efforts to contribute to the actions of the Pact for the Future.

All museum staff have abundant opportunities to focus their work towards respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights, and protecting and restoring the natural environment.

All museum staff can work through this guide. ‘To do’ actions are intended to help you to reflect on how you already contribute to sustainable development, to ask questions about your organisation and your work, and to help you clarify your goals and intentions as you mobilise yourself for sustainable development.

This guide can be used along with other **Curating Tomorrow guides**, which explore particular aspects of sustainable development.









A MUSEUM MANIFESTO FOR THE 21st CENTURY:

INCLUSIVE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR COMMON FUTURES

This manifesto draws on the principles and goals of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, and builds on the frameworks set out in Museums and the Sustainable Development Goals, and Museums for Better Futures.

Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.

Nature also deserves to be protected and restored.

Human rights, environmental protection and restoration guide the goals, actions and processes of sustainable development.

People are entitled to contribute to decisions that will affect them. Participation in decision-making is an essential part of sustainable development.

What this means for museums:
Museums have many opportunities to contribute to people-centred sustainable development. Acknowledging these opportunities means museums have corresponding responsibilities: duties to act for the common good and our shared futures.

As public institutions, museums should direct themselves to fulfilling these responsibilities, everywhere.

Museums can contribute to inclusive sustainable development in many ways, notably by

1. **Protecting and safeguarding cultural and natural heritage, both within museums and more generally**
2. **Supporting and providing learning opportunities that support sustainable development**
3. **Enabling cultural participation for all, within museums and in wider society**
4. **Supporting sustainable tourism**
5. **Enabling research that contributes to sustainable development**
6. **Directing leadership, management and operations towards sustainable development outcomes**
7. **Directing external leadership, collaboration and partnerships towards sustainable development outcomes**



In order to achieve the necessary transformations, museums can take the following ten actions:

1. Connect museum work with sustainable development agendas and approaches more concretely, including the Sustainable Development Goals, human rights and the Human Rights-based Approach, Disaster Risk Reduction and environmental goals.

2. Set clear goals, plans, actions, monitoring and communication of sustainable development activity. It is not enough to ‘support’ sustainable development.

3. Connect global and local dimensions: empower people to understand and contribute towards local and global initiatives, such as international days, to make multilateralism commonplace.

4. Make use of current practical action plans for human rights and environmental goals, to contribute to multilateralism.

5. Restoring nature is good for people, communities and nature. Empower people to take part in environmental action that brings people together in a common endeavour, promotes mutual understanding, respect and compassion for one another, and protects and restores nature too.

6. Empower people to draw on culture and heritage as resources promoting sustainable development action, and not as barriers to action.

7. Make use of museums as information centres and platforms for sustainable development activity, facilitating the smooth flow of sustainable development information upwards, downwards and across society and across sectors.

8. Make sure that activity is rights-based, acknowledging that people have their own ideas, aspirations and goals, individually and collectively. While there is a place for top-down programming, ensure that there are also opportunities for people to shape programmes, goals and activities that will affect them, using the Human Rights-based Approach. Respect, protect and fulfil human rights, always.

9. Make sure that museum activities are appropriate and sensitive to the aspirations and goals of people, notably minorities, to 'Leave No-one Behind'.

10. Museums can support long-term transformations. They need to empower people to learn the lessons of past experiences, and prepare for and shape the future. Everyone should have opportunities to learn about challenges and opportunities, and to contribute their ideas and take part in decision-making for desirable futures.

EXPLORING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A



SECTION 1:

THE CONTEXT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1.1
Our world today

Our world today contains many challenges. Some are persistent and long-term, others are new and emerging (such as the impacts of AI on jobs, or technologies of surveillance).

- ECONOMIC CHALLENGES
  - The current economic system and political system in many countries is taking us far away from sustainable development.
  - Inequality, within and between countries, results from the concentration of wealth in the hands of a tiny part of the population, while many people are impoverished by political and economic decisions.
  - That inequity was built over centuries through colonialism and imperialism, and latterly with economic domination. However, it is actively maintained by decisions now.
  - Reducing public funding for public services is not a self-evident fact, or a done deal: it is a political choice. We should recognise the difference and resist the privatisation of the cultural sector.
- SOCIAL CHALLENGES
  Poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunity based on gender, disability, age, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, and other status, are widespread. These manifest themselves in multiple ways, with physical and mental health impacts, reducing the length and quality of people's lives and restricting their freedom in multiple ways.
- ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES
  Climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution are massive challenges that need addressing, for the sake of nature, and for the sake of people.
- CHALLENGES TO PEACE AND SECURITY
  Weakening multilateralism, mistrust of institutions and politicians, failure of politicians to secure sustainable development, failure to protect and restore nature, and poor health and other issues all result from globalisation and the rise of populism.

  Wars - the ultimate failure of relations within and between countries - are happening now, in many places. Conflicts come in many shapes and sizes, from local, small-scale conflicts, to civil wars and international conflicts, in which civilians and nature suffer the terrible consequences.
- CHALLENGES TO MULTILATERAL ACTION
  It is now more than 75 years since the founding of the United Nations and the international rules-based order, after the devastation of two World Wars, the Holocaust, mass deaths and killings in many countries, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, and the attendant refugee crisis. Yet, history is practically repeating itself with wars, genocides and mass killings, countries turn away from responsibility, and people do not know what to do. Organisations, including museums, go quiet as they have not prepared themselves in advance. On top of these crises, new crises, notably environmental damage and new challenges from technology and globalisation, make it even more difficult to address challenges effectively.

Nevertheless, none of these challenges or outcomes are a fait accompli. While the slow pace of change is a symptom of a lack of appetite or ability of governments to genuinely address them, mass interest and mass concern can ramp up the pressure to do the necessary.

Multilateral action also needs organisations to play their parts. How many museums address poverty? How many museums speak up about conflicts or disasters around the world, although they have abundant opportunities to do so? How many museums factor human rights into their goals, plans and reporting? How many museums have set concrete goals for reducing greenhouse emissions (including visitor travel emissions), developing a climate adaptation plan, or protecting and restoring nature? How many museums have committed to workers' rights, ending exploitation, and supporting fair economies? Not enough. Cultural institutions, supposed to serve and benefit society, are in a privileged position to support such necessary transformations. This guide aims to help you understand how they can do this, in a rights-respecting way.

There is a massive potential for museums to contribute to sustainable development challenges, if they want to. In fact they have rights-based responsibilities and obligations to do so. The question is, are they prepared to accept the call and live up to these responsibilities and obligations. Knowledge is power, and the majority of museums do not currently have the necessary information, direction or practical tools to help them stand up for freedom of expression, to properly promote participation in public affairs, or to empower people and communities to really achieve their rights through museums. This guide aims to help arm you and protect you with this knowledge, although how it may be practically used will vary from place to place, and even from museum to museum.

Not every museum or museum worker will have the appetite for this, but many do. Let us work together, speak up, find one another, learn from one another, and be on the front foot as we take hold of what we can do, and make it happen.

This work is not about grand statements. It is about action, which might be very small actions or larger ones.

We all have agency and autonomy in some aspects of our work. Change begins with us, change can start today if it hasn't already.

TO DO

What are the main challenges and opportunities in your town? How is your museum currently addressing them?

Accept what you can't change.
Change what you can't accept.

1.2
Agenda 2030 and the SDGs: a vision of a better world

At the same time that there are massive challenges (explored in the previous section), there are also massive opportunities. Addressing social and environmental challenges is not just about fixing problems, but setting a direction for a world at peace, where everyone fulfils their potential, where poverty and inequality are things of the past, and where nature is protected and restored (habitats can be restored or enhanced, and local extinctions reversed; global extinctions are not reversible). All of these things are possible, with effort and attention.

The best opportunity we currently have is the vision set out in Agenda 2030, with its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). While not perfect, the Agenda is an opportunity for more of society to come together to shape desirable pathways to a better future. It is far better to work with what we can in this Agenda, and share our views for the next one, than to simply not bother with it.



The ‘5 Ps’ of Agenda 2030: our five missions for a better world

Agenda 2030 has five over-arching goals, that take the three traditional aspects of sustainability (social, economic and environmental) and add on two further aspects (peace and partnership). Not only that, the Agenda goes beyond talking about these aspects as generalised, abstract dimensions of sustainability, to turn them into specific, goal-oriented, action-oriented challenges and programmes of action. These are the ‘5 Ps’ (they all start with the letter ‘P’). The 5 Ps are our over-arching missions, all of which have to be achieved for a better future for everyone and for nature. The 17 SDGs as goals are a more focussed blueprint for action to address these five missions.

THE ‘5 Ps’		MISSIONS
1.	**People:**	to **end poverty and hunger,** in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.
2.	**Planet:**	to **protect the planet from degradation**, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.
3.	**Prosperity:**	to **ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives** and that economic, social, and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.
4.	**Peace:**	to **foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies** which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.
5.	**Partnership:**	to mobilise the means required to implement the 2030 Agenda through a revitalised Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on **a spirit of strengthened global solidarity**, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.

While the titles of the ‘5 Ps’ are easy to remember, if anything it is more important to remember the active parts: to end poverty and hunger, to protect the planet from degradation, to ensure prosperous and fulfilling lives in harmony with nature, to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies and to strengthen global solidarity. The ‘5 Ps’ are not simply concepts: they are missions and calls to action.

Partnership is absolutely fundamental to sustainable development, that is why it has its own ‘P’ and is also a standalone Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 17, Partnerships for the Goals).

Note especially the reference above to **‘strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people’**.

End poverty and hunger, protect the planet, ensure prosperous fulfilling lives, foster peace, strengthen solidarity

‘All stakeholders’ is an invitation to all museums - as a sector and individually. Not only can museums contribute directly to the SDGs, some goals will not be achieved without their involvement. On the other hand, museums really need the SDGs to strengthen their contributions to society (as outlined in ‘**Museums and the Sustainable Development Goals**’).

Agenda 2030 and the SDGs have **three universal values** that should be adhered to at all times:

Human Rights-based Approach: recognised human rights standards (notably human rights Conventions) guide programmes and decisions. People affected by decisions (rights holders) should be consulted by authorities and other actors (duty-bearers), empowering people to claim their rights, and ensuring organisations deliver their responsibilities.

Leave No-one Behind: prioritising the needs of the poor and combatting inequality within and between countries, combatting discriminatory laws, policies and social practices.

Gender equality and women’s empowerment: ensuring everyone has access to opportunities in life, for leadership, access to employment opportunities and decent work, and life in society.

> Sustainable development is an active process of change and transformation, building on what we do that contributes positively to the world, and reducing the negative impacts of what we do. This is what it means to

- **Do more good:** respecting, protecting, fulfilling and promoting human rights so that more people enjoy their rights; sharing benefits more equally across society; protecting and restoring nature
- **Do less harm:** understand museums’ negative impacts (on workers, suppliers, communities, climate and biodiversity, weak governance and decision-making) and taking positive steps to reduce those negative impacts

Do more good, and do less harm, directed to achieving real-world goals, helps to strengthen human freedom and dignity, and protect and restore nature, as a basis for sustainable development.

As an ever-moving horizon, sustainability is the goal, and sustainable development is the pathway to get there.

TO DO

Pay attention to the ‘5 Ps’. Note how they are not just about ‘staying the same’. They are five missions that are calling on all of us to act, and to act together. Making sure action for one doesn’t undo action for another is what helps achieve a more harmonious balance between people and nature. The five missions are highly ambitious and goal-oriented. They underpin the SDGs. Try to remember them as much as possible, beyond the five ‘P’ words: the missions are crucial.

1.3
How can museums contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals?

Museums can contribute to sustainable development and the SDGs in lots of ways. As a simple framework, they can concentrate on these seven key activities, which are set out in 'Museums and the Sustainable Development Goals':

1. **Protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage, both within museums and more generally:** making sure collections are in good condition, shared effectively, and developed to maximise their public benefit; showing concern for cultural and natural heritage more widely.
2. **Support and provide learning opportunities in support of the SDGs:** education and learning are lifelong, empowering people to take part in sustainable development through knowledge, motivation and practical skills.
3. **Enable cultural participation for all:** enabling people to take part in museums, and also to take part in the cultural life of the community and of humanity, and to take part in decisions that affect them.
4. **Support sustainable tourism:** strengthening the positives of tourism and eliminating negative aspects.
5. **Enable research in support of the SDGs:** facilitating research, and acting as a platform for research.
6. **Direct internal leadership, management and operations towards the SDGs:** making everyday decisions count every day for a better world.
7. **Direct external leadership, collaboration and partnerships towards the SDGs:** taking part in local and global partnerships for a better future.

A museum will be operating at high capacity when these seven activities are effectively supported, delivered and developed. A museum that allows one aspect to 'balloon' at the expense of the others is not operating effectively, and will need to rebalance its activity at some point.

If museums, museum organisations and the wider museum sector are serious when they say they aim to contribute to sustainable development, then they need to walk the talk: understand the SDGs and targets, set priorities, make plans, do the work, and tell the story. This is not extra work, but a way to plan and deliver our work more effectively and efficiently, and for greater public good. Working with the SDGs makes a lot of sense: the SDGs need museums, and museums need the SDGs.

TO DO

Look at the framework of seven key activities above. Which ones relate closely to your own work?







'Museums and the Sustainable Development Goals', 'Mainstreaming the SDG's', and 'Localizing the SDGs' are open-access guides that set out the basics of sustainable development and the SDGs, and provide step-by-step frameworks to help you get to work, and create a timetable. From no prior knowledge you will learn how you are already contributing to sustainable development and the SDGs, and make and deliver concrete actions to strengthen your contributions to a better future.

"The SDGs need museums, and museums need the SDGs"

1.4
Frequent misunderstandings about sustainable development

Before we go further, it is worth being upfront about some of the misunderstandings or criticisms that come up again and again regarding sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Let's address these right away.

Criticism 1. Sustainable development is about trying to stay the same or a steady state. **Sustainable development is about ongoing change,** which may be small or may be transformative depending on the context. It is not just about stopping things going wrong or minimising negative impacts, it is also about unlocking and creating positive social and environmental potential, to maximise human freedom and to protect and restore nature.

Criticism 2. Sustainable development is 'development' made a bit more 'sustainable'. Sustainable development is not 'unsustainable development with a few tweaks'. **It is a different type of development, prioritising human and environmental outcomes, not just economics.**

Criticism 3. Sustainable development is incremental. **Sustainable development, as in Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, is goal-oriented and goal-based, and aiming to be as transformative as possible.** The highest aspirations of a world with human rights for all, in peace, on a healthy planet, are not incremental: they are ambitious and aspirational. The greater effort we put into achieving these fundamental goals, the stronger our sustainable development action is.

Criticism 4. Sustainable development and the SDGs are a new thing. **The SDGs are a governance innovation** to help address the many challenges that are not currently being achieved, many of which are covered by existing international conventions on human rights and environmental protection, that people don't know about and governments don't manage to deliver. By creating opportunities for more of society to take part in a common programme, we have a much better chance of making progress on these, and addressing them together to avoid trade-offs between the challenges.

Criticism 5. The SDGs are just a neoliberal programme. While it is true that economic growth is included within the SDGs, along with many other things, that does not mean the whole programme should be thrown out in the absence of an alternative. There is plenty in the Agenda that can be used to shift focus away from economic growth and to build a world that is fairer for everyone. It is also important to recognise that the goals and targets aren't supposed to be cherry-picked: we take action to address all of them, and to secure action and outcomes for the '5 Ps'. That is why we shouldn't over-focus on one part of them.

Criticism 6. The SDGs favour the Global North. **The SDGs are a framework that applies to all countries, tailored to local circumstances**, which is different from the Millennium Development Goals (which only covered Global South countries). The **SDGs were conceived of in the Global South:** the lead proponent was from Colombia, and early champions were Guatemala and Peru, expanded to South America and Caribbean countries. **The Open Working Group** that developed the detail of the SDGs involved representative participation from a wide range of countries. The SDGs were developed by a more inclusive process than previous development agendas, with input from more than 10 million people, and a more inclusive process than museum policy developments.

Criticism 7. The Sustainable Development Goals are just for governments. Governments have made commitments to work towards the SDGs, and how they do that is left up to them. However, **the fundamental principle of Leave No-one Behind also applies to the Agenda and the SDGs.** They are an invitation to all sectors and all people to take part in sustainable development, and to apply their ideas and creativity to addressing them in locally meaningful ways, to achieve transformative outcomes in a global partnership. By involving those affected by decisions, decisions made can be more transparent, more transformative, and more likely to actually be achieved.

In summary, the SDGs are a tool. Like any tool, they can be used for good or used for bad.[1] Ensuring that we work with the underlying principles - of a human rights-based approach, Leave No-one Behind, and gender equality - makes sure we are using them for public benefit, not selfish purposes.

Let us recognise these misunderstandings and criticisms for what they are and not let them get in the way as we set out to explore how museums can contribute to sustainable development and the SDGs.

TO DO

When you think of 'sustainability' or 'sustainable development', are you free of these seven misunderstandings and criticisms?

1.5
Values for collaboration and co-operation in the 21st Century

The importance of partnerships and solidarity has already been mentioned, and will be mentioned many times through this guide. That is because they are fundamental for sustainable development. The Millennium Declaration (2000) identified six fundamental values for international relations in the 21st century:

Freedom. Men and women have the right to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice. Democratic and participatory governance based on the will of the people best assures these rights.

Equality. No individual and no nation must be denied the opportunity to benefit from development. The equal rights and opportunities of women and men must be assured.

Solidarity. Global challenges must be managed in a way that distributes the costs and burdens fairly in accordance with basic principles of equity and social justice. Those who suffer or who benefit least deserve help from those who benefit most.

Tolerance. Human beings must respect one other, in all their diversity of belief, culture and language. Differences within and between societies should be neither feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity. A culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations should be actively promoted.

Respect for nature. Prudence must be shown in the management of all living species and natural resources, in accordance with the precepts of sustainable development. Only in this way can the immeasurable riches provided to us by nature be preserved and passed on to our descendants. The current unsustainable patterns of production and consumption must be changed in the interest of our future welfare and that of our descendants.

Shared responsibility. Responsibility for managing worldwide economic and social development, as well as threats to international peace and security, must be shared among the nations of the world and should be exercised multilaterally. As the most universal and most representative organization in the world, the United Nations must play the central role."

Note, again, the emphasis on solidarity, as in the '5 Ps' explored earlier, and the principle of shared responsibility. The United Nations states that it has a central role to play, and museums and the museum sector can benefit from making use of many UN approaches and principles, to strengthen multilateralism and international relations.

These fundamental values could also be used by museums as a framework for their own actions and decisions, to collaborate with one another, with people and communities, with other sectors and internationally.

We will bear these six principles in mind through this guide, and we can make use of them to take action for sustainable development and the SDGs. We can also consider the extent to which we really use these principles in museums, and what actions are needed to embed them in museum work more effectively. Who or what are we ignoring? Where should we be directing our attention? How are we making our decisions? How can we do more (and why aren't we)?

TO DO

Think of a museum you know. How do its actions support the six principles above? How does it undermine these principles? What actions could help it support these principles more effectively?

Now think about your own work. Do these six principles align with what you believe you should be doing, as a person and as a worker? What opportunities do you have to make more use of them?

1.6
Challenges facing cultural institutions

While museums and cultural institutions face some of the same challenges as the rest of society - inequality, poverty, climate change, governance challenges, threats to peace and security - the cultural sector in many countries faces some particular and related challenges:

- Cultural institutions in some countries are ideologically (politically) driven to behave like businesses in a market place, and accept a decline in public funding
- 'Culture' is often taken as meaning the cultural sector/'high culture', and is strongly connected to tourism and economic growth in politicians' minds
- Competition between institutions, and competition within them, in the context of project-based funding which is generally insufficient
- Excessive focus on short-term impacts rather than long-term maintenance or change for sustainable futures
- Instrumentalisation of culture and cultural institutions for different agendas, with little transparency
- Shrinkage of civic space and heavy-handed approaches by authorities (including museums) to prevent dissent

These challenges can create some responses that are headed in the wrong direction, the opposite of sustainable development:

- Institutions pressed to do more and more with less and less, till they are trying to do everything with nothing
- Excessive competition between institutions, rather than behaving as a sector
- Increasing inequality between institutions
- Staff poorly paid or in insecure employment, while museums simultaneously aim to be 'more inclusive'
- Understaffing and over-use of volunteers to replace paid staff, undermining workers' rights
- Addressing climate change through exhibitions and events, without addressing the impact of visitor travel (which can be the biggest source of emissions in many museums)
- Museums behaving in top-down ways that seek to 'fix' people's problems, in ways that are not rights-respecting or rights-based,
- Excessive focus on short-term impacts while not protecting or developing the underlying long-term assets (collections, buildings and staff)
- Measures of success that are growth-based rather than outcomes-based
- Censorship and self-censorship, that suppress a diversity of views and turn away from human rights challenges

We will explore many of these topics in this guide.

TO DO

Which of these challenges and responses can you see in museums you know?

Do you think these challenges and responses are getting better (less), or getting worse?

1.7
The challenges of Neoliberalism, marketisation and privatisation

This guide is also written to try to shift the focus of museums away from Neoliberal and market-based approaches. Why? Because an over-emphasis on these can result in the erosion of the quality of cultural experiences and undermine the effectiveness of cultural institutions.

Neoliberalism is an ideology described as 'capitalism on steroids'. It focusses on free-market capitalism, deregulation, and reduction in government spending. Essentially, it forces institutions to compete ever more intensely for declining government funding. It is a race to the bottom. Neoliberalism is a great threat to human rights, and is opposed to notions of solidarity, or responsibility for others or nature.[2]

Marketisation is related to Neoliberalism, but not the same. Marketisation applies market-based approaches to what were formerly non-market services or goods. In terms of museums, marketisation can be thought of as having two main aspects. Firstly, museums are increasingly reliant on and exposed to (and expose themselves to) the marketplace, meaning they are reliant on visitor expenditure, project funding and other sources of income (e.g. sponsorship) due to reductions in core funding and because they are hungry for bigger budgets. Second (and partly because of the first aspect), museums increasingly use market-related tools and tactics, such as advertising and marketing, awards schemes that drive up competition, special offers, and membership schemes with benefits; these are all standard marketing tactics.[3]

Privatisation is also a strong thread in Neoliberalism. According to Whitfield, privatisation is "more than asset stripping the public sector. It is a comprehensive strategy for permanently restructuring the welfare state and public services in the interests of capital."[4]

Key elements of privatisation and marketisation (adapted from Whitfield 2003, 2020)

Privatisation	Marketisation
Ownership of public assets (services, organisations, buildings, land, IP, information) sold or transferred to private or voluntary sector Governance and accountability of public bodies reduced or diluted by shifting to company and trust models Increased use of finance and investment, new/increased charges for services Operating principles and values changed to reflect private and commercial interests (funders' requirements, sponsorship, and only doing what is fundable) Management of public organisations restructured and commercialised to implement the above changes	Commodification of services and infrastructure (putting a price on it, charging for services) Commodification of labour: reorganising work and jobs for financial efficiency, reducing staffing, outsourcing for financial reasons Restructuring regulation of public organisations to promote competition and market-based approaches (e.g. shifting regulation to match with Neoliberal aims, project-based funding provision, reducing required staffing levels) Restructuring (reducing) democratic accountability Embedding and promoting business interests in management and communications

Neoliberalism is a break with the post-Second World War consensus that recognised that some aspects of functioning societies rely on or deserve public funding, funded through taxation.

Neoliberalism grew as a set of ideas from the mid-20th century and was embraced wholeheartedly by the dictator Augusto Pinochet in Chile, in the UK when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister (1979-90), and in the US under Ronald Reagan's 'Reaganomics'. It pervades modern politics, economics and society in many countries today.

Thatcher once (notoriously) stated in an interview that "there is no such thing as society", "only individual men, women and families".[5] Although Thatcher's statements were in the context of social security, they chime with Neoliberalism's general 'culture' of deregulation, individualism, selfishness, ruthlessness and cruelty, and declining public spending. This approach (considering only competing, selfish individuals) is a political strategy that exerts strong, authoritarian political control by undermining the existence of groups and networks, that also impacts heavily on culture and cultural institutions.

Far from creating the 'freedom' and 'liberty' that it claimed, instead, Neoliberalism undermined workers' rights and citizens' rights and ramped up inequality. For the great majority of people, it boosted negative globalisation that prioritised the production of cheap goods for mass consumption, with low wages and poor protections for people, declining resources for public services, and without environmental protections. Neoliberal 'reforms' divided society and communities into atomised individuals, where measures of activity are geared towards the individual rather than the collective.

Neoliberalism is toxic: for people, for the planet, for collaboration, for peace and stability, and for culture (in narrow and broad senses).

Why mention this now? Because Thatcher's reforms set a direction that continues today in the UK, and because the 'UK model' is now being applied to cultural sectors in other countries, so that cultural organisations are expected to behave like businesses rather than as part of publicly funded public services.

Neoliberal approaches would have it that there is no museum sector, only individual museums competing with one another, in a dog-eat-dog world where some survive and others are left to fail: a sector of winners and losers, with little regard for fairness or basic entitlements to cultural activities. Unfortunately, Neoliberalism pushes museums to behave in such a way, but there are ways to resist this.

The 'cultural goods' (exhibitions, activities) that are offered by museums under the Neoliberal mindset are geared towards market-based considerations: typically, maximizing visitor numbers and visitor 'spend' (tickets to exhibitions, merchandise and in museum cafés). Maximising visitor numbers may be sought as a means to increasing visitor spend, rather than as an end in itself.

Project funding (soft funding) is also a marketplace, as numbers of cultural institutions compete with one another to secure funding from a pot that is insufficient to meet the needs of all institutions, all of whom presumably have worthwhile projects and real needs.

While many smaller museums struggle to survive, larger ones monopolise funding, and take up excessive space in the museum press. New museums, even very large ones, are opened and require funding in countries where existing museums struggle to balance their books. This makes the sector become even more unbalanced, as funding is directed towards these new, often glamorous, museums with massive budgets and heavy financial demands, diverting yet more of the diminishing funding away from smaller museums.

The result of this? There are winners (those who get funding) and losers (those who don't). Small institutions will tend to lose out in such a competition as they don't even have the staff to write funding bids. Very large institutions will always receive substantial government support and have enough distinction to become distinctive 'brands' (another market-based trait). Those in the middle were typically built on inequality in the past (e.g. on industrial capital), but have sufficient resources to seek further funding from grants. So, a system is built that was unfair when it was founded, continues to be unfair now, and in many ways gets worse.

How can we change this dynamic? Attending to social and environmental challenges and opportunities as the core of museum work gives us a different outlook, that goes beyond simply 'balancing the budget'. A healthy balance sheet is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, namely, contributing to a better future for all. Working in this way, with people as rights-bearing participants rather than as recipients/beneficiaries of market providers, can also give museums a clear purpose that can help to protect and enhance their continuity and their funding.

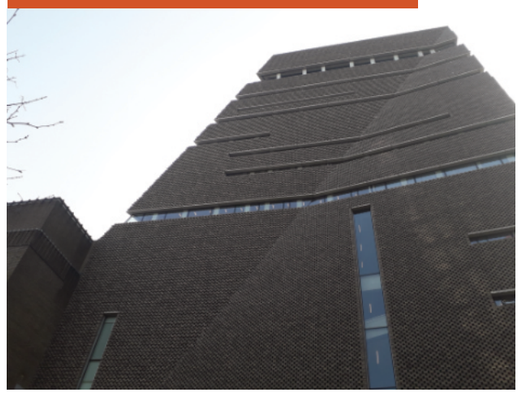
TO DO

Think of a museum you know. Can you see signs of increasing marketisation or privatisation? What positive and negative impacts do these have on people's cultural opportunities? Who benefits, and who is left out?



V&A Dundee opened in 2018 at a cost of £80 million, while many existing museums struggle to survive. Do expensive, glamorous capital projects enrich the cultural sector, or undermine its resilience?

Tate Modern is named for Sir Henry Tate; the Blavatnik Wing is named for one of the world's wealthiest men. Both funders are controversial: Tate made his fortune in the colonial sugar trade; Blavatnik made his fortune in oil, aluminium and media, and has been accused of censorship. Both funders have attracted criticism and public protest.



1.8
Sustainable development: a basis and a vision for a better cultural sector

A vision for a more effective, accountable, transformative museum sector can be built on the foundations of Agenda 2030, using the SDGs and (especially) the targets, and wider sustainable development approaches as templates.

- More effective
- More relevant
- More inclusive
- More diverse
- More transformative
- More transparent
- More collaborative
- More peaceful
- More vibrant
- Better for people and for nature
- More stable
- Better prepared
- More resilient

Working to address sustainable development challenges empowers institutions **to contribute to the most pressing challenges of our time.**

It enables them to **learn fast about what they should be doing, and to do it.**

It is not just about 'stopping things going wrong' or 'being more sustainable'. It is about **helping things go right.**

Public institutions, or institutions accepting public funding, **carry some of the State's responsibilities** to fulfil its commitments regarding human rights and environmental action.

Working to address sustainable development challenges **also recognises people's and communities' rights to be the architects of their own futures**, not just the 'beneficiaries' of museums' or funders' decisions. It respects, protects and fulfils their human rights and the rights of other people, as well as protecting and restoring nature.

Sustainable development, properly applied, can also help us **move towards a stronger museum sector**, built on common principles for common challenges tailored to local contexts, strengthening partnerships between institutions and across different contexts and countries.

Museums are not a marketplace or an industry. They are fundamental, multifunctional infrastructures for society and communities that can play many roles in sustainable development. We should remember that, or come to realise it. A museum sector that focusses more on **respecting, protecting, fulfilling and promoting human rights, and protecting and restoring nature, as its goals**, will help shift attention away from the dominance of economic thinking that is currently to be found in museums in many countries, and in the minds of cultural policy makers.

Museum workers are people too and deserve to be treated fairly and with respect, in decent work that provides them with their livelihoods. Unfortunately, many museum workers experience low-paid or insecure employment.

A 'Sustainable Development Culture':

- **A commitment to human rights, and making them a reality for everyone as part of our responsibilities**
- **A commitment to protecting and restoring nature**
- **A commitment to tackling poverty and inequality**
- **A commitment to equality for all people, irrespective of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability or other status**
- **A commitment to ensuring workers are fairly treated in decent work**
- **A commitment to social justice and fairer sharing of costs and benefits**
- **A commitment to a Rule of Law culture, and a world at peace**
- **A commitment to collaboration and solidarity**
- **A commitment to active, free and meaningful participation in sustainable development**
- **A commitment to unlocking the potential of culture and heritage to contribute to sustainable development**
- **A commitment to building a better future for people and nature**
- **A commitment to integrity: to clear goals, clear actions, and clear accountability**

We will explore these topics through this guide.

TO DO

Look at this list of commitments and consider them against the list of 17 SDGs. You should see that the SDGs are closely related to this list. Which of these commitments are already part of your work ethic? Which others could you commit to more resolutely?

Recognise that a commitment to a 'sustainable development culture' or a 'sustainable development mindset' embraces all of these aspects, together, as challenges and opportunities are connected.

1.9
'Our Common Agenda' and the 'Pact for the Future'

The 75th anniversary of the United Nations (2020) saw insufficient progress to achieve sustainable development, the terrible impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and worsening peace and security in many places. In light of these many challenges, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres launched Our Common Agenda in 2021, to set out a broad roadmap to get on track to sustainable development. In the report, he stated:

"Humanity has shown time and time again that it is capable of great achievements when we work together. This common agenda is our road map to recapture this positive spirit and begin rebuilding our world and mending the trust in one another we need so desperately at this moment in history."

Our Common Agenda addresses the biggest challenges facing humanity today, building on the SDGs and aiming to help propel action for them forwards. In the report, the UN Secretary-General stated:

"the choices we make, or fail to make, today could result in further breakdown, or a breakthrough to a greener, better, safer future. The choice is ours to make; but we will not have this chance again.

That is why Our Common Agenda is, above all, an agenda of action designed to accelerate the implementation of existing agreements, including the Sustainable Development Goals."

- **Now is the time to re-embrace global solidarity and find new ways to work together for the common good**
- **Now is the time to renew the social contract between Governments and their people and within societies**
- **Now is the time to end the "infodemic" plaguing our world [disinformation and 'fake news']**
- **Now is the time to correct a glaring blind spot in how we measure economic prosperity and progress**
- **Now is the time to think for the long term, to deliver more for young people and succeeding generations and to be better prepared for the challenges ahead**
- **Now is the time for a stronger, more networked and inclusive multilateral system, anchored within the United Nations**

If you too believe that now is the time, then sustainable development provides you with an agenda, goals, outcomes, processes and approaches, and access to lots of good tools.

Now is the time.

So what can we do? To begin to address these challenges and commitments, **Our Common Agenda** made a number of recommendations, which fall into four broad themes:

1. **We the Peoples:** A renewed social contract between governments, people and across societies, anchored in human rights, to rebuild trust and social cohesion

   Trust: effective, accountable, transparent institutions

   Inclusion, protection and participation: education, lifelong learning, decent work, social protection, gender equality, decent housing, digital inclusion

   Measuring and valuing what matters to people and planet: measures beyond GDP, valuing unpaid work and care

2. **A focus on the future, through a deepening of solidarity with the world's young people and future generations**

   Solidarity with younger generations: voice and participation, education, decent work

   Solidarity with future generations: long-term thinking, represent future generations

   Safeguarding the future: a healthy planet, strong institutions, health and social protection, education and work, preparedness

3. **Urgent action to protect and deliver global commons and global public goods, through more networked, inclusive and effective multilateralism**

   Protect the global commons including the atmosphere, high seas, Antarctica and outer space

   Identify and deliver global public goods including global health, information, global economy, healthy planet, science, peace, digital, and identify others.

4. **Renewed multilateralism within, between and across sectors, and organizational effectiveness to be effective, adaptable and transparent**

The Secretary-General proposed a Summit of the Future for 2024, stating "Now is the time to take the next steps in our journey together, in solidarity with and for all people." The Summit resulted in a Pact for the Future (explored below), to make these commitments operational.

In this guide, we will explore these key actions in relation to museums, as a blueprint for how museums can strengthen their commitment and action for sustainable development challenges, and help transform the institutions and the sector at the same time.

TO DO

Look at the list of action areas above. Do you think these actions can make a difference? How motivated are you to embrace the spirit of Our Common Agenda, and play a part in making it a reality?

Our Common Agenda

Topics for 'Our Common Agenda': a programme for transformation

To support the work for Our Common Agenda and to help prepare for the Summit of the Future, a series of **policy briefs** were developed to explore particular topics. These influenced the Pact for the Future and are likely to strongly influence the post-2030 Agenda. They are a valuable source of information that museums can draw on as they pivot to focussing on sustainable development approaches. The recommendations they contain were largely written into the Pact for the Future (explored in the next section).

The policy briefs include (among others):

Transforming Education: transforming education and lifelong learning to meet the needs of today, and recognise education and lifelong learning as global public goods.

To Think and Act for Future Generations: acting for future generations contributes to achieving sustainable development, gender and human rights goals.

Youth engagement: strengthening meaningful youth engagement in decision-making at all levels.

Valuing What Counts: going beyond GDP and poor measures of progress. The SDGs are identified as a widely used framework that does this.

Global Digital Compact: promoting an open, free and secure digital future that benefits everyone.

A New Agenda for Peace: trust, solidarity and universality (of commitments and applicability of human rights) as guiding principles for peace, built locally and globally.

The policy briefs are **summarised into one brief**.

"The future starts today, not tomorrow."

Pope John Paul II

TO DO

Read the summarised policy brief and other briefs that relate to your work. Which ones could you support through your work?

Pact for the Future

The ‘Pact for the Future’: building tomorrow together

In September 2024, the Summit of the Future was a milestone event to set a direction for the post-2030 Agenda, and to complete the work of the current programme as far as possible. The outcome document is called the **Pact for the Future**, and it is accompanied by a **Digital Compact** and a **Declaration on Future Generations**.

The **Pact for the Future was developed and agreed by UN members**, with wide consultation across society. So, it has a strong mandate, both politically and across society. Basically, Our Common Agenda provided the conceptual framework and direction, and the Pact for the Future gives more specific actions to turn Our Common Agenda into reality.

The Pact for the Future sets out its context and its purpose as follows:

“We are at a time of profound global transformation. We are confronted by rising catastrophic and existential risks, many caused by the choices we make. Fellow human beings are enduring terrible suffering. If we do not change course, we risk tipping into a future of persistent crisis and breakdown.

Yet this is also a moment of hope and opportunity. Global transformation is a chance for renewal and progress grounded in our common humanity. Advances in knowledge, science, technology and innovation could deliver a breakthrough to a better and more sustainable future for all. The choice is ours.

We believe that there is a path to a brighter future for all of humanity, including those living in poverty and vulnerable situations. Through the actions we take today, we resolve to set ourselves on that path, striving for a world that is safe, peaceful, just, equal, inclusive, sustainable and prosperous, a world in which well-being, security and dignity and a healthy planet are assured for all humanity.

This will require a recommitment to international cooperation based on respect for international law, without which we can neither manage the risks nor seize the opportunities that we face. This is not an option but a necessity. Our challenges are deeply interconnected and far exceed the capacity of any single State alone. They can only be addressed collectively, through strong and sustained international cooperation guided by trust and solidarity for the benefit of all and harnessing the power of those who can contribute from all sectors and generations.”

What is the point of drawing museums attention to these kinds of agreement? Aren’t they just ‘warm words’? They will achieve little if no-one knows about them, if they are not socialised much more than they are. The Pact is also not only addressed to governments, but to sectors and to people. Yet, most people have probably not heard of Our Common Agenda or the Pact for the Future. Museums could help to spread the word.

Museums and museum organisations can use the Pact for the Future and Our Common Agenda, to guide their decision-making: their goals, funding decisions, policy directions from policy makers, and on-the-ground actions by museums, and every museum worker. Every country has signed up to this, and every sector can, and should, be playing a part to make these aspirations and commitments a reality. Why? Because these initiatives do not come from nowhere: they recognise and aim to address the challenges facing people and communities everywhere.

The chapters of the Pact are:

- **Working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals**, including finance for the goals
- **International Peace and Co-operation**, built around the UN Charter and human rights, multilateralism and co-operation
- **Science, Technology and Innovation**, including the Digital Compact
- **A More Forward-looking World**, considering youth and future generations
- **Fairer Multilateralism**, including involvement of different countries to meet shared challenges and crises

The Pact for the Future includes a number of commitments and actions specifically about culture and heritage, and about education, inclusion and participation. We can use it to guide (or at least inform) the work of museums, to strengthen their contributions to sustainable development, and make the Pact for the Future a reality, everywhere, every day, for everyone.

Museums and museum organisations don’t have their own ‘pact for the future’. They can use the UN Pact as a ready-made template, already agreed, and with a broad mandate across society.

TO DO

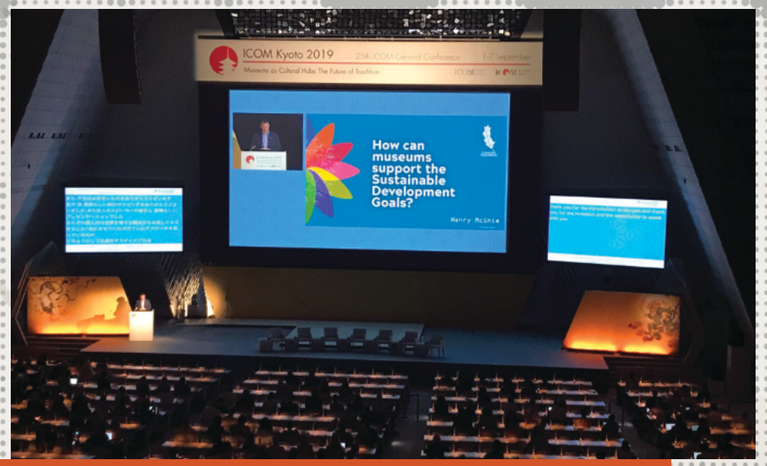
Read the Pact for the Future and the Declaration on Future Generations



1. Sharing museum perspectives at UN Climate Change summit, Bonn, 2018.



2. UN 'Action for Climate Empowerment Dialogue', which featured museum perspectives, Bonn, 2017.



3. ICOM plenary session on museums and the Sustainable Development Goals, Kyoto, 2019.

PHOTO STORY

Museum multilateralism

Multilateralism involves partnerships across and between sectors.

Museums can raise awareness of global perspectives. At the time of the climate change conference COP25, in Madrid in 2019, museums and galleries took part in related activities. Here, the Prado hung a large banner above its entrance *(background photo)*.

Museum perspectives have been included in UN Climate Change summits and workshops, promoting awareness of the contributions and potential of museums as actors in Action for Climate Empowerment (article 6 of the UNFCCC and article 12 of the Paris Agreement) *(photos 1 and 2)*.

The SDGs are the main programme for multilateral action for sustainable development. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) adopted them as the framework for sustainability action at its conference in Kyoto in 2019 *(photo 3)*.

Science Centres have committed to the SDGs. Sector conferences, such as the Science Centre World Summit (Tokyo, 2018) are opportunities to make collective commitments and goals, that participants can take forwards in their own work following these events *(photo 4)*.



4. Science Centre World Summit, Tokyo, 2018.

Museums can raise awareness of global perspectives.

SECTION 2

CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2.1
Culture, sustainability, development

What is the place of culture in sustainable development? Has it been left out or undervalued? What can cultural institutions do (and what shouldn't they do) to contribute to sustainable development?

Culture, sustainability and development are three of the most complex and contested words in the English language. The role[s] of culture[s] in sustainable development[s] is debated a lot, but some of the discussion gets confused. We need some kind of shared understanding of what we mean by them, or at least we need to be able to explain what they mean to each of us to avoid mixing up different meanings, which can get in the way of genuine sustainable development action. We do not need concrete definitions, nor do we need to agree on single definitions for each term, as these are undesirable. All people and communities should be able to freely determine what sustainable development and culture looks like to them; that freedom is, itself, part of sustainable development.

2.1.1 Culture

UNESCO defines culture as:

"the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature, but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs"

In this definition, culture extends far beyond the old-fashioned and elitist idea that culture is the 'best' of human creativity (a problematic idea as it is often linked to colonial and imperial views): artworks, 'high' refined tastes and performances for social elites. Culture, in the definition above, is everywhere: in our homes, in the streets, in the marketplace, in religious settings, and through our human interactions.

The UNESCO definition is more focussed on culture as the set of practices, rather than the problematic differentiation between 'different cultures' which can come to mean 'civilisations', 'ethnicities' or nationalities, which can separate people into different groups. In the context of fierce nationalism, 'culture' and 'cultures' can be used to differentiate, divide and exclude people.

However, in many people's minds and in common usage, 'culture' means something more narrow, akin to or equal to 'the arts' or 'high culture'. If you look at a newspaper magazine, the 'culture' section is more akin to the 'arts' usage than anything like the UNESCO definition set out above. In such a narrow, snobbish view, key parts of culture, such as education, sports, traditions, popular and folk culture, and literature get omitted entirely. Even museum exhibitions rarely make it into the arts-dominated 'culture' sections of newspapers.

Culture can be, at the same time, too narrow ('the arts' or 'high culture') or too broad (the 'culture is everything' interpretation) to be meaningful or usable for policy development.

Culture has diverse meanings, and sometimes organisations (including UNESCO) slip between these meanings as if they are the same thing. This leads to confusion, and sometimes positive moves regarding culture and sustainable development get derailed to mean different things that are less desirable or not at all desirable.

In his influential 'Keywords: a Vocabulary for Culture and Society',[6] Raymond Williams differentiated between three diverse meanings or approaches to 'culture' (also noting that 'culture' is among the most complicated words in the English language). These remain largely true today:

"(i) The independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development.... [i.e. 'to culture']

(ii) The independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general.... [i.e. 'a way of life, a culture']

(iii) the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity." [i.e. 'cultural works', works considered to have artistic or intellectual merit]

Williams notes that the term's earlier use was mostly concerned with some sense of cultivating in the sense of husbandry of land and tending to agriculture (and which may well have been more in line with 'living in harmony with nature'). The use of the term shifted so that 'culture' moved to be more about individual improvement, and latterly about to social improvement or social control, with attendant issues of race, class, and forcing particular ideas onto society and its members.

The first of Williams's three meanings or approaches is the narrower view of culture as about personal development and taste, notably through the arts, meaning and symbolism. This meaning can be interpreted more widely and usefully as being about how people develop themselves for life in a rights-respecting society. The second approach is more like the broad, anthropological approach, as a 'way of life'. The third meaning or approach is focussed on the products of such activity (arts, literature, even science), which are consumed as part of 'being cultured'.

As Williams points out, the last of these three approaches - which many people would now consider to represent 'culture' (certainly in 'culture' sections in newspapers) - is really a newcomer, and quite different from earlier uses.

It is worth noting that in international relations and sustainable development discussion, the predominant use is the second, in a broad, anthropological approach; while that is not the same as is used in the cultural sector (which tends to prioritise the first and third meanings or approaches). The third meaning or approach is the most elitist, the second the broadest.

It is also worth saying that in international relations, 'cultures' is often used more-or-less interchangeably with 'civilisations' or 'peoples'. This can be problematic as it can be a source of division that plays out in intercultural conflict between social groups. 'Culture' can be used in very divisive ways, especially when it is considered as fixed or unchanging.

Another problem in a lot of the discourse on culture and sustainable development is that culture is presented as all 'good things' while negative aspects, which also have cultural aspects, do not get addressed. Toxic nationalism, racism, sexism, homophobia, destruction of nature, mass consumption, wastefulness, violence and intolerance, all have cultural aspects, and so can be changed. Not only can they be changed, they have to be changed for a more rights-respecting world where all people can flourish and enjoy their basic rights, and where nature is treated with respect. If we only think of culture as all 'the good things', then these negative aspects don't get addressed, and that can be a serious block for sustainable development. UNESCO often takes this valorising approach, for which it receives some criticism:

"UNESCO's policy papers and reports present culture in a positive light, as a factor naturally predestined to building a better world. Culture is said to be 'a fundamental component of sustainable development'. Such discourse is in line with the organisation's universalist aspirations, but it does not open the space for discussing the issue well known to anthropologists or sociologists that culture is more an area of a struggle than of consensus. In social reality, norms and values are constantly contested, they clash with each other. Culture is not a territory of peace and harmony, but rather of negotiations and conflicts. Diverse actors are guided by their own or group interests that sometimes contradict each other. What's important, national politics is at play as well. Minority groups in many countries face discrimination and cannot freely express their culture. Some indigenous communities are under pressure to conform to the national culture and suppress their cultural practices."[7]

Valorising approaches, used during advocacy, can paper over the cracks and prevent critical assessment of how culture can - and how it can't - contribute to sustainable development. We will explore this topic later.

In summary, we see that culture is very complex and contested. There are diverse meanings that are prioritised differently among different stakeholders, notably between sustainable development actors and the cultural sector. Consequently, the place of culture in sustainable development is very confusing, and very confused. People may argue for culture to be a 'pillar of sustainability' (on an equal footing as social, environmental and economic pillars), as requiring its own goal among sustainable development goals, and as a cross-cutting dimension covering all other aspects. It is no wonder that making a clear case for the position, role or importance of culture in sustainable development has been so difficult.

However, there are aspects of culture that are on a much stronger footing. Education in particular is more widely recognised as a crucial component of sustainable development, and of course culture and education are closely connected. Emphasising the role of museums in education (cultural and otherwise), whether that is schools (formal), training (non-formal) or lifelong and community learning (informal) may get farther than the confusing debate on the role of culture in sustainable development. Ensuring that informal education has a stronger place in the post-2030 Agenda (the 'next SDGs') would help a lot.

TO DO

'Culture' was originally more akin to tending to land, such as common land. How can that idea be revived, to be more attentive to looking after our shared world, rather than consuming cultural productions?

Consider how your work relates to the three 'versions' of 'culture'.

2.1.2 Sustainability

The words ‘sustainability’ and ‘sustainable’ have been over-used as to have been rather emptied of meaning. Sustainability is often talked about in terms of ‘being sustainable’ or being ‘more sustainable’, although neither of these make much sense, or are at least unclear.

Cultural institutions often refer to sustainability when they are talking about reducing negative environmental impacts (‘being more environmentally sustainable’). However, just being ‘more efficient’ doesn’t question the purpose or relevance of the wider programmes that are being made ‘more sustainable’.

Simply treating the environment as a resource not to be over-used does not achieve a better balance of considerations of people and the rest of nature, which is a crucial part of sustainable development: it doesn’t rebalance the relationship, or restore or enhance nature, or fulfil people’s right to a decent life. In fact, merely considering ‘sustainability’ as being about ‘environmental efficiency’ can fall into the trap of being a Neoliberal approach about organisational efficiency.

Any discussion about sustainability should really consider different aspects (e.g. social, environmental, economic), to ensure that, in addressing one problem, you’re not just adding to another problem elsewhere. We need to go from ‘win’ or ‘win-lose’ thinking to ‘win-win-win’ thinking.

Alternatively, cultural institutions talk about sustainability in terms of ‘ensuring the organization is sustainable’, meaning it can balance its budget. However, that is not sustainable development, it is simply economics, and it may just be exploitative capitalism and Neoliberalism. Why? Because the Neoliberal mindset that forces institutions to seek efficiencies (usually meaning to reduce costs) ahead of all other considerations, means that they may take actions that are fundamentally opposed to human rights or damaging for the environment, and so are not part of sustainable development, nor of the older sustainability discourse.

Consider if a museum, in order to balance its budget, reduces staff costs, or reduces the number of staff, or replaces paid staff with volunteers. These actions all undermine the economic and social aspects of sustainable development as they make workers worse off and erode their rights. These actions are going in the opposite direction as required by sustainable development. It is important to recognise the difference.

TO DO

What does sustainability mean to you? Careful use of natural resources, or something else? Do you consider human rights within it?

Look at the set of ‘sustainability pitfalls’ in ‘Mainstreaming the SDGs’.

2.1.3 Development

The word ‘development’ also has lots of negative connotations. When it means unbalanced, endless economic growth, or exploitation, or unrestrained building, it is certainly not something that makes the world better, as in improving it for some people it makes it worse for others.

In other situations, ‘development’ (as in the ‘development sector’) may be associated with aid and charity, that may be well-meaning but set up unhelpful dynamics that diminish people’s agency and make them ‘victims’.

However, the concept of ‘development’ in and of itself is not necessarily a bad thing. Babies develop into adults, trees grow from tiny seeds, ‘personal development’ is part of life, and ‘professional development’ and ‘skills development’ are part of work. These are all considered to be positive things. Development is natural, it happens, and change is inevitable.

So-called ‘development’ that is merely focused on economics is not necessarily ‘development’ at all, if it is creating more negative outcomes (social, economic, environmental) than are being gained economically. That is certainly not to say that many places and countries around the world - including in rich Global North countries - should not have economic development, as many certainly need it and have been prevented from achieving it, by poor planning within countries, by being held back by other countries and by crippling international debt. Making sure people and nature are always factored into development projects, even those solely for economic development, is better than nothing and better than what we often have today.

Similarly ‘museum development’ that is just about a bigger building or a bigger budget may be creating more negative impacts than benefits, and may be undermining a museum’s own resilience by becoming too big. ‘Development of the museum sector’ (beyond economic development) could, for example, mean that greater attention is given to small museums than very large ones, for a fairer distribution of benefits; or that development is targeted to areas that have few or no museums available, rather than building more and more in city centres. More generally, museum development could (and often does) mean the addition of skills, staff, capabilities and resources, to better meet the needs of society and nature. Once again, recognizing the difference between these forms of development and simplistic economic considerations is important.

Human development focusses on the lives, aspirations and realities of people: of their abilities to lead the kinds of lives that they themselves want to lead, individually and together, and that increase larger freedom for all people.

We will return to the concept of development in later sections, in relation to the Right to Development, and the Capability Approach and Human Development.

TO DO

How does your work empower people to lead the kind of lives they themselves want to lead?

2.2
Sustainable development

Sustainability is often taken to mean a balance between social, environmental and economic considerations. However, that concept is rather vague, gives the false sense of continuity, and equates the value of people, planet and economic wealth (or can be interpreted that way). The idea of a perpetual state doesn't match with reality. Things are always changing, we just need to make sure that it is change for the better. Sustainable development can be taken to mean the actions that facilitate positive transformations - that is, it is about change, not staying the same - to achieve a more harmonious balance, a better world. It is about maximising the potential around us and minimising and eliminating harm too; it is profoundly transformative, understood correctly. Sustainable development also gets away from the rather abstract concept of 'sustainability' to focusing on the specific, concrete actions that are taken. Too much time is taken up debating what sustainability means, or trying to create perfect definitions of it. We learn it and understand it by doing it, by planning and delivering sustainable development actions.

The most common definition of sustainable development comes from the Brundtland Report (1987), as

"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

This is still quite a complicated statement and its interpretation has developed over time. One common approach is to take in three considerations:

- meeting of human needs, not just basic needs, but fulfilling, prosperous lives
- respecting environmental limits, protecting and restoring nature, and
- promoting social justice, for a more equitable sharing of costs and benefits of human activity[8]

We can see here that sustainable development is not only about increasing the efficiency of extracting value from nature to satisfy human needs, but about actively growing - cultivating (culturing!) - human and social development (skills, knowledge, freedom, rights, health and wellbeing, peace and democracy), and actively protecting, restoring and enhancing nature too. It is about increasing these fundamental aspects of life and our world, not just converting one (nature) to the other (to satisfy human needs).

> Sustainable development is about action, otherwise, we are only talking.

We can consider sustainable development as the antidote to the negative aspects of so-called development. In the same way that we have 'fair trade' because many (all?) other forms of trade are unfair, 'sustainable development' does not mean making unhelpful (destructive) forms of development a bit less harmful to be 'more sustainable'. It is a different type of development as it prioritises something different: human rights, collective freedom, and protecting and restoring nature.

Precisely 'what' is developed and 'for what' as part of sustainable development activity is not a simple formula and does not have a simple definition. It is subjective and is dependent on the needs and opportunities in each place, and on the aspirations of the people living there. But, to be understood and undertaken correctly, it needs to have the right principles in place: human rights and a rights-based approach, and protecting and restoring nature.

When we connect **Human Rights** and **Human Development**, with **protecting and restoring nature**, we have a good, simple model for **sustainable development**.

> "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature."
>
> Rio Declaration Principle 1

We should resist simple or perfect definitions of what sustainability or sustainable development is or what they mean. Everyone is entitled to add their ideas, their actions and their voices, so long as in fulfilling their own human rights, they are not undermining someone else's rights. Nature must be factored in too, as it is all-too -often forgotten in so-called 'development' projects.

Pathways to sustainable development have strong cultural aspects: what is acceptable or what will work in one place will not necessarily work in another, just as what is required in one place is not the same as necessary actions elsewhere.

Attempting to create perfect definitions of sustainability or sustainable development will not create a better world: actions create a better world, and the SDGs are our best common programme.

TO DO

Reflect on how sustainable development is about increasing collective human freedom and ability, and protecting and restoring nature.

2.3
Culture: valuable in itself or just a partial solution to help other sectors?

What is the value of culture in policy agendas? Culture simultaneously enjoys a kind of 'high status' in policymakers' minds, at least in cultural policymakers' minds, and a low status in comparison with other sectors. The old-fashioned view of culture as the high points of human achievement can sound (and be!) very elitist, or sound like some kind of 'civilising' mission, that also has connections to imperialism and colonialism, which are badly outdated. Grand claims about culture's value for a variety of policy agendas are not always that convincing when claims are made without evidence to back them up. Be sceptical if you ever hear grand claims without clear evidence. Conversely, if you are going to make grand claims, make sure you can back them up, to be credible.

At the same time, it is said that no other sector spends so much time debating what it is or what it is about. Let's experiment with this.

- What is the point of food?
- What is the value of health?
- What is the benefit of having a family?

These sound like very strange questions to ask, as it is obvious that food, health, and having a family (whatever kind of family) are part of being human. That is why they are included in the standard list of human rights.

Now consider the question **'what is the value of culture?'**

There are plenty of studies that have tried to do this, and that often try to answer the question by showing or arguing how cultural life (or at least cultural activity or institutions) contributes to many other agendas: health, wellbeing, social inclusion, job creation, employability, value to the tourist economy, innovation, creative industries, peace, the list is a very long one.

From a human rights and sustainable development perspective, the value of participating in cultural life cannot just be argued in relation to how it contributes to various other agendas. It is a right in itself. It has meaning and value, in and of itself. It certainly can (let's not fall into the trap of saying 'always') contribute to a wide range of other agendas. However, to limit the value of culture to how it contributes to other agendas is a very weak system of valuation, that serves to undermine the validity of cultural participation. Why? Because it devalues culture and cultural participation (and the full extent of Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) in comparison with other rights, as if it has no intrinsic value. That is a serious misunderstanding of human rights, which are equal in weight and indivisible. In fact, it turns culture into the 'nice to have' or 'luxury' mentality that actually undermines the validity of culture as a policy concern or self-evident human right.

To simply measure culture in terms of health and wellbeing benefits 'sets it up' against health and wellbeing benefits created by other sectors (such as the health sector itself), which may be in a better place to demonstrate clear, concrete benefits than the cultural sector is able to do.

To continue with the experiment, when did you last hear about the health sector measuring its value in terms of its cultural benefits? Probably never. The health sector is confident enough in its purpose and rights-related obligations to measure its value in health and wellbeing terms.

> The cultural sector should have measures for cultural value that are based on culture itself (if it is to have measures), in addition to valuations of how it contributes to wider human rights and other sectors.

TO DO

Reflect on what the measures for culture could be, in terms of cultural development, 'a culture', and/or cultural works/heritage.

2.4
Culture and sustainable development: continuity and positive change

While 'sustainability' is often thought of as the ability to 'stay the same', 'culture', 'development' and 'sustainable development' all embrace the concept of change. 'Culture' is both noun and verb, similar to the verb 'to grow'; we still use the word this way when we think of culturing bacteria, or in agriculture. However, it is often used in other ways. When groups of people are considered as 'different cultures' it can become particularly problematic. 'Culture' can too often be used to block things, or be used as a tool for division, especially when it is used as an argument for continuity or repression, under the guise of 'tradition'. Cultural practices that repress women, or that persecute minorities, or that destroy nature, are not part of sustainable development.

'Development' also includes the concept of growth and becoming: of maturing, of unfolding.

'Sustainable development' also includes the concept of growth that is positive: not endless, one-dimensional economic growth, but the growth of human capabilities, freedoms and nature. Sustainable development is about some kind of change, for the better.

Culture and sustainable development, then, can all be seen as including some idea of change, of ever-evolving, ever-changing, ever-blossoming in response to the world around us, and with some intentionality, building on what came before, for the better.

Acknowledging that 'culture' does not have all the answers or that it can be all things to all people gives us a more realistic approach to work with. If we accept that 'culture' contributes both positively and negatively to the world, then our next job is strengthening the positives and reducing and eliminating negatives. This is the work of sustainable development, as it is in other aspects of life and in sectors, to 'do more good' and 'do less harm'.

For comparison, education is generally seen as a good thing. This is true. Yet it is also true that the value of education rather largely depends on what people are educated to do, and what they do with that education or are allowed to do. People can be taught to hate, to fear, or to be selfish, none of which are part of sustainable development. In a similar way, culture can have negative aspects, or be mobilised for negative purposes. 'One-size-fits-all' statements that culture is this or that don't necessarily allow space for culture - narrow and broad - to change for the better.

It is quite common to see people attempt to position culture within sustainable development, for example as 'culture in sustainable development', 'culture for sustainable development' and/or 'culture as sustainable development'.[9] If we are open to the reality that culture is not a fixed thing or set of practices, that culture is not the answer to every problem there is, that it can also be modified (and in order to better support sustainable development it often has to be modified), then we can focus more on another trajectory. That is, supporting the positive aspects of culture and managing and eliminating negative impacts, for the **sustainable development of culture**.

This simply means taking a rights-based approach to culture that empowers people to meet their needs and aspirations, individually and collectively, while protecting and restoring nature, and sharing benefits of culture and development more fairly. How people want to go about that is up to them, as that is part of their cultural development. Ensuring that the people most closely associated with cultural practices and traditions are involved in reshaping them is essential for rights-based transformations of culture and cultural participation.

> Sustainable development is about ongoing, positive transformation; the more inclusive it is, the more transformative it can be.

TO DO

Reflect on cultural aspects of sustainable development in your place. What would you hope would continue, and what would be forgotten or discarded?

2.5
Culture: much more than an ‘enabler of sustainable development’

Culture is often considered as an ‘enabler of sustainable development’ or a ‘driver of sustainable development’, or that its power needs to be ‘harnessed’ for sustainable development. These are all problematic formulations, for a few reasons. Culture (in broad and narrow senses) and cultural participation are part of sustainable development, rather than sitting outside of it as is suggested by ‘enabling’ or ‘driving’ sustainable development. Culture can be instrumentalised in top-down ways, so using culture as a ‘driver’ can be problematic. As creativity should be unleashed, supported and unlocked, the idea of ‘harnessing’ culture seems to head in the wrong direction: it needs to be *unharnessed*.

For example, the **2023 SDG Summit political declaration noted**: “We reaffirm the role of culture as an enabler of sustainable development that provides people and communities with a strong sense of identity and social cohesion and contributes to more effective and sustainable development policies and measures at all levels.”

As we explored in sections 2.1 and 2.4, viewing ‘culture’ as only good things is problematic as it doesn’t acknowledge that culture can be a source of intolerance and division, and these aspects have to be changed.

Regarding (or limiting) culture as if it is only an ‘enabler of sustainable development’ has come in for criticism. For example, the UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights has reported that:

“Culture is more than just an “enabler” of sustainable development. It is an indispensable part of it…

How can we have sustainable development if people and communities are not enabled to develop and use their creativity? If they are not those who decide on their development priorities based on their philosophies and aspirations? They must implement their practices, and lead their own development plans…

Time and time again, we see development that disregards the development of the identity [of] individuals and groups. We see development that is alien to the values, priorities and practices of the people concerned. The implementation of cultural rights is paramount if sustainable development is to be truly sustainable,”

While policy makers may, understandably, wish for culture and cultural participation to support their agendas and fulfil their commitments, culture and cultural participation cannot only be seen as delivering on the wishes of authorities. Why? Because that is not really culture, it is simply public administration.

- A rights-based approach to sustainable development, culture and cultural participation includes top-down, bottom-up and transverse components and dynamics.
- Respecting, protecting and fulfilling cultural rights means the whole range of cultural rights, and not only in relation to political agendas: creativity, self-expression and communication are to be encouraged in all their forms, on whatever topic.
- Culture-respecting sustainable development is not simply about delivering an existing agenda, but about creating it and involving people in that creation, through debate and decision-making that narrow long lists of possible options down to a few real actions.
- Culture-respecting sustainable development includes many, many voices: people as individuals and communities, special-interest groups and more, most notably those currently worst-off, marginalised and ‘left behind’. It is rich, and it should be allowed to be loud.
- Cultural institutions may also instrumentalise themselves in ways that are not rights-based or rights-respecting. Although well-intentioned, top-down approaches that get in the way or even oppose people’s rights are taking people and organisations in the wrong direction, that is, not sustainable development.

Nobel Prize-winner Amartya Sen outlined relations between culture and human development in a chapter in ‘Culture and Public Action’ (2004)[10]. Sen opened by setting out not to answer questions about ‘if culture matters’, but ‘how culture matters’, noting that **“in the anxiety to take adequate note of the role of culture, there is sometimes a temptation to take rather formulaic and simplistic views of the impact of culture on the process of development”** (p.38) and, later, that **“what is needed is not the privileging of culture as something that works on its own, but the integration of culture in a wider picture, in which culture, seen in a dynamic and interactive way, is one important influence among many others.”**

“As creativity should be unleashed, supported and unlocked, the idea of ‘harnessing’ culture seems to head in the wrong direction: it needs to be unharnessed.”

Sen set out some suggestions on how culture matters for development:

1. **Culture as a constitutive part of development:** "The furtherance of well-being and freedoms that we seek in development cannot but include the enrichment of human lives through literature, music, fine arts, and other forms of cultural expression and practice, which we have reason to value… In one form or another, culture engulfs our lives, our desires, our frustrations, our ambitions, and the freedoms that we seek. The freedom and opportunity for cultural activities are among the basic freedoms the enhancement of which can be seen to be constitutive of development."

2. **Economically remunerative cultural activities and objects:** tourism, cultural sector employment, creative industries, job creation, can all derive from cultural experiences and cultural facilities.

3. **Cultural factors influence economic behaviour:** trust and preventing corruption all have cultural aspects that underlie norms and economic behaviour.

4. **Culture and political participation:** "Participation in civil interactions and political activities is influenced by cultural conditions. The tradition of public discussion and participatory interactions can be very critical to the process of politics, and can be important for the establishment, preservation, and practice of democracy…"

5. **Solidarity and association:** "Aside from economic interactions and political participation, even the operation of social solidarity and mutual support can be strongly influenced by culture. The success of social living is greatly dependent on what people may spontaneously do for each other. This can profoundly influence the working of the society, including the care of its less fortunate members as well as preservation and guardianship of common assets. The sense of closeness to others in the community can be a major asset for that community."

6. **Cultural sites and recollection of past heritage:** "…by supporting historical excavations, explorations and related research, development programs can help to facilitate a fuller appreciation of the breadth of - and internal variations within - particular cultures and traditions. History often includes much greater variety of cultural influences and traditions than tends to be allowed by intensely political - and frequently ahistorical - interpretations of the present. When this is the case, historical objects, sites and records can help to offset some of the frictions of confrontational modern politics."

7. **Cultural influences on value formation and evolution:** "…value formation is an interactive process, and the culture of talking and listening can play a significant part in making these interactions possible."

Importantly, Sen resists the idea that culture is fixed or unchanging, and makes the connection between cultural prejudice and wider, political prejudice. He resists grand claims about what culture is or is not. Sen's list is a helpful one. Museums can take note of these possible pathways of how culture and development are related, to strengthen the opportunities they provide people and communities to claim and experience these pathways as their own. That way, the cultural aspects of human development can be enhanced, and museums can contribute more effectively to culturally-determined human and sustainable development.

TO DO

Look at the list of seven ways that Sen proposes culture to matter for human development. Which of these seven are prioritised in a museum you know? Are any avoided or not fulfilled?

2.6
An instrument for whom, and for what?

If 'culture' (in the narrower institutional/sectoral sense, or the broader anthropological sense) merely becomes a tool for delivering authorities' promises, commitments or plans - including those of museums - culture ceases to be culture, and is reduced to public administration. There is a role for culture in public administration (sharing information from authorities, for example), but it cannot be all of it.

Whenever we hear of culture as a tool, or an enabler or an instrument, using a cultural metaphor, we may ask 'an instrument to be played by whom, and who calls the tune?'

Taking a cultural rights-based approach, the audience of such a performance would not necessarily be the public, but decision-makers. who should listen to what society is telling them. In other words, 'culture as an enabler of sustainable development' (although a problematic formulation) or an 'integral component of sustainable development' (as in the Pact for the Future) may reach its fullest capacity when it creates opportunities for:

- **people and communities to create and express themselves actively, freely and meaningfully**, in response to whatever topic is important to them, not only topics of interest to decision-makers or institutions
- that people and communities have **public and civic space that fully respects, protects and fulfils their various human rights** (cultural and otherwise)
- **a rich diversity of voices, views, ideas, expressions and collaborations**, not necessarily in agreement with one another
- an **instrument for collective use, not just individual use**
- a **tool for authorities to fulfil their obligations to provide publicly accessible information and public participation in decision-making**, in a variety of forms
- and for **people and communities to respond, react and contribute as part of decision-making**
- for **people, communities and authorities** to work in unison for the common good.

To push the cultural metaphor to its limit, let us consider culture as an orchestra, or a wide variety of orchestras and bands: the instruments, the players, the music, the stage and the audience. It is all of these.

TO DO

Consider a museum you know. Who decides what culture is 'for'? What right do they have to do so?

2.7
Culture in the Pact for the Future

In the end, culture was included in the Pact for the Future as an *integral component of sustainable development*. This is surely clearer and has more traction than the rather vague concept of culture as an 'enabler of sustainable development' (as if it was separate from it).

Recognising culture as **part of** sustainable development, without overstretching it, is very positive. It avoids the overclaiming or generalised claims that are sometimes made, and gets away from the idea that culture is either somehow special or left out. It also avoids the confusing terminology that has sometimes been used, for example that culture is 'a common good' or a 'global public good' (explored in Section 4).

Culture is part of sustainable development, alongside a lot of other aspects of life. For those working with the broad interpretation of culture, this is obvious; for those working with the narrow interpretation of culture, it is a reminder that the cultural sector does not sit outside of society or is anything special, and that the cultural sector also must make changes as part of sustainable development.

There is a specific action for culture in the Pact for the Future, included here in full:

"ACTION 11.
WE WILL PROTECT AND PROMOTE CULTURE AND SPORT AS INTEGRAL COMPONENTS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

We recognize that culture as well as sport offer individuals and communities a strong sense of identity and foster social cohesion. We also recognize that sport can contribute to individuals' and communities' health and well-being. Culture as well as sport therefore are important enablers of sustainable development. We decide to:

(a) Ensure that culture as well as sport can contribute to more effective, inclusive, equitable and sustainable development, and integrate culture into economic, social and environmental development policies and strategies and ensure adequate public investment in the protection and promotion of culture;

(b) Encourage strengthened international cooperation on the return or restitution of cultural properties of spiritual, ancestral, historical and cultural value to countries of origin, including but not limited to objets d'art, monuments, museum pieces, manuscripts and documents, and strongly encourage relevant private entities to similarly engage, including through bilateral dialogue and with the assistance of multilateral mechanisms, as appropriate;

(c) Promote and support intercultural and interreligious dialogue to strengthen social cohesion and contribute to sustainable development."

This is a significant improvement on how culture appears in Agenda 2030 for several reasons. It now sits alongside sport, which had been specifically included in Agenda 2030 in a way that culture had not. As sport is manifestly a part of culture, connecting culture and sport speaks to the broader sense of culture than a narrow focus on 'the arts' or 'high culture' (which is more elitist). The emphasis on culture as promoting social cohesion is also more aligned with the wider, anthropological view of culture. It is very positive to see that culture is identified as something that *can* contribute to effective, inclusive, equitable and sustainable development, rather than a blanket statement that it always does so (as it doesn't).

It is also worth noting that a key part of the work for governments and museums to take, is to accelerate the return of improperly acquired cultural heritage to source communities.

The action in the Pact for the Future aligns well with the approach taken in this guide, that

1. culture, in both broad and narrow senses, **can be more effectively incorporated in a wide range of policies**

2. **sustainable development can be significantly strengthened in a wide range of policies and actions, in the museum sector and in museums themselves.** It is a two-way street.

The action quoted above from the Pact for the Future is also well-aligned with this guide, in that it emphasises the importance of ensuring culture (broad and narrow) can contribute to **"more effective, inclusive, equitable and sustainable development"**. In other words, sustainable development that is not only about delivering governments' or museums' objectives, but promoting the bottom-up and transverse aspects of culture and sustainable development.

Ensuring "**adequate public investment** in the protection and promotion of culture" - as opposed to leaving it to the whim of the market - should also be noted.

"In the end, culture was included in the Pact for the Future as an integral component of sustainable development."

TO DO

Familiarise yourself with this action. How is your museum currently supporting it? How well are authorities delivering on this action? What else should they be doing, and what else should your museum be doing? How can you raise awareness, commitment and action, to contribute to the Pact for the Future?

2.8
More information

Culture 21 | Agenda 21 for culture

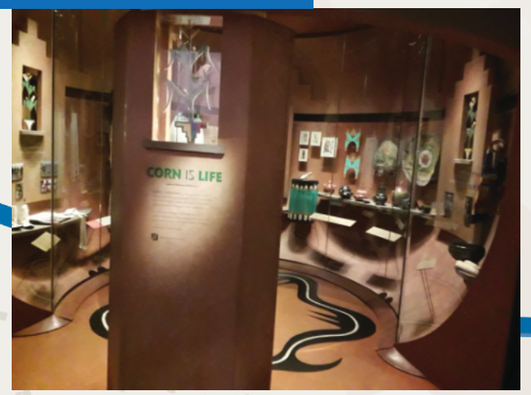
EU experts publish proposals to harness the power of culture for sustainable development | Culture and Creativity (europa.eu)

https://cultureactioneurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Cultural-Deal-EU-Statement_2020.pdf

https://culturalfoundation.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Gijs-de-Vries_To-make-the-silos-dance.pdf



The National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC promotes the wider understanding of First Nation Peoples, and promotes their involvement in their cultural heritage.



CULTURE, SUSTAINABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT ARE THREE OF THE MOST COMPLEX AND CONTESTED WORDS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

SECTION 3

HUMAN RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

3.1
Human rights at the core of sustainable development

As sustainable development is rooted in human rights and rights-based approaches, a proper understanding of what these are can help us to clarify our thinking, our language, and our actions to contribute to sustainable development.

When we truly understand that sustainable development has human rights - along with environmental protection and restoration - at its very core, we fully consider them to guide our intentions, actions, processes and intended outcomes.

Human rights are also central in Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Human rights and rights-based approaches are one of the **three universal values** of the Agenda, along with Leave No-one Behind (explored in a later section) and gender equality. The UN says:

"Human rights matter because they embody the power of people standing up to change the world. Above all this is what the 2030 Agenda needs to accelerate its course....

When people can exercise their human rights, they can stand up for themselves and for each other, they are empowered to shape the decisions that impact their lives. Human rights stand for equality, for participatory and inclusive societies that dismantle the structures of discrimination which drive poverty and inequality. When everyone can claim their human rights, no one can be left behind. Human rights are not only the right way, but the smart way to accelerate progress for more equitable and sustainable development....

The SDGs already mirror much of the human rights framework. Each sustainable development goal, whether aimed at eradicating hunger, preventing disease, providing clean water or climate action, or focused on securing peace or decent work - all are simultaneously a claim about human rights."

The UN Secretary-General outlined the importance of human rights in sustainable development in his report **The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights**, published in 2020 on the 75th anniversary of the United Nations.

In introducing the report, **he stated**:

"Human rights are about the dignity and worth of the human person. They expand the horizons of hope, enlarge the boundaries of the possible, and unleash the best of ourselves and our world.

Human rights are our ultimate tool to help societies grow in freedom. To ensure equality for women and girls. To advance sustainable development. To prevent conflict, reduce human suffering and build a just and equitable world....

When we take a human rights-based approach to development, the outcomes are more sustainable, powerful and effective. This is why human rights permeate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] are underpinned by economic, civil, cultural, political and social rights, as well as the right to development."

The report includes a set of **Guiding Principles:**

- **Human rights are universal and indivisible.** We must see human rights with a vision that speaks to each and every human being and encompasses all rights: economic; social; cultural; civil and political.
- **Our efforts must be characterised by the highest standards of integrity, impartiality and independence,** based on evidence and norms, and guided by the voices of those whose rights are affected.
- **Our purpose is, above all, to have a positive impact.** This means being open to all available channels and opportunities to engage. There is a place for negotiations behind the scenes, a place for building and strengthening national capacities, a place for supporting different stakeholders, and a time when speaking out is essential.
- **Human rights and human dignity will never be realised without a special emphasis on the human rights of women**. Realising gender equality underpins every element of this Call to Action.
- **Human diversity is an asset, not a threat.** We must appreciate the richness of our differences while never losing sight of our common humanity and dignity. Every community, including minorities and indigenous peoples, must feel that its identity is respected and that it can fully participate in society as a whole. Every individual is entitled to enjoy human rights without discrimination on any basis, even as we also recognise that age, gender and diversity shape their experiences and must be taken into account in our responses.
- **Climate change is the biggest threat to our survival as a species** and is already threatening human rights around the world. Addressing it must remain among our top priorities.
- **Human rights and human dignity are critical to defining governance and ethics for the future**, including inter-generational justice.
- **Human rights are the glue that binds us but only if we commit to meaningful dialogue, including with those who question or disagree,** and to more effective communication about the positive impact, making a stronger case for each and every right, as well as for the universality and inherent interdependence of all human rights.
- **Realizing human rights is anchored in national ownership yet linked globally.** It requires broad and sustained engagement with states, civil society and other stakeholders, and is intrinsically linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- **Within the United Nations, human rights must be fully considered in all decision-making, operations and institutional commitments.** [This could be easily applied to museums and the museum sector too]
- **Our overall intention is to strengthen UN leadership in advancing the cause of human rights,** to make the human rights system responsive and innovative in confronting human rights challenges, and to enhance synergies between human rights and all pillars of the work of the United Nations. [Again, this could be easily applied to museums and the museum sector]

Have you heard this call for human rights?
Do you accept it? What will you do? When will you start?

The report also articulates **a set of priority considerations:**

- **Rights at the core of sustainable development:** understanding that human rights are absolutely central to Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, in terms of respecting, protecting, fulfilling and promoting people's established rights, including the Right to Development.
- **Rights in times of crisis:** respecting and protecting people's rights during and after crises, and using human rights to guide responses to crises.
- **Gender equality and equal rights for women:** half of the world's population represent half of its potential, yet are routinely held back in different countries and situations. In addition, LGBTQ people face many barriers around the world, whether everyday discrimination, or laws that make their very existence illegal and may lead to them being persecuted or even killed.
- **Public participation and civic space:** ensuring people have the opportunity to shape decisions that they care about and will be impacted by, and ensuring people have the opportunity to know, to care, and to act for sustainable development.
- **Rights of future generations, especially climate justice:** all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. That means each generation has to leave a world at least as habitable as the one it inhabited. That is not currently happening, we need to change course.
- **Human rights at the heart of collective action:** global challenges and more local challenges require strong collaboration across society, involving people and communities, businesses, as well as governments and NGOs. Human rights can guide and protect collective action.
- **New frontiers of human rights:** technological advances create new challenges, such as AI. In addition to the frontiers outlined in Our Highest Aspiration, growing attention to the rights of nature and of other species are a frontier with growing interest and, in some places, incorporation into national laws.

Every single word of these Guiding Principles and priority considerations could be adopted, or at least adapted, by museums and museum organisations everywhere. Making use of them in our daily work and in our longer-term goals and programmes of work would significantly strengthen our contributions towards human rights, sustainable development and the creation of a human rights-based society.

We will return to these principles many times throughout this guide, as it empowers you as an active agent for sustainable development.

"To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity."

Nelson Mandela

TO DO

Look at this framework of Guiding Principles and priority considerations. How well does your museum currently reflect these, and what else can it do to apply them with more ambition? What policies and plans can incorporate these Principles and considerations? How can you empower people to know about them and take part in them?

3.1.1 How can we bring human rights into the SDGs in practical ways?

Human rights can seem like lofty aspirations, which they are. However, they are much more than that: they are a practical framework, supported by all manner of apparatus: laws, policies, commitments, work programmes, guidance, monitoring and reporting.

The UN has produced some summary guidance on how human rights and the SDGs can be brought together:

1. **Aligning action for the SDGs with existing human rights standards,** whether under international agreements, or national laws. In the context of cultural activity, this may mean respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights - all rights - as they impinge on cultural life and institutions.

2. **Leave No-one Behind,** a fundamental aspect of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, meaning that we need to understand and address inequalities in provision and participation in activities. In the context of cultural activity, this should mean that no particular social group is underserved in society or cultural life.

3. **Active and meaningful participation,** meaning that people and groups affected by decisions by authorities and organisations should have the opportunity to contribute both actively and meaningfully to decisions. In the context of cultural activity, this should also mean that people participate and contribute actively and meaningfully to the cultural life of the community.

4. **Robust accountability,** human rights provide a framework to understand and communicate activity: how have activities respected, protected and fulfilled particular rights? Who has benefitted and how? What goals were set, actions taken, and outcomes and impacts achieved?

In summary, human rights and the SDGs are inseparable: international human rights agreements provide a political mandate, supported by national laws; programmes for particular rights or rights-related agendas give us practical opportunities for collaboration; existing guidance provides a powerful body of support; the SDGs already incorporate the main human rights agreements and considerations; and existing reporting methods for both human rights and the SDGs give us an opportunity to monitor, evaluate and communicate our work. The rest of Section 3 will explore these topics in more detail.

TO DO

Consider a museum you know. How is it already bringing the SDGs and human rights together? What else can it to strengthen the connection, using the four actions listed above?

3.1.2 The Pact for the Future as a to-do list for human rights

How can we take practical action for human rights through our work? Where can we find a 'to-do list' that embraces both human rights and the SDGs? The Pact for the Future gives us just such a list of actions, as it is compliant with and is directed towards achieving the commitments set out in human rights and environmental agreements. The Pact, like the SDGs, helps governments and more of society participate in the creation of a human-rights society:

"Every commitment in this Pact is fully consistent and aligned with international law, including human rights law. We reaffirm the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fundamental freedoms enshrined therein. The implementation of the Pact will enhance the full enjoyment of human rights and dignity for all, which is a key goal. We will respect, protect, promote and fulfil all human rights, recognizing their universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness, and we will be unequivocal in what we stand for and uphold: freedom from fear and

TO DO

Ask yourself, do you want your work to create a human rights society, and to protect and restore nature? Read the Pact for the Future, to help you find actions that you can easily support for human rights.

'**Museums and Human Rights**' explains how human rights relate to museum work, and explores relevant rights and human rights agreements in detail.



3.1.3 Cultural rights

Among the various human rights, some are referred to as cultural rights, but what are cultural rights? How do they relate to other rights (civil, political, economic, social, environmental)? Are they 'the right to culture', or something else?

Farida Shaheed, former UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights, **has reported** that from a human rights perspective:

"Cultural rights protect the rights for each person, individually and in community with others, as well as groups of people, to develop and express their humanity, their world view and the meanings they give to their existence and their development through, inter alia, values, beliefs, convictions, languages, knowledge and the arts, institutions and ways of life. They may also be considered as protecting access to cultural heritage and resources that allow such identification and development processes to take place."

Cultural rights have been articulated as including the following protections:

(a) human creativity in all its diversity and the conditions for it to be exercised

(b) the free choice, expression and development of identities, and to change identity

(c) the rights of individuals and groups to participate, or not to participate, in the cultural life of their choice

(d) the right to interact and exchange, within and between groups of one's choice

(e) the rights to enjoy and have access to the arts, to knowledge and to an individual's own cultural heritage, as well as that of others; and

(f) the rights to participate in the definition and implementation of policies and decisions that have an impact on the exercise of cultural rights[11]

From this scheme, we can see that cultural rights are much more than simply 'accessing cultural institutions'.

It is worth noting that cultural rights are **not a separate set of particular rights**, in the same way that civil and political rights are not a separate set of rights. However, many rights have some cultural content or cultural aspect. So, the cultural sector should not restrict its interest to a couple of rights, as that breaks the principle of the indivisibility of human rights.

Wherever the cultural sector has opportunities to support particular rights, such as the right to education or the right to participate in cultural life, this creates obligations (duties) to respect, protect and fulfil these rights, and other rights that can be progressed through these rights. For example, the right to education can support activity in support of the rights to an adequate standards of living, to promote international co-operation, to combat intolerance, and to promote respect for nature. Any educational institution or organisation, such as a museum, should therefore ensure that its educational activities support these related rights. That is what it means to promote full enjoyment of human rights, and that they are interrelated and indivisible.

TO DO

If you see a museum or museum organisation referring to human rights, is it respecting, protecting, promoting and fulfilling human rights generally, or picking out a few particular rights? How could it strengthen its actions for particular rights, and rights generally?

More information

Bennoune, K. (UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights) (2018). Universality, cultural diversity and cultural rights. UNGA report A/73/227

Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Mapping cultural rights: nature, issues at stake and challenges.

Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights.

3.1.4 Cultural rights, and civil and political rights overlap

It is well understood that human rights are interconnected and indivisible: they overlap and cannot be picked out. As we explored in the previous section cultural rights are a means by which other rights can be understood and claimed. Furthermore, some rights are both cultural rights, and civil and political rights too. These include:

- **Freedom of expression:** this right allows people to express their views, to take part in political discourse, and communicate their cultural identity and creativity
- **Right of access to information:** this right ensures people have access to information to inform their views, and to demand accountability and transparency from authorities and institutions
- **Freedom of assembly and association:** this right facilitates political participation and the organization of cultural activities, and for people to associate together to communicate, debate and protest peacefully
- **Right to education:** this right empowers people to develop their personality, and develop the knowledge, motivation and skills to act on issues that matter to them
- **Right to participate in public affairs:** this right empowers people to take part in elections and decisions that will affect them. It requires access to information and opportunities to develop shared priorities, and to communicate these with others and to authorities.
- **Right to participate in cultural life:** this right, often thought of as the 'classic' cultural right, is also a civil and political right. It ensures that people can take part in the cultural, artistic and social aspects of their communities, and to play a role in shaping and debating policies and matters relating to cultural heritage and to wider topics of interest. It ensures that people's right to know, to care and to create is respected, protected and fulfilled. It is also worth remembering that the proper title and content is actually 'the right of everyone freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts, and to share in scientific advancement and its achievements'.

What does this mean? It means that it is not possible to consider culture and cultural rights as a completely separate sphere from civil and political rights or topics. They are intimately connected. Politics with a small 'p' is part of life. Attacks on cultural rights are attacks on civil and political rights, and vice versa. Conversely, if we support and expand cultural rights - properly understood - we may also support and expand civil and political rights.

As we see here, individual rights overlap extensively, and it is very undesirable that they be 'picked off' or prioritised to suit organisations' own agendas, as that does not necessarily lead to sustainable development where all rights are progressively realised for people. The overlap between these various rights, and people's individual and shared opportunities to experience them, are well connected in the Declaration on the Right to Development, discussed in a later section.

Note especially the full, proper meaning of the so-called 'right to participate in cultural life'. The focus of the right is on participating in the cultural life of the community, rather than a narrow interpretation as 'access to cultural institutions' as it is sometimes taken to mean by museums and museum organisations. It is important to fully recognise and support the other aspects: of enjoying (meaning benefitting from and having full access to) the arts, that it should be free from constraints of any kind, as well as the scientific aspect. This last part, especially, is often forgotten about when people think of the 'right to participate in cultural life'.

> Many cultural rights are also civil and political rights: the two are inseparable



The topic of protest in an exhibition at M Shed, Bristol, 2024. Museums may be more comfortable exhibiting the topic of protest, than facilitating public debate.

3.1.5 Solidarity and human rights

In the context of Neoliberalism and mass consumption, it is worth recalling that human rights are not simply something for those who are better off to continue to amass or consume for themselves. Human rights are entitlements we all have, but with entitlements we also have responsibilities. We have responsibilities for ourselves, and for one another. That means that solidarity - listening to and standing up for others - is part of human rights and sustainable development.

The principle of solidarity and shared responsibilities is foundational in the work of the United Nations, and is a principle in international law and international relations. Here are some references to this principle in foundational human rights commitments and agreements:

> "To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace"
>
> "**To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems** of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion" (UN Charter)
>
> "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and **should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood**."
>
> "**...Everyone has duties to the community** in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible." (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948) (note, the UDHR used a gendered view, so that 'his' personality refers equally to all men and all women)

Solidarity is also central in the conception of sustainable development and the SDGs.

The UN says:

"The **Sustainable Development Agenda** is centred on people and planet, underpinned by human rights and supported by a global partnership determined to lift people out of poverty, hunger and disease. It will, thus, be built on **a foundation of global cooperation and solidarity**."

However, this solidarity is threatened by Neoliberal approaches to finance and governance. The **UN has noted**:

"At the national level, solidarity has steadily eroded over the past decades. Economic policies advocating deregulation and limited government have concentrated wealth, dismantled social protections and disempowered the State to address mounting social challenges. The international financial crisis in 2008 as well as the COVID-19 pandemic have compounded the effects of these policies. Increasing discontent is compounded by rising inequalities in access to the more empowering opportunities of the twenty-first century - such as housing, higher education and technology - and by the lack of social mobility."

Two of the most powerful human rights agreements - the ICESCR and the ICCPR - both repeat the same fundamental principle that human rights are not just something we gather, but that we stand up for:

"Realizing that the individual, having duties to other individuals and to the community to which he belongs, is under a responsibility to strive for the promotion and observance of the rights recognized in the present Covenant." (ICESCR and ICCPR Preambles, noting again that 'he' applies to all men and women equally)

The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders[12] provides excellent guidance for governments, organisations, educators, communities and individuals. It is an under-used agreement that can help promote a 'culture of solidarity and human rights'. The Declaration states that:

"Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels." Article 1

"Everyone has duties towards and within the community, in which alone the free and full development of his or her personality is possible.

Individuals, groups, institutions and non-governmental organizations have an important role to play and a responsibility in safeguarding democracy, promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms and contributing to the promotion and advancement of democratic societies, institutions and processes..." Article 18

If everyone has these rights and responsibilities, then organisations with the potential to support these rights have a responsibility to respect, protect, fulfil and promote them. What does this mean for museums? That they empower people to know and claim their rights, individually and collectively; and that they create an enabling environment for them to do so. Wherever people and communities are standing up for human rights, institutions such as museums should not only permit it, they should actively encourage it. It is a good thing, and good for museums too.

TO DO

Read the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. How can your museum fulfil the educational and awareness-raising aspects of the Declaration? How can your museum respect, protect and fulfil people's rights and responsibilities to stand up for what they believe in?

What issues or topics should you be doing more for? What opportunities do you have? Who else might have the same concerns?

OHCHR says: **"Demonstrations in which people worldwide are claiming their rights and standing up for future generations, illustrate a new movement of solidarity that rejects inequality and division and unites young people, civil society, the private sector, cities, regions and others behind policies for justice. There is a need for a renewal of the fundamental bond of trust between people and institutions, which underpins the social contract. Reinstating trust in global institutions will require greater global solidarity and more inclusive, effective and networked multilateral approaches that contribute to more responsive global governance structures."**

What does this mean, 'greater solidarity'? Being more attentive to the plight of others. Being more prepared to listen and to act. Being more prepared to question things when we see rights undermined, or nature over-exploited or destroyed. Being more willing and able to express support or dissent with others. Being more willing and able to use democratic channels and call decision-makers to account, and making ourselves more accountable - personally, in our museums and to society.

All of these are actions that museums can support and can take themselves - if they want to. Whether they want to or not, under rights-based approaches, public institutions have responsibilities wherever they have abilities to respect, protect, fulfil - and promote - human rights, for everyone. Public institutions cannot claim to 'be responsible' if they ignore or avoid their rights-respecting duties.

"What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything?"

Vincent Van Gogh

3.1.6 Strengthening international solidarity through human rights

How can we strengthen international solidarity, using human rights as a guiding framework, and why should we do so? The **UN Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order** has noted that:

"The aspirations of all peoples for an international order are based on the principles enshrined in the [UN] Charter. This includes promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all and respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, peace, democracy, justice, equality, the rule of law, pluralism, development, better standards of living and solidarity.

As a result, a democratic and equitable international order means all peoples:

- **Have the rights to peace, international solidarity, development and self-determination**
- **Exercise effective sovereignty over their natural wealth and resources**
- **Freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development**
- **Have equal opportunity to participate meaningfully in regional and international decision-making; and**
- **Have a shared responsibility to address threats to international peace and security**

A democratic and equitable international order fosters the full realization of all human rights for all, and everyone is entitled to it."

If we recognise the truth of these statements, we can ask ourselves what we can do to create a world at peace with universal respect for and enjoyment of human rights.

TO DO

Read the list of entitlements that people have, from the list above. In your context, how well are these rights being achieved? Is there stability? Injustice? Freedom to participate in decision-making? What is your museum doing to make these a reality for everyone? What is it not doing?

The Revised Draft Declaration on Human Rights and International Solidarity 2023 is a draft UN agreement, promoting international co-operation and solidarity. It notes that international solidarity is foundational in the work of the United Nations, as expressed in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and indeed the UN was set up to promote co-operation and shared interest among countries, and increasingly among other actors and wider society.

The Draft Declaration notes that **"International solidarity is essential in preventing and overcoming global challenges"** and that:

"International solidarity is an expression of unity by which peoples and individuals enjoy the benefits of a peaceful, just and equitable international order, secure their human rights and ensure sustainable development…

International solidarity consists of preventive solidarity, reactive solidarity and international cooperation to solve global challenges…

Preventive solidarity is characterized by actions to safeguard and ensure the fulfilment of all human rights, through collective or individual efforts…

Reactive solidarity is characterized by collective or individual actions… to respond to and solve global challenges, including, inter alia, health emergencies, exposure to toxic substances, environmental degradation, natural or man-made disasters, climate change, armed conflict, forced migration, trafficking of persons, poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, food insecurity, all forms of violence against women and children, racism and discrimination, violent extremism, terrorism, colonialism, foreign domination and occupation, aggression, unilateral coercive measures that are inappropriately or too broadly targeted, international and transnational crime and corruption…

International cooperation in the field of human rights rests on the premise that States and other actors should work together, with common but differentiated responsibilities…"

Such a list gives us a list of **common concerns and challenges** that countries cannot handle alone, and that require shared attention and shared action.

Actions for international solidarity may include, in a non-exhaustive list:

1. **Promoting human rights**
2. **Promoting trust and respect for peace and security**
3. **Addressing inequality within and between countries to progress sustainable development**
4. **Supporting refugees and migrants at risk of marginalisation and persecution**
5. **Addressing climate change**
6. **Empowering civil society organisations and wider society**
7. **Combatting corruption**
8. **Countering misinformation, disinformation and hate speech with facts, science and knowledge**
9. **Combating violence against women and the use of gender stereotypes**
10. **Combating unilateral coercive measures that are inappropriately or too broadly targeted** [this may mean actions by authorities or governments that are unduly harsh, or applied too broadly]

The Declaration outlines **international solidarity as both a right and a duty:**

"The right to international solidarity is a right of individuals and peoples to participate meaningfully in, contribute to and enjoy a social and international order in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be realized.

Individuals and peoples are central subjects of, active participants in and beneficiaries of international solidarity."

Authorities and organisations - including museums - should **create an enabling environment where people can learn about and exercise their right, and their duty, to stand up for the human rights of others**, and to progress action in the face of challenges to people and nature everywhere.

Museums can play especially useful roles in providing timely, reliable information that people and communities can draw on to inform their own decision-making and actions.

TO DO

Consider, how is your museums respecting, protecting and fulfilling the right to international solidarity? What else can it do to promote peace, justice and the protection of nature?

International Solidarity Day (20th December) has the following aims, that could, if we wanted to, be followed 365 days a year:

- **a day to celebrate our unity in diversity**
- **a day to remind governments to respect their commitments to international agreements**
- **a day to raise public awareness of the importance of solidarity**
- **a day to encourage debate on the ways to promote solidarity for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals including poverty eradication**
- **a day of action to encourage new initiatives for poverty eradication**

TO DO

What can your museum do to raise awareness of International Solidarity Day? Look at the list of international days and weeks, years and decades. Which of these observances are relevant to your museum, and what can you do to promote a common awareness of them, and wide participation in them, as a concrete action for international solidarity?

Should museums make statements on matters of public concern?

Should museums make statements on matters of public concern? That would seem to be a straightforward enough question, but the answer is far from simple. Let's look at this a bit more. When the Black Lives Matter movement came to widespread prominence in 2020, in the aftermath of police brutality and the murder of George Floyd in the US, many museums and museum organisations in the UK and elsewhere made statements that they were committed to anti-racism. While these actions are very much to be welcomed, in doing so, museums (and the wider museum sector) also revealed how behind they were in doing what they should have been doing (and required to do) in the first place. This is not to say that many museums were not trying to act to combat racism, as many were - the point is that they were not being required to do so in an impactful (rights-based or agreement-based) way by authorities.

There is an international agreement - a Convention, so binding under international law - that includes the following commitment: "States Parties (i.e. countries) undertake to adopt immediate and effective measures, particularly in the fields of teaching, education, culture and information, with a view to combating prejudices which lead to racial discrimination and to promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and racial or ethnical groups..."

Now, this agreement is not a new one, certainly not from 2020. It is from 1965, the height of the Civil Rights Era. It is called the **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination**. It is also one of **the most widely adopted (ratified) international agreements**, ratified by more than 150 UN member states, but few people (or museums or museum regulators) have probably heard of it, read it, or make practical use of it in their work.

Unfortunately, **governments' commitments did not make it into sectors' policies**, including the museum sector, and we have the world we have. We see this problem time and time again: governments sign on to agreements; sectors are unaware of what they could or should be doing; agreements aren't turned into concrete action; and people, communities and nature pay the price of inaction.

If we want to do better, we really need to understand what museums could or should be doing, and making sure we are doing it. In the absence of being requested to do such things, **we need to empower ourselves** to understand what opportunities there are for museums to respect, protect and fulfil their obligations to society more effectively, for a better future for all.

> Sustainable development and the SDGs give us a ready-made framework that already includes all of the main human rights and environmental agreements.





Statements are easy to make, but putting plans into action is less easy. To be credible and to promote trust, statements on what museums are going to do, whether to address racism or other matters of public interest, **should include concrete, ambitious yet realistic, time-bound actions, and methods for communicating progress and remaining challenges in an open and transparent way**. So, should museums make statements? One reason that museums should be cautious about making statements, is that these should be done on a transparent basis. Why issue statements on some matters but not others? Who decides what is important and worth attention, or not? Museums are, after all, buildings with collections in them. It is people who make statements, and in the case of museums these 'museum statements' are in reality likely to be the views of the most senior and powerful people, such as managers and directors. Their views do not necessarily reflect the workforce's views, nor society's views, but are turned into rather abstract 'museum views'.

In the UK, for example, museums and museum organisations have been quick to make statements in support of Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression (which they are quite right to do), but have been very quiet or totally silent on other conflicts and other disaster situations. Why speak out on the situation in Ukraine but say little or nothing on the horrendous conflict in Gaza, the civil war in Sudan, humanitarian crises in many other African countries, terrible flooding in Pakistan, or other crises and conflicts that wreck lives, cause massive damage to the environment, and undermine any chance for peace and sustainable development?

If museums, or other organisations, are making statements in a way that is asymmetrical or untransparent, then they are at risk of sustaining or even creating conflict rather than supporting peace, and undermining their own credibility as trusted, impartial actors. If their statements only reflect the prevailing political standpoint of their governments, or the personal viewpoints of senior staff, then they are rather far from being impartial rights-respecting actors.

While we are on the subject of transparency, we should recall that being **impartial** is not the same as being **neutral**. While neutrality implies doing nothing and being a bystander (although that too is a choice), being impartial means to treat all parties the same. For a metaphor, a referee in a football match aims to treat both teams in a match fairly, in accordance with a set of rules: the referee is impartial but certainly not neutral. If museums choose to do nothing in the face of oppression, they are taking the road of 'neutrality', and throwing away any kind of responsibility or role in society. If they choose to act in some circumstances but not others, then they are certainly not impartial, nor neutral: they are partisan.

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

How can we promote impartiality? If museums **develop transparent guidelines** for when they will make statements, on what basis, and in search of what (hopefully that would be peace and upholding human rights), then they take the much more worthwhile road of ***impartiality***. These guidelines need to be openly available, and they would need to be used. If you are planning on developing them when a crisis situation emerges, you are too late: they need to be developed in advance. For impartiality to thrive, there needs to be some kind of rules, that is, a normative basis. Human rights, environmental goals, sustainable development and the SDGs, give us such a normative basis for our decisions and our actions. They help protect us as we step up to the plate; they 'arm' us to do the right thing, and they 'shield' us from angry, loud voices seeking to quash dissenting views.

Let's look at some major conflicts, from the **International Rescue Committee 2025 Emergency Watchlist**

	Country	Conflict	Impact
1	Sudan	Civil war, huge hunger crisis, massive displacement	More than 25 million people in need of humanitarian assistance,
2	Occupied Palestinian Territory (Gaza and West Bank)	Conflict between Israel and Hamas, with Israeli blockades of humanitarian aid and destruction of civilian infrastructure.	"The entire population of Gaza is facing high levels of acute food insecurity, with one in five facing starvation."
3	Myanmar	Civil war, persecution of Rohingya minority, earthquake.	More than 19 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.
4	Syria	Civil war, hyperinflation meaning food not affordable, drought, cholera.	Crisis has displaced 12 million people, population is dependent on humanitarian relief.
5	South Sudan	Military conflict, climate impacts such as flooding, lack of food, displacement.	More than 9 million people, in need of humanitarian assistance.
6	Lebanon	Recent war with Israel has led to massive displacement of people, major food shortages.	1.5 million Syrian and almost 500,000 Palestinian refugees.
7	Burkina Faso	Half the population under control of armed groups, massive displacement, climate impacts.	More than 6 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.
8	Haiti	Political turmoil, economic and climate shocks.	Nearly half the population needs humanitarian assistance.
9	Mali	Multifront conflict, food shortages as armed groups target food production.	More than 7 million people in need of humanitarian support.
10	Somalia	Decades of war. Series of droughts followed by flooding. Climate impacts damaging infrastructure.	More than 4 million at risk of severe food insecurity.

Now, the point of including the International Rescue Committee's Watchlist is not to play one conflict against the other, or identify the worst ones, when all are dreadful. It is to highlight that there are terrible conflicts and crises going on now, that people are rather unaware of, and that organisations - including museums and the wider museum sector - seem not to consider worthy of either their attention or public attention. Museums are thus complicit in keeping people in the dark about what is happening around the world. How many museums contain objects from these places? How many museums have people affected by these awful conflicts in their communities? The answer to both of these questions is probably 'quite a few'. As there is a good chance that people affected by these conflicts are likely to be under-served by museums, paying more attention to these situations is a way to build more relevant institutions that concern themselves with the real world, building more effective services locally, and contributing more effectively to international solidarity.

The list of conflicts above, as well as other conflicts and crises, are all situations that museums should consider as they make statements, if they are going to make them at all. If museums are to express solidarity, then let it be based on the real world, and not a selective list or the conflicts that are 'easy' to support and stand up against.

Museums or museum organisations making statements should be careful to ensure that in projecting their own voice and views (or the views of managers or directors) **they are not silencing or drowning out others' voices**. It is surely **more important that a museum empowers people and communities to lift up their voice[s]**, than to project its own.

Finally, statements are effectively expressions of opinion. In a world where there are so many noisy opinions (notably those expressed in social media), **perhaps a better purpose and function for museums is to focus less on making statements, and more on providing transparent access to information: facts, evidence, scientific research, experts' views, using museums' skills in communication, and empowering people so that they can use their own voice[s]**. In a world crippled with misinformation and disinformation, museums can play valuable roles in translating complex information, so it is more understandable and meaningful for people and communities to inform their own thoughts and decision-making. They can also focus more on **providing platforms for people and groups to freely express their own views and ideas**.

TO DO

Consider a museum you know. Has it made public statements on particular topics? If so, how is it making itself accountable through ongoing communication on progress and remaining challenges?

PHOTO STORY

Challenging poverty, hunger and persecution to promote solidarity

Everyone has the right to be free from fear or harm, and to an adequate standard of living, including access to food. These are fundamental human rights. Museums and memorials can provide opportunities to stand up for these rights for all people, in the past, today and tomorrow, as expressions of solidarity.

'Famine' is a public memorial in Dublin by Rowan Gillespie. It commemorates the Great Famine of 1845-49, when the population of Ireland halved as a result of starvation and emigration. The Great Famine resulted from political and economic choices that failed to provide social protection for poor, starving people *(photo 1)*.

'The Emigrants' is a public memorial in Helmsdale, Scotland by Gerald Laing, commemorating the people who were forced from their homes and traditional lifestyles as part of economic shifts called the Highland Clearances. An identical statue is situated near Winnipeg in Canada, the destination of some of those who left (or were forced from) Scotland *(photo 2)*.

The First World War and its aftermath saw mass displacement of people. Nansen Passports were issued to displaced people during 1922-38 to help them reach home or safety. After the Second World War, the Refugee Convention of 1951 also sought to provide social protection for huge numbers of people fleeing harm or persecution *(photo 3)*.

The plight of refugees and poorly managed migration may be manipulated by radical and extreme right-wing movements, turning vulnerable people into scapegoats to justify victimisation and persecution *(photos 4 and 5)*.

Deliberately depriving broad populations of food, water and other basic needs has been, and continues to be, used to secure political and military goals, although it is prohibited by customary international law. Recent examples include deliberate deprivation of food - which naturally leads to starvation - in Ukraine by Russia and in Gaza by Israel, as well as in internal conflicts in Syria, Yemen and South Sudan. This is against fundamental human rights and countries' obligations under international law *(photo 6)*.

A public memorial and gathering place to promote International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17 October) is situated close to the Famine Memorial in Dublin, shown in photo 1 *(photo 7)*.

1. 'Famine' by Rowan Gillespie, a public memorial in Dublin commemorating the victims of the Great Famine of 1845-49.

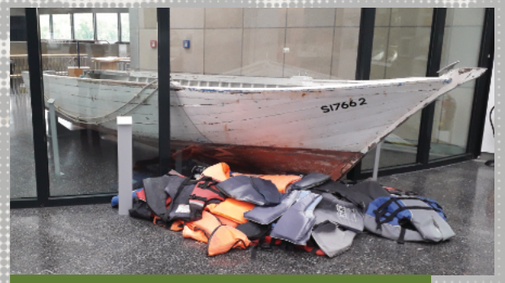


2. 'The Emigrants' by Gerald Laing, a public memorial in Helmsdale commemorating the victims of the Highland Clearances.



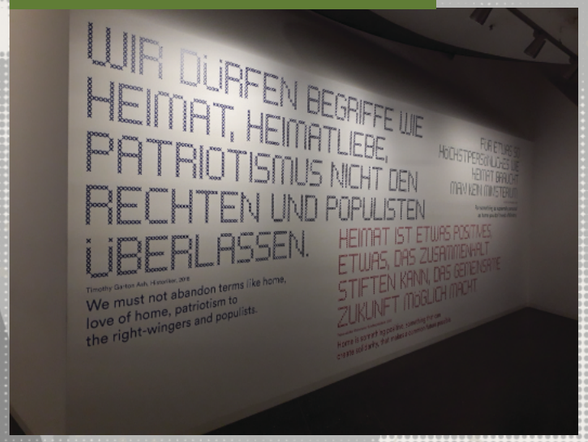


3. Nansen Passport on display at the Nobel Prize Museum, Stockholm. Fridtjof Nansen was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1922 for his work supporting refugees.



4. An exhibit at the House of German History, Bonn, with the caption "Rejection: rising numbers of refugees generate fears and boost extreme right-wing movements."

5. An exhibit at the House of German History, Bonn, with the caption "We must not abandon terms like home, love of home, patriotism to the right-wingers and populists."





6. An exhibition at the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (in Riga) in 2022 drew attention to 'Hunger as a Weapon' in Ukraine in 1932-33 and again in 2022, by Russian aggressors. Hunger is being used as a weapon in many conflicts.



7. A public monument and gathering place to promote International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17 October), close to the Famine Memorial, Dublin.

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UNEP, **who are environmental defenders?**

3.1.7 Right to Development

When you think of 'development', what image comes to mind? It might be the economic regeneration of a former industrial area, or installing a sanitation system in a community that didn't have one. It might be building windfarms to provide green energy. Or it might be a new industrial estate, or a focus on strengthening economic growth in a deprived area. All of these are certainly 'developments', but are they 'development', let alone 'sustainable development'? **The UN says:**

"Development is not just about changing the material conditions that prevent a person from reaching these goals. It is also about empowering people with voice and agency to be active participants in designing their own solutions and shaping development policy. It is about transforming laws, policy, practice, social norms and power relations such that everyone can flourish in equal dignity and freedom."

There are certainly many countries, places and communities that lack basic resources - infrastructure, finance and opportunities for work - that need to be addressed so people can have a decent quality of life, and it is not for other people or countries to say what standard of life those people should be accepting. However, harmful, inappropriate 'development' is also a great problem, for communities, countries and nature.

The Declaration on the Right to Development was adopted in 1986. It draws attention to the fundamental rights and freedoms of all, and to widespread violations of rights resulting from colonialism and neo-colonialism, racism, foreign influence and territorial disputes, and by day-to-day discrimination.

The Declaration establishes the right of everyone **"to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized."**

Development is taken to mean **"the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom."**

The elements of the right to development are:

1. **People-centred development.** The Declaration identifies "the human person" is the central subject, participant and beneficiary of development. This is an important point that museums should note. The emphasis is not on service provision, but on providing an enabling environment.

2. **A human rights-based approach.** Development must be carried out in a manner "in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized".

3. **Participation.** The Declaration calls for the "active, free and meaningful participation" of people in development, and all people have a responsibility for development as part of their duties to the community.

4. **Equity** and the fair distribution of the benefits of development.

5. **Non-discrimination.**

6. **Self-determination.** All people are entitled to self-determination, to pursue their economic, social and cultural development, without discrimination and without exception.

The Right to Development is noticeably light on content relating to the environment, but it is well-known and widely accepted that a clean, healthy, sustainable environment is essential for a wide variety of human rights, including the Right to Development. This means that protecting and restoring the environment can be read into the second element, the human rights-based approach to development.

The Right to Development is also distinctive in that it is a 'third-generation' right, meaning that it is not only held by people as individuals, but as groups. Other third-generation rights include the rights of Indigenous peoples as groups, the rights of nature, and solidarity rights. Third-generation rights are 'cutting edge' rights, in that they are arguably the most progressive class of rights.

However, the Right to Development is poorly known, and rather widely misunderstood. It does not mean the right of authorities or businesses to pursue economic or infrastructural development that has a net negative impact on people and nature. That is unsustainable development.

We will return to the concept of development in a later section, on Human Development.

Active, free and meaningful participation as a basis of development

The Right to Development is often thought of in terms of international relations, but it has a more everyday applicability too. Let us explore this.

The key innovation of the Right to Development was the emphasis on people-centred development, including their Active, Free and Meaningful Participation. Although it is often referred to in UN discussions, what constitutes **'Active, Free and Meaningful Participation'** is not that well-defined, so what might it mean? How can it apply to the work of museums and other institutions?

Perhaps it is easiest to consider the opposite: passive, coerced, and/or meaningless participation, or non-participation.

Wherever museums' activities support people's or special interest groups' active involvement in setting goals and developing programmes of action, or where they attend to matters of interest or relevance to these groups, these are supporting active, free and meaningful participation.

Wherever museums are simply acting as broadcasters they may not be supporting active, free and meaningful participation, but they may be supporting effective public administration and the right to information, for example providing information that is of public benefit that supports informed decision-making.

> Active, free and meaningful participation in museums and in society should be considered as meaning all people, and helps avoid considering people as more-or-less-passive members of homogeneous 'audiences'.

Active, free and meaningful participation may mean:

- People and communities **contributing to decision-making about museum activities** that they or others will subsequently make use of, not only selecting from among a series of options drawn up by museums.
- People and communities **contributing meaningfully to cultural experiences**, for example sharing their views and ideas as a component of exhibitions and other cultural activities.
- People and communities **contributing to policies, strategies and plans**.
- **People and communities with a stake in collections** - whether as originating communities, current communities of interest, or special interest groups such as researchers - being consulted regarding decisions on the development of collections for use, whether as acquisition, transfer, repatriation or disposal (disposal does not necessarily mean destruction).
- Museums supporting **active, free and meaningful participation in wider social developments, debates and policy developments (public affairs)**.
- Museums providing relevant, timely information, combined with **opportunities for debate, dialogue and joint decision-making that genuinely influences decisions**.

Connecting the principles of the Right to Development and Leave No-one Behind, we see that we should not only focus our attentions on the well-off and empowered. Leave No-one Behind compels us to prioritise those worst-off, or in other words, least well-served. This may involve activities directed towards/involving those people and groups themselves. Conversely, it may mean raising other people's and groups' awareness of those people and groups, perhaps in terms of the challenges they face, but also a wider appreciation of their ideas, creativity and aspirations (in other words, their cultural rights). Then again, it may involve activities that bring different groups of people together.

We will return to meaningful participation - which also has to be active and free - in the section on 'Leave No-one Behind'.

TO DO

Consider a museum you know. Do people participate in active, free and meaningful ways?

More information

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3.1.8 Reminding governments, policy makers, and museums of their responsibilities

We will explore authorities' and museums' responsibilities many times in this guide. They have them, they are just often unaware of them. For now, let us remember that countries have already signed up to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and two legally binding Covenants (on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and on Civil and Political Rights), as well as many other human rights and environmental agreements. If you want to check with treaties your country has signed up to, you can do so **here**. No-one made them do this, and they then agreed to be bound by the treaties' contents when they ratified the agreements (unless they made some specific reservations). Many countries have written these commitments into their laws. In addition, many human rights agreements include commitments on culture (in broad and narrow senses), education, freedom of expression and the right to information, the right to participate in public affairs, and many more, all of which are clearly relevant to the museum sector.

When governments make these agreements they make them in line with a 'treaty of treaties' called the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, from 1966. One of the fundamental principles of this agreement is a general principle that 'promises must be kept', or pacta sunt servanda. Think on that, 'promises must be kept', and reflect on how it is a far cry from the world we have today. As we work to build or rebuild trust in institutions, fulfilling basic, fundamental obligations, and acting transparently, are basic actions that can both build trust and provide better public service.

> The principle that promises must be kept is reliant on timely access to accurate, relevant information on what commitments authorities have made or are about to make. This supports public information, informed decision-making, and transparency.
>
> The principle that promises must be kept is also reliant on effective, well-informed institutions.

We will look at just a couple of the crucial commitments - promises - that governments have made, but that museums and policy makers are rather unaware of. These promises can be used to hold governments to account, but they are also practical tools for us all to guide our actions, as we aim to provide effective, accountable, transparent public services that contribute concretely to sustainable development and the SDGs.

The following commitments are to be found in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the ICESCR), one of the most powerful international human rights agreements, part of the International Bill of Rights:

"All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development." (Article 1)

"The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right to work, which includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts, and will take appropriate steps to safeguard this right.

The steps to be taken by a State Party to the present Covenant to achieve the full realization of this right shall include technical and vocational guidance and training programmes, policies and techniques to achieve steady economic, social and cultural development and full and productive employment under conditions safeguarding fundamental political and economic freedoms to the individual." (Article 6)

"1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone:
(a) To take part in cultural life;
(b) To enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications;
(c) To benefit from the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

2. The steps to be taken by the States Parties to the present Covenant to achieve the full realization of this right shall include those necessary for the conservation, the development and the diffusion of science and culture.

3. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to respect the freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity.

4. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the benefits to be derived from the encouragement and development of international contacts and co-operation in the scientific and cultural fields." (Article 15)

These commitments are a far cry from the challenges facing museums: poorly paid work, precarious working conditions with large amounts of the work done on zero-hours or freelance terms that are poorly protected, and insufficient funding.

In the context of museums and collections, note the commitment to take steps necessary for the conservation, development and diffusion of science and culture, or, in other words, to maintain, develop and make accessible collections and related information. As these are national commitments, it means that governments should take steps to ensure that they are implemented effectively across their territory, not just left to the vagaries of the market, or as a result of competition for insufficient resources by individual institutions.

The ICCPR covers civil and political rights. Among its commitments are the following:

> **"Article 19**
>
> **1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.**
>
> **2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.**
>
> **3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary**
>
> **(a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals."**

Both the ICESCR and ICCPR highlight that human rights are something that everyone should support and promote: governments, institutions and individuals. This is repeated in the preamble of both Covenants:

> **"Realizing that the individual, having duties to other individuals and to the community to which he belongs, is under a responsibility to strive for the promotion and observance of the rights recognized in the present Covenant."** (ICESCR and ICCPR Preambles)

If people are to claim and enjoy their own rights, and to fulfil their responsibilities to support other people to claim and enjoy their rights, then the first step is surely knowing what these rights are. As museums are public information and educational institutions, that means they have a crucial role to play in building a rights-respecting society.

TO DO

Know your rights and your responsibilities. Whether governments or policy makers are asking you to do these things, you can use these commitments to empower yourself and to empower others. Know that in doing so, you are working for a human rights culture, and you are helping the country fulfil its obligations too. You are leading the way while governments and authorities lag behind. The extent to which you are able to do this will depend on the political context, but there is a lot that can be done in most countries and in most museums.

PHOTO STORY



1. The Genbaku Dome, close to the hypocentre of the Hiroshima atomic explosion.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki: from atomic disasters to campaigning for peace

On 6 August 1945, US military forces dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima killing 70,000 people instantly; three days later another bomb was dropped on on Nagasaki killing 40,000 people. While the bombs detonated in the air, they caused massive damage to both cities and tens of thousands of people died after the bombings over decades.

The Genbaku Dome was close to the epicentre of the blast and is preserved as part of Hiroshima Peace Memorial, a World Heritage Site *(photo 1)*.

2. Survivor Ginkgo tree, Shukkeien Park.





3. Shukkeien Park.



4. Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, Hiroshima.



5. Children's Peace Monument, Hiroshima Peace Park.



6. Memorial Cenotaph, Hiroshima Peace Park.

Shukkeien Garden was destroyed by the Hiroshima atomic blast. A lone Ginkgo tree survived the blast, although the force of the blast tilted the tree, as it remains today. The park was a gathering place for people after the blast and many people are buried in its grounds *(photo 2)*.

Today, Shukkeien Garden is restored. The terrible wounds inflicted on the city and its precious garden are difficult to find *(photo 3)*.

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum tells the story of the atomic bombing on Hiroshima, and the damage that the bombing caused for generations of people. It collects oral testimonies and campaigns for peace and nuclear disarmament *(photo 4)*.

The Hiroshima Children's Peace Monument is dedicated to the tens of thousands of children who were victims of the Hiroshima atomic bombing. It commemorates Sadako Sasaki and her efforts to fold a thousand origami cranes. An inscription reads "This is our cry, this is our prayer: for building peace in the world" *(photo 5)*.

The Memorial Cenotaph is one of the oldest parts of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, from 1955 *(photo 6)*.

Once the hypocentre of an atomic bombing, Hypocentre Park in Nagasaki is now a beautiful park, and a sacred place where people commemorate the memory of the terrible bombing and promote peace *(photo 7)*.

Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum educates people about the horrors of the Nagasaki bombing, as well as the continuing threat that nuclear weapons pose today *(photo 8)*.

7. Hypocentre Park, Nagasaki.





8. Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum.

3.2
Leave No-one Behind

3.2.1 Active, free and meaningful participation for everyone

The principle of **Leave No-one Behind** is closely related to the principle of solidarity, and is one of the three universal values of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs (along with human rights and a rights-based approach, and gender equality). The UN says:

"Leave no-one behind (LNOB) is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It represents the unequivocal commitment of all UN Member States to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole.

LNOB not only entails reaching the poorest of the poor, but requires combating discrimination and rising inequalities within and amongst countries, and their root causes. A major cause of people being left behind is persistent forms of discrimination, including gender discrimination, which leaves individuals, families and whole communities marginalized, and excluded...

LNOB compels us to focus on discrimination and inequalities (often multiple and intersecting) that undermine the agency of people as holders of rights. Many of the barriers people face in accessing services, resources and equal opportunities are not simply accidents of fate or a lack of availability of resources, but rather the result of discriminatory laws, policies and social practices that leave particular groups of people further and further behind."

Those currently 'left behind' might mean people who are subjected to poor living conditions, poor people, victims of persecution and intolerance, those impacted by wars and conflicts everywhere, displaced people, those who are at the forefront of climate change or environmental damage, the old, young, women, LGBT people, persons with disabilities and others: unfortunately a very long list. It means prioritising their needs and aspirations, and recognising that they have their own ideas and agency.

'Leave No-one Behind' does not necessarily mean instrumental approaches carried out by institutions, however well-meaning (although that may be part of it). It also means involving people in decision-making about matters that will affect them. This requires meaningful participation, or to use the Right to Development language, 'active, free and meaningful participation'. **UN guidance**[13] **helps clarify what this looks like:**

"Participation can be defined as meaningful when participants manage to influence decisions on issues that affect their lives. This happens when policymakers and service providers give serious consideration to their views and provide appropriate feedback on how those views have been taken into account. An important outcome of meaningful participation is participants' strengthened empowerment, which can be defined as their capacity to exert control over their lives and to claim their rights."

For museums, this can mean consulting with groups or at least those with expertise on the challenges, aspirations and concerns of those groups, to avoid making assumptions and perpetuating the cycle that restricts people's agency and autonomy.

For example, a museum seeking funding for a community programme should at least have consulted with those with detailed knowledge of that community, or the community itself, so that it can define its own priorities and concerns. That way, people are more empowered/less disempowered in decision-making, the organisation will submit a funding bid that is actually worth funding, and the outcomes are likely to be better for the community and the museum. What constitutes 'better' should have been at least partly determined by the relevant community, and certainly not the museum on its own.

Funding bids that merely satisfy a funder's requirements, with no real effort to situate the activity in the needs and aspirations of people and communities concerned, are not promoting active, free and meaningful participation.

How museums can embed meaningful participation in shaping and delivering activities to Leave No-one Behind:[14]

- **Understand civil society space in the country:** what freedom do people, communities and organisations have to form associations and operate? Are vulnerable and marginalised people represented in civil society?
- Are there **physical and online spaces** for effective public participation in the decision-making process?
- How is the **inclusion and representation of people's views**, notably those in vulnerable situations, guaranteed in decision-making processes?
- **Who is not participating**, notably those from vulnerable and marginalised groups?
- What are some **obstacles and incentives for participation in decision-making?** Do groups in marginalized situations have equal access to information and consultation processes? Are they able to participate meaningfully and make specific proposals?
- What measures are in place to ensure people and groups can **express themselves freely** without a sanction or fear of a sanction?
- How can people and groups **under-represented in consultations and decision-making** be reached? How can the barriers to their equal participation be removed?
- **What particular barriers are faced by persons with disabilities?** What measures can remove these barriers? What do they or their representatives say is required?
- **Who is currently left furthest behind?** What actions could help facilitate their meaningful participation in decision-making, at least by a representative number of them?
- What actions can museums take to **promote inclusive policymaking, programme development and delivery**? This might mean for policies and programmes in wider society, or for museums themselves.

- How can museums help empower people from left-behind groups to **contribute their views to national policy and planning processes, and monitoring and evaluation**?
- How can people currently left behind have **greater opportunity and agency to take part in society and work**? How can museums promote this?
- If you don't know the answer to any of these questions, which **experts, reports or community representatives could help provide informed answers**?
- In **conflict, post-conflict and humanitarian contexts**, how has the crisis affected access and participation of vulnerable people and groups? What other social groups have been particularly negatively impacted by the crisis?

These questions can help guide the identification and development of actions aimed at providing more effective public services and opportunities for people currently left behind. They may be factored into activities relating to the SDGs, for example in localising the SDGs to set priorities, devise programmes of action, and to monitor, evaluate and communicate sustainable development action.

As inclusion, participation and transparency are basic tenets of human rights and the SDGs, meaningful participation is not some 'nice to have' to be bolted on. Meaningful participation - active and free - is foundational in Agenda 2030 and in sustainable development more broadly. It helps ensure programmes have a public mandate, that incorporates the views and aspirations of under-represented people and groups. This helps to guarantee that people's right to influence activities that will affect them has been respected, protected and fulfilled.

The UN's approach on Leave No-one Behind is set out in the **Shared Framework on Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development**. This guide outlines steps to set goals, make and deliver plans, and monitor and communicate actions to address inequality and promote inclusion and participation. The guide can be used by museums to support their own transformation to 'Leave No-one Behind'.

Another UN report, **'Operationalizing Leave No-one Behind' (2022)**, is also extremely useful and can help museums to make active, free and meaningful participation a reality, both within museums and across society. The report provides detailed guidance in a step-by-step approach to understand and address inequality and inclusion, and also provides links to many useful tools.

To do: What proportion of your museum's efforts aim to 'Leave No-one Behind'? Who is most marginalised in your community, and what could local museums do to increase their opportunities and positive representation, both in the museum and more widely?

TO DO

What proportion of your museum's efforts aim to 'Leave No-one Behind'?

Who is most marginalised in your community, and what could local museums do to increase their opportunities and positive representation, both in the museum and more widely?

'Leave No-one Behind' is closely related to many SDGs and targets.

3.2.2 Leave no museum behind: reducing inequality between museums

Just as there is inequality between countries, there is great inequality between institutions, including museums. There is a tendency for large museums to exert a kind of gravitational pull - on collections, on people, on attention, and on funding - away from smaller museums. What does this mean? Good quality or desirable collections did not necessarily go to the most local or relevant museums, but went to the large museums, especially national museums, giving them an even stronger gravitational pull on funding away from smaller museums. In colonial and imperial contexts (mainly historical but not entirely), collections flowed towards centres of imperial and colonial power, where they remain today. Large museums also have greater resources for programming, exhibitions and marketing; they have more people to write bids for funding, to ask for larger amounts of funding, and to cultivate donors to secure philanthropy. They essentially compete with one another and with smaller museums for visitors, visitor spending, and generally for attention.

A smaller museum is much more likely to reflect the local reality of towns, regions and communities than a national museum, and to create more meaningful and relevant social and environmental benefits locally. In fact, smaller, more local museums can contribute to sustainable development challenges and opportunities more effectively, as they are more localised than large museums.

Large museums occupy most of the space in many museum magazines and conferences, although their realities are not that representative of the sector, nor of society. Equalising the contribution and presence of museums in museum magazines and at conferences would go some way to ensuring that the sector represents a diversity of experiences and practices, rather than large, powerful museums dominating the headlines, soaking up the limelight, and steering the sector in ways that are not always helpful. Large museums are also like supertankers that find it hard to change course, just by virtue of scale (but also because of more bureaucracy); small museums can change in much more nimble, responsive and adaptive ways.

As consumption is essentially proportionate to budget spend, larger museums (with big budgets) are heavier consumers of materials and energy than smaller ones. Indeed, the largest museums have comparatively huge carbon footprints, as they attract disproportionately large numbers of international visitors, to say nothing of larger exhibitions and more international touring exhibitions (which most smaller museums simply don't do). They may be too close to governments to change easily, or acknowledge their problematic histories. Large museums also tend to be more commercially minded and driven.

Museums interested in resource-efficiency, people-centred approaches and sustainable development will learn a lot from the experiences of small and medium-sized museums. Small and medium-sized museums have more direct experience and lessons of getting by with less (often with a lot less!), with less negative social and environmental impacts. We are more likely to find scalable, replicable options there than in huge institutions.

3.2.3 Empowerment and ‘Leave No-one Behind’

‘Empowerment’ is one of those words that you often encounter in museums. But what does it mean? Who is empowered to do what, and who is doing the empowering?

A very helpful definition of empowerment **was developed and used by the WHO**, in relation to health care. This definition has found its way into other sectors:

“‘Empowerment' refers to the process by which people gain control over the factors and decisions that shape their lives. It is the process by which they increase their assets and attributes and build capacities to gain access, partners, networks and/or a voice, in order to gain control.”

“Community empowerment refers to the process of enabling communities to increase control over their lives.”

"Enabling", implies that people cannot "be empowered" by others; they can only empower themselves by acquiring more of power's different forms (Laverack, 2008).

It assumes that people are their own assets, and the role of the external agent is to catalyse, facilitate or ‘accompany’ the community in acquiring power.”

People are their own assets

Note especially where agency lies: it certainly does not come from institutions somehow adjusting or changing people, or ‘fixing’ their problems. That is instrumentalism taken to the extreme. Conversely, note the concept of ‘accompaniment’, that can be usefully considered by museums to shape their own work with empowerment, of individuals and communities. Museums may provide resources and opportunities as people and communities empower and organise themselves.

There are a number of approaches relating to empowerment that all acknowledge that agency is not something that is given by others, however well-meaning that may be.

Laverack (2008)[15], considering public health, developed an approach that acknowledges both ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ approaches, as two tracks that are related to one another and can be developed and delivered together. The model he developed can be considered by museums in their own work on empowerment, as including both ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ responsibilities.

The development sector has been transformed by centring people and communities at the centre of what constitutes desirable action. These transformations ensure that people are involved in decisions that will affect them, and they could be usefully applied by museums as a means of strengthening empowerment. The **Human Rights-based Approach** takes human rights as normative standards to work towards through development actions, and also emphasises the importance of involving people and communities in decisions and programmes that will affect them or they will make use of. The Approach is helpful in avoiding well-intended but misguided ‘top down’ actions from institutions, but helps them to strengthen their own services while also empowering people to claim their related rights. The Human Rights-based Approach is explained in more detail in the guide ‘**Museums and Human Rights: human rights as a basis of public service**’.



3.2.4 Freedoms and human development

The concept of freedom has been part of human rights discourse for centuries, as major advances on rights have often come in the shadow of wars and horrific human loss. FD Roosevelt had 'four freedoms' in mind in 1941, as the Second World War was underway. Rights and freedoms - and responsibilities - were expanded upon in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The **UN Charter** seeks to **"promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom"**

Building on these early developments, **human development has identified seven basic freedoms** that all people should experience as a normal part of their lives:

- **Freedom from discrimination** - for equality, for example based on gender, race, ethnicity, national origin or other status
- **Freedom from fear** - with no threats to personal security
- **Freedom of thought and speech**, for participation, expression and association
- **Freedom from want**, for a decent standard of living
- **Freedom to develop and realize one's human potential**
- **Freedom from injustice and violations** of the rule of law
- **Freedom for decent work** without exploitation

One of the criticisms of human rights is that they can be misused to justify all manner of personal actions. The concept of freedom may be too narrowly restricted to take an individual perspective. My freedom cannot come at the expense of someone else's misery: that is a zero-sum game. Yet, that is the goal of Neoliberalism: to erode workers' rights, in a race to the bottom. As has been emphasised throughout this guide, human rights are not only about how individuals amass rights for themselves, but about how people and communities live together. Individuals who have the benefit of experiencing their rights have responsibilities towards other people.

When we talk about 'larger freedom' we can consider that we are aiming to grow collective freedom: opportunity, agency, responsibility, peace.

"no one of us can be free until everybody is free"
Maya Angelou

3.2.5 Human Development

UNDP says: "Human development - or the human development approach - is about expanding the richness of human life, rather than simply the richness of the economy in which human beings live. It is an approach that is focused on people and their opportunities and choices." Human Development is strongly linked to the Capability Approach, explored in the next section.

UNDP says the emphasis of Human Development focusses on three aspects:

"People: human development focuses on improving the lives people lead rather than assuming that economic growth will lead, automatically, to greater wellbeing for all. Income growth is seen as a means to development, rather than an end in itself.

Opportunities: human development is about giving people more freedom to live lives they value. In effect this means developing people's abilities and giving them a chance to use them. For example, educating a girl would build her skills, but it is of little use if she is denied access to jobs, or does not have the right skills for the local labour market. Three foundations for human development are to live a long, healthy and creative life, to be knowledgeable, and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. Many other things are important too, especially in helping to create the right conditions for human development... Once the basics of human development are achieved, they open up opportunities for progress in other aspects of life.

Choice: human development is, fundamentally, about more choice. It is about providing people with opportunities, not insisting that they make use of them. No one can guarantee human happiness, and the choices people make are their own concern. The process of development - human development - should at least create an environment for people, individually and collectively, to develop to their full potential and to have a reasonable chance of leading productive and creative lives that they value.

As the international community moves toward implementing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda, the human development approach remains useful to articulating the objectives of development and improving people's well-being by ensuring an equitable, sustainable and stable planet."

Building on this work, the **Human Development Index** gives a rough measure of 'beyond GDP' measures of human and social progress (as GDP doesn't actually measure human development at all), including income, education, and life expectancy. The Index is available since 1990, covering more than 30 years. While crude, this measure is supplemented by other measures that look at particular adjustments (e.g. for gender, environmental impact and others).

The Human Development Index is measured annually and presented in the more-or-less annual **Human Development Reports**. These reports are much more than simple presentations of the Index, but detailed, thematic discussions on particular topics. Particularly relevant for the museum and cultural sectors are the following reports:

Human Development Report (2004). Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World. UNDP.

"Accommodating people's growing demands for their inclusion in society, for respect of their ethnicity, religion, and language, takes more than democracy and equitable growth."

Human Development Report (2000). Human Rights and Human Development. UNDP.

"Human freedom is the common purpose and common motivation of human rights and human development."

As we have seen a number of times, Neoliberal approaches have a different emphasis from Human Development Approaches, which have been summarised as follows[16]:

Human Development Approach	Neoliberalism
Expansion of human freedoms as the objective	Maximisation of economic income/growth as the objective
'Freedom of choice' is taken to mean the growth of human capabilities and functionings	'Freedom of choice' taken to mean expansion of consumer options and choices, and consumer satisfaction
Emphasises all human rights	Emphasises political and civil rights
Concerned with equity and justice	Concerned with economic efficiency
Health and education have intrinsic value	Health and education are seen as an investment to achieve other outcomes, notably economic ones
State has important functions, acknowledging State responsibilities and commitments	State has minimal functions, 'small state'
People are the ends and a focus of concern, economic growth is only a means to an end	People are the means, and markets/economic growth are a focus of concern
Poverty seen as multidimensional, including opportunities	Poverty defined as below an income line
Multidisciplinary and pragmatic approach	Economic and dogmatic approach
Non-monetary and economic focus, leading to weak data	Good quality of data but neglects non-economic issues and values

When we consider the different aspects set out in the table, and relate them to the museum sector, we will often find a mixture between the two approaches. Notably, when we consider the data that museums are required to provide to funders (both to secure funding and to demonstrate their contributions), we will often find that their concerns are much more closely aligned with the Neoliberal approach than the Human Development Approach. So, what can museums do? When we focus our efforts to prioritise or emphasise one approach - of which the human development approach is much more preferable - we will be able to strengthen museums' abilities to order their own affairs, articulate and demonstrate their true value, and build their own capability to resist empty Neoliberal approaches and pressures. This will help them to persist.

Human development considers people, opportunities and choices

TO DO

Consider the aspects of Human Development: people, opportunities and choice. How is your museum centring these considerations? How is your museum supporting people - all people - to achieve greater freedom, not only in a narrow sense within institutions, but more broadly in society and in life?

What can your museum do to shift away from Neoliberal considerations to a Human Development Approach?

3.2.6 The Capability Approach

Human Development aims to increase people's opportunities to lead the lives they wish to live, and that support collective living standards. It is strongly connected with Nobel Prize-winner Amartya Sen's **Capability Approach**, to which Martha Nussbaum has also made leading contributions.

Sen wrote about the Capability Approach in **'Development as Freedom' (1999). The book opens with the sentence: "Development can be seen… as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. Focussing on human freedoms contrasts with narrower views of development…"** The essential consideration is that these freedoms are freedoms that people themselves wish to achieve. In a nutshell, the Capability Approach helps to understand what people want to do and their abilities to do these things: it does not define what constitutes a 'good life'. While people have many different experiences in life, referred to as 'functionings', for Human Development and the Capability Approach, a crucial consideration is understanding the extent to which people are able to achieve different and desirable functionings they wish to. This is called capability: the freedom to choose, exercise and experience the kind of life you want to live. A starving person and a fasting person may have the same experience, but the starving person may have no access to food, while the fasting person has made a positive choice not to eat. The fasting person has much greater capability than the starving person. The difference is important to understand.

Agency is an important aspect in the Capability Approach, with an agent defined as **"someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well."**

> The opposite of an agent is someone who is forced, oppressed, or passive: a subject.

Alkire has written[17] (for the Human Development and Capability Association): **"Agency expands the horizons of concern beyond a person's own wellbeing, to include concerns such as saving the spotted owl or helping others. In this perspective, people are viewed to be active, creative, and able to act on behalf of their aspirations.**

Agency is related to other approaches that *stress self-determination, authentic self direction, autonomy* and so on. The concern for agency means that participation, public debate, democratic practice, and empowerment are to be fostered alongside well-being."

What is important to note here is that agency means that people do not merely need to be made passive or calmed down by wellbeing initiatives, but that actively participating in shaping alternative, desirable futures is a core component of agency. In the face of massive challenges, people don't need to be more passive or made more contented: they need to be empowered to be more active. Agency extends to solidarity and standing up with others, and for others, in the face of injustice.

We can consider the Capability Approach in relation to museums: based on the Approach, they should consult with people and groups about the wider actions and experiences in life that they want to achieve, or their concerns or aspirations, and ask what the museum can do - and do differently - to support them to achieve these wider actions and experiences. The Approach also requires people to have access to information and opportunities on which to base their decisions; this is a key role for museums, who are in a good position to provide good-quality, timely, reliable, relevant information.

Museums can - and should - facilitate, strengthen and amplify public debate, with wide participation, and promoting local democracy. Whether this is comfortable for museums or not is not really the point here: strengthening empowerment and capability is in everyone's interests, including museums. With practice and experience, museums can get better at fostering the kinds of broad social relations that people and communities want, with free speech, democracy, the ability to reach consensus while accepting difference, and so on.

As with Leave No-one Behind, the Capability Approach shifts the power onto people and communities, and away from institutions, politicians and funders. This is not to say that the museum simply does what people and communities want, as that is also to abandon responsibility, and it certainly doesn't mean abandoning any sense or purpose of museum-based expertise. In fact, museum-based expertise and well-maintained collections are essential resources that will be required to support people's and communities' empowerment, notably by providing information for decision-making.

More information

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1. Natori City Earthquake Reconstruction Tradition Centre, a small museum.



2. Arahama School, now a museum.

3. Survivor trees near the coast that survived the 2011 tsunami.





4. Coastal forest planted to break the force of future tsunamis.



5. Sendai Mediatheque recordings of tsunami experiences.



6. The Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster Memorial Museum, Futaba, Fukishima.



7. Tsunami markers, Yuriage, coastal Sendai.

PHOTO STORY

Learning from tsunamis in Sendai, and preparing for the future

There are no such things as natural disasters - only social, economic and political failures to meet events. Japan faces many natural hazards, so has a lot of experience in preparing for high-risk situations and preventing disasters.

A huge tsunami affected Sendai and nearby areas in 2011, travelling 10 kilometres inland, and killing 20,000 people.

Large numbers of small museums have been established in the area affected by the tsunami, to commemorate the 3.11 disaster. These museums support local communities to commemorative the victims, process the disaster, and to support economic regeneration through tourism in disaster-affected areas. They also serve as educational institutions to help people be prepared for future tsunamis. This example is the Natori City Earthquake Reconstruction Tradition Centre (Yuriage, near Sendai) *(photo 1)*.

Arahama School was a place where people gathered together after the 3.11 tsunami. Students went to the top floors to be safe from the tsunami waters. The school is preserved as a memorial and a museum, while the surrounding town has been completely destroyed *(photo 2)*.

'Survivor trees' such as these few pine trees near the coast at Yuriage can be powerful symbols for people and communities in post-disaster settings. *(photo 3)*

A coastal forest helps to break the force of tsunamis. Planting trees involves communities, and brings people together in a common endeavour, and educates them about tsunamis too *(photo 4)*.

Sendai Mediatheque is a library in Sendai. It has a programme to collect oral histories of how people were affected by the 3.11 earthquake and tsunami, and what lessons can be drawn from it for the future. The recordings can be borrowed by members of the public *(photo 5)*.

The Fukushima Daiich Nuclear Power Plant was badly affected by the 2011 tsunami. The powerplant itself was flooded, and the electricity supply was cut off. The disaster was a complex one, with a number of contributing factors, including bad planning. The Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster Memorial Museum (shown here) explores the factors that contributed towards the complex disaster (*photo 6*).

Japan has faced many earthquakes and tsunamis over the centuries. Tsunami markers are stone markers to warn future generations that tsunamis can reach particular places. Not only do the markers need to be preserved, people need to remember their message to avoid building in tsunami zones. *(photo 7)*

3.3
The right of everyone to participate freely in cultural life, enjoy the arts, and share in scientific advancement and its benefits

3.3.1 The right of everyone to take part in cultural life

The right of everyone to participate in cultural life is of special relevance to museums and similar institutions. The right forms part of Article 15 of the ICESCR, and is based on Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (where the full title is the 'right of everyone freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts, and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits').

The right of everyone to participate in cultural life is also referred to in most, if not all, international human rights legal instruments. **The right has been further clarified and defined by the UN in a guidance note called a General Comment**:

'Cultural life' acknowledges that culture has been defined in many ways: "culture is a broad, inclusive concept encompassing all manifestations of human existence.

The expression 'cultural life' is an explicit reference to culture as a living process, historical, dynamic and evolving, with a past, a present and a future."

The concept of 'cultural life' is a useful one for museums and similar institutions to consider. 'Cultural life' shifts the focus on to the person as an individual (or group of individuals) and the extent to which museums and cultural practices contribute towards their lives. This is a more inclusive and outcomes-based approach than an approach in which people are viewed as consumers of cultural productions (goods and services) arising from a cultural sector.

"To participate" (or "to take part", used interchangeably) is considered as having three main components:

(a) **Participation in cultural life:** the right of everyone to engage in cultural practices.

(b) **Access to cultural life:** the right of everyone to know and understand their own culture and that of others through education and information.

(c) **Contribution to cultural life:** the right of everyone to be involved in creating the spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional expressions of the community.

The following conditions are considered necessary for people to exercise their right to take part in cultural life, on the basis of equality and non-discrimination:

(a) **Availability** of sites and cultural institutions such as museums, and events, resources and opportunities for cultural interaction.

(b) **Accessibility** of opportunities for individuals and communities to take part in cultural life fully, within physical and financial reach without discrimination: to seek information on culture, take part in cultural practices, and contribute to the cultural life of the community.

(c) **Acceptability** of measures (laws, policies, strategies, plans and programmes) to the individuals and communities involved, developed through consultation.

(d) **Adaptability** of measures relating to cultural life.

(e) **Appropriateness** of measures so they are respectful of the culture and cultural rights of individuals and communities, including minorities and Indigenous peoples.

Limitations to the right of everyone to take part in cultural life may be required in certain circumstances, for example where customs and traditions infringe upon other human rights.

Non-discrimination and equal treatment

The ICESCR prohibits any discrimination regarding the right of everyone to take part in cultural life, and no one should be excluded from access to cultural practices or activities. This is worth noting for museums, who should not consciously (or unconsciously) seek to discourage or prevent anyone or any group from access to their services, whatever their opinions or other status (see also the sections on Freedom of Speech and Expression). Special efforts to promote full inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalized/under-served individuals and groups should be undertaken, whatever level of resources are available.

Specific legal obligations

The right of everyone to take part in cultural life, like the other rights enshrined in the ICESCR, imposes three types or levels of obligations: (a) the obligation to respect; (b) the obligation to protect; and (c) the obligation to fulfil. Museums can consider these duties, both in terms of how governments deliver their obligations; and what obligations museums can (and therefore should) respect, protect and fulfil themselves.

The obligation to respect: governments are to refrain from interfering, directly or indirectly, with the enjoyment of the right to take part in cultural life. The obligation to respect means that proactive measures should be taken to achieve respect for the right of everyone to participate in cultural life.

The obligation to protect: steps should be taken to prevent third parties from interfering in the right of others to take part in cultural life. Obligations to respect and protect are often interconnected. For example:

(a) to respect and protect cultural heritage in all its forms, and to preserve, develop and transmit cultural heritage "as a record of human experience and aspirations, in order to encourage creativity in all its diversity and to inspire a genuine dialogue between cultures."

(b) respect and protect cultural heritage of all groups and communities, in particular the most disadvantaged and marginalized/under-served individuals and groups

(c) to respect and protect the cultural productions of Indigenous peoples; and

(d) to promote existing legislation and policies that prohibit discrimination based on cultural identity, and tackle hate speech, hostility and violence.

The obligation to fulfil: requires active measures to achieve the full realization of the right. The obligation to fulfil can be subdivided into the obligations to facilitate, promote and provide. Facilitation includes creating opportunities for people to take part in cultural life, for example by establishing and supporting public institutions such as museums. The obligation to promote means the promotion of the right to participation in cultural life through education and public awareness, particularly in rural and deprived urban areas, for minorities, and for Indigenous peoples. The obligation to provide requires that nations, and others, must take affirmative steps that people are unable to take for themselves, for example by undertaking programmes to preserve and restore cultural heritage; providing educational opportunities; and providing "guaranteed access for all, without discrimination on grounds of financial or any other status, to museums, libraries, cinemas and theatres and to cultural activities, services and events."

Museums' responsibilities for the right of everyone to participate in cultural life
While primary responsibility for implementing the ICESCR lies with governments, the UN Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has also noted that **"all members of civil society… also have responsibilities in relation to the effective implementation of the right of everyone to take part in cultural life… Communities and cultural associations play a fundamental role in the promotion of the right of everyone to take part in cultural life at the local and national levels…"**

The duties to respect, protect and fulfil the right of everyone to participate in cultural life thus fall to museums (along with others), as institutions closely linked to this right.

3.3.2 The right of everyone to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications

This right also forms part of Article 15 of the ICESCR and is based on part of Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (in the UDHR the right is "to share in scientific advancement and its benefits").

In a helpful guidance note, **General Comment No. 25** (2020), the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has stated that:

"…science, which encompasses natural and social sciences, refers both to a process following a certain methodology ("doing science") and to the results of this process (knowledge and applications)."

"Doing science does not only concern scientific professionals but also includes 'citizen science' (ordinary people doing science) and the dissemination of scientific knowledge. States parties should not only refrain from preventing citizen participation in scientific activities, but should actively facilitate it."

"Culture is an inclusive concept encompassing all manifestations of human existence. Cultural life is therefore larger than science, as it includes other aspects of human existence; it is, however, reasonable to include scientific activity in cultural life. Thus, the right of everyone to take part in cultural life includes the right of every person to take part in scientific progress and in decisions concerning its direction. This interpretation is also implied by the principles of participation and inclusiveness underlying the Covenant and by the expression, 'to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress'. Such benefits are not restricted to the material benefits or products of scientific advancement, but include the development of the critical mind and faculties associated with doing science."



The guidance states that a research infrastructure is necessary to support science, and that everyone is also entitled to have opportunities to 'do' science, for example through citizen science activities. The right places a number of obligations on States, and by extension their agencies (thus including museums, and museum funders and regulators):

Availability
"...States parties should direct their own resources and coordinate actions of others to ensure that scientific progress happens and that its applications and benefits are distributed and are available, especially to vulnerable and marginalized groups. This requires, inter alia, instruments for the diffusion of science (libraries, museums, Internet networks, etc.), a strong research infrastructure with adequate resources, and adequate financing of scientific education...."

Accessibility
"Accessibility means that scientific progress and its applications should be accessible for all persons, without discrimination. It has three dimensions: first, States parties should ensure that everyone has equal access to the applications of science, particularly when they are instrumental for the enjoyment of other economic, social and cultural rights. Second, information concerning the risks and benefits of science and technology should be accessible without discrimination. Third, everyone should have the open opportunity to participate in scientific progress, without discrimination...."

Quality
"Quality refers to the most advanced, up-to-date and generally accepted and verifiable science available at the time, according to the standards generally accepted by the scientific community. This element applies both to the process of scientific creation and to access to the applications and benefits of science..."

Acceptability
"Acceptability implies that efforts should be made to ensure that science is explained, and its applications are disseminated in such a manner as to facilitate their acceptance in different cultural and social contexts, provided that this does not affect their integrity and quality. Scientific education and the products of science should be tailored to the particularities of populations with special needs, such as persons with disabilities..."

This right can be supported by providing public awareness and education regarding scientific topics, which can address a range of contemporary issues, including climate change, the rapid loss of biodiversity, pandemics and zoonotic diseases, the development of dangerous technologies and automation, and the threat of weapons of mass destruction. The worrying pandemic of disinformation and conspiracy theories around scientific topics can also be usefully addressed by museums.

Museums can support this right in many ways, including by:

1. Preserving and developing collections and collections information to be useful for scientific research purposes, and making them available online to aid discovery and use. Making collections data available in aggregators such as GBIF should be seen as a priority.

2. Supporting and providing educational opportunities to understand scientific topics and share in scientific advancement, and to combat wholesale disinformation on scientific topics.

3. Ensuring that all people and groups are empowered and enabled to engage with scientific topics, and to participate in activities linked to these topics, recognizing that scientific information alone will not necessarily provide people with the support that they need to respond. In the context of museum-related research, ensuring that publicly funded research is publicly and freely available as part of open science and open-access publications (rather than locked away behind journal paywalls, or in expensive publications) should be seen as a priority.

4. Ensuring tourists and other visitors to places are empowered to understand scientific activities taking place in those places, for example scientific and environmental monitoring of species, habitats and climate-related impacts and management responses to these.

5. Supporting research and researchers that makes use of collections for scientific purposes, through suitable access arrangement, staff and equipment, and making the results of such research available to the wider public.

6. Ensuring that management decisions support the development of collections for scientific purposes, and that collections care and development are suitably budgeted for, and that there are suitably trained staff able to support scientists and other researchers with specialist enquiries.

7. Participating in partnerships and collaborations that make use of collections for scientific purposes, and that engage people with scientific research and topics, and ensuring that decision-makers and policy makers understand the value of collections for supporting scientific agendas, to ensure proper funding and support in an ongoing way.

3.3.3 The right to enjoy one's own culture

Article 27 of the ICCPR provides for the right of members of minorities to enjoy (experience and benefit fully from) their own culture, practice their own religion and use their own language.

Although the Article is specifically about linguistic, religious and ethnic minorities, it can be a useful guide for considering how museums can support other minorities to enjoy and express their own culture. The right is closely linked to the right of everyone to participate in cultural life (qv.), and with freedoms of expression, religion and belief, and assembly and association.

Museums can support people's right to enjoy their own culture by:

1. Preserving and developing collections that reflect the cultural diversity of their place in an ongoing way, that help perpetuate and preserve cultural and natural heritage, and that document cultural change over time.

2. Providing educational opportunities for everyone to explore their own culture.

3. Ensuring that they enable all people, notably marginalized/under-served people and minorities, to take part in activities drawing on their own culture, and to contribute to the cultural life of their community and the wider community, on their own and with others.

4. Support sustainable tourism that enables people to enjoy their own culture, supports local cultural activities, supports livelihoods, and shares local culture with others.

5. Support research that helps understand and interpret cultures and traditions, including local traditions.

6. Ensure management decisions support everyone's right to enjoy their own culture, for example through access arrangements (e.g. charging for entrance), and provide markets for local cultural products.

7. Participate in partnerships and collaborations that support activities drawing on local cultural traditions, and that enable distant communities to access collections and information.

3.3.4 Cultural heritage as a human rights concern

Cultural heritage and human rights are closely related. It is important to recognise that **cultural heritage itself is not a human rights concern.** It is people's access, ownership, use, the meanings they attach to heritage, and contribution to cultural heritage that relates to human rights: people and communities have rights, not objects, collections or institutions. This is quite a different starting point from how museums often consider ownership, preservation and access to cultural heritage: as if it is of value in and of itself, in an unquestioning way.

Former Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights Farida Shaheed, in **one of her thematic reports** to the UN, noted that:

"The concept of heritage reflects the dynamic character of something that has been developed, built or created, interpreted and re-interpreted in history, and transmitted from generation to generation. Cultural heritage links the past, the present and the future as it encompasses things inherited from the past that are considered to be of such value or significance today, that individuals and communities want to transmit them to future generations."

"Accessing and enjoying cultural heritage is an important feature of being a member of a community, a citizen and, more widely, a member of society."

"Cultural heritage is to be understood as resources enabling the cultural identification and development processes of individuals and communities…"

The Rapporteur emphasised that decisions regarding heritage - what it is, what it is for, and how it should be used and passed on - should also incorporate the views of concerned stakeholders, of which she identified the following groups of people:

> **"(a) originators or "source communities", communities which consider themselves as the custodians/owners of a specific cultural heritage, people who are keeping cultural heritage alive and/or have taken responsibility for it**
>
> **(b) individuals and communities, including local communities, who consider the cultural heritage in question an integral part of the life of the community, but may not be actively involved in its maintenance**
>
> **(c) scientists and artists; and**
>
> **(d) the general public accessing the cultural heritage of others."**

She noted emphatically that cultural heritage concerns a set of human rights issues.

Considering the 'respect, protect, fulfil framework for human rights, the Rapporteur identified the following obligations on States (governments and their agents):

"The obligation to respect requires States to refrain from interfering, directly or indirectly, with the right to access and to enjoy cultural heritage, while their obligation to protect requires that they prevent third parties from interfering with that right. General comment No. 21 stresses in particular that States have the obligation to:

(a) Respect and protect cultural heritage in all its forms, in times of war and peace, and natural disasters

(b) Respect and protect cultural heritage of all groups and communities, in particular the most disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups, in economic development and environmental policies and programmes

(c) Respect and protect the cultural productions of indigenous peoples, including their traditional knowledge, natural medicines, folklore, rituals and other forms of expression; This includes protection from illegal or unjust exploitation of their lands, territories and resources by State entities or private or transnational enterprises and corporations.

The obligation to fulfil requires States to take appropriate measures aimed at the full realization of the right to access and enjoy cultural heritage by all, and at improving the conditions under which this right can be enjoyed… States have the general obligation to take positive measures for the conservation, development and diffusion of culture, which entails protection, preservation/safeguard, dissemination of information on and promotion of cultural heritage."

"The right of access to and enjoyment of cultural heritage forms part of international human rights law, finding its legal basis, in particular, in the right to take part in cultural life, the right of members of minorities to enjoy their own culture, and the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination and to maintain, control, protect and develop cultural heritage. Other human rights must also be taken into consideration, in particular the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of belief and religion, the right to information and the right to education."

Her report includes a number of recommendations, including the following, that relate to museums and museum workers:

- "Cultural heritage should be acknowledged, respected and protected. The preservation/safeguarding of cultural heritage should aim at ensuring human development, the building of peaceful and democratic societies and the promotion of cultural diversity.
- Concerned communities and relevant individuals should be consulted and invited to actively participate in the whole process of identification, selection, classification, interpretation, preservation/safeguard, stewardship and development of cultural heritage.
- Professionals working in the field of cultural heritage should be encouraged to adopt a human rights-based approach and to develop rules and guidelines in this respect.
- Professionals working in the field of cultural heritage and cultural institutions (museums, libraries and archives in particular) should build stronger relationships with the communities and peoples whose cultural heritage they are the repositories of, respect their contributions regarding the significance, interpretation, sharing and display of such heritage, and consider in good faith their queries regarding repatriation."

Protecting cultural heritage and ensuring that people can access, make use of, and contribute towards it, are included in many additional international agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other Rural Workers, and others.

Making countries' commitments to human rights regarding culture and heritage more explicit in museum regulators' requirements of museums, in funders' requirements when they are providing public money to museums, and in museums' requirements of themselves, will help create a rights-based and rights-respecting cultural sector.

Experiencing, using and contributing to cultural life through cultural heritage is not a luxury for wealthy people. It is a basic human right belonging to everyone.

TO DO

Consider the 'respect, protect, fulfil' framework in relation to your museum and its collections. Whose rights to enjoy cultural heritage is it respecting, protecting and fulfilling? Whose rights are not being met, and whose rights are being undermined? What actions are required?

3.4
Taking part in public affairs

Public affairs mean the challenges and opportunities that affect people. In this section we will explore various aspects of public affairs, and how museums can - and should - help empower people to take part in public affairs, individually and collectively.

3.4.1 Combatting reactionary populism and attacks on human rights

The UN Secretary-General reported in 2017 that **"Disregard for human rights is a disease, and it is a disease that is spreading… We are increasingly seeing the perverse phenomenon of populism and extremism feeding off each other in a frenzy of growing racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim hatred and other forms of intolerance."**

In 2019, the UN General Assembly noted that it was **"alarmed at the spread in many parts of the world of various racist extremist movements based on ideologies that sought to promote populist, nationalist, right-wing agendas and racial superiority, and stressed that those practices fuelled racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance."**

In order to address these challenges, the UN General Assembly emphasized **"the need to promote tolerance, inclusion and respect for diversity and the need to seek common ground among and within civilizations in order to address common challenges to humanity that threaten shared values, universal human rights and the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, through cooperation, partnership and inclusion."**

In his 2020 thematic report to the UN, the Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity outlined how rising reactionary populism (a form of right-wing populism) undermines human rights and international solidarity:

"There is a strong sense these days that liberal democracy is under siege by populist revolt. Across the world, a so-called tide of populism is threatening to sweep aside, or is actually sweeping aside, long-held notions of the value of governance under the regime of the rule of law. Instead, there is a growing authoritarian shift to governments held in thrall to populist leaders untethered from the restraints often imposed by the liberal or constitutional order. Such leaders have pounced on, and too often merely alleged, 'economic anxiety, existential insecurity and a growing culture of fear' to fan the embers of bigotry and intolerance, whose rhetoric they manipulated to attain political power in the first place."

He reported on **"the serious threat that the rise in populism in far too many parts of the world poses to the enjoyment or realization of the human rights of vulnerable individuals and groups, including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, persons of African descent, ethnic and religious minorities, women, girls and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons."**

He identified various forms of populism, which are distinct from nationalism in that they are not necessarily about conflict between countries, but more broadly about an 'insider' group (often cast as 'the people') who are under attack either from 'outsiders' (often marginalised social groups) or from an 'elite'. When people feel that these dynamics reflect their experience of the world, or can be persuaded that the 'outsider' group are responsible for their poor quality of life, populism grows, and those who claim to represent the 'will of the people' access power for themselves.

Reactionary populism, in particular, is toxic for a rights-respecting society, a rules-based order, and international solidarity. It seeks to reverse social progress and taps into nostalgia of 'better times'.

"If human rights-based international solidarity is coterminous with the alignment and joint action of State and non-State actors alike to address potential or existing global crises and challenges, it is the opposite of reactionary populism, which is committed to erecting even more borders that separate peoples, and to pulling peoples apart on the basis of pre-determined distinctions, including race, religion and ethnic origin. Moreover, populism of this reactionary kind is antithetical to international cooperation because there is abundant and now well-known evidence showing that contemporary reactionary or negative populists tend to disdain globalization and are "nations first" ideologues who view international solidarity, and the cooperation that it entails, as problems to be solved, rather than as a source of solutions to global human rights challenges."

In his report he concluded that:

- "Populism, especially in its reactionary form, represents a considerable threat to human rights-based international solidarity, the multilateral human rights system and the realization of human rights for all, as they are under constant attack in the rhetoric and practice of its practitioners."
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the withdrawal of governments from international solidarity, and reactionary populism all undermine international solidarity.
- The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of international solidarity in overcoming global and transnational human rights challenges.

He recommended the following:

- The importance of recognising **"prominently and forcefully the relationship between reactionary populism, the decrease in human rights-based international solidarity and the inability of States and other stakeholders to promote and protect human rights around the world…"**

- **"Recall that Member States are obliged to take action to combat the threat of reactionary populism, as parties to such binding instruments as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which impose limitations on the propagation of racist and xenophobic expression and outlaw the advocacy of national, racial or religious prejudice that amounts to incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence…"**

- **"Remind political parties and their leadership of the role they play in combating the threat of nationalist and reactionary populism, given their significant influence on the political climate. Condemnation of such reactionary populism must be swift and unequivocal by all public actors, including multilateral agencies and regional bodies."**

- **"Call upon the media to play its important role in tackling reactionary populist expressions and encourage journalists to observe codes of conduct on the basis of the principles of truth and accuracy, independence, fairness and impartiality, humanity and accountability."**

- **"Consider adopting codes of practice to combat reactionary populism, such as the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech."**

- **"Consider adopting the draft declaration on the right to international solidarity. In the human rights arena in particular, little can be achieved over the shorter or longer run without maintaining international solidarity among States, peoples and civil society groups, as well as with one another. The recent pandemic has cast into bold relief the reality of the importance of human rights-based international solidarity to the globally inclusive human rights system."**



An exhibition at the EL-DE Haus in Cologne in 2023 explored recent right-wing violence, to combat extremism. See photo story on page 153.

What can museums do:

Museums have abundant opportunities to promote international solidarity, and to challenge reactionary populist perspectives. Note the **"call upon the media to play its part in tackling reactionary populist expressions…"**

Empowering people to spot the signs of when they are being manipulated by populists, and drawing attention to historical and contemporary forms of intolerance, related laws, the difference between freedom of speech and hate speech, and the universality of human rights, helps to reduce the fuel that populists seek to enflame.

This could be achieved through promoting:

- **Information literacy and digital literacy** to guard against disinformation on social media and other media.

- **Education on democracy and human rights, as well as countries' legal commitments.**

- **Encouraging people to understand their democratic routes to raise concerns**, for example with their MPs or with local authorities.

- **Raising awareness of how populism works and how social tensions are exploited** by reactionary populists.

- **Provide safe spaces for debate** where different viewpoints are actively encouraged.

- **Promoting the commonality between people**, their shared and separate histories, that heritage and nationality are only one aspect of identity, raising awareness of the historical and contemporary connections between people living in different places.

- More broadly, **creating shared experiences** that bring people together helps to combat the ignorance and suspicion that fuels populism.

- **Ensuring that museums are not, or are not mobilised to be, presenters of a jingoistic version of history** that glorifies past achievements while ignoring historic and contemporary exploitation, helps to reduce opportunities for populism to take root.

- Also ensuring that **museums do not only cater for a well-off middle class**, and do not hold working class people and culture in disdain, to reduce possible conflict.

- More widely, **ensuring that museums are not selecting concerns or viewpoints, or projecting their own view of the world onto society (or if they do, at least to provide clear explanation)**, helps to empower more of society to take part in broad cultural life.

TO DO

Look at the list of possible actions above. Which actions is your museum already actively supporting, and what else can be done to take stronger action? What are your goals and concrete actions for the next twelve months?

FASCISM IS THE EXTREME ANTITHESIS OF INCLUSIVE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

3.4.2 Spotting the signs of fascism

Fascism is the extreme antithesis of inclusive sustainable development. It is explored here so we can recognise the opposite of what we are trying to achieve, and also spot the signs to make sure we do not allow them to take root. While it may seem dramatic to raise the spectre of fascism, it is worth recalling that the UN, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the rules-based order all grew from the horrors of the Second World War. Countries and peoples had battled fascism in the quest for individual and collective freedom, for democracy, and for human rights. The rules-based order was set up to say 'never again'; yet, 'never again' has become 'once again' in many ways and in many places, with weakening solidarity, attacks on minorities and insufficient progress to address local and global challenges, conflicts and wars around the world.

With the passage of more than 75 years, human rights are widely attacked by those who find them inconvenient and who want to yield yet more power. Among the various forms of populism, right-wing populism, unbridled, can lead to the very worst excesses of authoritarianism and totalitarianism, namely fascism. Yet fascism does not appear from nowhere, it grows over time. Signs of growing fascism can be spotted, and affirmative action taken to promote a culture of peace, rather than a descent into tyranny, fear and insecurity.

Political scientist **Laurence Britt analysed previous fascist regimes**[18] and identified fourteen common features, that can also serve as a list of symptoms of growing fascism today. Britt's headings are reproduced here, with some modified interpretation of these, along with suggestions on what museums can do to spot them, empower people to understand them, and resist them through daily action, both in museums and in society.

Common feature	What museums can do to mitigate this feature
1. Powerful and continuing nationalism Jingoistic nationalism, with heavy use of symbols, such as patriotic mottos, slogans, flags, bunting, strong support for the monarchy, and or selective simplistic views of national history as a 'glorious past' or 'glorious present'.	Museums can make judicious use of symbols. They can educate people to understand that many symbols (such as many national flags) are often relatively modern creations, and that they are far from permanent. They can also empower people to resist the uncritical use of symbols, and encourage people to value a diverse set of symbols and identities. Perhaps most importantly, they can empower people to understand history, the good and the bad, and that being patriotic does not mean giving over all autonomy to an autocratic state, as fascism is very undemocratic.
2. Disdain for human rights It is not surprising that fascist regimes have little or no regard for universal human rights, finding these inconvenient, and they actively undermine the purpose, notion and international obligations regarding human rights. Attacks on minorities' rights precede attacks on everyone's rights.	Empowering museums and those who use them to respect, protect and fulfil rights, and stand up for the rights of others, helps build a human-rights culture. Ensuring people understand when sweeping power grabs are taking place, and how to resist them through democratic processes. Museums can also normalise human rights, as this guide is intended to help them to do. Education plays crucial roles, and museums can also ensure that their own actions respect, protect and fulfil human rights (notably for workers and visitors).
3. Identifying enemies/scapegoats A common thread of fascist regimes is the establishment of an 'other', an enemy usually in the shape of a minority, that is held to be the reason for people's low standard of living. Fascist regimes could easily whip up public action against these minorities, who had been the subject of extensive propaganda and disinformation.	Consider which social groups are excessively targeted by populist and fascist politicians (LGBT people, refugees and asylum seekers, people from other countries, poor people, unemployed people, persons with disabilities, women) and what you can do to promote an objective understanding of the sources of risk in countries. Ensure these targeted groups are respected and receive effective museum services, as well as creating abundant opportunities for diverse people to encounter one another to avoid marginalisation, suspicion and mistrust of others. Empowering people to understand where marginalisation has led to in history and around the world helps avoid intolerance, which can escalate to have terrible results.
4. Supremacy of the military Fascist and populist leaders often identify closely with the military, as a symbol of power. Emphasising military might over other nations helps to establish a hierarchy of nations.	Museums can ensure that, while respecting the sacrifices made by those serving their country, war is not glamourised. Helping people understand war as a failure of politics, rather than a sense that 'might is right', helps to promote peace, not war. Promoting the peacekeeping and humanitarian missions of the armed forces helps to provide a more balanced understanding of peace, conflict and war.
5. Rampant sexism Fascist governments are typically male-dominated, promoting strict, restrictive gender roles, as well as strong anti-abortion stances, homophobia and transphobia.	Promoting respect for women and girls, educating people against misogyny, and promoting decent treatment of all people, irrespective of sex, gender or sexuality, is crucial for a culture of universal respect to resist sexism and discrimination. Calling out the persecution of people based on sex, gender or sexuality should be the norm, with a zero-tolerance policy. Museums can make commitments to equality based on gender, sex and sexuality, as part of the SDGs and the UN Global Compact.
6. Controlled mass media Mass media may be controlled in a number of ways to support fascist regimes, in more or less direct ways: political appointments to key roles, threats regarding funding, a strong party line in the media, keeping the public in the dark about government excesses, and/or censorship (especially during wartime).	Museums are a medium that should recognise their potential to provide impartial information on matters of public interest. Ensuring that they respect, protect and fulfil freedom of speech and the right of access to information, and that they provide abundant opportunities for people to make up their own minds regarding public affairs, are key roles for museums to take. Ensuring they do not censor or self-censor is crucial. Adopting freedom of expression and anti-censorship measures before crises happen helps protect organisations from oppression, censorship and self-censorship.
7. Obsession with national security Fascist regimes typically control a force for national security, often under the guise of 'keeping people safe', while clamping down on people's rights and freedoms. Criticism of these actions were typically case as unpatriotic.	Educate people about the real risks facing a place or country; and about democracy, civil and political rights, freedom of speech and the right of assembly. Empower people to understand what they can do in the face of oppression. Educate people about what oppression looks like in history and around the world. Promote solidarity with those facing oppression, and educate people about shared interests and common concerns in the context of globalisation.
8. Religion and ruling elite tied together Fascist leaders often cast themselves as 'defenders of the faith', as a strong symbol of national identity, even though their actions were at odds with the religion's precepts. They cultivated a sense of a 'God-given right' to justify their leadership and excessive actions.	Educate people about world faiths (the diversity of faiths) and about how politicians have used religion in history and around the world. Empower people to recognise that religion may be heavily manipulated for political gain. Empower people to recognise religion as just one aspect of their complex identities, rather than a dividing line between people and peoples.
9. Power of corporations protected While citizens' rights were undermined, corporations were largely protected by fascist regimes. Shared interests were cultivated as an additional means of controlling citizens' lives.	Empower people to understand the connections between politics and corporate interests over time. Educate people about how to exercise their consumer choices, and to demand accountability from politicians. Educate people to understand and combat corruption in all its forms. Museums can also sign up to corporate social responsibility standards, such as the UN Global Compact, and ensure that all interactions with businesses not only protect human rights, but respect and fulfil them too, by avoiding interactions with businesses that undermine human rights.

Common feature	What museums can do to mitigate this feature
10. Power of labour suppressed or eliminated Attacks on workers' rights as part of Neoliberalism, attacks on workers' abilities to organise through oppressive laws, mass media campaigns against unions. General denigration of poor people and disdain for poor people as lazy or scroungers.	Empower people to understand that poverty is not a choice made by lazy people, but a structural challenge constructed and maintained through political decisions. Promote the understanding of the development of social protection (social security, public services, jobless support) as an investment in society and a government responsibility. Have zero tolerance for attacks on workers' rights or attacks on unions. Have a code of conduct regarding workers' rights, ensure everyone is in decent employment, and have no part of worker exploitation or replacing paid workers with unpaid labour.
11. Disdain and suppression of intellectuals and the arts Fascists typically resist freedom of ideas or criticism. Intellectual freedom was equated with being subversive and threatening to the State. Universities and academics were oppressed. The purpose of art and literature was directed to serve the national interest or not to exist at all.	Museums can be a powerful medium for nationalistic ideas. That is why it is so important that they are free from excessive political control, which directs them, either in overt or more subtle ways, to exhibit and support particular ideas and ideologies. Freedom of expression can be easily set back in cultural institutions, by giving people and communities no voice at all (museums and galleries use their voice only), or by selecting only particular, typically nationalistic viewpoints. These challenges can be avoided by having clear guidelines on freedom of expression, promoting a wide variety of viewpoints (including viewpoints the museum may not agree with at all), and increasing opportunities for people to express their views, as well as providing platforms for a variety of academic viewpoints consistent with human rights norms.
12. Obsession with crime and punishment Fascist regimes typically made heavy use of criminal justice systems, imprisoning large numbers of people. Policy, army and judiciary may be co-opted to support fascist regimes' objectives. Fear and hatred whipped up against those who did not stand for supposed national values were oppressed by criminalising dissent.	Museums can empower people to understand the development of laws and justice, in the context of human rights and social challenges over time. Empower people to recognise the signs of growing populism and fascism that marginalise and criminalise people in search of human rights and democracy. Creating opportunities for people to understand the diverse reasons that people commit crimes, and avoiding demonisation of particular groups or viewpoints, helps to avert the mistrust that populism and fascism feed off.
13. Rampant cronyism and corruption Fascist regimes typically promoted their friends (whether they worked in relevant industries or not) to high, powerful positions, that they benefited from personally.	Museums can help build a culture free from cronyism and corruption by operating openly and transparently in the public interest, with clear sharing of information covering progress and challenges. Public officials working in or with museums should be held to high standards, and required to justify their decisions, notably to do with spending of public money. Working to support diverse sets of small-scale providers, rather than a 'chumocracy' or narrow set of large providers, will help to combat cronyism (a form of corruption) and other forms of corruption.
14. Fraudulent elections Elections under fascist regimes can be a sham, or are manipulated by misinformation campaigns, or even the removal of political opponents. Legislation that tilts votes in particular ways, shifting of political district boundaries, and manipulating the media at election time, all serve to manipulate elections. Fascist regimes may involve the judiciary in manipulating or controlling elections.	Museums can empower people to understand how voting works in elections, and how to spot the signs that they are being manipulated by populists and fascists. Encouraging people to make use of diverse forms of media, rather than single outlets, can help to promote a broader understanding of issues and political responses. Empowering people to understand the huge efforts that went into building democracy and free and fair elections can help to promote stronger support for democracy and the Rule of Law.

3.4.3 Democracy and Rule of Law: a crucial part of sustainable development

Having looked at populism which seeks to grasp power by dividing people, and fascism which aims to control them through force, let us turn now to democracy and its relationship to sustainable development. We can consider this together with the Rule of Law, as the two are closely related. Populism and fascism, on the other hand, are not aligned with either democracy or the Rule of Law: they aim to apply the law differently to rulers and the ruled, and oppress laws and rights when it is convenient to do so. Reactionary populism and fascism are opposed to sustainable development as they do not respect, protect or fulfil people's rights; in fact, they do the opposite.

While democracy may be thought of in the context of voting in elections, **it has wider meanings** concerned with people's access to information and to decision-making, in line with the right to participate in public affairs. As we have seen many times in this guide, people have rights to take part in decisions that will affect them, and to shape services they will be provided with by institutions (such as museums). This means opportunities for democratic participation, so that decisions reflect the will of those affected by those decisions.

Agenda 2030 is explicit on the necessity of democratic involvement in decision-making: **"democracy, good governance and the rule of law as well as an enabling environment at national and international levels, are essential for sustainable development."**

Peace is one of the 'five Ps' of Agenda 2030, and is the basis of one of the SDGs, namely SDG 16, 'Peace, justice and strong institutions'. Yet even this short title doesn't do SDG 16 justice. Its full title is as follows:



Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

SDG 16 thus has three main aspects:

- firstly, creating an enabling environment for peace and justice through accountable and inclusive institutions
- second, that everyone has access to justice, in institutions and in the wider world
- and third, we have to also promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development.

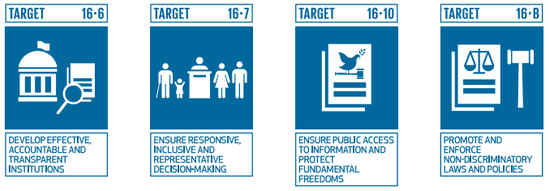
Promote peace and inclusion, **provide access** to justice, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions: three actions that we can take, in museums and in wider society. Like the '5 Ps', these are not lofty aspirations: they are concrete actions to take. 'Build' does not necessarily mean literally building a lot of new museums and other institutions, but directing our institution to be effective, accountable and inclusive.

TO DO

Reflect on what your museum is currently doing for these three actions, and ask what else it could do? What can you do to help make the first step?

Within SDG 16, there are several targets that are important for building effective institutions and these are included in the monitoring framework introduced in Section 5.

SDG 16 gives us an excellent framework for good governance, including effective, accountable and transparent institutions (16.6), inclusive decision-making (16.7), supporting and acting for laws and policies for sustainable development (16.B), and actively upholding and promoting human rights for everyone (16.10 and 16.B, and other targets).



More widely, the targets in SDG 16 can be used to strengthen our commitment and action for a range of sustainable development challenges including the Rule of Law (16.3), returning improperly held collections (16.4), and combatting corruption (16.5).



Peace and justice are not only to be found in SDG 16. A wider approach, called **SDG 16+** is promoted by the TAP Network (Transparency, Accountability and Participation for Agenda 2030). SDG 16+ includes targets from a wider range of goals, to help promote three aspects: Peaceful, Just, and Inclusive societies. SDG 16+, and these three aspects, are based on the Peace dimension of the '5 Ps': "We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development."

The **UN has noted** that **"democracy is based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives."**

We will explore this principle again, that it is **people** who define their chosen cultural systems and institutions, and **the people** has a sense of collective decisions rather than just a set of separate individuals.

TO DO

Note this principle, and ask yourself how well this describes how 'culture' is seen in your context. Is it chosen and shaped by the wider population, or are decisions the preserve of elitist institutions and funders? Is it really people who choose the institutions they are provided with? How democratic are these decisions?

What practical actions can we take to promote democracy and a 'culture of democracy', not only in elections but in other contexts too? The **UN recommends the following activities** to strengthen support for democracy, in different contexts:

- Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms
- Freedom of association
- Freedom of expression and opinion
- Access to power, in accordance with the rule of law
- Free and fair elections, where everyone has the right to vote
- A pluralistic system of political parties and organizations
- The separation of powers between government and parliament
- The independence of the judiciary
- Transparency and accountability in public administration
- Free, independent and pluralistic media

TO DO

Look at the list above. What can your museum to embed these principles into its own activities, and to promote a wider understanding and realisation of democracy?

The **Rule of Law** is a foundation for justice and peace, between and within countries, but also more locally and in organisations, including museums. Why does this matter? Because the Rule of Law is poorly understood, and is sometimes [mis]used by politicians and decision-makers as a justification to do particular things that are not really in the spirit of the Rule of Law.

If organisations don't follow the rules that they should, then they are not effective in contributing to the common good. If organisations aren't seen to live by a rules-based order, then suspicion and mistrust grow, relationships break down, and the social contract is weakened.

Consider the challenges to museums over accepting sponsorship from fossil fuel companies, their associations with companies involved in the arms trade, their historic relationships with money derived from the slave trade, or their reluctance to return cultural artefacts when these were clearly taken in problematic circumstances (looting during or after war, for example). All of these challenges are made because of a feeling of injustice - often very, very deep injustice - where museums are seen to be on the wrong side of history.

In the face of injustice and perceptions, transparent action is required. This is the basis of the Rule of Law. The UN says:

"The rule of law is fundamental to international peace and security and political stability; to achieve economic and social progress and development; and to protect people's rights and fundamental freedoms. It is foundational to people's access to public services, curbing corruption, restraining the abuse of power, and to establishing the social contract between people and the state. Rule of law and development are strongly interlinked, and strengthened rule of law-based society should be considered as an outcome of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)."

UN Global Compact is the world's largest corporate social responsibility scheme, with many thousands of members. UN Global Compact says:

"Governments need to have good laws, institutions and processes in place to ensure accountability, stability, equality and access to justice for all. This ultimately leads to respect for human rights and the environment. It also helps lower levels of corruption and instances of violent conflict.

This concept is called "rule of law." It affects everything about where people work and how they live. By having a strong rule of law, governments give business and society the stability of knowing that all rights are respected and protected. A strong rule of law includes:

- **Clearly written and easily accessible laws that create certainty and enforceability of legal rights**
- **An independent and impartial judiciary that promotes fairness and ensures transparent, timely and predictable resolution of disputes**
- **Effective and efficient public institutions that empower business and individuals to make a positive contribution to the economy and society"**

The UN Human Rights Council identified a number of measures to promote democracy and the Rule of Law. These include the following (among others):

- **"All components of civil society must be able to exercise their right to participate in decision-making structures and mechanisms and to be actively involved in democratization processes.**
- **Incitement to hatred, discrimination or intolerance on any ground is a threat to democracy and should be appropriately countered.**
- **National security and counter-terrorism strategies must not serve as pretexts to undermine democracy, human rights and the rule of law.**
- **Human rights education and civic education foster democratic culture and practices and promote a culture of peace. They should be systematically incorporated into school and academic curricula."**

The UN has recognised the fundamental importance of education for democracy, notably in a **UN General Assembly Resolution, Education for democracy (2020)**.

The UN had earlier adopted a **Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace (1999)** which outlined what is meant by a 'culture of peace', and the importance of education at all levels in achieving and creating this.

UNESCO and UNODC has produced an excellent toolkit, **Strengthening the Rule of Law Through Education: a guide for policymakers (2019)** to help understand the concept of Rule of Law in relation to education.

In 2023, member States of UNESCO adopted an updated **Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development**, which is also explored in Part B ('Provide transformative Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship'). As it is already adopted, this Recommendation has a political mandate.

The Council of Europe's **Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (2010)** outline's its approach to promoting education and lifelong learning for democratic citizenship and human rights education, to empower everyone to take part in a human-rights society.

The Council of Europe's **Competences for Democratic Culture (2016)** are a list of competencies to be developed through educational programmes, to empower learners to participate effectively and appropriately in a culture of democracy.

ICCROM's **Our Collections Matter Toolkit** includes many resources that can support you with educational and other activities relating to democracy and the Rule of Law.

There are a number of excellent initiatives and resources that can help to understand the state of democracy and Rule of Law in countries and around the world. Some notable examples including the following:

CIVICUS is "an international alliance dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world", with the vision of "A worldwide community of informed, inspired, committed citizens engaged in confronting the challenges facing humanity. CIVICUS seeks to amplify the voices and opinions of ordinary people. It recognises that for effective and sustainable civic participation to occur, citizens must enjoy rights of free association and be able to engage all sectors of society."

The **CIVICUS Monitor** provides information on civic space in countries, with an annual index published.

The **World Justice Project Rule of Law Index** evaluates 142 countries round the world, producing an annual index and a snapshot of Rule of Law for each country.

Other useful resources include the **Economist Global Democracy Index** and the **Global State of Democracy Initiative**, which focuses more on elections.

Each of these resources provides an annual snapshot, a review of trends and the impact of particular crises (such as COVID-19) on civic space, democracy and the Rule of Law.

TO DO

Look at the CIVICUS Monitor at find the latest information for your own country in the Data section. What rating does the Monitor give? Look into what the ratings mean. Does your country's rating surprise you? How would you describe your museum's actions for democracy and civic space, looking at the ratings' definitions?

A word on cultural democracy

While we are discussing democracy and the Rule of Law, let's take some time to look at the concept of cultural democracy, as this term is fairly widely used.

Democratisation of culture means making 'high art' and 'high culture' accessible to more of society beyond elites. This is essentially a top-down approach: people are still being told what is 'art and culture' and, by extension, what is not. It is not really that democratic at all, as people have no increased say in what is or is not art or culture or how it is used or experienced. This democratisation can also fall into the trap of Neoliberalism: it is about increasing or extending a 'market' (whether the 'customers' are paying or not doesn't really matter).

Cultural democracy is different, in that it aims to be more bottom-up, and to involve more people in creating and enjoying cultural activity, notably in creative activities. It is about getting more people drawing, painting, writing, interpreting. It does not mean, and should not be taken to mean, getting rid of specialist staff who are required to look after 'official' cultural heritage (collections, artworks, scientific research resources), as that is actually very antidemocratic. Cultural democracy can also fall into the trap of Neoliberalism, as it can be about increasing the production of art, as if creative production is consequence-free and just a 'good thing'. As we shall explore later, cultural production should also be viewed in terms of the value it creates for individuals and others, in relation to the resources it consumes.

These two terms - widely conflated - are still based on a rather traditional view of what cultural institutions are or what they are for. There is a third term to explore, that comes from citizenship and promoting a rights-respecting, inclusive, peaceful society.[19]

Culture of democracy: A culture of democracy refers to the wider, more anthropological use of the term culture, as has been used throughout this guide. It is about participating in the cultural life of the community and participating in public affairs and society, not only about 'high culture' or 'the arts'. This is mentioned here to emphasise that both democratisation of culture and cultural democracy are still rather rooted in the more restrictive concept of 'the arts' or 'high culture' than in wider cultural life.

Building a culture of democracy - in wider society - is something that cultural institutions can support, by respecting, protecting and fulfilling people's various rights, that include both top-down aspects and duties (providing information, access to cultural heritage, providing opportunities for people to take part in public affairs and cultural life), and bottom-up aspects (opportunities for people to share their ideas, creativity, concerns on public affairs and as an end in itself). Not all exhibitions need to be about climate change or human rights, but it would be very positive if at least some were. On the other hand, making every exhibition about a narrow range of topics, however well-meaning, is also a flattening of cultural life. Balancing the top-down and bottom-up aspects helps to create both cultural democracy and a wider culture of democracy. A culture of democracy helps to shift the focus away from Neoliberalism, as it emphasises human rights, participation, peace and justice, rather than narrow economic considerations.

TO DO

Read through the Council of Europe's Competences for Democratic Culture (2016) and consider how well these competences are developed in your local place, and what your museum can do to strengthen them, for all people.

3.4.4 Participation in public affairs is a human right

Everyone has well-established rights to take part in decision-making, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, especially article 21, and in the ICCPR (article 25) on the right to participate in public affairs. This right is asserted over and over again, in the Rio Declaration, the Århus Convention (Europe), Escazú Agreement (Latin America and Caribbean), and other regional human rights agreements such as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the American Convention on Human Rights, as well as many others.

The **'Guidelines for States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs'** note that:

"participation makes decision-making more informed and sustainable, and public institutions more effective, accountable and transparent. This in turn enhances the legitimacy of States' decisions and their ownership by all members of society."

While they are directed to States, the Guidelines can be readily adopted, or at least adapted, by local authorities and organisations such as museums.

Elsewhere, in a **General Comment** that provides guidance on understanding and implementing the right to participate in public affairs, the UN has stated that:

"The conduct of public affairs... covers all aspects of public administration, and the formulation and implementation of policy at international, national, regional and local levels...

Citizens may participate directly by taking part in popular assemblies which have the power to make decisions about local issues or about the affairs of a particular community and in bodies established to represent citizens in consultation with government...

Citizens also take part in the conduct of public affairs by exerting influence through public debate and dialogue with their representatives or through their capacity to organize themselves. This participation is supported by ensuring freedom of expression, assembly and association."

In other words, 'public affairs' covers all kinds of policies and programmes, in society and in sectors and institutions, including museums. This is in keeping with the central importance of **self-determination**, which is included in the ICCPR and ICESCR (which have legal standing) and in the Right to Development and many other human rights instruments and agreements.

This General Comment also states that **"the free communication of information and ideas about public and political issues between citizens, candidates and elected representatives is essential. This implies a free press and other media able to comment on public issues without censorship or restraint and to inform public opinion."**

It is easy to read the work of museums into these statements, as they are a form of media. Museums can help empower people by promoting active, free and meaningful participation in decision-making in the following ways (this is not an exclusive list):

- Empowering people and communities to identify and know about matters of public concern or interest, through provision of information, and through education and awareness-raising activities.
- Providing spaces and opportunities for public assemblies and opportunities for people to assemble, where people share their concerns and ideas
- Museums should listen to what public matters are of interest and concern to people and communities, and so deserve attention from museums
- They should pay special attention to ensuring minorities and under-represented/under/served groups voices and perspectives are included in discussions and decision-making
- They can empower people, communities and civil society organisations to lift up their voices, creativity and collective concerns, through cultural activity
- They should also minimise all museum actions that get in the way of the foregoing points, or that edit or censor them
- They should clarify what kinds of actions are legal and non-violent, to empower people to make informed decisions about how they participate in public affairs, for example in relation to protest in museums and galleries

" I learned from my illiterate but wise mother that all rights to be deserved and preserved came from duty well done."

Mahatma Gandhi

Meaningful participation - active and free - involves deliberate actions at all stages of decision-making[20]:

Before decisions are made: by involvement in shaping goals and priorities.

During decision-making: through inclusion in decision-making processes, and in the scrutiny and agreement of decisions

After decisions are made: through inclusion in reviewing progress and challenges, effective sharing of information on progress and challenges, and in shaping the further development of programmes of activity.

For museums, this framework could easily be applied to museum decisions, for example in policy development, programme development, and priority setting.

Key guidance on the right to participate in public affairs comes from article 25 of the ICCPR, and is elaborated in the following:

Human Rights Committee (CCPR) (1996). **General Comment 25: The right to participate in public affairs, voting rights and the right of equal access to public service (Art. 25)**. UN.

OHCHR (2018). **Guidelines for States on the Effective Implementation of the Right to Participate in Public Affairs**.

OHCHR (no date). **Summary of Guidelines for States on the effective implementation on the right to participate in public affairs. OHCHR**. This Summary is very practical and can guide museums to promote effective, inclusive participation in public affairs.


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Note especially, that cultural spaces are spaces of interaction, not individualistic consumption.

“The right to take part in cultural life and the right to freedom of artistic expression both imply the possibility of a public, shared dimension. It is necessary to preserve existing public spaces, as well as to create new ones, for people to learn, develop their creativity and experience the humanity of others, and to foster civic engagement.”

At its most basic, there needs to be an **Availability** of public spaces. These need to be **Accessible**, and this is specifically referred to in a number of international agreements and national laws to prevent discrimination. However, being Accessible does not just mean that people can enter museums and behave in the ways that museums may desire. Spaces and activities need to be **Acceptable**: relevant and meaningful for them, a good use of their time and where their participation furthers their rights, individually and collectively. Public spaces also need to the **Appropriate** to the needs of minorities, people and groups at risk of being excluded. This is crucial to fulfil the principle of **Leave No-one Behind**.

People are entitled to behave in any way they choose in public spaces, consistent with their obligations to one another and subject to national laws. The more museums direct people in how to behave, what to experience or how to experience it, the more they close down opportunities for self-expression, and the more they undermine people’s basic rights.

> Accessible museums and other public spaces can make many contributions to a rights-respecting society, where people can interact and access their cultural heritage.

Neoliberalism, with its attendant marketisation and privatisation, poses great threats to public spaces and cultural rights, as the Rapporteur identifies in her report:

“Privatization and overreliance on private sponsorship of cultural events may also affect cultural activities in public spaces, such as festivals. The attendant risks include censorship by private sponsors, when freedom of artistic expression is no longer guaranteed by public authorities, and decreasing diversity.”

“Urban centres are increasingly subjected to branding strategies aimed at attracting tourists, which can increase gentrification processes and exclude those who do not fit the chosen branding image. There is also a risk of watering down cultural assets for tourist consumption and a ‘theatricalization’ of public spaces.”

3.4.6 Civic space for democratic culture: protecting participation in public affairs

Civic space is more than public spaces: it is a place, physical and virtual, where people interact on issues of common concern. Not all public spaces will be civic spaces. Civic spaces permit, or actively encourage people to participate, and to exercise their various civil, political and cultural rights. Democracy thrives in civic space.

The UN says:
“Progress and civic participation go hand in hand; a confident nation gives citizens a say and a role in the development of their country. Governments on their own do not have all the answers, and it is in their interest to dismantle barriers to the exercise of public freedoms to make it easier to unleash the creativity and ingenuity of civic activity to produce solutions.”[21]

What is civic activity? What is civic space? It is not only civil society organisations, but includes people and communities shaping decisions that will affect them.

OHCHR says:

“What is civic space?

Civic space is the environment that enables civil society to play a role in the political, economic and social life of our societies. In particular, civic space allows individuals and groups to contribute to policy-making that affects their lives, including by:

- accessing information
- engaging in dialogue
- expressing dissent or disagreement, and
- joining together to express their views

An open and pluralistic civic space that guarantees freedom of expression and opinion as well as freedom of assembly and association, is a prerequisite for making development and peace sustainable.

Civic space is under pressure
Today, this civic space is under pressure. Repressive laws are spreading, with increased restrictions on freedoms to express, participate, assemble and associate. New technologies have helped civil society networks to grow, but they’ve also given governments excuses to control civil society movements and media freedoms, often under security pretexts.

Civil society actors are facing pushback
Civil society actors, including those who cooperate with the United Nations, are also facing a pushback across the world. Online and off-line attacks on **human rights defenders**, including journalists and environmental activists, continue and in many places are worsening. In the most extreme cases, human rights defenders have suffered arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance and killings.

Human rights defenders are at the forefront protecting and promoting human rights - but they too need protection.”

Following on from the launch of The Highest Aspiration: A Call of Action for Human Rights, OHCHR developed a **Guidance Note on the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space (2020)**. Emphasising, once again, that participation and accountability are not desirable for true sustainable development but an essential part of it, the Guidance Note identifies three components of open, inclusive civic space:

1. **Freedom of expression, association and assembly**
2. **The right to participate in public affairs via open civic space**
3. **Ensuring the security of those who speak up**

From these simple conditions, a wide range of benefits flow:

- More voices bring more ideas and suggestions
- Options are tailored to the aspirations and needs of the many, not the few
- Open civic society supports candid feedback
- Better responses produce better policies
- Reduced conflict and lasting peace
- Better outcomes for people and planet
- More resilient societies

Museums can use the Guidance Note to reflect on and strengthen their own contributions to respecting, protecting and fulfilling people's right to take part in public affairs.

TO DO

Reflect on how well museums you know support these three components. What are some good examples?

PHOTO STORY



1. The EL-DE Haus, a museum in Cologne, Germany.

Resisting fascism: commemorating and learning from Nazi persecution

The EL-DE Haus, officially called the NS Documentation Centre, is a museum in Cologne, Germany. This ordinary looking, bourgeois high-street building, was taken over by the Nazis in 1934 and was the headquarters of the Cologne Gestapo from 1935-45. Prisoners were kept in cells, and many executions were carried out on the premises.

The EL-DE Haus was transformed into a memory site and a museum, opening in 1997. A permanent exhibition tells of the machinery of Nazi oppression built over decades: victimisation, blaming minorities, radicalisation, racism, propaganda, attacks on democracy and more. As a well-preserved site of Nazi persecution, the museum has an important role in truth-telling and education *(photo 1)*.



2. Exhibition on the rise of Nazism, EL-DE Haus, Cologne.

3. Exhibition on recent right-wing violence, EL-DE Haus, Cologne.





4. ‘Stumblestone’ memorial to members of the Cossmann family in Bonn, murdered by the Nazis.



5. Memorial to victims of Nazi persecution in Bonn.

Special exhibitions raise awareness of far-right violence, racism and intolerance today *(photos 2 and 3)*.

Memorials of different types commemorate the victims of Nazi persecution. The Stolperstein (Stumblestones) can be found in many European cities. They commemorate the last known address of people murdered by the Nazis. More than 100,000 stumblestones have been put in place, making them the largest distributed public memorial. These ones are in Bonn, and commemorate three members of the Cossmann family, deported to concentration camps *(photo 4)*.

Also in Bonn, a memorial commemorates the six hundred citizens who were murdered by the Nazis, including Jews, Roma, persons with disabilities, communists and other political enemies, forced labourers and prisoners of war *(photo 5)*.

In Bonn, in the town square where the Nazis once burned banned books, an annual festival of cultural diversity now takes place, themed around the city’s motto of ‘Joy’ *(photo 6)*.



6. Annual festival celebrating Bonn’s cultural diversity.

3.5
Protecting freedom of expression and assembly

3.5.1 Freedom of expression and museums

Museums in many countries find themselves politicised in various ways, in a context of increasing polarisation.[22] Museums and museum authorities may be censored or, more likely in many countries, they may self-censor themselves. They may do this by believing that they are acting in the public interest, but perhaps more often this will be out of self-interest: avoiding the possibility of punishment by authorities, for example through the risk of loss of funding, or just avoiding conflict and 'playing safe'.

It is important to understand freedoms of expression, speech and assembly as fundamental human rights. As with most other rights, these are not absolute and they do have limits: 'my right to swing my arms ends when my arm meets your nose' is a common way of thinking about this. So, museums should behave in the best way possible, but best for who: for themselves, for vocal vested interests, for a particularly vocal social group, or for all people? We should also remember that museums can also cause conflict, through their programmes, actions and partnerships, that result in people and groups wanting to voice their dissent.

In the context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, 'freedom of expression' includes the right to information, so that everyone has the right "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers".

A **General Comment on Freedoms of Opinion and Expression** (including the right of access to information) provides valuable guidance, noting that **"A free, uncensored and unhindered press or other media is essential in any society to ensure freedom of opinion and expression and the enjoyment of other Covenant rights. It constitutes one of the cornerstones of a democratic society."**

There are many **UN experts (Special Rapporteurs)** with UN mandates to focus on human rights issues relating to freedom of expression and related matters, including climate change, cultural rights, freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of assembly and association, and human rights defenders. Each expert undertakes focussed studies that produce annual reports and statements. These are an invaluable source of information, and guidance in the form of recommendations. Those who are interested can also make written submissions, to inform the Rapporteurs' work and reports.

Each year since 1999, some of these UN experts have issued a **Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression**, covering current issues. Many of the topics relate to the work of museums. The guidance in these statements can support museums to make rights-informed decisions. For example, the **2024 Joint Declaration covered Freedom of expression and media** crucial to tackling climate crisis, condemning censorship and attacks on environmental defenders and journalists, and making concrete, practical recommendations for a variety of actors.

Former Rapporteur on Cultural Rights Karima Bennoune **reported to the UN General Assembly**,[23] in 2018, how **"actions in the field of arts and culture can make significant contributions towards creating, developing and maintaining societies in which all human rights are increasingly realized.**

By engaging people and encouraging their interaction through artistic and cultural expression, actions in the field of culture can open a space for individuals and groups to:

- **reflect upon their society**
- **confront and modify their perception of one another**
- **express their fears and grievances in a non-violent manner**
- **develop resilience after violent or traumatic experiences, including human rights violations**
- **imagine the future they want for themselves and how to better realize human rights in their society**

Through these initiatives, people can increase social interactions necessary for mutual understanding and built or rebuilt trust. This is essential to achieving a range of human rights goals and to respecting cultural diversity."

She also noted that cultural expressions are under attack:

"It is because cultural and artistic expressions are powerful that they are at risk of being targeted, manipulated or controlled by those in power or in search of power."

To mitigate against these attacks, she recommended that cultural institutions should:

(a) **Adopt a cultural rights-based approach**, respecting, protecting and fulfilling cultural and other rights

(b) **Commit to featuring a variety of socially engaged perspectives**, including the works of artists and marginalized voices, in their exhibitions, performances and public programmes…

(c) **Invite creative collaborations featuring artists and cultural productions from different sides of any social and political divides and representing multiple world views**, including non-religious and religious, as well as different interpretations of religions

(d) **Facilitate convenings of stakeholders involved in the field of culture** where they can safely reflect on the ethical dimensions of their practice and establish networks

(e) **Organize activities and take steps to increase public access to cultural institutions**, and bring arts and culture beyond institutions and into the public space when conditions and security allow

(f) **Promote the establishment of cultural institutions in disenfranchised regions and neighbourhoods.**

She also made suggestions to **minimise risks of self-censorship and instrumentalisation of arts and cultural initiatives**, by:

(i) **Focusing resources on funding** for local infrastructure needed for art-making, such as local theatres and cultural centres and public spaces for arts productions, as well as training programmes in the various art forms

(ii) **Creating opportunities for a multiplicity of actors to engage positively with artistic and cultural productions**

(iii) **Undertaking awareness-raising about the importance of artistic expression and cultural production**, including that which is socially engaged, so as to heighten public support for such work and those who take part in it

(iv) **Establishing a transparent process and explicit criteria for selection of artists and cultural workers eligible for publicly funded grant support**, or for arts initiatives that will take place in public space

(v) **Creating review panels or other structures for accountability** that have broad representations of respected civil society leaders and can maintain the independence of artists

TO DO

Consider these recommendations and suggestions, and how they could be applied to your museum, to help manage and reduce perceived risks to cultural heritage from protesters.

In the US, the **National Coalition Against Censorship** has developed a number of resources targeted towards arts and culture professionals. These include **A Manual of Arts Censorship (2018)** by S. Mintcheva.

Their Museum Best Practices for Managing Controversy (2022) is a key resource that can be applied to museums of any size or type. The resource identifies **three strategies for protecting freedom of expression and managing controversy:**

1. **Prepare a Public Statement Affirming Commitment to Artistic and Intellectual Freedom of Speech** ("Freedom of Speech Commitment")

2. **Preparation in Advance of Upcoming Programs and Potential Controversy,** through agreement on clear curatorial procedures, feedback mechanisms, and educational plans

3. **Procedures for Addressing the Press or Complaints from the Public after an Exhibition or Special Program Opens**

The resource provides templates and suggests practical actions for each of these three strategies, which aim to:

- **Equip an institution with the tools to respond to criticism of controversial content**
- **Improve relationships with the public**
- **Support the right of audience members to access a wide variety of work**
- **Safeguard the exhibiting institution against self-censorship**
- **Introduce transparency**
- **Ensure institutional support of curatorial decision-making and**
- **Provide board member orientation [keep board members informed and onboard]**

The publication notes that **"The promotion and use of these strategies by national organizations and leading institutions will help validate them as the best practices in the field, and will help create communities of support when controversy arises in a specific institution."**

Note that, to effectively manage freedom of speech, concerns and complaints, it is important to be prepared before events (e.g. exhibitions) are launched. If you're hoping you'll prepare for the worst when the time comes, you will be too late.

If you're hoping you'll prepare for the worst when the time comes, you will be too late.

3.5.2 Understanding and combatting hate speech

Freedom of speech is not unlimited, although the presumption should be that limitations on freedom of speech are as minimal as possible. Hate speech is not the same as freedom of speech and it is usually prohibited, to different extents in different countries.

Understanding the difference between free speech and hate speech is important to protect the first, and protect people from the second.

Although there is no universal definition of hate speech, it typically has the characteristics of

- **Strongly emotive language**
- **Directed towards groups of people**, who share some kind of characteristic (nationality, ethnicity, refugee status, LGBT people, poor people, persons with disabilities etc.)

The United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech (2019) acknowledges that there is no universal definition of hate speech, but uses a working definition of hate speech as **"any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor. This is often rooted in, and generates intolerance and hatred and, in certain contexts, can be demeaning and divisive."**

The Strategy and Plan of Action notes that hate speech is often used to incite discrimination, hostility and violence against particular groups of people.

The Strategy and Plan of Action is based around four principles, that could be readily adopted by museums to combat hate speech and support freedom of expression:

1. **"The Strategy and its implementation must be in line with the right to freedom of opinion and expression, as the UN supports more positive speech, not less speech, as the key way to address hate speech.**
2. **Tackling hate speech is the responsibility of all. That means we must all take action: governments, societies, the private sector, starting with individuals.**
3. **The UN intends to support a new generation of digital citizens, empowered to recognize, reject and stand up to hate speech in the digital age.**
4. **As effective action must be supported by better knowledge, the Strategy calls for coordinated data collection and research, including on the root causes, drivers and conditions conducive that drive hate speech."**

These four principles are supported by 13 actions that can be easily applied to museums, with a specific action on education (including informal education) that includes the following:

- Support the national Government in providing teacher training and student briefings on human rights values and principles, to promote tolerance, and in strengthening intergroup dialogue and understanding as part of the school curriculum for pupils of all ages
- Support initiatives from civil society; women, girls and youth who are members of targeted and vulnerable groups; school clubs and youth groups, which facilitate or include intergroup dialogue to build social cohesion and social resilience to hate speech
- Support educational programmes, projects and activities that address hate speech indirectly, including those that seek to:
  - Eliminate bias in educational materials, including those used in the teaching of history
  - Prevent violent extremism, strengthen the rule of law, teach about violent pasts, including past instances of atrocity crimes, and safeguard religious sites
  - Advance respect for human rights, democratic values and the rule of law, as well as to foster peaceful co-existence and social cohesion, and diverse and inclusive societies
  - "Promote critical thinking, social and emotional skills, and responsible engagement through Global Citizenship Education, in accordance with target 4.7 of Sustainable Development Goal 4... including through the mainstreaming of gender equality and human rights in national education policies, curricula, teacher education and student assessment, and the use of digital technologies for distance and remote education."

The Plan of Action is a practical framework that museums everywhere can use to strengthen action to combat hate speech, and promote freedom of expression.

TO DO

Read the Plan of Action and identify which actions your museum currently supports, which actions it gets in the way of, and what actions it can take to 'do more good' and 'do less harm'.

States regularly abuse the concept of hate speech to quash dissent. The organisation Article 19 says:

“States regularly exploit the label ‘hate speech’ to discredit, or even prohibit, expression that is critical of the State, the symbols of the State (such as flags and emblems), or power-holders. While some domestic laws expressly prohibit ‘insult’ or ‘denigration’ of abstract concepts, or particular offices of state in this context, while others, more ambiguously, prohibit ‘sedition’ or expression that is against ‘national unity’ or ‘national harmony’.”

From the rights-based perspective, and under international human rights law, **countries cannot be the subject of hate speech**, as they are not natural persons before the law. Human rights law protects people and their rights, not countries or governments.

Article 19 “works for a world where all people everywhere can freely express themselves and actively engage in public life without fear of discrimination”, dedicated to supporting people’s freedom to speak and freedom to know. Article 19 has developed a number of guidelines and resources to help combat hate speech and protect free speech:

The **Johannesburg Principles: National Security, Freedom of Expression and Access to Information**[24] (1995/96) aimed “to set authoritative standards clarifying the legitimate scope of restrictions on freedom of expression on grounds of protecting national security. Since that time, the Principles have been widely endorsed and relied upon by judges, lawyers, civil society actors, academics, journalists and others, all in the name of freedom of expression. They set a high standard of respect for freedom of expression, confining claims based on national security to what States can legitimately justify.”

Article 19 also publishes an annual **Global Expression Report** outlining progress and challenges to freedom of expression.

They have produced a practical toolkit **Hate Speech Explained**: to help people understand the difference between hate speech and freedom of speech.

Other useful resources include the following:

UNESCO (2023). Addressing Hate Speech Through Education: A Guide for Policy Makers. UNESCO.

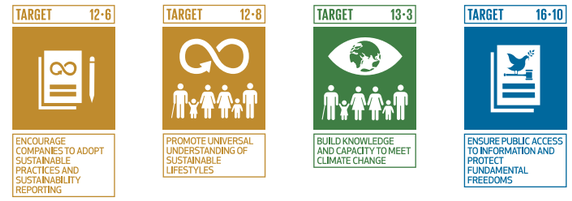
3.5.3 Freedom of expression is essential for the Sustainable Development Goals

In her 2023 report to the UN General Assembly, **‘Sustainable Development and Freedom of Expression: Why Voice Matters’** the UN expert Irene Khan reported that **“only when both access to information and the effective participation of youth, Indigenous communities, the media, human rights defenders, civil society actors and others are fulfilled will the promise to leave no one behind be realized…**

The link between sustainable development and freedom of expression is not only about information. Equally fundamentally, it is about voice - the right to articulate views, debate, discuss, criticize, challenge, protest and demand. If development is to be meaningful, then the voices of those most disadvantaged in society must be heard and heeded, and civil society and the media must have the freedom and space to use information and voice to hold the powerful to account.”

The report covered both topics:

Freedom of information, which relates to transparency from all actors, and is related to, for example, SDGs 12.6 (which includes sustainability reporting), 12.8 (access to information for sustainable lifestyles), 13.3 (building capacity to address climate change) and 16.10 (public access to information)



Voice as participation in sustainable development, which relates to a wide range of SDGs including women’s participation (SDG 5.5), universal inclusion (SDG 10.2), and an enabling environment including SDG 11.7 (safe and welcoming public spaces), 16.7 (participatory decision-making), 16.10 (protecting freedoms) and 16.B (promoting laws and policies for sustainable development), among others, and which can contribute to all SDGs.



In terms of Voice for Sustainable Development, she wrote:

"Voice is a fundamental attribute of the right to freedom of expression and, combined with access to information, gives individuals and communities the agency to shape the conditions affecting their lives and to demand accountability. Voice in that context is the right to share information and ideas, express diverse views, participate in decision-making processes, criticize government and corporate policies and practices, and expose wrongdoing without fear. Voice, combined with access to information, reinforces transparency and accountability."

Enablers of Voice

International commitments that support informed public participation in decision-making, for example regional agreements such as the Aarhus Convention (Europe) and the Escazú Agreement (Latin America and the Caribbean) on environmental matters.

Civil society organisations and networks, that can provide expertise and support to wider communities, and produce independent assessments of progress and challenges.

Role of the media: "free, independent, diverse and pluralistic media fulfil the public's right to know as well as the individual's right to freedom of expression." Public interest media, community media and investigative journalism are all important for democracy and sustainable development.

Inhibitors of Voice

Attacks and reprisals: threats of physical violence are the most extreme form of attack. Human rights and environmental defenders face especial risk of violence. In some contexts, authorities have denounced civil society organisations, journalists and activists.

Weaponisation of the law: powerful businesses may seek to quash criticism through vexatious lawsuits which "distract, intimidate, silence and exhaust the resources and morale of the person or organisation being sued, and to intimidate others into silence." Some courts have found that these lawsuits violate the right to free expression.

Barriers to participation by women, Indigenous groups and minorities: More broadly, minorities and marginalized people and groups may be attacked, physically or online, by those who seek to silence their views.

Internet shutdowns, disinformation and misinformation: Deliberate shutdowns, as well as the multiplication of disinformation and misinformation all threated people's opportunity to share their concerns, as well as to formulate their views.

UNESCO's **Freedom of Expression Toolkit: a guide for students (2013)** aims to support the empowerment of young people to understand and exercise their freedom of expression, and understand its limits. The guide is available in the six UN languages.

The **Index on Censorship** has developed a series of resources on different freedom of speech and freedom of expression issues. While tailored to the UK, the resources have wider application.

TO DO

Look at the list of enablers and disablers above. Think of a museum - one you know or one you work in - and ask, to what extent is it enabling and disabling voice for sustainable development challenges? Who is getting a chance to speak, and whose voices are missing? Who is being told to be quiet?

3.5.4 Assembly and peaceful protest are essential for the SDGs

The former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association produced a report in 2018 on **the importance of peaceful assembly and association for the achievement of the SDGs**. He said:

"The exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association are essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in every State. Democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law are pillars on which the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association are built and can flourish to achieve sustainable development. The rights of freedoms of peaceful assembly and of association enable people to communicate, mobilize, organize and connect, favouring solidarity and partnerships and contributing to shaping public opinion and decision-making, thus constituting real drivers of change.

These rights ensure that people have a voice and are able to organize collectively around shared interests. Their action in the social domain is particularly important because they help to tackle the barriers of exclusion, a key objective of the 2030 Agenda."

His report emphasised the importance of :

- An **enabling environment for civil society** as a prerequisite for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda goals
- **Participation and inclusiveness** in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals
- **Transparency and accountability** as key components of the 2030 Agenda
- **Partnerships with civil society**
- **Supporting labour rights** in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Further guidance and recommendations can be found in the report, to guide museums' decisions.

The former UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association produced a set of **Ten Principles for the Proper Management of Assemblies (2016)**, covering people's rights, authorities' responsibilities, and when and how assemblies may be limited (and when they should not), as well as sharing information for accountability. For each of these Guiding Principles, detailed guidance is provided, as well as a set of indicators to monitor compliance with the Principles. The Ten Guiding Principles are (titles only):

Guiding Principle One:	**States' duty to respect and ensure rights**
Guiding Principle Two:	**The inalienable right to take part in peaceful assemblies**
Guiding Principle Three:	**Limited restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly**
Guiding Principle Four:	**Facilitation of the right to peaceful assembly**
Guiding Principle Five:	**Use of force**
Guiding Principle Six:	**The right to observe, monitor and record assemblies**
Guiding Principle Seven:	**Collection of personal information & privacy**
Guiding Principle Eight:	**Access to information**
Guiding Principle Nine:	**Responsibilities of business enterprises**
Guiding Principle Ten:	**State accountability**

These Guiding Principles should be considered by museums as they consider how, when or if they plan to place restrictions on people and communities who wish to express their views or protest. The detailed guidance should be used to help understand what they mean and what the limitations and responsibilities are that go with them. It is very easy for museums to introduce rules and conditions of access to museums, they should ensure they are doing this for the right reasons and in the right way.

For more information on the links between peaceful assembly and the SDGs, see **Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly (2018). The linkages between the exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. OHCHR A/73/279**

Further information is provided at the end of this section in More information.

3.5.5 Protecting cultural heritage from/during protests

Objects in museums may be targeted by protesters, especially famous artworks in large museums. As a response, museums may introduce rather heavy-handed approaches to deal with protesters, that are broadly applied so that they impact on the cultural participation of all people. Considering how particular artworks may be protected from protesters, so that all visitors are not subject to limitations, is preferable to a blanket approach that diminishes everyone's cultural participation.

Some approaches may include the following, in a non-exhaustive list:

- The recommendations made throughout this section can provide some useful guidance, from a rights-based perspective
- Educate people about their freedom of expression and assembly rights, and the difference between peaceful and non-peaceful protest
- Providing abundant opportunities for people to share their views and concerns, voiced freely, may help to reduce targeted attacks on particular artworks
- Ensure especially high risk/targeted artworks are suitably protected to avoid over-the-top restrictions on other artworks or cultural experiences
- Have clear, transparent guidelines available for staff and visitors about what to do in protest situations, and ensure staff are suitably trained to deal with protest situations
- If there are to be restrictions, try to make these as targeted as possible
- Try to avoid 'either/or' situations, that cast the right to peaceful protest up against the protection of cultural heritage. Work towards solutions that enable peaceful protest (not violent protest) and the protection and sharing of cultural heritage to coexist

See also a **list of recommendations** on protecting artworks from protesters.

More information

Participating in public affairs and civic space

TAP Network SDG16+ Civil Society Toolkit

Article 19

OHCHR (2018). Guidelines on the effective implementation on the right to participate in public affairs. OHCHR

OHCHR and protecting and expanding civic space
(see also the section on Civic space for democratic culture)

OHCHR (2014). Civil Society Space and the UN Human Rights System

OHCHR (2016). Practical recommendations for the creation and maintenance of a safe and enabling environment for civil society, based on good practices and lessons learned. United Nations A/HRC/32/20.

UN Human Rights Committee (2011). General Comment No. 34 on Article 19: Rights of Freedom of Opinion and Expression. OHCHR.

UN Development Group (2017). Expanding Civil Society Space.

Freedom of expression, and managing assemblies and protests

UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights (2013). The Right to the Freedom Indispensable for Artistic Expression and Creativity. UNGA, A/HRC/23/34.

UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association (2016). Ten Principles for the Proper Management of Assemblies. OHCHR

UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (2019). Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa. African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

OHCHR (2024). Practical toolkit for law enforcement officials to promote and protect human rights in the context of peaceful protests. OHCHR

UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association (2021). Exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association as essential to advancing climate justice. UNGA, A/76/222.

UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association (2023). Importance of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in advancing sustainable peace and democratic transitions. UNGA, A/78/246.

European Commission for Democracy Through Law and OSCE ODIHR (2019). Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly (3rd edition). Council of Europe.

UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression (2021). Disinformation and freedom of opinion and expression. UNGA, A/HRC/47/25.

UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change (2024). Promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change. UNGA, A/79/176.

3.6
Protecting and restoring nature, at the heart of sustainable development

Nature is more than the stage on which people live their lives, or a store of resources that people use. Nature is part of us, and the relationships between people and nature - positive and negative ones - are profoundly important for sustainable and unsustainable development. Nature knows no political boundaries, so also needs collaboration between countries. We will return to this aspect later in this guide, as it is a key part of Our Common Agenda, the Pact for the Future and the SDGs.

While the older sustainability discourse focussed on reducing harm to nature or 'do no harm', sustainable development goes much further. Building natural capital (protecting and restoring nature and its functions) as we build human and social capital is a core goal of sustainable development. People need a good quality environment to thrive, so 'people' and 'nature' considerations can't be seen as an either-or. We need to support both aspects to secure sustainable development. It is about people and nature as full partners supporting one another in positive ways, not just reducing negative environmental impacts. For example, Nature-based Solutions such as coral reefs and mangroves help reduce the impact of coastal storms; healthy oceans provide us with oxygen and food; forests absorb carbon dioxide and provide abundant resources. Protecting and restoring nature helps to undo previous degradation and restores functioning ecosystems, although globally extinct species cannot be restored. Biodiversity is a non-renewable resource that needs protection and support; some natural resources are renewable so long as they are used within their limits of renewal. Biodiversity, geodiversity and wider natural capital and natural processes are not simply resources for people to command, but part of our shared world with meaning and intrinsic value.

Among the 17 SDGs, several are especially closely linked to environmental protection and restoration, although such considerations are part of most or all goals.



Within these SDGs, there are some targets that focus more specifically on aspects of environmental protection and restoration. These are just some examples, there are many more targets that contribute to environmental protection and restoration.

	2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality
	6.6 By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes
	11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage
	12.2 By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources
	12.6 Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle.
	12.8 By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature (many other targets in SDG 12 cover particular aspects of resource use too)
	13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

	14.2 By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans
	15.1 By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements
	15.2 By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally
	15.3 By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world
	15.5 Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species
	15.7 Take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products
	15.8 By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species



SDG 15 also includes targets that aim to promote international co-operation, to provide additional funding and support for Global South countries for conservation, promoting sustainable use, forest management, and to tackle poaching and the illegal wildlife trade.

Looking after and restoring nature needs people to be involved, and it needs to be done in ways that also support people and communities. This is well reflected in the **Convention on Biological Diversity**, with its three goals of:

1. Conservation of biodiversity

2. Promoting sustainable use of biodiversity

3. Fair sharing of benefits of the use of biodiversity (especially use of genetic material)



Great Ķemeri Bog.

Ķemeri National Park is a combination of wetland and forest habitats, that have been used by people for thousands of years.



Lake Kaņieris.



Lapmežciems Municipality Museum exhibit on fishing traditions on Lake Kaņieris.

The current operational programme for the CBD is called the Global Biodiversity Framework (2022-30). The Framework is explained, and connected to the work of museums in an open-access guide.



The Paris Agreement, too, recognises that people need to be provided with opportunities to know about climate impacts and what to do to address climate change, and to be motivated and have the necessary skills to take action. The current operational programme for the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement is called the Glasgow Work Programme on Action for Climate Empowerment, running from 2021-31, and makes specific reference to the key role of museums among other actors. An open-access guide explains the Programme, and how museums can connect with it as a very concrete, direct way to contribute to the Paris Agreement.



Separate guides outline the Paris Agreement generally, as a template for climate action, and the guide **Mobilising Museums for Climate Action**, which gives information on climate action in bite-sized chunks covering mitigation, adaptation, Disaster Risk Reduction, climate justice and lots more.







Living in harmony with nature helps to reduce the likelihood and impact of disasters, and nature is also a powerful ally in coping with climate change, and coping with the social impacts of crises. Bringing considerations of people and nature together helps to promote true sustainable development. This is set out in the report **Museums for Better Futures**.

3.6.1 People and nature together: the Rio Declaration

The Rio Declaration, from the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, underpins the three Rio Conventions (on climate action, biodiversity and desertification). It is a set of fundamental principles that countries all signed up to and which could be used as a basis for sectoral actions, including in museums.

The Rio Declaration aimed to establish **"a new and equitable global partnership through the creation of new levels of cooperation among States, key sectors of societies and people,**

Working towards international agreements which respect the interests of all and protect the integrity of the global environmental and developmental system,

Recognizing the integral and interdependent nature of the Earth, our home"

Note especially the commitment to promote new levels of co-operation, not only for governments but for sectors and people. Museums could be such a sector, working together with the Declaration's principles in mind. The Rio Declaration is already written into the SDGs, so working to achieve the SDGs already contributes to the Rio Declaration, and many more agendas too.

Since the Rio Declaration was developed, the **right of everyone to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment** has been internationally proclaimed and accepted. Many countries already have constitutional protection for a healthy environment for people, and the recognition of the 'new' right is likely to strengthen such protections and help them spread more widely.

TO DO

Read the Rio Declaration, consider how well your museum is supporting it, and what additional actions it can take to make it widely known, and a reality for all people in all countries.

"Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens..."

Some key aspects of the Rio Declaration are:-

"Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature." Principle 1

"States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the **sovereign right to exploit their own resources** pursuant to their own environmental and developmental policies, and the **responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction**." Principle 2

"The right to development must be fulfilled so as to **equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations**." Principle 3

"In order to achieve sustainable development, **environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it**." Principle 4

"**All States and all people shall cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty** as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world." Principle 5

"**The special situation and needs of developing countries, particularly the least developed and those most environmentally vulnerable**, shall be given special priority. International actions in the field of environment and development should also address the interests and needs of all countries." Principle 6

"States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem..." Principle 7

"To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should **reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies**." Principle 8

"**Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens**, at the relevant level." Principle 10

"**Women have a vital role in environmental management and development.** Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development." Principle 20

"**The creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilized to forge a global partnershi**p in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all." Principle 21

"**Indigenous people and their communities and other local communities have a vital role in environmental management and development** because of their knowledge and traditional practices. States should recognize and duly support their identity, culture and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development." Principle 22

"The environment and natural resources of people under oppression, domination and occupation shall be protected." Principle 23

"Warfare is inherently destructive of sustainable development. **States shall therefore respect international law providing protection for the environment in times of armed conflict** and cooperate in its further development, as necessary." Principle 24

"Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible." Principle 25

3.6.2 Nature's rights

What if we consider that nature - whether as individual species, ecosystems, places, rivers, mountains or Mother Earth as a whole - have intrinsic rights that should be recognised in the same way as human rights are supposed to be?

The rights of nature are already incorporated into a number of countries' constitutions, and in many Indigenous cultures.[25]

The **Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature** is a leading organization campaigning for nature's rights and recognition. In 2010, the Alliance adopted a **Universal Declaration for the Rights of Mother Earth**, which recognizes and promotes the following rights of nature:

Mother Earth and all ecosystems and species of which she is composed have the following inherent rights:

1. **The right to life and to exist**
2. **The right to be respected**
3. **The right to continue their vital cycles and processes free from human disruptions**
4. **The right to maintain their identity and integrity as distinct, self-regulating and interrelated beings**
5. **The right to water as a source of life**
6. **The right to clean air**
7. **The right to integral health**
8. **The right to habitat**
9. **The right to be free from contamination, pollution, and toxic or radioactive waste**
10. **The right to not have their genetic structures modified or disrupted in a manner that threatens their integrity or their vital or healthy functioning**
11. **The right to live free from torture or cruel treatment by human beings**
12. **The right to play their roles in Mother Earth for her harmonious functioning; and**
13. **The right to full and prompt restoration in the face of violations of the rights recognized in this Treaty caused in whole or in part by human activities.**

TO DO

Think of a museum you are familiar with, or that you work with. How well does it fulfil these proposed rights of nature? What can it do to respect, protect and fulfil these rights more concretely? How could it embed these considerations into its vision, mission, plans and reporting?

HUMAN BEINGS ARE AT THE CENTRE OF CONCERNS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



1. Swedish National Museum of Natural History, Stockholm.



2. High-quality exhibits of Harbour and Grey Seals.

3. Invasive species in Sweden, helping people to notice the spread of these species.





4. An exhibit on the 'scabby fox', on an outbreak of scabies and Fox population management.

5. An 'escape room' where people try to solve the decline of insects together.





6. An exhibit on the museum's research and environmental monitoring work.



7. The museum courtyard doubles up as a recreational and educational space, and a home for nature.

PHOTO STORY

Natural history museums as multifunctional resources for conserving and using natural heritage

The Swedish National Museum of Natural History is a large museum that promotes the effective understanding and management of natural heritage in the wider world *(photo 1)*.

High-quality exhibits allow people to explore nature up close *(photo 2)*.

Exhibits help people explore the threats that nature faces, such as invasive species or emerging diseases affecting people and wildlife *(photos 3 and 4)*.

An 'escape room' provides a stimulating experience for youth and adults using collections, that helps participants understand challenges to biodiversity and to take personal action to try to solve these challenges *(photo 5)*.

Huge stored collections are a powerful research tool that helps understand living nature and the museum is also a monitoring centre for environmental challenges and bird ringing. These aspects of its work are also explained in exhibitions *(photo 6)*.

Green space in the museum courtyard provides habitat for wildlife and gives practical advice on how to conserve and restore nature at home *(photo 7)*.

The museum is in a city park that makes space for nature, as well as a relaxing place for people to enjoy *(photo 8)*.



8. The museum also provides larger areas of woodland habitat for wildlife and people.

SECTION 4

COMMON CONCERNS AND PUBLIC GOODS

4.1
‘Commonness’ and the United Nations

Throughout the work of the United Nations, and of sustainable development, we find a strong emphasis on shared problems and opportunities, of shared concern and responsibility, and the importance of addressing challenges and opportunities together. Strengthening concern between countries and among peoples works to ensure that problems aren’t just moved from one place to another as a zero-sum game. This concern for shared pasts, presents and futures, and collaboration and shared concern, relates to the concept of the commons. What are commons? We shall explore this concept throughout this section.

When you hear the term ‘common’, what springs to mind?

- To be common might mean to **be seen as ‘lower class’**, to be looked down on. Certainly museums and others with elitist, snobbish attitudes will hold this view. Such attitudes are an offence to the fundamental belief that all people are free and equal in dignity and rights, although people most certainly have different opportunities.
- Or to be common might be to **be ordinary**, to be everyday, to be widespread.
- Yet again, to be common has **a shared aspect**. Common concern and common interest, mean more than just being everyday: they have a sense of collaboration and mutuality. Your concern is my problem, and vice versa; your success is my success, and vice versa; I take pleasure in your success, and you take pleasure in mine, and vice versa.

‘Common’, in the work of the United Nations and in sustainable development, is most strongly connected to the second and third meanings.

Let’s explore this a bit. A number of major international agreements include various concepts and commitments around a common, shared response to challenges and opportunities.

The Stockholm Declaration of 1972 recognised “the **need for a common outlook** and for **common principles** to inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment.”

The Brundtland Report, the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, from 1987 gave us the universal definition of sustainable development. It’s proper title is **Our Common Future**, and it explored our **Common Concerns, Common Challenges** and **Common Endeavours**. In other words, we all rely on particular shared resources (common concerns), that are threatened in ways that will affect us all, but in different ways (common challenges), and that these challenges require solidarity, co-operation and action to be addressed effectively (common endeavours).

4.2
‘Common But Differentiated Responsibilities’

The Rio Declaration from the 1992 Earth Summit recognised in its Principle 7 that: “States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem.

In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, **States have common but differentiated responsibilities**. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.”

In the UNFCCC, the main **international treaty to address climate change**, it states:

“The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their **common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities**. Accordingly, the developed country Parties should take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof.”

We have already encountered the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities in an earlier section on Strengthening international solidarity (Section 3.1), as it is included in the **Revised Draft Declaration on Human Rights and International Solidarity (2023)**.

There are a number of commitments and statements regarding ‘common’ principles in Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, notably that:

“We reaffirm all the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, including, inter alia, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, as set out in principle 7 thereof.”

The concept and commitment to respect ‘common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities’ is an important one. It highlights the differences between countries in their contributions to problems, and also the need for them to co-operate with one another. One country’s challenges will often affect another country. Promoting solidarity between countries is in everyone’s interests, for a world with universal respect for human rights and peace too. The ‘respective capabilities’ aspect draws attention to the double inequality, in that those who contributed least to the problems are those in need of most support: they need assistance, not as a matter of charity, but as a matter of justice.

TO DO

Do you think museums have ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ to one another? Should small museums expect support from large ones? Should large ones speak up for smaller ones when they are under threat?

4.3
‘Common heritage’ and ‘common concerns’

The concept of the Common Heritage of Mankind, or Humankind, is a recognised legal concept that was established through the 20th century, notably in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982). Under this concept, a shared place or resource is to be jointly used or managed, or preserved, for the benefit of all countries and all people. The high seas are a notable example, as are the seabed, outer space, and Antarctica.

Frakes identified **five core components** of the concept[26]:

1. No one legally owns common heritage spaces.
2. Representatives from all nations must manage resources contained in such a territorial or conceptual area on behalf of all, since it is considered to belong to everyone, meaning that some kind of regulator or regulation should be established
3. Benefits from exploiting resources from the common heritage region must be shared between all nations, restraining profit-making
4. No weaponry or military installations established in territorial commons areas.
5. The commons should be preserved for the benefit of future generations, thus preventing their short-term or long-term erosion

References to the Common Heritage of Humankind and/or to the Commons can also be found in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982), Brundtland Report (1987), UNESCO Declaration on Future Generations (1997), the UNDRIP on the rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and the UNDROP (2018) on the rights of peasants and other rural workers.

There have been times when Global South countries have protested against the application of the Common Heritage of Humankind principle, when they see it [mis]used to justify control of supposedly shared heritages by powerful Global North countries. Where the deep sea, Antarctica or space are being exploited by rich countries (for minerals or for political and military power), this undermines the concept of the Common Heritage of Humankind.

The principle of **Common Concern of Humankind** is different from the Common Heritage of Humankind, in that it is less focussed on use of resources than it is on the need by humans to maintain whatever is the focus of concern. The Common Concern of Humankind principle is part of the UNFCCC (1992) and Paris Agreement (2015) in relation to climate change, Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), Convention to Combat Desertification (1992), and the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2007).

The concept of the **Common Heritage of Mankind**, or **Humankind**, is a recognised legal concept that was established through the 20th century, notably in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982).

The list of shared challenges that require international solidarity to address, as set out in the **Revised Draft Declaration on Human Rights and International Solidarity** (2023) (explored in an earlier section), provide us with a good list to work with:

"International solidarity is essential in preventing and overcoming global challenges such as health emergencies, environmental degradation, climate change, armed conflict, forced migration, trafficking of persons, poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, food insecurity, all forms of violence against women and children, racism and discrimination, violent extremism, terrorism, colonialism, foreign domination and occupation, aggression, unilateral coercive measures that are inappropriately or too broadly targeted, international and transnational crime, and corruption."

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the '5 Ps' that underpin them also provide us with an excellent set of common concerns, broadly overlapping with the list above. Working with the SDGs in mind is an excellent way to work in solidarity to address our common concerns.

We need to work together - and if governments won't, then the rest of us need to - to have any chance of progressing these challenges. They are our common, shared challenges and opportunities to create a better world.

While museums may have their own, often professionally motivated, concerns, common concerns are wider concerns of humankind. Connecting museum concerns with common concerns, such as human rights, solidarity, and protecting and restoring nature, gives museums a stronger basis for their actions, and strengthens their relevance and resilience.

Shared challenges:

- health emergencies
- environmental degradation
- climate change
- armed conflict
- forced migration and trafficking
- poverty
- food insecurity
- violence against women and children
- racism and discrimination
- extremism and terrorism
- colonialism
- foreign domination and occupation
- international aggression
- crime and corruption

TO DO

Common concerns for humankind should be common concerns for museums. Consider how or if your museum addresses these common concerns, and what else it could do to ensure that these common concerns are addressed effectively, through awareness-raising, education, participation in decision-making, and collections development. Common concerns can be used as a to-do list for public discussion and debate.

4.4
Culture: Common? Good? Public?

'Our Common Agenda' proposed that the Pact for the Future should include actions that protect the global commons (including the atmosphere, high seas, Antarctica and outer space), and to identify and deliver global public goods (including global health, information, global economy, healthy planet, science, peace, digital, and to identify others).

As a result of this call from the UN Secretary-General, there was quite a lot of discussion and advocacy on what should be included in such a list of global public goods. But what are these? Is the concept a useful one?

The concept of 'goods' in this context has little to do with whether something is 'a good thing'. Public goods and global public goods derive from economic theory, and are value-neutral in terms of whether they are morally 'good' or not. The push to have culture recognised as among a list of global public goods builds on work done over a longer period that aimed to get education considered as, or recognised as, a global public good, in the context that education was being more-or-less privatised in many countries, rather than provided by the state.

Economists typically distinguish different types of goods, based on access and use[27]:

	Conditions	Can you be kept out of it (excludable)	Does your use prevent other people's use (rivalrous)	Museum-based example
Private goods	Can be bought, used privately	Yes	Yes	A book you bought in a museum shop
Club goods/toll goods	You pay to access them for your use	Yes	No	Entry ticket to a special exhibition
Common goods (common pool resources)	You can't be excluded from them, but using them reduces them for others	No	Yes	A book in an open-access museum library (especially if it was open 24 hours a day)
Public goods	You can't be excluded from them, and using them doesn't reduce them	No	Yes	Online collections information, websites (so long as not censored), or the external view of a museum building

Discussion on what type of good something is (or is not) can be rather confusing and highly abstract. The difference between 'a public good' and 'the public good' is frequently confused, as if they are the same thing, but they are very different. 'A public good' derives from how something is produced and consumed, while 'the public good' is a moral and ethical claim. It is also worth noting that 'a public good' does not mean that it is provided by public authorities. The nature of a particular 'good' is often a matter of perspective or context, so that the search for universals is often unconvincing on closer inspection.

Let's take some examples. Being a member of a golf club gives you access to play on the golf course: it is a club good. Having a set of golf clubs of your own makes them private goods. If you prefer to go fishing and you go to catch fish, the fish are likely to be common goods if they are in the sea, also called 'common pool resources'. If they are in a river and you need a fishing permit, then they are a club good (or access to them is a club good). If you drove to the golf course or the river, the road you drove on could be considered as a public good, so long as it was not a toll road (which would be a club/toll good). If it was rush hour and the road was very busy, it is more like a common good, as your use of it is congested by the other users.

What is the point of exploring this? In the hurry to get culture recognised among a list of public goods, some of the discussion was rather confusing, and the emphatic advocacy message that culture 'is' a global public good didn't really acknowledge that it is more complicated than that. The concept of culture as a 'global public good' was a headline of the Mondiacult conference on cultural policies, held in Mexico in 2022, making emphatic points about culture as a global public good.[28]

However, even in 'Our Common Agenda' a slightly different definition of global public goods was used from the traditional one (to add to the confusion), defining global public goods as "those issues that benefit humanity as a whole and that cannot be managed by any one State or actor alone". In fact, what was referred to as 'global public goods' in 'Our Common Agenda' is more like the concept of the Common Concern of Humankind (explored in the previous section) than anything to do with obscure debates about accessibility and use of resources from an economic model.



Land, such as this Scottish mountain landscape, may be both privately owned (a private good) and accessible as a public good. It is an impure private/public good.

Let's look at some aspects of culture and the types of good they represent.

	Can you be kept out of it (excludable)?	Does your use prevent other people's use (rivalrous)?	Type[s] of good
Culture in the wider, anthropological sense	People and groups of people may be excluded from particular cultural practices	Probably not	Closest to a public good, but not a perfect one (impure) as access can be impeded
Cultural practices, such as rituals, dances and festivals (intangible cultural heritage)	You may be excluded if a ticket or fee is required to take part, or if your social group is not permitted to take part	Probably not, although it would depend on the practice (if it was for a limited number of people then yes, it is rivalrous)	Impure public good as access can be impeded, or club good if you have to pay to take part
Access to museums generally	Yes, you can be kept out by the museum. For example, the museum will have opening times. You may have to pay a fee to enter	Not really, until it reaches the physical capacity to accept visitors	Impure public good (if access is open), or club good if you have to pay
Access to special museum exhibitions	Yes, and you may have to pay an additional entry fee	Not really, until it reaches the physical capacity to accept visitors	Impure public good, club good if you have to pay
Access to particular objects in collections	Yes, because you have to be physically at the museum where they are kept. Consider objects from far away	Yes, in the sense that an object can only be in one place at once	Certainly not a global public good, more like a private or common good
Access to online collections information	No, so long as you have a computer and access to the internet	No	Public good

Ironically, museums often take what are public goods or common goods (e.g. shells from a beach), and make them public in a different way (e.g. making them available to current and future generations to use), or more private (by restricting open access to them), or much more private, by charging people to see what was freely available to everyone in the first place.

While museums themselves may not fulfil the criteria of public goods particularly well, they may assist people and communities in managing their other, more common/shared/public resources and concerns. For example, natural history collections in museums, which may be a public resource but not necessarily usable as a public good, may be made 'more public' or 'more common' by sharing collections information online, so it can contribute to local planning and decision-making on the management of nature. A preserved shell in a museum maybe used to educate people about the actions required to conserve living molluscs in the wider world.

Whether a particular good is rivalrous or not depends on how many other people are wanting to use it. In fact, public goods are rather few and far between; global public goods are even rarer. In reality, many goods are mixed: they are impure public goods (also called semi-public or quasi-public goods), with some public, some club, some common, and/or some private aspects.

In a similar way to public goods, commons often have mixed features, and attempts to identify universals often don't work. David Harvey proposed the active process of **commoning** as a way out of the 'trap' of fixed definitions:

"The common is not to be construed, therefore, as a particular kind of thing, asset or even social process… There is, in effect, a social practice of commoning. This practice produces or establishes a social relation with a common whose uses are either exclusive to a social group or partially or fully open to all and sundry. At the heart of the practice of commoning lies the principle that the relation between the social group and that aspect of the environment being treated as a common shall be both collective and non-commodified-off-limits to the logic of market exchange and market valuations."[29]

If we want culture to be more public, more common and shared, whether we are thinking of culture in the broad, anthropological sense, or the narrower sense, note especially Harvey's principle that **commons exists separate from market-led considerations**.

If we want culture to attend to our shared challenges and opportunities, we need greater awareness of and attentiveness to common concerns of humankind (whether local or global common concerns). Not 'concern' in a worried sense, but in the sense that these concerns are issues that we all rely on and can contribute towards. We have responsibilities to address our common concerns, for ourselves and for one another. In the face of government inaction and corporate vested interests that do not want to change direction, common concerns will involve empowering people to raise their concern together to call for change.

Addressing shared challenges and opportunities - common concerns, in fact - will also help the cultural sector be more meaningful and relevant to more of society. This means shifting away from elitist conceptions of what culture is and, conversely, what it is not. Looking to the original sense of culture as being about tending the land, more like farming, helps us to apply to concept of commoning to culture, perhaps as a **culture of commoning**.

The way that culture and museums are made more public/common/shared is a matter of choice: political choice and policy/funder choice, as well as public choice. Freeing them from market considerations and constraints (consumer spend, visitor numbers as measures of 'success') will be important in securing any sense of 'culture as a common good', and/or 'culture for the common good'.

Commoning, like sustainable development, is an active process among people and groups. Indeed, when commoning reflects the will of communities to manage their resources in such a way, commoning is sustainable development, or at least it is part of it. Authorities, including museums, will have responsibilities relating to museums that go beyond public choices (for example to provide specialists with effective collections for research and understanding), but these responsibilities should also be delivered effectively rather than left to the vagaries of markets.

'Common goods' and 'the common good'

While the discussion on public goods is fraught with problems, as it derives from an economic starting point and is rather confusing, the concept of 'the public good' is a different matter altogether. In practice, rather few things are pure 'public goods' (many are impure, with public and non-public aspects), but they are the result of choices that society has made - usually by voters, on what they think authorities should be providing for the rest of society, to be paid with taxes. That means that choices have been involved and made. This is more like the concept of the commons, where people have collectively decided that 'something' (an issue, or a public service, or a matter of public interest) should be provided to all people, for 'the common good'. Involving people in decisions on what these matters are, and how they should be maintained and developed, is something that museums and other public institutions can actively encourage.

We may say that human rights, human rights agreements and laws, nature conservation and restoration, even the SDGs, are for 'the common good', so long as we make sure that we are not too single-minded and in the quest for progress for one aspect (e.g. a particular right or a particular SDG) we are undermining others. To be truly common we have to consider the impacts of our actions in a wider sense, in the quest for a better future for more people and for nature. That is why there is such a strong relationship between the concept of the public good and sustainable development: they are very similar, in fact.

Providing 'public goods' and 'common goods'

Public goods and global public goods are often referred to in terms of how they are provided. Because it is not possible to stop people using them, they tend to be underprovided by commercial interests, because it is hard to make a profit from them as people may use them anyway (called the 'free rider problem'). On the other hand, taking the approach that there are many things that society simply needs and that authorities have a responsibility to provide, whatever you think about the economics of public goods, authorities still have responsibilities. They cannot simply throw away their responsibilities to the market, which does not care, is likely to fail in meeting authorities' obligations, and undermines public services and people's quality of life. Similarly, when we talk of managing issues as commons issues, this cannot mean that we let governments and authorities 'off the hook', so that they leave people and communities to organise their own cultural (or other) affairs without providing necessary funding or other resources. Governments and authorities have responsibilities: we should understand them, and demand them, to ensure they fulfil them.



1. Durham Miners' Gala on the streets of Durham, England.



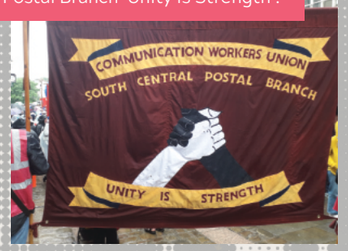
2. A procession under the banner 'Solidarity Forever'.



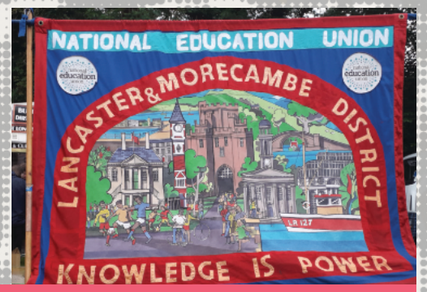
3. Music and public singing are important aspects of the procession.



4. Durham Miners' Association, Blackhall Lodge 'Need Before Greed'



5. Communication Workers' Union South Central Postal Branch 'Unity is Strength'.



6. National Education Union, Lancaster and Morecambe District Branch 'Knowedge is Power'.



7. Barnsley Miners' Wives Action Group 'We Are Women We Are Strong' and 'United We Stand Divided We Fall'.



8. 'Bear Ye One Another's Burdens'.

PHOTO STORY

Open-air cultural participation as a public good

Public goods are consumed in ways that don't reduce their availability for other people, and people can't be excluded from them. Museums don't fulfil these two criteria very well, but they can learn some lessons from open-air cultural participation.

The Durham Miners' Gala is a huge one-day open-air event; many thousands of people take part in this free event on the streets of Durham, England. The Gala is a celebration of trade unionism, working class culture, standing up for public services, and solidarity. Beyond being a celebration, the event highlights the need for good relations between empoyers and empoyees, decent working conditions, and the need for fair transitions in industries. The event is a good example of a public good; the focus on solidarity and community also acts for the public good *(photo 1)*.

The procession passes in front of the Royal County Hotel (by tradition), under the banner of 'Solidarity Forever' *(photo 2)*.

The marching groups walk under banners, often with bands playing, and the crowd sing along to familiar songs that emphasise solidarity *(photo 3)*.

Banners are symbols of groups, and are also a medium for communicating powerful messages *(photos 4-8)*.

The Miners' Gala grew from mining community culture. Although coal mining has disappeared, the cultural traditions of solidarity and common humanity that bind communities together continue today.

Crofton Field is a public green space on a former coal mine site. The slogan 'Remembering Mill Pit, Planting the Future' reflects the reverence for the past and the transformation for the future *(photo 9)*.

Another banner with the motto 'The Past We Inherit, The Future We Build' is also a powerful, active message, that connects with ideas of heritage *(photo 10)*.



9. Crofton Field 'Remembering Mill Pit, Planting the Future'.



10. English Coalfields 'The Past We Inherit, The Future We Build'.

A revised way of considering provision of public goods, beyond a purely economic argument[30]			
	Ethos	**Provision**	**Ensuring provision**
Traditional economic approach to public goods	Provision of public goods by markets will tend to fail	Public goods become under-provided by markets	State has to provide public goods to avoid market failure and underprovision
Humanistic/human rights-based approach to public goods	Everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy their full range of rights, including education and cultural participation	What gets provided is determined through democratic processes (voting, local decision-making), but the government always understands its basic responsibilities	State has ultimate responsibility to see that public goods are provided effectively, in an equitable way. It has legal and moral obligations

In the end, the concept of public goods (let alone global public goods) was not included in the Pact for the Future (except in relation to digital public goods). It is rather unclear, and the phrase 'global public good' has perhaps been used too freely, beyond what it means in a stricter sense to different disciplines, and used as an advocacy tool but without adherence to its stricter meaning.

Conclusion

The point of this section has been to introduce the reader to some of the background on the concept of culture as a public good, or a global public good. The reader is encouraged to critically assess any claims that they see, however well-meaning, that conflate 'a public good' (an economic argument) with 'the public good' (a moral argument). The difference is important to understand, to avoid confusion and misuse. Rather than universal definitions, it is suggested that it is more important to ask what the trajectory is: is culture, in whatever sense, being made more common, more public, or more private. That question can be asked locally and at higher levels.

4.5
Culture for the common good

Elinor Ostrom was a leading proponent of commons as a means of organising and managing issues of shared concern. She emphasised the importance of public choices in decisions around managing responses to challenges and opportunities of shared concern. She won the Nobel Prize for Economics for her many contributions in this area.

In 'Governing the Commons' (1990)[31], Ostrom proposed eight principles for the long-term management of commons:

1. **Commons need to have clearly defined boundaries**, that determine who is entitled to use them and for what.
2. **Rules should fit local circumstances**, meaning that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to common resource management. Rules should be determined by those affected by the commons, mindful of the local ecological needs.
3. **Participatory decision-making is vital**, as people are more likely to follow rules if they've helped shape them, and as many people as possible are included in decision-making.
4. **Commons must be monitored**, so that the state of the common pool resource is well-understood. "Commons don't run on good will, but on accountability".
5. **Sanctions for those who abuse the commons should be graduated**, meaning that slight abuse leads to a slight sanction, and larger abuse to a larger sanction.
6. **Conflict resolution should be easily accessible**, so that issues are resolved in informal, affordable ways. People should have easy access to remedies.
7. **Commons need the right to organise**, meaning that authorities have to agree not to get in the way, and to recognise the legitimacy of common approaches to management.
8. **Commons work best when nested within larger networks:** local issues may be related to wider issues, or require awareness of conditions elsewhere. Dealing with global or regional issues at a local level, and co-ordinating across networks dealing with their own and global issues, helps bring everyone into the management of larger, shared commons (e.g. addressing climate change through local actions).

We can see that museums themselves do not fit very well into these eight conditions. For one thing, it is not always desirable to consider that people and communities just manage their own cultural heritage, as that lets governments and authorities off the hook much too easily (and would be a triumph of Neoliberalism).

Where museums and particular collections fulfil authorities' commitments (e.g. collections recognised for their exceptional quality, contribution to science and understanding, requiring protection because of their high financial value), authorities cannot just pass off or throw away their responsibilities onto society.

Museums may be considered a public good or common good by public choice (if the public have voted for them or voted for public services), without necessarily fulfilling all of the features of either common or public goods: they may be impure common or public goods (with some features of both).

Although museums themselves are not necessarily a commons, at least in a pure sense, they can be very useful in providing resources, information and space for people to manage their wider commons, namely wider issues (such as the SDGs), natural and cultural heritage beyond museums, their identities and intended social development pathways. Museums then become enabling assets that help protect, manage and develop a set of wider commons/common concerns. What might this look like in practice? Let us look again at Ostrom's eight principles for the management of commons, and how museums could support them:

1	**Commons need to have clearly defined boundaries**	Many museums will relate to a particular area (town, district, region): use that area to determine or identify what the local commons are, and to develop collections and programmes accordingly
2	**Rules should fit local circumstances**	Museums can help raise awareness of local circumstances, and work with communities to determine them. Museums can highlight legal and more local conditions of use of commons, to promote appropriate use
3	**Participatory decision-making is vital**	Ongoing involvement in decision-making, ensuring no one is 'left behind' in decision-making or considerations. Museums could support this if they support long-term involvement, rather than short-term (often project-based) relationships
4	**Commons must be monitored**	Museums can provide resources that help understand the long-term condition of commons: collections, collections information, taking part in research, sharing information, and promoting citizen science and other participatory activities to monitor commons
5	**Sanctions for those who abuse the commons should be graduated**	Museums can highlight legal and more local consequences of use and abuse of commons, and promote the commonly determined rules for use of commons
6	**Conflict resolution should be easily accessible**	Museums can provide access to information on what the processes are for managing conflict in relation to commons
7	**Commons need the right to organise**	Museums can work to ensure they are providing impartial information, and not forcing their own views (i.e. opinions and views, beyond legal requirements) onto the management of commons
8	**Commons work best when nested within larger networks**	Museums can act as nodes that communicate commons-related issues and actions at different scales, e.g. promoting access to information on global, national, regional and local challenges, opportunities and actions in relation to commons

We saw earlier that Our Common Agenda requested proposals for a set of global public goods, that should be protected and made available for all people. Where may we find a list of public goods or common goods (accepting that all of the terms can be rather problematic or unclear)? Nebel and others have explored development in relation to the concept of the common good.[32] In particular, they emphasise that what makes it 'common' is that it is about collective decision-making, interaction and actions. They select or propose a set of basic common goods, as a non-exhaustive set, drawn from the ICESCR, a human rights agreement that has been mentioned many times in this guide. They identified these common goods as "a fair proxy for a minimum threshold for humanity". The common goods they propose are:

- **Education**, which includes the institutions that provide education, in all its forms. "Education therefore covers the basic wisdom, knowledge and skills needed in order to understand and to function in a society."
- **Solidarity**, considering the determination of people and groups to stand up for the security of others. The security that comes from solidarity provides a common benefit for all members of society.
- **Culture**, which refers to "the many and mostly informal interactions by which a community inhabits and actualises its common memory, traditions, language, and values." Culture as a common good provides a space for sharing ideas that can be understood across society. Note that this usage is in the wider anthropological sense, rather than a narrow 'high-culture' sense.
- **Work**, including the wellbeing enjoyed by workers, through decent, fulfilling work, that provides a decent living and personal fulfilment for everyone as a common benefit.
- **Rule of Law**, including the equal application of rules and laws, upheld by the State. Rule of Law is a basic foundation for justice, and the common benefit should extend to everyone in society.

Whether you think this is a good list, or have other ideas, it is worth noting that the common goods that they identify overlap extensively with the way human rights for sustainable development have been explored in this guide.

TO DO

Consider how your museum is supporting these five basic common goods for the common good. How well is it doing? What is it not supporting, or even getting in the way of, and what actions can be taken to make these five common goods a basis for decision-making, resource allocation, and monitoring and communication?

4.6
‘Sustainable’ culture



SDG 12 is titled ‘Responsible production and consumption’. It has a set of quite specific targets that are mostly about different aspects of waste and how they can be prevented, minimised and managed. Let’s take a sideways look at this goal, and consider how, when, or if culture is responsibly produced or consumed.

Some forms of cultural activity are quite resource-light and have small negative impacts to manage. For example, traditional practices that draw on abundant natural resources, or that are more especially acts of production than consumption, can be said to be rather positive from a sustainable development perspective. The good that they do is large in comparison with the harm (resource use) that they do. Intangible cultural heritage, in particular, is often very light on use of resources: singing songs and dancing are creative acts with little material input. If more people take part in them, it doesn’t really use more resources in the process.

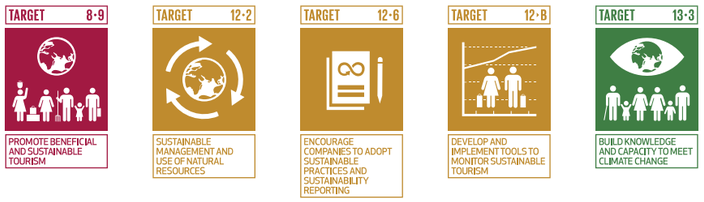
Now let’s consider a museum example: a museum that develops an exhibition, with lots of steel, wood and glass, that is shown for a short time, then thrown away. That is rather irresponsible production: a waste of money and natural resources.

Now consider that the exhibition only served the museum’s existing, well-off visitors, including large numbers of people who travelled from overseas. The same sector of society visited over and over again. Local people were excluded as the museum didn’t offer anything of interest to them; poorer people were excluded by the high ticket price to visit the exhibition. That is also irresponsible production, as it doesn’t attend to the needs and interests of local people, but it is also irresponsible consumption, with a small part of society making heavy use of museums as part of their high-emissions lifestyles.

The exhibition has been neither responsibly produced, nor consumed. It has been developed in a way that is very wasteful, unnecessary, serves high consumers, and encourages high consumers to consume even more. That is going in the opposite direction of sustainable development.

The point of this section is to highlight that there is nothing exceptional about cultural consumption. Consumption is still consumption: resources are used up, to create a good or service for some people who use it, and then it is disposed of when the organisation thinks it has served its purpose; carbon emissions from the production and disposal of the exhibition, and from visitor travel, all contribute to climate change. This ‘make, use, chuck’ approach is an excessively high user of natural resources.

The idea of ‘sustainable culture’ is closely linked to a number of SDG targets.



There are some ways through this situation.

Firstly, the waste hierarchy can be applied to all productions, including cultural productions:

- **Prevent:** the best way to avoid waste and wastefulness, is not to do the activity, simply don’t do it.
- **Reduce:** if you must do it, reduce its resource use or the impact of use, for example by using more renewable materials (or doing less temporary exhibitions).
- **Reuse:** reuse the exhibition as much as possible, for example by giving it to other museums to make use of.
- **Recycle:** rather than throwing materials into landfill, make sure the materials in exhibitions are recycled into other activities and into recycling waste streams. This doesn’t just mean throwing an exhibition into recycling bins, but breaking it up to be recycled within the organisation as much as possible, or shared with other organisations.
- **Disposal:** the last option, sending materials to landfill or for burning, all of which contribute to climate change.

Making sure that you have had a zero-waste approach in mind from the start will help you avoid wastefulness down the line, by planning for where materials will go to before you commit to using them (and avoiding using them in the first place where possible).

The second thing to remember is that culture is not only about consumption, although that is the way it is heavily geared in cultural institutions at present.

Culture is also about production: people produce culture through their interactions, their shared ideas and experiences, their creativity, and more, both in wider society and in museums. Strengthening the opportunities people have to contribute to cultural life, whether in discussions, debates, performances, or other creative acts, helps to get away from the heavy emphasis on culture being about consuming material goods, or simply consuming the products of the cultural sector.

Attending to the lives, goals and interests of local communities, rather than tourists (especially international tourists) helps avoid the flattening of cultural experiences that can result from an excessive focus on tourism. For example, it is preferable that a museum remain open throughout the year, even on restricted hours, than only being open during the tourist season, as seasonal opening locks local people out of their own cultural opportunities and leads to the hollowing out of small and often rural communities.

Cultural life is a balance of knowing your own culture and that of other people, taking part in cultural practices, and contributing to the cultural life of the community. These are not high-resource-intensity activities. They are being made to be resource-intensive by museum practices and marketisation, which insists that ‘bigger is better’. We can change our priorities and our practices to strengthen the all-of-society creative aspects of culture, instead of reducing culture to a consumer activity where people consume high-resource-use ‘products’ from museums (e.g. exhibitions). Shifting cultural practices so that people can participate in cultural activities as part of low-carbon (rather than high-carbon) lifestyles is essential for sustainable development. ‘Sustainable culture’, if it is to mean anything, will be a culture where people’s use and production can continue over time in ways that respect and protect the planet and other people. It will very likely be ‘slow culture’, rather than big, bright, marketised culture. It will also be ‘fair and common culture’, where everyone has cultural opportunities that they can take part in actively, freely and meaningfully, rather than a subsection of ‘high consumers’ making excessive heavy use of, while other parts of society are not provided for.

4.7
Towards a Universal Basic Culture

Many people will be familiar with the idea of a Universal Basic Income, and O'Connor[33] has discussed the idea of Universal Basic Services in the Foundational Economy (which is about satisfying basic human needs). Let's take this idea further, and explore what a Universal Basic Culture would look like. This means working out what institutions, resources and opportunities are required to satisfy basic human needs, taken from a rights-based perspective.

Let's look again at what **Farida Shaheed had proposed** in terms of cultural rights:

"Cultural rights protect the rights for each person, individually and in community with others, as well as groups of people, to develop and express their humanity, their world view and the meanings they give to their existence and their development through, inter alia, values, beliefs, convictions, languages, knowledge and the arts, institutions and ways of life. They may also be considered as protecting access to cultural heritage and resources that allow such identification and development processes to take place."

From this we can see that, to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of everyone, and of groups and communities, there need to be an availability of places - physical and online - where people can **develop** and **express** their humanity, **together**. We also see that there are necessary conditions that enable this to happen, in the shape of providing physical and online spaces, people having access to their own language and other languages, to knowledge and the arts, to their own institutions and their way of life. People, groups and communities also need to **have access to their cultural heritage**, which may include objects and collections. Not only that, **people need to have opportunities for access to one another**; while this seems obvious, too much attention is given to the idea of individuals consuming cultural offers, rather than the collective dimension we have been exploring in this section.

In fact, this list gives us an excellent piece of guidance on what **everyone** should expect as their basic cultural entitlements. These could be the elements of a **Universal Basic Culture**, in terms of opportunities for people, individually and collectively, to explore and express their humanity.

We can look at this from the standard human rights framework, in that there need to be the following:

Availability: physical and online spaces where people - everyone - can readily access their cultural heritage, learn about it and other cultures, and to explore all forms of knowledge as appropriate, and to have open opportunities to respond and interact, and create together. Everyone should have some kind of access to these opportunities relatively easily wherever they are. It has to be said this is not really how the museum sector operates, with disproportionate numbers of museums in towns and cities, and large parts of the world (in all countries) where people have limited opportunities for cultural activity (not to mean that cultural activity only happens in museums).

Accessibility: all of these opportunities have to be open to everyone, not only those with deeper pockets who can pay for a higher level of experience or access to cultural heritage. That goes against the idea that all people are free and equal in dignity and rights.

Acceptability: cultural opportunities have to be meaningful to society, in all its diversity. That means there is no one-size-fits-all, or that mass-marketed culture is necessarily meaningful to all of society.

Adaptability: cultural opportunities will have to be able to adapt to the range of society and changing interests, notably in the context of demographic and environmental change.

Resilient: cultural opportunities can't just be short-term, or dependent on short-term funding cycles. Culture needs space to develop and to change over time. That requires places whose role it is to maintain collections and collections information, make them available, and to be able to move with the needs of people and communities, and wider stakeholders they have responsibilities to.

Quality: quality cultural experiences relate to the dimensions of being accessible and acceptable: there need to be opportunities that are meaningful to those who take part in them, not only the desires of institutions.

We can see quite easily that the elements of a Universal Basic Culture are all there, but the current distribution of cultural opportunities, and the relevance of many of those opportunities to the breadth of society, require rebalancing and addressing. A Universal Basic Culture is not about saying there is a kind of 'low-grade' culture that everyone should be able to access. It is saying that these aspects are what make cultural opportunities available and meaningful everywhere. They are rights-based culture in a way that elitist, luxurious, marketised, capitalist culture is not.

So what is it that we need to protect these cultural rights from? Rather strangely, it appears to be the economic model and the model of what successful museums look like: places that are economically 'a goer', that attract large numbers of visitors as a measure of success.

Protecting cultural rights then becomes about protecting them from authorities and funders - including museum regulators - who are not prioritising the right thing.

Supporting smaller museums, protecting funding for existing museums, and avoiding the unnecessary multiplication of museums where there is already plenty of provision, will help support a Universal Basic Culture, for everyone.



SDG 11.7 has the following aim:

> "By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities."

Such access and participation is included in a variety of international agreements, such as the CEDAW (women), CRPD (persons with disabilities) and ICERD (ethnic and national minorities).

4.8

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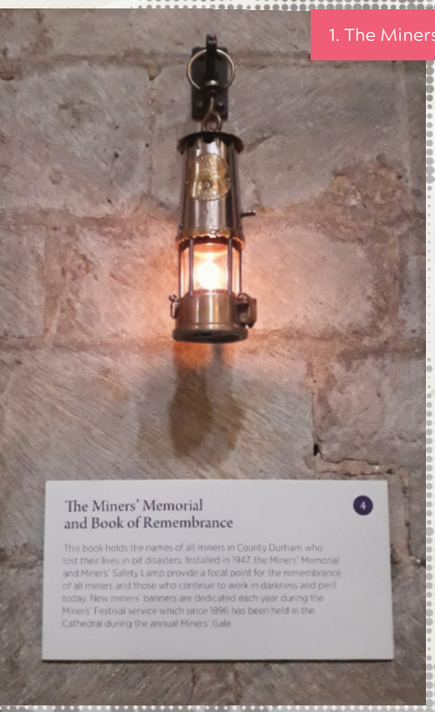
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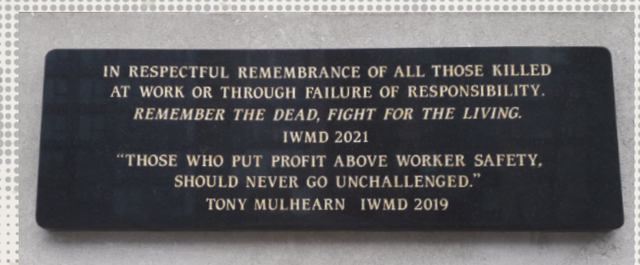
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CULTURE IS PART OF DAILY LIFE: WE CONSUME IT AND WE CREATE IT TOGETHER



1. The Miners' Memorial, Durham Cathedral, England.



2. International Workers' Memorial Day tablet, Liverpool England.



3. International Workers' Memorial Day monument, Inverness, Scotland.

PHOTO STORY

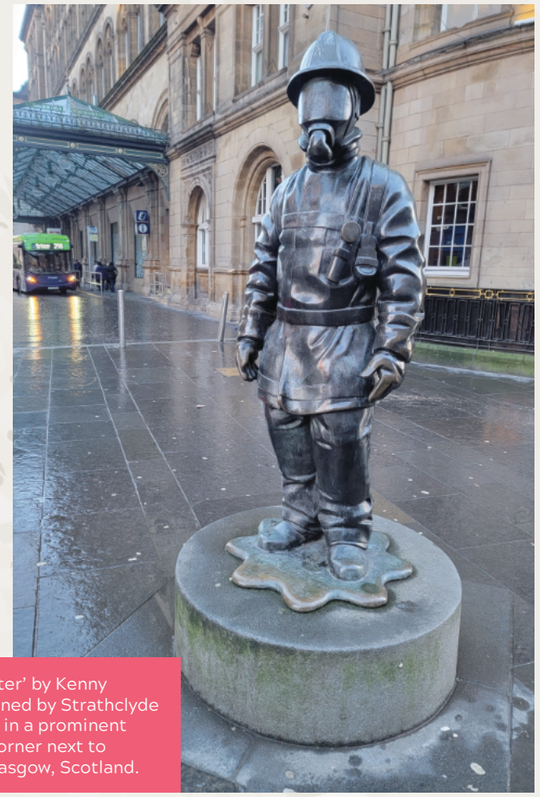
Commemorating workers

Statues and monuments frequently feature the 'great and the good': wealthy and powerful people. Statues and monuments can also recognise the contributions and challenges faced by people everywhere, promoting appreciation and solidarity.

The Miners' Memorial in Durham Cathedral commemorates the people who were killed in 'pit disasters'. Coal mining was a very dangerous profession, and continues to be so in many parts of the world *(photo 1)*.

International Workers' Memorial Day (28 April) is a strong expression of solidarity with workers past, present and future, for decent, safe working conditions, with the slogan 'Remember the Dead. Fight for the Living' *(photo 2 and 3)*.

Emergency workers, public servants and volunteers provide services that are essential for daily lives. Their contributions are rather rarely commemorated, but when they are they are powerful opportunities for solidarity *(photo 4)*.



4. 'Citizen Firefighter' by Kenny Hunter, commissioned by Strathclyde Fire and Rescue, is in a prominent place on a street corner next to Central Station, Glasgow, Scotland.

SECTION 5

MONITORING AND REPORTING CULTURE AND PARTICIPATION

5.1
Beyond visitor numbers

How can we measure culture and participation? Why should we do it?

GDP is often used to measure countries' output, but it is well-known that it does not capture essential aspects such as human happiness or contentedness, or health, let alone the state of nature. Human development and the Human Development Index aim to go further, but are still a fairly crude measure of social conditions. There are a variety of approaches available to measure value created 'beyond GPD', but many of these are too complicated and technical to be easy to understand, measure or apply. What can museums do to 'measure' culture and participation?

Visitor numbers are an easy way for museums to measure or communicate the intensity of use, but they do not tell you anything about whether they were used heavily by a particular part of society (or even by the same people many times over), or the difference that visits made.

Visitor numbers are, in some ways, the museum equivalent of GDP: a rather general measure that doesn't provide that much meaningful information.



Three SDG targets relate to the monitoring and measurement of culture. As we devise effective measures for culture and participation, we are contributing to the SDGs.

If we are to 'measure what we treasure' we need to use different approaches, and this will mean different approaches in museums too.

Measurement of culture is problematic for a number of reasons: how can we measure something so intangible? Who should decide what success looks like?

However, we can take a more informal approach that could be helpful.

TO DO

Consider again Thatcher's words that there are "men, women and families", and no such thing as society. Think about cultural experiences in museums you know. Are they simply experiences by a group of separate individual men, women and/or families? Or are they experiences where people really come together, do things together, and/or express themselves together? How could you prioritise valuing collective or at least shared experiences over simply big numbers, that might just be hiding Neoliberal individualism? What could the targets or indicators be?

The SDGs themselves are a framework that goes beyond GDP. They could be presented as a simple dashboard by museums, linked to some key actions that they aim to take.

The SDGs are often presented as a traffic-lighted dashboard that can help to understand challenges and priorities in each country, and so inform museums' priorities. These dashboards are produced each year (around June) by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network in the **Sustainable Development Report and Index**.

Alternatively, **reporting on how museums have contributed to the '5 Ps'** would be easy enough to do, and could include both quantitative and qualitative information.

Capitals approaches acknowledge that in addition to financial capital, society exists on a number of additional capitals:

- human capital (individuals' skills and capacities)
- social capital (networks, trust)
- natural capital (nature that we rely on, and nature more widely)
- built capital (infrastructure, heritage, information and knowledge, and economic capital)

Society needs all of these to function effectively. While each capital can be transformed into others (e.g. natural capital can be turned into natural resources that are sold to build economic capital), none of them can be allowed to go bankrupt. Capitals approaches are about building up capitals. Communicating our efforts to actively build these capitals could be a simple enough way to communicate museums' overall 'balance sheet'.

... in addition to financial capital, society exists on a number of additional capitals: human capital, social capital, natural capital, built capital

Form of capital	Possible measures to report
Human capital	The number of people who took part in educational programmes about sustainable development, human rights and/or environmental protection and restoration Proportion of staff who report that they are in decent work and receive the training they need Positive actions to provide more effective services for underserved groups of people **Overall goal that 100% of people in the local area have knowledge, motivation and skills for sustainable development** **Overall goal of 100% of staff report that they are in decent work that is fulfilling and for which they receive fair pay.**
Social capital	Number of people who took part in local decision-making processes Number of people who report that they took part in group activities with people they did not know previously Active communication and reporting by the museum to promote transparency and trust **Overall goal that 100% of people in the local area report that they believe their town to be a good place to live, and they have opportunities to share their opinions in decision-making**
Natural capital	Collections have been used to understand local biodiversity by specialists, to develop effective conservation plans **Overall goal that local natural heritage is in good condition, free from pollution, with strong climate action, and active conservation and restoration of biodiversity and geodiversity**
Built capital	Actions to repair and upgrade the building to face climate impacts, other hazards, and to use clean energy Active maintenance and development of collections as a multipurpose infrastructure, and progress in documentation and sharing collections information online Actions to support the protection, development and sharing of information and knowledge, as a form of built capital Financial investments in long-term assets **Overall goal that buildings and collections receive reliable, sufficient funding to live within their means, and where hazards are well-understood and risk is minimised.**

Measuring stocks and flows

In accounting, stocks are measures of the underlying quantity of something, while flows are measures of use. An easy way to tell the difference is that flows are usually measured in terms of use over a period of time (a rate), while stocks are a quantity that doesn't consider a period of time. Here are some museum related examples:

Number of objects in a collection	Stock
Percentage of objects in good condition	
Number of object records in a database	
Number of objects added to (or removed from) a collection	Flow
Number of publications based on museums collections in a year	
Condition of social and environmental capital beyond museums	Stock
Number of visitors to a museum	Flow
Percentage of the population who have made use of a museum in the last year	
Percentage of the population who have the knowledge, motivation and skills to take part in sustainable development	Stock
Number of people visiting a museum website	Flow
Energy use and carbon emissions	
Weight of waste created, disposed of and/or recycled	

As long-term institutions, with responsibilities to safeguard collections and buildings for the long-term, and to promote sustainable use of their resources, museums need to value, understand, measure and report on the condition of both stocks and flows. The problem with most museum statistics, is that they are excessively focussed on **flows** and pay little attention to the **stocks** on which they rely. For example, in the UK, national museums report to the relevant government department (DCMS) on numbers of visitors from different social groups (e.g. international visitors, schools visits), visitor satisfaction rates, income and numbers of loans. These are all flow statistics: there is no measure of stocks for the condition or development of the underlying resource, that is, the collections, or the condition of the buildings they are kept in. Nor are there any statistics in this list for employee satisfaction (which is largely a flow, but related to the underlying stock of the workforce). Under this scheme, it would be perfectly possible for a museum to run down the collection and its care, and simply prioritise heavy, short-term use. **Focussing solely on flows creates a blind-spot that makes museums very vulnerable and erodes their resilience.**

Sustainability reporting is included in the SDGs, as SDGs 12.6 (adopt sustainable practices and sustainability reporting) and also supports SDGs 16.6 (effective, accountable and transparent institutions) and 16.10 (protect the right to information). Sustainability reporting principles can help museums communicate in a transparent way, so that communication is more than a marketing exercise that only tells 'good news stories'. Effective reporting promotes trust, and enables society to gauge how well museums' statements measure up. This does not only relate to environmental sustainability information, but can cover all of the SDGs, and all of the 5 'Ps'.

See **Mainstreaming the SDGs** for more information on sustainability reporting and how to write a simple sustainability report in line with the SDGs.



Culture indicators

UNESCO received a lot of criticism for the way culture ended up in the SDGs, moving from a wide approach to culture (as recognised in the Hangzhou Declaration), to take an approach rooted in the creative industries. After this, UNESCO developed a set of **'thematic indicators'** to attempt to demonstrate how culture contributes to many different aspects of sustainable development. There are 22 indicators under four headings. However, the thematic indicators are not widely used, and the relationship between them and the 'official' indicators is rather confusing. As UNESCO sought to demonstrate the value of culture for other policy agendas, the thematic indicators are not particularly focussed on culture itself (in the broad sense). The emphasis seems to be in demonstrating the contributions of the cultural sector to sustainable development, rather than a broader view of culture.

5.2
Evaluating the common good and collective agency

In the earlier section on 'Culture for the common good' (section 4.5), we looked at the work of Nebel and others, who proposed a set of basic common goods. Emphasising the collective aspects of sustainable development, they focus on collective agency, as a key consideration that should be properly understood and a basis for measurement.[34]

They propose three dimensions of **collective agency**, as follows:

1. **People's freedom to imagine things together:** forming shared visions, through interaction, discussion, debate, deliberation and collaboration. This can be evaluated through understanding people's real opportunities to contribute to decision-making, in 'active, free and meaningful' ways (outlined earlier). Do people have places to gather together? Do they meet regularly? Is everyone empowered to take part? Do people value or trust this space of interaction? Do they believe their contributions make a difference?

2. **People's freedom to organise around shared goals:** the freedom to get together and determine what to do to progress shared visions, to make them practical and action-focussed. This can be evaluated through people's real opportunities to devise plans together, and the capacity that people have to organise themselves. Do people have knowledge and information to make informed decisions? Are they able to co-operate and devise shared plans? Is there high trust across the group to promote solidarity and co-operation? Can they build consensus even where there is disagreement? Can they draw on external initiatives and work with other groups with shared or different values or interests?

3. **People's freedom to achieve things together:** "perhaps there is no better proof of the existence of collective agency that the actual dynamism of the community and its actual success in producing commons and social goods". This aspect refers to the actual, real actions by the group, and its ability to achieve its goals: its effectiveness in promoting and realising people's freedoms. This may be evaluated by asking the group to what extent they were able to realise their objectives, and whether the outcome was of a low, middle or high level of success. They conclude that "in practice, this dimension should measure the capacity of the group to achieve its goals and shape their destiny."

These three dimensions - to dream, to plan, to achieve - can be considered by museums as they aim to determine their own contributions to people-centred sustainable development. How much space are they willing to give to groups and collectives? When should they step aside? When is it not appropriate to give away too much responsibility? Is there genuine freedom, or is it a token gesture that merely replicates the museum's views or its funders' concerns? What are the limits to such freedom, considering the rights of others, and the wider responsibilities of museums?

TO DO

Consider a project that your museum has recently undertaken. To what extent were people able to define themselves as a group (not to be defined or selected by the museum), to shape goals, make plans, and deliver actions through the museum? Imagine a project that fully embraces these three dimensions: what would it be, and what would be required to make it happen? What would need to change?

5.3
The importance of non-use values

In the fast society of short-termism, it is common to regard short-term use as a measure of usefulness, as a core value. This can be contrasted with museums as long-term institutions, that preserve materials that may not be used on a daily basis. However, this does not mean that these things are 'no use'. It is part of the trap of Neoliberalism to equate short-term use and impact with value. This doesn't hold true with culture or heritage.

As an example of the importance of non-use values, ICCROM undertook a large survey in 2018-19, including nearly 2,400 people, asking them:

Imagine the world without cultural heritage collections: no more libraries, archives, museums, treasured artefacts in temples, cultural centres, and communities. How big a difference do you think this would make in your life?

Respondents could answer on a range from 'none' to 'huge', and to justify their answer in a short statement.

> More than 80% of respondents reported that the loss of cultural heritage would have a 'huge' or 'very large' impact on their lives.

While the biases in such a survey mean that this is not necessarily entirely representative of wider society, the methodology points to a very useful and meaningful approach that goes beyond the short-term and transactional evaluations that museums often undertake (as part of market research, for example).

The main themes that respondents gave to justify their responses were as follows:

- Identity, roots and belonging (1,092 respondents)
- Continuity between past, present and future (693 respondents)
- Our shared history and memory (622 respondents)
- Leisure and enjoyment (444 respondents)
- Resource for knowledge and learning (437 respondents)
- Enabler for a better world (422 respondents)
- Livelihood (283 respondents)
- Spiritual enrichment (261 respondents)

Further discussion and a more detailed breakdown is provided in **the article**.

A key point to take from this survey is that non-use values of cultural heritage are highly relevant to sustainable development, in terms of long-term aspects, placemaking, identity, supporting change and learning, and more. The responses are quite different from the ways that culture and heritage are frequently highlighted by authorities, for example as contributing to tourism, economic growth, or as employers. Identity, roots and belonging relate more to local people and communities than they relate to itinerant tourists, who are often privileged in the cultural sector. The last thing to acknowledge is that the overwhelming response was that museums, libraries and archives are beneficial to society and add something distinctive and irreplaceable: they contribute to the common good.

5.4
Monitoring SDG 11.4



Within the SDGs, SDG 11.4 'Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage' has the most direct relevance to the conservation and preservation of heritage (just as SDG 4.7 has the most direct relevance to education relating to culture and heritage, as well as to education for sustainable development).

The official indicator for SDG 11.4 is quite thorough, although complex (information at this link sets out the rationale and elements of the data, as well as useful definitions):

"Indicator 11.4.1: Total expenditure (public and private) per capita spent on the preservation, protection and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage, by type of heritage (cultural, natural, mixed and World Heritage Centre designation), level of government (national, regional and local/municipal), type of expenditure (operating expenditure/investment) and type of private funding (donations in kind, private non-profit sector and sponsorship)"

The rationale for the indicator states that it helps to ensure that "cultural resources and assets are safeguarded to keep attracting/to attract people (inhabitants, workers, tourists, etc.) and financial investments, to ultimately enhance the total amount of expenditure." In other words, a market-based concern, which is a problematic starting point. However, the indicator is still quite good, if the data can be collected to determine the amount spent per capita on preservation, protection and conservation of heritage. Other aspects of culture and heritage - such as educational use, and public access and participation - are better covered in relation to other SDGs, SDGs 4 (education), 10 (inequality) and 11 (sustainable communities).

What does this mean for museums: in management and reporting, be sure to quantify the financial commitment to preservation, protection and conservation, as well as to collections acquisitions, and collections development (including transfer). This could be in terms of:

- direct staff costs for different collections-based roles
- budgets dedicated to preservation, protection and conservation (preferably split up across the three headings)
- budgets dedicated to collecting and collections development that support 11.4.1

Because of a lack of data in many countries, UNESCO has been running a survey since 2020 with-updated-stats-indicators to inform a report on expenditure on heritage, aimed at a national level. However, this report uses a proxy measure that does not capture the full nuance of SDG 11.4 or indicator 11.4.1. The proxy measure covers total expenditure on culture and heritage by source of expenditure (public, private), and is focussed on the overall provision and operation of cultural services, rather than on 'preservation, protection and conservation' of heritage. These are not the same and the proxy would include, for example, general running of museums, expenditure on visitor activities such as exhibitions and other actions that are not linked so clearly to 'preservation, protection and conservation' of heritage. Also, the amount spent, and the effective preservation, protection and conservation are not necessarily a perfect correlation.

5.5
A monitoring framework for museums' contributions to the SDG targets



The SDG targets give us a very good framework to monitor and communicate the activity of museums for sustainable development. Using this framework can help to embed the SDGs into the work of museums (mainstreaming and localising), and communicating your actions using the SDG targets can help decision-makers understand how museums contribute to sustainable development.

While the official indicators that countries use to report on their national actions are not that relevant to museums, ICCROM's Our Collections Matter programme has developed bespoke indicators, to help museums and other collections-based institutions make and deliver plans, and communicate their SDG actions

'Localizing the SDGs in Museums and Libraries' includes a monitoring framework for museums, including key SDG targets that relate to museum (and library) activities, as well as some suggested measures of activity (indicators) adapted from the Our Collections Matter indicators.

Activity	Relevant SDG targets		Suggested indicators for museums (select one or more)
1. Strengthen efforts to identify, protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage		11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage Official indicator: "total expenditure (public and private) per capita spent on the preservation, protection and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage."	Budget dedicated to collections care, collecting, staffing, documenting and conserving collections. Plans, policies and procedures in place for the identification, safeguarding and protection of cultural and natural heritage. Collecting programmes to protect, safeguard and make use of cultural and natural heritage. Proportion of collections in good condition. Proportion of collections that are well documented, and published online and in publications.

Activity	Relevant SDG targets		Suggested indicators for museums (select one or more)
2. Support and provide learning opportunities that help address social, economic and environmental challenges and that aim to 'leave no-one behind'		4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.	Numbers of people in each type of programme. Proportion of educational programmes incorporating Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education approaches. Evidence that learners have acquired knowledge, motivation and skills to promote sustainable development.
3. Enable cultural participation for all, focussing especially on people and groups currently under-served		10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.	Collecting to reflect under-served communities' interests and aspirations. Numbers of people from different social groups making use of collections. Numbers and proportions of people from different demographic groups involved in decision-making processes, both in relation to collections and collections-based institutions, and in current affairs.
		11.7 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.	Numbers of people accessing collecting institutions from different demographic groups, notably women, children, older people, persons with disabilities, and under-served people. Extent of green space provided by collections institutions.

Activity	Relevant SDG targets		Suggested indicators for museums (select one or more)
4. Adopt sustainable tourism approaches to address social, economic and environmental challenges		8.9 By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.	Numbers of jobs created or supported that relate to sustainable tourism drawing on local cultural practices and products (e.g. craft producers). Actions to reduce and eliminate the negative impacts of tourism (e.g. waste, emissions).
5. Unlock the research potential of collections and other resources, to contribute to local sustainable development challenges		9.5 Enhance scientific research, upgrade the technological capabilities of industrial sectors in all countries, in particular developing countries, including, by 2030, encouraging innovation and substantially increasing the number of research and development workers per 1 million people and public and private research and development spending.	Number and proportion of collections facilities that effectively support research and researchers. Number of research outputs based on collections (scientific and other publications). Expenditure on initiatives to enhance and upgrade collections facilities and collections. Numbers of staff dedicated to supporting and developing research use based on collections.
6. Adopt sustainable working practices and sustainability reporting, and contribute to meeting sustainable development challenges		8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.	Appropriate staffing levels for collections curation, conservation, education and other activities. Proportion of staff in secure employment, elimination of short-term or insecure work. Adoption of decent work principles. Actions to promote decent work for women and minorities. Actions to ensure people in the supply chain are fairly paid and well-treated.

Activity	Relevant SDG targets		Suggested indicators for museums (select one or more)
6. Adopt sustainable working practices and sustainability reporting, and contribute to meeting sustainable development challenges		12.6 Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle.	Publicly available visions, goals, strategies and plans relating to sustainability. Commitments to be in line with local, regional, national and/or international targets and ambitions. Membership of corporate social responsibility schemes (e.g. UN Global Compact). Incorporation of sustainability into reporting for funders and other stakeholders, including the public. Reporting to include both progress and challenges.
		12.7 Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities.	Incorporation of sustainability considerations into procurement, in terms of advertisement and invitation to tender, contracts, and selection criteria for suppliers.
		16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.	Proportion of the population [audience/users/non-users] satisfied with their last experience of public services. Access to information, and accountability policies and mechanisms. Effective arrangements to fulfil legal and social responsibilities. Long-term plans with realistic budgets.
		16.B Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.	Proportion of population [audience/users/non-users] reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months. Number and proportion of policies that incorporate sustainable development considerations, including all relevant Conventions, Declarations, environmental agreements and human rights.

Activity		Relevant SDG targets	Suggested indicators for museums (select one or more)
6. Adopt sustainable working practices and sustainability reporting, and contribute to meeting sustainable development challenges		11.5 By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic products caused by disasters...	Sources of disaster risk understood. Disaster Risk Reduction plans in place and being implemented effectively. Collections and other resources factored into local disaster management plans.
7. Direct external leadership, collaboration and partnerships towards the SDGs		17.16 Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships...	Global and/or international multi-partnerships that share collection-related knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources to address the SDGs. Promoting international initiatives such as international days, decades and years.
		17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.	Expenditure committed to public-private and civil society partnerships. Number and/or increase in number, and diversity of local, national and regional partnerships that address the SDGs.

5.6
Making effective use of governments' reporting for culture-related agreements

There is a lot of debate about developing a culture goal for the 'next SDGs', the argument being that culture is 'left out' of the current SDGs (although that is a debatable point, as there are plenty of references to culture, heritage and wider cultural participation in the SDGs and targets). What the targets are to be for the 'culture goal', and the 'shape' of the goal itself (a broad approach to culture or a narrow one, an economically driven one, or a rights-based one) is very important, to ensure that culture in the rights-based sense is not subsumed to culture in a sectoral or 'creative industries' sense; that culture is as expansive as possible and not shrunk down; and that culture is not fossilised in the process, and unable to change.

Whatever happens with a 'culture goal' and its targets, we should remember that the SDGs are in many ways not a new thing, but a new way to better achieve the many agreements that are not being progressed, and to progress them together more effectively.

A number of existing human rights agreements, some of them with serious legal weight, include cultural dimensions. The reporting requirements for these agreements already cover these cultural dimensions. The main environmental agreements (UNFCCC, Paris Agreement, CBD) also include cultural aspects in their workplans and reporting.

These reporting requirements are worth embedding more effectively (or at least considering) in culture-related targets and reporting for the SDGs, to avoid reinventing the wheel, or confusing and undermining the reporting for the pre-existing agreements. Indeed, helping raise awareness of the agreements that governments have signed up to, and making much more effective use of the reporting for these agreements, is highly desirable as it raises accountability from governments, so that they may be more likely to fulfil their international promises. Incorporating existing monitoring and reporting for human rights and environmental agreements into the cultural aspects of the SDGs would also contribute to the SDGs, by strengthening policy coherence (the subject of SDG 17.14). Apart from anything else, it just makes good, common sense to do so.

In international law, Conventions are binding and so have a monitoring body (called a Treaty Body) that sets guidelines and reviews countries' periodic reports. Declarations, such as Declarations on the Right to Development, on Indigenous Peoples, and on Peasants and Other Rural Workers, are voluntary and do not have a monitoring mechanism. Conventions have more legal standing, and more effective monitoring and reporting.

For an introduction to the work of Treaty Bodies, there is **a fact sheet** that explains their work. Each Treaty Body produces guidance notes called **General Comments** on particular topics, that are extremely useful and practical, and that are also worth being aware of as they help guide countries in their action (developing laws and policies). Countries are obliged to **prepare reports** on their progress and challenges for these agreements. These are a very useful source of reference, but are not made that much use of in sectors such as museums.

For a more coherent review of countries' progress and challenges, countries prepare reports for a **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** every 4.5 years. This is different from the reports for Treaty Bodies, as the report covers all human rights agreements, and it is assessed by other countries to promote multilateralism. All of the UPR reports are **readily available**.

Countries also prepare a **Common Core Document** outlining the following:

- General information about the state, such as demographic, economic, social, and cultural characteristics, and including acceptance of human rights norms.
- Constitutional, political, and legal structures.
- Framework for the protection and promotion of human rights at the national level.
- Non-discrimination and equality measures, along with effective remedies

You can view the **Common Core Documents** for all States online.

In addition, there are **detailed guidelines** regarding reporting for each of the main international agreements, including the ICERD (racial discrimination), CEDAW (women), CRC (children), CMW (migrant workers) and others.

TO DO

Look up the Common Core Document for your own country to find out about its general acceptance of human rights norms, and the main mechanisms and activities to promote human rights. Which international human rights agreements has the country agreed to be bound by (ratified), and how do you rate its adherence to its commitments?

5.6.1 Reporting on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is a Treaty Body that monitors countries' activities in support of their commitments under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), one of the main international agreements, with a legal standing. Under Article 15 of the Covenant (the Article most focussed on cultural participation), countries are to report on the following (relevant SDG targets have been included in parentheses):

"Provide information on the institutional infrastructure to promote popular participation in, and access to, cultural life, especially at the community level, including in rural and deprived urban areas. In this regard, indicate the measures taken to promote broad participation in, and access to, cultural goods, institutions and activities, including measures taken:

(a) To ensure that access to concerts, theatre, cinema, sport events and other cultural activities is affordable for all segments of the population; [closest to SDG 11.7]

(b) To enhance access to the cultural heritage of mankind, including through new information technologies such as the Internet; [closest to SDG 11.7]

(c) To encourage participation in cultural life by children, including children from poorer families, and migrant or refugee children; and [closest to SDG 11.7]

(d) To eliminate physical, social and communication barriers preventing older persons and persons with disabilities from fully participating in cultural life. [closest to SDGs 4.5 and 11.7]

Indicate the measures taken to protect cultural diversity, promote awareness of the cultural heritage of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities and of indigenous communities, and create favourable conditions for them to preserve, develop, express and disseminate their identity, history, culture, language, traditions and customs. [closest to SDGs 1.4, 4.5, 4.7, 10.2, 10.2, 11.4]

Provide information on school and professional education in the field of culture and the arts. [closest to SDGs 4.3, 4.4 and 4.7, could relate to targets in SDG 8]

Indicate:

(a) The measures taken to ensure affordable access to the benefits of scientific progress and its applications for everyone, including disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups; and [not overtly included in the SDGs, could be seen as part of 16.10]

(b) The measures taken to prevent the use of scientific and technical progress for purposes which are contrary to the enjoyment of human dignity and human rights. [not overtly included in the SDGs, could be closest to SDG 16.1]

Indicate the measures taken to ensure the effective protection of the moral and material interests of creators, in particular:

(a) To protect the right of authors to be recognized as the creators and for the protection of the integrity of their scientific, literary and artistic productions [closest to 1.4, targets in SDG 8 and 16.10]

(b) To protect the basic material interests of authors resulting from their productions, which enable them to enjoy an adequate standard of living [closest to 1.4, targets in SDG 8 and 16.10]

(c) To ensure the protection of the moral and material interests of indigenous peoples relating to their cultural heritage and traditional knowledge and [closest to SDGs 2.5, 11.4, 15.6, 16.4, 16.10]

(d) To strike an adequate balance between the effective protection of the moral and material interests of authors and the State party's obligations in relation to the other rights recognized in the Covenant. [closest to SDG 16.10 and 16.B]

Indicate the legal provisions in place to protect the freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity and any restrictions on the exercise of this freedom. [closest to SDG 16.B]

Indicate the measures taken for the conservation, development and diffusion of science and culture and to encourage and develop international contacts and co-operation in the scientific and cultural fields." [closest to SDGs 11.4, 4.7, 9.5 and 17.16]"

From this set of reporting requirements, we see that countries are already required to report a lot of information relating to culture and cultural participation, in broad and narrow senses. Making more use of such reporting, and ensuring it does not interfere with or undermine other reporting, will help strengthen countries' actions in support of their commitments. Referring to the ICESCR reporting would be a good way of ensuring that the most appropriate targets are selected for a 'culture goal' for the post-2030 Agenda, if there is to be one. Even if this does not happen, we can all make much more use of the ICESCR reporting in our institutions and in the museum sector more widely.

Whatever happens regarding the post-2030 Agenda (the 'next SDGs'), it would be desirable that measures for culture cover the following:

- **Protection, preservation, conservation and development of cultural heritage, cultural institutions, and wider cultural opportunities**
- **Access to people's own culture and that of others, notably for minorities and under-served groups**
- **Participation in culture, notably for minorities and under-served groups**
- **Contribution to culture, notably for minorities and under-served groups**, so that culture is actively developed and not simply using existing resources
- **Collective dimensions of cultural participation**, so that it is not solely about individual people consuming cultural goods, but producing their culture together
- **Protecting freedom of expression and the right to information**
- **Ensuring quality lifelong education, including informal education, and Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship continue to have a distinct place in the post-2030 Agenda**, and that the lifelong aspect is monitored and reported more effectively than in the current programme
- **Protecting the right to participation in public affairs of all kinds**

It is also highly desirable that culture and its 'measurement' is not only seen as being about some particular targets in a particular SDG. Like education, culture is related to the shaping and delivery of targets across all goals, and it would be good to ensure that this aspect is not forgotten. This can be supported by promoting a strong reference to cultural participation in the overall Agenda, not just in some particular SDGs or targets.



5.6.2 Existing reporting on cultural participation and racial discrimination

As a further example of the existing reporting that countries have to provide regarding cultural participation, let's look at the reporting for the **Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)**. The relevant international agreement, the **ICERD (1965)** defines racial discrimination as "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life."

In the reporting to the CERD, the guidelines state (p.60) :

"The right to equal participation in cultural activities.

States parties should, for example, report

(a) on measures taken to enhance the right of all persons without discrimination to participate in cultural life, while at the same time respecting and protecting cultural diversity;

(b) on measures taken to encourage creative activities by persons belonging to groups protected under the Convention, and to enable them to preserve and develop their culture;

(c) on measures taken to encourage and facilitate their access to the media, including newspapers, television and radio programmes, and the establishment of their own media;

(d) on measures taken to prevent racial hatred and prejudice in competitive sports; and

(e) on the status of minority, indigenous and other languages in domestic law and in the media"

Countries also have to report on **a wide range of activities to combat prejudice and intolerance through education, culture and access to information**, covered on **p.62-64 of the Guidelines**

You can **search the reports of the different Treaty Bodies**, available by country and for each Body. These reports are a crucial source of information to inform museum decision-making in each country, and can inform education and awareness programmes.

TO DO

Look at the actions that States are supposed to take to promote equal participation in cultural activities. How well is your museum, or a museum you know, taking these actions forward? What else could it do, and how could it communicate these actions?

STRENGTHENING MULTILATERAL ACTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN MUSEUMS

B

OUR COMMON AGENDA AND THE PACT FOR THE FUTURE

Our Common Agenda and the **Pact for the Future** are not only for governments, they are for everybody. We can use them to sharpen our focus, strengthen our collective action, and tell a more coherent story of the many ways that we are working to create a better future, together.

Our Common Agenda is set out under four broad themes, which were operationalised in the actions in the Pact for the Future, grouped slightly differently. This section provides some pointers and further discussion on how museums can strengthen their contributions towards these themes and actions, to enhance their contributions to sustainable development.



broad themes

- **We the Peoples**
- **A focus on the future**
- **Urgent action to protect and deliver global commons and global public goods**
- **Renewed multilateralism**

We the Peoples:

A renewed social contract between governments, people and across societies, anchored in human rights, to rebuild trust and social cohesion

“There is a growing disconnect between people and the institutions that serve them, with many feeling left behind and no longer confident that the system is working for them, an increase in social movements and protests and an ever deeper crisis of trust fomented by a loss of shared truth and understanding…

People wish to be heard and to participate in the decisions that affect them. Institutions could establish better ways of listening to people whom they are meant to serve and taking their views into account, especially groups that are frequently overlooked, such as women, young people, minority groups or persons with disabilities.”

António Guterres, Our Common Agenda

Foundations for a renewed social contract from Our Common Agenda:

Trust: effective, accountable, transparent institutions

Inclusion, protection and participation: education, lifelong learning, decent work, social protection, gender equality, decent housing, digital inclusion

Measuring and valuing what matters to people and planet: measures beyond GDP, valuing unpaid work and care

Strengthening commitment, ambition and action for sustainable development and the SDGs

“Pact for the Future, Action 1.
We will take bold, ambitious, accelerated, just and transformative actions to implement the 2030 Agenda, achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and leave no-one behind.”

Museums can take part in a renewed social contract, by strengthening their commitment, ambition, action and accountability to sustainable development. The SDGs provide a ready-made framework to do so. By working to reduce inequality, promote fulfilling lives for everyone, supporting human rights, protecting and restoring nature, providing transparent and transformative institutions, and working in partnership, museums can be active partners in sustainable development. Taking the global challenges and addressing them in locally relevant and meaningful ways helps connect people with the global dimension of our common challenges and opportunities, and also lift up their voices and ideas, to go from the local to the global.

The International Council of Museums has already adopted the SDGs as its blueprint for sustainable development and has been working to promote the uptake of the SDGs by its members. The more museums and museum workers take part in this work, the stronger the action will be, the stronger the sector will be, and the stronger the benefits will be.

How can museums strengthen their work for sustainable development and the SDGs?

'Museums and the Sustainable Development Goals' introduces Seven Key Activities, as museums' main opportunities (channels of activity) to support the SDGs.

1. **Protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage, both in museums and more generally**
2. **Support and provide learning opportunities in support of the SDGs**
3. **Enable cultural participation for all**
4. **Support sustainable tourism**
5. **Enable research in support of the SDGs**
6. **Direct internal leadership, management and operations to support the SDGs**
7. **Direct external leadership, collaboration and partnerships towards the SDGs**

'Understanding the SDGs' explores the goals and targets in detail, core concepts, and related human rights, to help give you a solid grounding in sustainable development and the SDGs.

'Mainstreaming the SDGs' can help you to make commitments to sustainable development, and turn them into actions that can be clearly monitored evidenced and communicated.

'Localizing the SDGs' can help you to understand local sustainable development challenges, opportunities and priorities, and takes you through the process of implementation in a step-by-step way.

'Museums for Better Futures' gives you ten recommendations to bring the SDGs, human rights, climate action and Disaster Risk Reduction together in one, holistic programme.









Peace and trust

"Pact for the Future, Action 13. We will redouble our efforts to build and sustain peaceful, inclusive and just societies and address the root causes of conflicts.

Action 17. We will fulfil our obligation to comply with the decisions and uphold the mandate of the International Court of Justice…

Action 18. We will build and sustain peace."

In the New Agenda for Peace, one of the policy briefings for Our Common Agenda, it is noted that:

"Low levels of trust indicate low social cohesion, which in turn is often closely linked to high levels of economic, political and gender inequalities. The waves of protests that have occurred globally throughout the past decade are an example of the growing alienation of citizens, in particular young people, who do not trust public institutions and other institutional mechanisms to peacefully address grievances, in particular in a context where civic space has become narrower."

Protests are not actions to be suppressed, but signals of public dissatisfaction with authorities' and organisations' decisions. While organisations - including museums - may find protests inconvenient (and only peaceful protests are permissible under human rights perspectives), much more concerning is the underlying dissatisfaction and grievance that people and groups feel that leads them to protest.

When dissatisfaction is not addressed, it is too easily manipulated by reactionary populists, who fan the flames of dissatisfaction for their own ends: breaking down trust, blaming marginalised people and groups for social and economic problems, and trying to divide people into 'us' and 'them'. Left unaddressed, dissatisfaction grows, and too easily breaks down into violence, or suspicion that makes shared concern and solidarity difficult to build.

In the face of widespread government inaction to tackle sustainable development challenges, the easy way that they align with corporate interests, and public dissatisfaction with how people and groups are being treated around the world, protests are not only understandable, they are inevitable.

Trust is built through belief that different actors will act in good faith, on their promises, and mistrust grows when promises are broken and left unfulfilled. In an earlier section on 'Reminding governments, policy makers, and museums of their responsibilities' (Section 3.1.8), we covered the principle that agreements between countries are made on the basis that they will carry them out in good faith. This is the principle of pacta sunt servanda: 'promises must be kept'. This involves trust, and it involves integrity. It also involves a rules-based order, where governments fulfil their obligations, as a basis for multilateral and more local action.

Yet, few people or organisations are aware of what governments have committed to on society's behalf, or of progress and challenges in meeting these commitments.

Education is critical for promoting peace and trust. There are excellent approaches and frameworks that are ready to use, that we will return to in 'Provide transformative education'.



Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum educates people about the importance of peace. Around the world, every museum could promote peace, locally and globally. See photo story on page 101.

Strengthening trust in museums

"Pact for the Future, Action 7. We will strengthen our efforts to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels and uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms."

Museums often make the claim that 'museums are trusted', mostly based on some surveys done in Europe and the US. However, as with many of the terms we explore in this guide, generalised, blanket claims are not always helpful, or even appropriate. If you dig a bit deeper in the methodology of these reports, a lot of it often comes down to 'where would you expect to get a reliable answer', in other words, where would you expect to find some expertise.

Certainly museums can behave in ways that promote trust and so are trustworthy, but a one-size-fits-all approach is more likely to plaster over the cracks. As Neoliberalism is undermining the very expertise that is often referred to in these surveys (by closing specialist-staff posts), blanket claims or generalisations should be treated with caution.

Many people most certainly don't trust museums, to gauge by the growing number of protests in museums in some countries, or claims from countries or communities who want their cultural heritage returned. Also, for large sections of society that make little or no use of museums, museums are irrelevant.

The **Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact** are an excellent framework for ethical businesses, that museums can also make use of. You do not have to be a member of the scheme to make use of the Principles. The Principles are a more holistic, practical framework for human rights and environmental protection than anything that currently exists in the museum sector.

As the Principles are based on the main human rights agreements, especially in relation to work, they are a good framework to respect, protect and fulfil workers' rights, as well as many other rights. Wherever it says 'businesses' in the Ten Principles, we can easily replace this with 'museums'.



UN Global Compact Ten Principles

Human rights

Principle 1:
Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and

Principle 2:
make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

Labour

Principle 3:
Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;

Principle 4:
the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;

Principle 5:
the effective abolition of child labour; and

Principle 6:
the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

Environment

Principle 7:
Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;

Principle 8:
undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and

Principle 9:
encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

Anti-Corruption

Principle 10:
Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

The UN Global Compact Ten Principles are a simple framework for openly communicating progress and challenges, so that stakeholders can get a full picture of how an organisation is contributing to sustainable development. This is important, and important for museum funders too, as museums are essentially competing for insufficient funding, so it is important to be sure that they are telling the 'whole story'.

If museums want to promote trust, then they should work on their trustworthiness. What does this mean? Having clear goals, with clear actions, and clear reporting that is open and honest about progress and challenges. Adopting the UN Global Compact Ten Principles can help make this a reality.

See also 'Mainstreaming the SDGs', 'Action for Climate Empowerment', 'Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Museums'







TO DO

Read the earlier sections on human rights and ask what you can do to do more to respect, protect, fulfil and promote human rights, and to protect and restore nature too. Look at the UN Global Compact Ten Principles and explore how you can implement them and commit to them in your museum.

More information

Can We Please Stop Saying that Museums are "Trusted"

What Does it Mean to Trust a Museum? - American Alliance of Museums

Work for your stakeholders (and make sure they're not just funders)

Who are your main stakeholders? Do you know? Whether you have made a list or not, you are likely to have some priority people or groups in mind when you are making decisions or setting priorities. If you are in a museum these might be:

- An elected official, such as a local council member responsible for museums
- A local politician
- Board of trustees or individual trustees
- Friends of the museum' group (who often provide additional funding for museums)
- Funder
- Sponsor
- Auditor
- Local civil society group[s]

If you ask a museum who their main stakeholder is, you will often hear it is 'the public'. Yet, in practice, the museum often doesn't involve 'the public' in setting the organisation's goals, involve it in developing its programmes, communicate what it has done, or ask 'the public' to determine success. Museum reporting, where museums do produce annual reports, may simply be an overall management report.

In such situations, the public can scarcely be said to be the museum's main stakeholder at all.

In a real and practical sense, the funder has often become the main stakeholder: they shape the organisation's goals (or the organisation shapes its goals to meet the funder's requirements), the organisation shapes its programmes to meet the funder's conditions, and the organisation does most reporting and communication to the funder. This situation is quite far from any sense of freedom of creative expression; where the funder is the government (whether directly or through an arm's length organisation), the museum may simply become a delivery mechanism for the funder's and the government's priorities, whatever they may be. People and communities are reduced to become little more than results to report to funders.

How can this situation be prevented or at least mitigated? Your main stakeholder should be the one that you communicate with the most and have the strongest relationship with: you build a strong relationship together, listen to their aspirations, and communicate your successes and challenges to them. Museums that have to do a lot of reporting for a funder, have to do even more communication with wider society, to respect people's rights to shape the services that they will be provided with. This doesn't mean communication in the sense of exhibitions and programmes, but communicating what the organisation is about, what it might want to do, what it has done, and certainly to ask lots of questions about what society wants from the museum.

Your main stakeholder is the one that you communicate with the most: make sure it is the public

Consider the term 'patron': it has two quite different meanings, but the differences can be useful for museums to think about. 'The arts' were often supported by patronage - gifts from powerful, wealthy people, often to build their own reputation and social status. This has a long history. Patrons can also mean something quite different: regular users or, in market terms, regular customers.

Considering culture and cultural participation: do you consider 'patrons' to be the great and the good (including funding bodies, donors or benefactors), or are they the people who actually make use of your museum? Which group's interests should take priority? Which group's interests really take priority?

From a rights-based perspective, authorities and funders have obligations to make sure that people are provided with opportunities to attain their various rights, and not to get in the way of those rights - the 'Respect' duty (protecting, for example, legal rights of expression and association). Secondly, authorities and organisations also have a responsibility to protect wider society from undue influence from third parties, the 'Protect' duty, usually meaning that sponsors and other third parties don't undermine people's ability to claim their full rights. The third duty is the 'Fulfil' duty, meaning that affirmative action is to be taken to enable more people to fully access and benefit from their relevant rights. This is what it means to 'enjoy human rights', that is, it is not the common usage of the word 'enjoy' as if it is a kind of fun entertainment. 'Enjoying human rights' is a legal way of putting it.

TO DO

Make a list of the stakeholders, people or groups you communicate with, starting with those you communicate with most. Does it reflect broader society? Are relevant special interest groups included? Are the most marginalised, or their representatives, in the list? Who is missing?

Decide who you want your main stakeholder to be, and make sure that they are the group you communicate with most frequently

Provide transformative Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship

“Pact for the Future, Action 6. We will invest in people… increase access to quality, inclusive education and lifelong learning, including in emergencies….”

‘Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship’ is included in a specific target in the SDGs (target 4.7); other specific targets for education cover sustainable lifestyles (12.8) and climate action (13.3), but education is essential for all SDGs, all targets, and for the overall Agenda.







More specifically, **they have been defined as follows**:

> “Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity. It is about lifelong learning, and is an integral part of quality education.
>
> Global Citizenship Education (GCED) nurtures respect for all, building a sense of belonging to a common humanity and helping learners become responsible and active global citizens. GCED aims to empower learners to assume active roles to face and resolve global challenges and to become proactive contributors to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure world.”

We will use ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) as a shorthand here for the two approaches covered by SDG 4.7, as they are complementary (although they have different origins), and because human rights and peace are crucial aspects of both Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education.

Broadly, ESD is slightly different from traditional types of teaching or education, in that it aims to develop people’s capacities to participate in sustainable development: it is not just about knowledge, but pays equal attention to motivation and to practical skills to take personal and collective action.

SDG 4.7 gives us a very good guideline on the content of education:

“By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through

- education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles,
- human rights,
- gender equality,
- promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence,
- global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity
- and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”

The official global indicator is “Indicator 4.7.1: Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment.” A **survey is run by UNESCO**, and has been adapted to monitor the revised Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development (discussed below), so that the educational content has eight themes:

- cultural diversity and tolerance
- gender equality
- human rights
- peace and non-violence
- climate change
- environmental sustainability
- human survival and well-being
- sustainable consumption and production

In addition to the global indicator 4.7.1, **a series of thematic indicators have been developed that cover different aspects of SDG 4.7**. These include the following:

4.7.2 Percentage of schools that provide life skills-based HIV and sexuality education

4.7.3 Extent to which green policy intentions are mainstreamed in curriculum documents

4.7.4 Percentage of students in lower secondary education showing adequate understanding of issues relating to global citizenship and sustainability

4.7.5 Percentage of students in lower secondary showing proficiency in knowledge of environmental science and geoscience

Some challenges of SDG 4 generally, and SDG 4.7, are that, although they are intended to promote lifelong learning, in fact, lifelong learning is not covered among the official indicators (global or thematic).

Similarly, some of the educational components of international agreements are not well reflected in target 4.7 or its indicators.

However, a lot of the content and principles of the indicators for SDG 4.7 can be readily applied to cultural institutions, at least in some way. Where it says 'schools' in the above list, why can't we just replace 'schools' with 'museums' and see what we can do?

The phrase "global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity" within SDG 4.7 can be understood or misunderstood to mean ethnic diversity, rather than cultural diversity, which is a problematic framing.

TO DO

Consider how the topics of SDG 4.7 are already supported by museums, what else they can do to support them more effectively, and how they could communicate these actions?

There is plenty of evidence that knowledge alone does not motivate or enable change to happen, but museums can often be very information-heavy, but light on helping people act on what they've encountered. Museums may also be overly passive, giving people little to do except look at displays: that may be enough for some people, but if others want more (to take part and contribute to cultural life), that should be supported too.

Education cannot only be about authorities or institutions (including museums) trying to shape or develop people as they would want them to be (however well-intended); from a rights-based approach simply aiming to somehow 'change' people or 'change their behaviour', without respecting their agency or freedom of thought or expression, sounds highly instrumentalist and undesirable.

ESD for 2030 is a major initiative to strengthen ESD and its contribution to the SDGs. The **UNESCO ESD2030 Toolbox** is a valuable source of guidance.

Teaching and Learning Transformative Engagement (UNESCO 2019) is also an important source of reference, outlining different forms of transformation, roles and responsibilities, considerations for the process, and suggested actions to promote transformative engagement.

In 2022 the UN Secretary-General called for the Transforming Education Summit, with a **vision statement** outlining the need to transform education, to meet the challenges and opportunities of today and tomorrow. While mostly aimed at formal (schools) and non-formal (training) education, a lot of the content can be readily applied to museums and other informal educational institutions.

For more information see **United Nations (2023). Report on the 2022 Transforming Education Summit. United Nations**.

A further report, **Reimagining Our Futures Together: a new social contract for education (2021)** makes more detailed recommendations.

> "We should enjoy and expand the educational opportunities that take place throughout life and in different cultural and social spaces. At all times of life people should have meaningful, quality educational opportunities. We should connect natural, built, and virtual sites of learning, carefully leveraging the best potentials of each. Key responsibilities fall to governments whose capacity for the public financing and regulation of education should be strengthened. The right to education needs to be broadened to be lifelong and encompass the right to information, culture, science and connectivity."
>
> Reimagining Our Futures Together

The policy brief **Transforming Education (2023)**, developed to accompany Our Common Agenda, notes that "The right to education and lifelong learning is at the very heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development because education, knowledge and learning are central to the dignity, growth and development of the individual."

There are four references to lifelong learning in the Pact for the Future: to invest in people to end poverty and strengthen trust and social cohesion (action 5), invest in social and economic development of young people (action 34), promote digital literacy, skills and capacity (Global Digital Compact), and promote opportunities for lifelong learning and other forms of learning (Declaration on Future Generations).



guiding principles

In 2023, member States of UNESCO developed an updated **Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development** (based on an earlier Recommendation from 1974). This is already adopted by 194 UNESCO member States. It is "the only global standard-setting instrument that lays out how education should be used to bring about lasting peace and foster human development through 14 guiding principles". The Recommendation is also intended for organisations and sectors involved in education and learning, so that includes museums.

The 14 principles are that education should be:

1. **Human-rights based**
2. **Life-long, continuous and transformative**
3. **Accessible and of good quality**
4. **Promoting the co-creation of knowledge**
5. **Non-discriminatory**
6. **Upholding freedom of thought, belief, religion and expression and banishing advocacy of all forms of hatred**
7. **Instilling an ethic of care, compassion and solidarity**
8. **Participatory, notably through the ethical and responsible use of technologies**
9. **Advancing gender equality**
10. **Applying an international and global perspective, underlining connections between the local and the global**
11. **Equitable, inclusive and respectful of diversity**
12. **Promoting dialogue between cultures and generations**
13. **Ensuring the safety, health and well-being of learners, teachers and education personnel**
14. **Instilling an ethic of global citizenship and shared responsibility for peace human rights and sustainable development for the benefit of all**

The Recommendation expands on these principles with concrete actions that can be used by a variety of stakeholders and for a variety of purposes, to drive forward transformative education for people, peace and planet. You can use it to connect the work of your museum with a high-ambition agenda with a political mandate. It could help you to seek funding or other resources, preferably in partnership with other museums to avoid unnecessary competition.

The **UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education (2024)** is focussed on culture and arts education, in terms of teaching about, with and through culture including the arts, as well as all forms of cultural and artistic expressions. The Framework may prove useful to policy makers, and to museums.

There are lots of good-quality resources available to support ESD and Global Citizenship Education. Many of these can be found in **ICCROM's Our Collections Matter Toolkit** under SDG 4.

The **Plan of Action for the Fifth Phase (2025-2029) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education** is a major opportunity for museums and other educational providers everywhere. The Plan of Action outlines actions for policies, learning content, training of educators, and an enabling environment.

TO DO

Reflect on the 14 principles from the UNESCO Recommendation and consider how they could be incorporated into your museum's education and learning policies and plans. As it is an international instrument, and if your country has signed up to it, this is a good chance for you to play your part in multilateral action for education for peace, human rights and sustainable development.

Expand museums' contributions to civic space

Museums exist in every country, they have the potential to significantly expand civic space - if they want to. Some museums already contribute to civic space, but many could do more. What does this mean? It is simple:

- **Keeping people informed** about authorities' commitments and promises, and matters of public interest
- Helping people explore **past, present and future challenges and opportunities**
- Creating abundant opportunities for people **to interact with one another**
- Creating abundant opportunities for people **to express themselves** - individually and collectively - in physical spaces and online
- Creating opportunities for people to **interact with authorities**
- Drawing on collections and exhibits to **explore ideas to inform decision-making**
- Promoting **meaningful participation in decisions**, by ensuring people are involved up front
- Making sure at all times that people are **being empowered to make up their own minds, form their own ideas and decisions**, and not steamrollered or manipulated by museums
- Communicating to wider society about **how people and communities have (and haven't) been involved in and shaped decisions**

Using the simple, standard framework, museums can strengthen their contributions to civic space when they:

- **Respect that people have a wide range of rights** that museums should not get in the way of, as far as possible
- **Protect people and communities from undue influence**, notably from vested interests such as sponsors, funders and philanthropists
- **Fulfil people's rights through museums:** to education, participation, assembly and association, and more

TO DO

Look back at the section on Taking part in public affairs.

If your museum has a set of visitor regulations or rules, review it and ask yourself where these regulations came from. Are they really protecting people's rights, or are they getting in the way? Who are they really serving? How can they be amended to expand civic space, not shrink it?

Respect, protect and fulfil workers' rights too. Always.

There is a paradox in museums in many countries, that while they aim to be more inclusive and welcoming to society, at the same time, workers in many countries face very vulnerable employment. Low pay, frequent restructures, zero-hours contracts, and high levels of unpaid labour in the form of volunteering. How can museums claim to be inclusive organisations if they are prepared to treat their staff so poorly? This is essentially a challenge of Neoliberalism, which erodes workers' rights in all sectors in the search for financial efficiencies.

As a litmus test, a museum can make commitments that cover their commitments to people, communities and wider society, that appear alongside their commitments to workers.

Decent work means that people have opportunities to obtain sufficient income for their lives, that they have opportunities for development and progression at work, and that they have a reasonable workload. Museum should not replace paid staff with volunteers, or exploit students and placements. Regulators should ensure that such exploitation is not permitted.

Museums should be open about labour disputes, and should actively respect and promote workers' rights to seek decent working conditions. In times of dispute, museums should not publicly criticise striking workers (unfortunately there are some recent examples of this happening). If the museum was providing decent working conditions in the first place, staff would not be out on strike.

Museums can promote people's understanding of the development of labour rights, and support the labour rights of all of their workers, including freelancers and others.

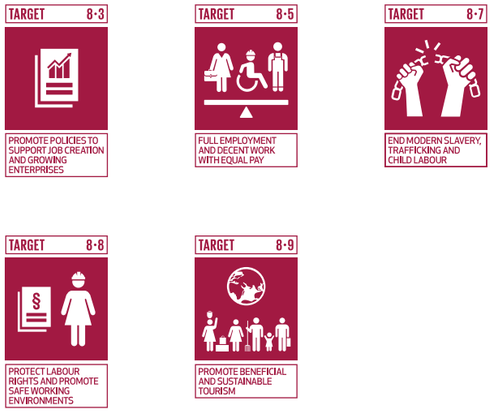
Ensuring that all workers are decently treated as part of genuinely sustainable organisations, rather than Neoliberal ones that seek efficiencies at the expense of workers' rights or conditions, could be protected by museum regulators and funders as conditions of funding.

Making sure that products and services used by museums are free from exploitation and, in the worst cases, modern slavery, should be a priority for all museums. Consider how cleaners, those dealing with laundry, those growing tea and coffee sold in cafes, or people making products that are sold in museum shops, are treated and paid. These are all sectors with a high incidence of modern slavery.

TO DO

Ask yourself, if your museum has a café, can the staff afford to eat or drink there?

Targets in SDG 8 cover various aspects of workers' rights and decent work.



TO DO

If your museum doesn't already have one, look at developing a workers' charter, which makes public commitments to upholding workers' rights, providing decent work, and ensuring there is no exploitation across the supply chain. Involve workers and their Unions in developing such a charter. Educate people about labour history and rights. Do not criticise workers or Unions standing up for workers' rights.

Measure what really matters

"Pact for the Future, Action 53. We will develop a framework on measures of progress on sustainable development to complement and go beyond Gross Domestic Product."

Measuring cultural activity in terms of visitor number is not enough. It does not keep an eye on the condition of the underlying 'stocks' that museums rely on: condition of collections, condition of buildings, or effectiveness of the workforce.

In an earlier section, we explored Monitoring and reporting culture and participation (Section 5). It is suggested that you re-read that section, in terms of:

- Identifying meaningful measures that are more than simply visitor numbers, to evaluate the condition of the underlying stocks, as well as the flows of how these stocks are used by different stakeholders.
- Making more use of the existing international agreements that already require culture and participation to be monitored and reported, for example by using the same headings and definitions.
- Using the SDGs as a dashboard to identify local priorities and opportunities, and challenges, to set priorities.
- Using the SDGs as a dashboard to communicate your actions.
- Preparing a publicly accessible report using the headings of sustainability reporting, and ensuring it reflects both progress and remaining challenges, and is open and transparent.
- Working together with other museums to tell collective stories of collective impact, that are more than individual museums competing in a marketplace.
- Make sure you include both use and non-use values.

TO DO

Re-read the section on Monitoring and reporting culture and participation (Section 5), set some priorities, make some plans, do the work, tell the story.

PHOTO STORY

Resisting persecution and occupation in Latvia



1. Biķernieki Memorial, Riga.

2. The Corner House, Riga. Former headquarters of the KGB, now a memory site and museum.





3. Memorial to commemorate Žanis Lipke and All Latvian Saviours of Jews, Riga.

4. Poster denouncing Putin's war on Ukraine, Pauls Stradiņš Medicine History Museum (opposite the Russian Embassy, Riga).





5. Exhibition 'Mom, I don't want war!' shown in Riga in front of the Russian Embassy.



6. Freedom Monument, Riga.

Latvia has a long history of foreign aggression and occupation. Following the establishment of Latvia as a sovereign state in the early 1920s, it was occupied first by the Soviet Union in 1940-41, then by Nazi Germany during 1941-44, and again by the Soviet Union during 1944-91.

The Biķernieki Memorial, in a quiet, beautiful forest on the outskirts of Riga, commemorates approximately 35,000 people who were murdered there by Nazi Germany with local collaborators. The memorial commemorates the victims, who were Latvian and Western European Jews, Soviet prisoners of war and others persecuted by the Nazis. The forest is still the resting place of around 20,000 people. The memorial has been vandalised by far-right extremists several times *(photo 1)*.

The Corner House in Riga is a bourgeois high-street building that served as the headquarters of the KGB during the first (1940-41) and second (1944-91) Soviet occupations of Latvia. The building was converted to dozens of prison cells and an exercise yard for prisoners. Thousands of people were processed (interrogated and beaten) there, to be deported to prison camps or to gulags (forced labour camps) in Russia; some were executed in the Corner House. The Corner House was converted into a museum and memory site in 2014, to preserve the memory of the atrocities committed during Soviet occupation *(photo 2)*.

In Riga, a memorial next to the former site of the Great Choral Synagogue (which was burned by the Nazis) commemorates the brave actions of Latvians including Žanis Lipke, who hid and sheltered Jews fleeing persecution, saving their lives *(photo 3)*.

The Pauls Stradiņš Medicine History Museum is situated on the opposite side of the street from the Russian Embassy in Riga. In 2022, the Museum erected a large poster directly facing the Embassy, showing a stylised image of Vladimir Putin as a 'death's head'. The Museum stated "With the poster, we express our support for Ukraine and, using our location towards the Russian Embassy, express our clear position against Putin's war in Ukraine!" The street has also been renamed 'Ukrainian Independence Street' *(photo 4)*.

The exhibition 'Mom, I don't want war!' combined drawings by Polish children of their experiences of the Second World War and Nazi occupation (1939-45), with drawings by Ukrainian children impacted by Russian aggression. The project aimed "to show that war always looks the same through the eyes of a child. Irrespective of place and time, it is a huge evil, and the child is always the victim of it. The similarity between historical and present-day drawings is striking." The exhibition was shown in Riga in front of the Russian Embassy in 2022. It highlights the important role that contemporary accounts - including children's drawings - play in promoting peace and standing up to aggression *(photo 5)*.

The Freedom Monument in central Riga commemorates soldiers killed during the Latvian War of Independence (1918-20). It was completed in 1935. The monument was threatened with destruction during the first and second Soviet occupations of Latvia but survived. It is the site of many public events and official ceremonies as an important symbol of the freedom, independence and sovereignty of Latvia *(photo 6)*.

A focus on the future

through a deepening of solidarity with the world's young people and future generations

"Any renewal of the social contract must include a profound deepening of solidarity between generations. Young people need to believe that they have a stake in society and a viable future. They also need to see society believe and invest in them.

This renewal of solidarity between generations should extend not only to those currently alive but also to their children and grandchildren. Humanity faces a series of long-term challenges that evolve over the course of multiple human life spans: warming and degradation of the planet, as well as managing new technologies such as artificial intelligence and gene editing, demographic shifts towards an older population, urbanization and the evolution of social welfare provision"

António Guterres, Our Common Agenda

Foundations for stronger solidarity with younger generations and future generations from Our Common Agenda:

Solidarity with younger generations: voice and participation, education, decent work

Solidarity with future generations: long-term thinking, represent future generations

Safeguarding the future: a healthy planet, strong institutions, health and social protection, education and work, preparedness



Actions from the Pact for the Future:

“Action 34. We will invest in the social and economic development of children and young people so that they can reach their full potential.

Action 35. We will promote, protect and respect the human rights of all young people and foster social inclusion and integration.

Action 36. We will strengthen meaningful youth participation at the national level.

Action 37. We will strengthen meaningful youth participation at the international level.”

The entire Declaration on Future Generations aims to strengthen solidarity with future generations.

Acting for future generations

The Pact for the Future, along with the Declaration on Future Generations, is an international agreement, made between governments, but its contents can be shared (socialised), tailored to local contexts (localised), and embedded into museums and across society (mainstreamed). These actions could be written into museums' objectives and principles.

The policy brief **To Think and Act for Future Generations**, which was developed to accompany Our Common Agenda, outline some basics and foundations for this work. Some aspects are as follows:

- **Future generations are everyone who will come after us.** Like current generations, they are entitled to a life of dignity in harmony with nature, yet their interests are often ignored.
- **Young people and future generations overlap, but are not the same.** Young people should not bear the burden of responsibility for advocating for everyone to come after current generations; they deserve a place in decision-making in their own right.
- Just as there is an **enormous diversity among current generations, so there will be enormous diversity in future generations**.
- **Acting for future generations also requires protecting and restoring nature** and ensuring future generations have all the resources they need for lives in dignity.
- **The future cannot be predicted**, but there are foundational common concerns that future generations are very likely to require.
- **Acting for future generations also addresses many of the major challenges facing society today**, and helps to ramp up ambition and action to address these challenges.
- **Addressing the needs and interests of future generations is also acknowledged and agreed in a wide range of international agreements and national laws.**

"The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made, and the activity of making them, changes both the maker and the destination."

John Schaar



Common Principles on Future Generations

The UN has developed a set of **Common Principles on Future Generations** (accompanied by a background note on Duties to the Future, and FAQs). The eight principles are:

1. **Promote a vision for future generations based on human rights and equity**
2. **Pursue fairness between present and future generations**
3. **Recognize and foster an interconnected world**
4. **Think, plan and act with future generations in mind**
5. **Ensure meaningful representation of future generations and their interests**
6. **Foster open science, data and knowledge for the future**
7. **Foster a future-oriented organizational culture and capabilities**
8. **Strengthen inclusive partnerships and global cooperation**

Further guidance and possible actions are outlined in the Common Principles.

Museums may be - but are not always - long-term institutions. Indeed, Neoliberalism is pushing them to be very short-sighted and focussed excessively on short-term considerations. Working with future generations in mind as museums make decisions may help them resist Neoliberalism and ensure they are resilient for the long-term.

Museums may take the eight principles outlined above, and use them to strengthen their long-term resilience, and their long-term value for society. Also, museum funders should consider these principles to make effective long-term, as opposed to ineffective short-term, decisions.

TO DO

Look at the eight Common Principles. If your museum aims to be a long-term institution, consider drafting your own Commitment to Youth and Future Generations, including the eight principles, and make it public. Use it to consider investments and priorities, to ensure youth and future generations will be provided with effective museums and resources for cultural lives.

Read the Declaration on Future Generations. How are you currently supporting it, and what else can you do to make its commitments a reality for young people and for future generations?

There are a number of approaches and considerations that can help focus on the future, and resist short-term thinking, or resistance to change.

- **Climate adaptation** involves considering how climate change will affect people, society and nature. Being aware of possible climate scenarios enables us to plan for the worst, and hope for the best. If we don't do this, when crunch time comes, it will be too late to make significant changes.
- **Disaster Risk Reduction** also involves understanding current and future risk scenarios, to understand, prepare for, reduce, and mitigate the impact of risks.
- **Futures thinking and approaches**, such as Foresight, help us to consider the signals of possible changes that we see now, and to plan for possible alternative scenarios.

While we cannot predict the future, we can make some fair assumptions about what it is going to be like, and what people are likely to need. If we do not make plans to ensure that we can resource those possible futures, then we are already writing off the organisation's relevance and its future.

For example, Disaster Risk Reduction scenarios consider how society and nature are likely to change in a place, as a result of, for example, shifts of industry, or if there are likely to be particular climate impacts (drought, floods, extreme heat), or if the community is an ageing one or likely to attract more young people. Perhaps political or social change will result in different demographics, such as more or less people from particular nationalities. All of these will result in social, cultural and environmental change. Being on the front foot of what these changes may look like helps to ensure that the community will have an effective museum service to draw on, and people will have abundant opportunities to participate in the cultural life of the community.

TO DO

Find your museum's and your town's climate adaptation plan. If they don't exist, find out how climate change is likely to impact your place. If a plan doesn't exist, you can start to make one.

More information

UNESCO's **Futures Literacy** programme aims to help people avoid the fatalism that the future is a set destination, which can disable current action. It helps to:

- Look at the present differently, by working with the future in mind, to imagine and unlock pathways to desirable futures
- Promote diverse futures
- Strengthen people's agency and empowerment

See **Mobilising Museums for Climate Action (2021)** for information on climate adaptation, and how to consider climate impacts in relation to museums.

See **Museums and Disaster Risk Reduction (2020)** for a step-by-step approach to planning and implementing actions that build resilience, in museums and in wider society.

Balance short-term and long-term considerations

The new ICOM Definition of a Museum, adopted in 2022, starts out that

"A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society…"

Neoliberalism undermines three aspects of this first part of the definition. Firstly, many museums are driven increasingly hard by funders - including museum sector policy makers - to provide their own maintenance and capital costs, from their profits. The second part, that a museum is permanent, is also increasingly challenged. Neoliberalism and marketisation also undermine the third aspect, in that museums are pushed to behave like visitor attractions rather than acting "in the service of society" (for public benefit).

Let us look at the second aspect, about the permanence of museums. In the UK, the **Mapping Museums project**, based at Birkbeck in London, has been identifying museums which operated since 1960. Incredibly, this study was the first to thoroughly identify how many museums there were in the UK, and when others had closed. Among the key findings were that:

- In the UK, the number of museums more than tripled between 1960 and 2017.
- Nearly 800, 20%, of museums that were open since 1960 have now closed.
- Small museums are more likely to close than larger ones, and most of the museums that have opened since 1960 are small museums.

> A key finding was that "The assumption that museums survive and that they keep collections for posterity is misplaced."

Heritage and long-term perspectives

The concept of heritage is closely linked to the concept of intergenerational transmission, dialogue and communication. Far from being about passing on materials from the past in a frozen, perfect state, it is about decisions in the present made on behalf of the future.

The museum sector, at least in the UK, often sees museums through the lens of the large and medium-sized museums. Yet, numerically, they are not representative of the museum sector. These larger museums are also the most stable, in that they have often been around for longer, and they are relatively well-insulated in their funding. Big collections, which underpin big museums, enable them to attract larger amounts of funding, even if the majority of that funding doesn't get spent on the care or display of those collections.

Neoliberalism also pushes museums to focus on short-term activities with fast delivery and quick outcomes. Longer-term activities: collections maintenance, collections documentation, collections development, building maintenance, building transformation for climate mitigation and adaptation, relationship-building with communities, are all replaced by a greater focus on short-term activities.

Short-term activities may include a greater emphasis on single acquisitions or 'blockbuster' acquisitions, greater emphasis on temporary exhibitions while permanent galleries become increasingly outdated, excessive turnaround of temporary exhibitions, focus on new buildings for increasing numbers of visitors while existing buildings remain unchanged or unadapted, and a short-term project-based approach to activities including working with communities. Where partnerships and relationships are geared to short-term outcomes, long-term relationships are not built, leading to an erosion in the relevance of the museum of the cultural life of the community. Partnerships and relationships become transactional, delivery-oriented, and exploitative.

There are ways in which museums can still hold on to some sense of the long-term, even with an inadequate short-term funding cycle. Some suggestions would be as follows:

- **Make sure that any activity, however short-term, can be situated within a longer-term strategy and plan**, so that each activity is a step on a longer, more meaningful journey. Learn from every single activity and make sure that every one of them has a legacy so it is not just forgotten about when it is over.
- **Make sure that every piece of funding leaves some long-term assets or benefits**, as a way of budgeting for resilience.
- **Do not rely on short-term/project-based funding for essential resilience actions:** that is not a recipe for success, it is a recipe for disaster.
- **Understand current and future challenges and opportunities for preservation, restoration, use and development of cultural and natural heritage**, and collect accordingly to promote effective collections.
- **Recognise that well-cared-for collections require good-quality management of collections information**, the two are inseparable.

- **Collections care and conservation, collections development (acquisition, transfer and disposal), documentation and sharing of collections information, are all essential for the fulfilment of basic rights and responsibilities in relation to cultural heritage**, in terms of insurance, public management of assets, protecting against theft, public guarantees of access to information, and as a basis of public trust in effective institutions. States have obligations to ensure that these actions are supported and carried out effectively.
- **Long-term public access to cultural heritage and to cultural participation for the whole of society requires effective collections, buildings and facilities** that are not necessarily well supported by a focus on short-term activities. Long-term and short-term considerations need to be balanced effectively.
- **Excessive focus on tourism undermines local people's cultural entitlements**, leads to a flattening of cultural offers, and results in (for example) closure of museums outside tourist seasons, relies too much on income from tourist spend, and erodes the everyday relevance of cultural institutions in local communities' cultural lives.
- **Where museums focus excessively on short-term outcomes, they reduce their ability to understand the collections through research** or sharing of research, and rely increasingly on external sources of expertise. Familiarity with collections and long-term development of expertise is undermined, again reducing museums' ability to understand, interpret and make use of their own collections.
- **If buildings are not adapted for climate impacts and are not modified to reduce their contribution to climate change, they are doubly vulnerable to any legislative change** that will make building alterations compulsory (for example, to receive public funding). Buildings that fall into disrepair cost more and more to repair.

TO DO

Re-read the section on Cultural heritage as a human rights concern. Look at the amount of funding that goes into short-term activities against long-term resource and capacity building. For example, some investment in acquiring new collections will have long-lasting, even intergenerational benefits. The same expenditure on marketing will be short-term only.

What is the trend in expenditure on short-term activities (temporary exhibitions, marketing) in comparison to long-term activities?





1. Preserved butterflies from different times and places.



2. Preserved mosquitoes are used by scientists to study Zika, Yellow Fever and other diseases.



3. The exhibition Outbreak explored how scientists use collections to study the origin and spread of diseases.

PHOTO STORY

Collections as time travel

Museum collections are four dimensional. They enable us to investigate change over time.

Well-curated collections combine specimens with good-quality collection information that is easily accessible. Collections of butterflies and other insects reveal the distribution of different species, enabling conservationists to study changes over time. Chemicals and DNA can be extracted from specimens to study the environment in which these insects lived, and to study their genetics *(photo 1)*.

Exhibitions about research collections help people understand this time dimension, in this case, the slow growth of coralline algae on display at the National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian Institution) *(background photo)*.

Research collections are powerful tools for studying the environment as it affects people. In this case, an exhibition at the National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian Institution) explained how scientists can go back in time to study diseases and vectors that we don't even know about yet *(photos 2 and 3)*.

Preserved egg shells in museum collections were used to demonstrate negative impact of pesticides on birds of prey, leading to the banning of these chemicals in many countries *(photo 4)*.



4. Preserved egg shells in museum collection.

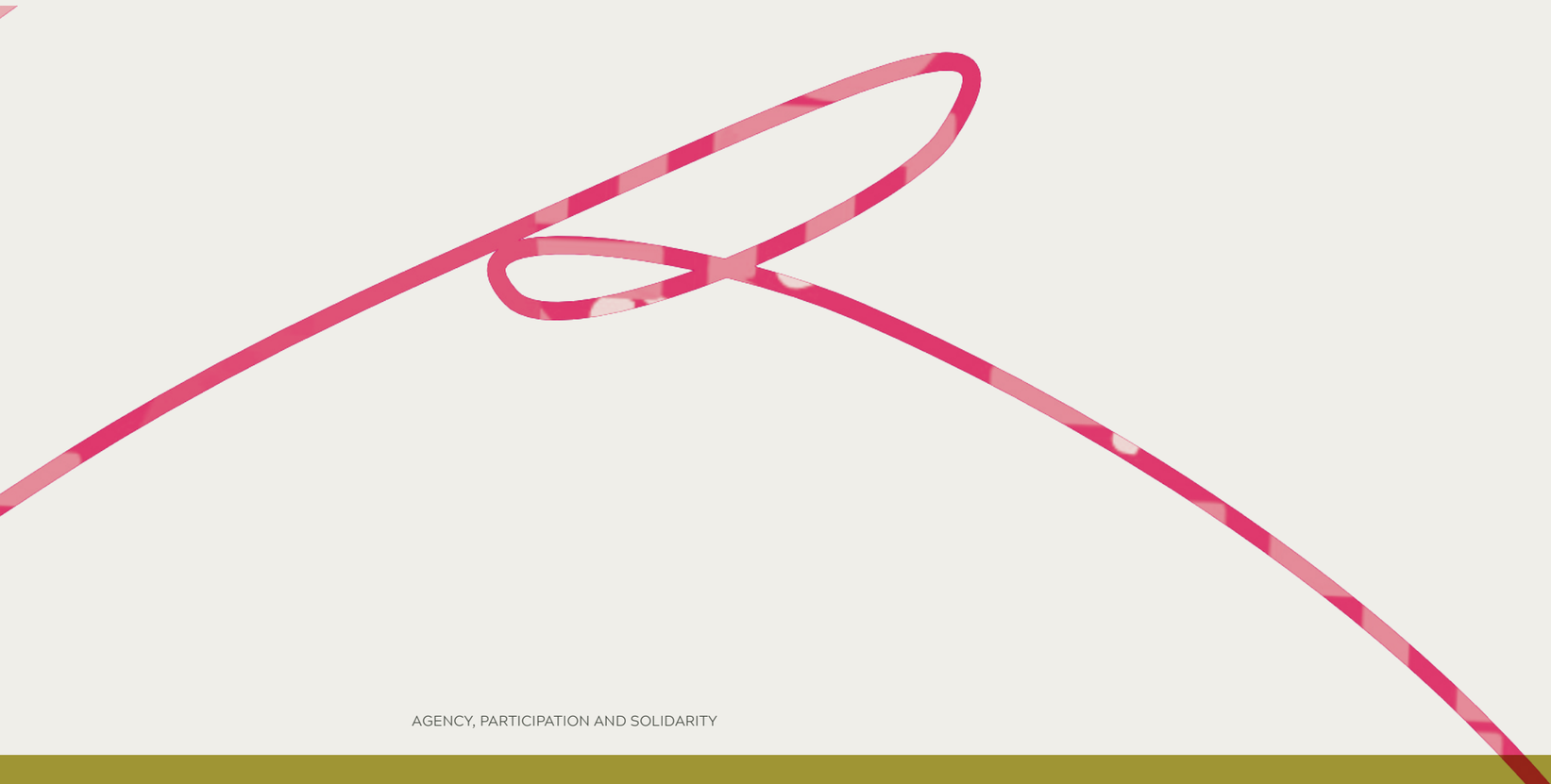
Urgent action

to protect and deliver global commons and global public goods

Priorities from Our Common Agenda:

Protect the global commons including the atmosphere, high seas, Antarctica and outer space

Identify and delver global public goods including global health, information, global economy, healthy planet, science, peace, digital, and identify others.



Actions from the Pact for the Future:

“Action 9. We will strengthen our actions to address climate change.

Action 10. We will accelerate our efforts to restore, protect, conserve and sustainably use the environment.

Action 11. We will protect and promote culture and sport as integral components of sustainable development

Action 28. We will seize the opportunities presented by science, technology and innovation for the benefit of people and planet.

Action 30. We will ensure that science, technology and innovation contribute to the full enjoyment of human rights by all.

Action 32. We will protect, build on and complement Indigenous, traditional and local knowledge.”

Looking to our common concerns

We have already looked at some actions that museums can take to support Our Common Agenda and the Pact for the Future, such as transformative education, and planning for the long-term. In this section we will look at some that have not already been covered. Science and technology had their own section in the Pact for the Future but not in the four headings of Our Common Agenda.

The challenges facing the global commons - at least climate and biodiversity - are relatively well understood. We know what the problems are and we know we need to address them; we have the goals to work towards; and we have the practical frameworks to take action. We have everything we need to take, or to begin to take, concrete action for climate change, to protect and restore biodiversity, and to promote sustainable use of nature, with fair sharing of the benefits of the use of the environment.

We can all take part in this multilateral action towards environmental goals:

- For climate change, using the Paris Agreement and its Glasgow Work Programme on Action for Climate Empowerment (2021-31)
- For biodiversity and sustainable use of biodiversity, the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Global Biodiversity Framework (2022-30)
- By contributing to the SDGs, many of which contribute towards environmental goals.









TO DO

Consider how your museum's current goals, policies and plans currently support the goals of the Paris Agreement and CBD. What are the main opportunities to support these agreements most effectively?

Re-read section 3.6 on Protecting and restoring nature.

Step-by-step information on how to embed and contribute to these agreements can be found in **Curating Tomorrow guides**, and in the guide '**Mobilising Museums for Climate Action**'.

Common concerns (or public goods, depending how you want to call them and think about them) can be understood as the shared concerns, resources and goals that people agree need attention and need to be looked after. We can think of these as common concerns, or the 5 Ps, or the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, or any other list that we develop together across society. Education, health, security, communication, infrastructure, culture and cultural heritage, may make it onto such a list. Protecting the assets and activities that people want to protect is a matter of public choice, as well as authorities' responsibilities. That means people have to be involved in identifying and determining what resources they want for the future, but they also need to know what authorities are supposed to be providing them to support their basic entitlements.

Some of the most commonly referred to global public goods/common goods, such as education, knowledge, and security, are not as perfect as they may seem. Education, for example, is not a global public good when we think of teachers in a classroom teaching pupils. The benefits of an educated population, meanwhile, are more like a public good: everyone shares in the level of education of the community. Knowledge, too, has been referred to as a global public good. Yet, that blanket consideration covers up lots of cracks. Knowledge, historically, has been highly privileged and exclusive: books were expensive to produce, and most people could not read. In modern times, knowledge is restricted through subscription to journals, copyrighting of material that prevents its reuse or redistribution. If knowledge were a pure public good, there would be no bookshops and no journals.

Knowledge and information are, or can be, common goods and public goods. That is so long as they are openly available, accessible, and people and organisations are able to make use of them.

Consider knowledge in relation to museums. Collections information is a form of data that can contribute towards knowledge. Yet, vast quantities of information is locked away in individual museums: in cabinets, in storerooms and, if you're lucky, in databases. Even sharing databases online does not go much farther. We need to find ways to mobilise this vast stock of data so that it can be used by people everywhere.

Making sure that museum-derived information and knowledge are available, for example, by ensuring that they are not locked behind paywalls or in expensive books that many people will not be able to afford.

Museums could commit to publishing scientific information in open-access formats and journals, and museum funders could insist that public money that is spent on research has to result in publicly available results.

Liberating collections data and getting it incorporated into GBIF is a target in the Global Biodiversity Framework for the Convention on Biological Diversity. For museums with natural history collections - and for those directing the policies and funding of these institutions - getting this information into GIBF should be a top priority.

Yet, funding for basic documentation and sharing it digitally is a low priority in many countries. Making the vast amounts of biodiversity information locked away in museums in the Global North widely available online is one of the most direct ways of increasing access and relevance of these collections to the Global South, where many of these collections came from.

Global Biodiversity Framework Target 21:

> **"Ensure that the best available data, information and knowledge, are accessible to decision makers, practitioners and the public to guide effective and equitable governance, integrated and participatory management of biodiversity, and to strengthen communication, awareness-raising, education, monitoring, research and knowledge management…" while protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.**

Indicator for Target 21:

> **"Growth in species occurrence records accessible through the Global Biodiversity Information Facility"**

TO DO

Re-read the section on Common Concerns. Which resources, places and topics are of shared concern to the people in the places your work makes a difference? If they don't know, what can you do to facilitate the development of such a list? How could you use the 5 Ps or the 17 SDGs to formulate such a list of priorities in your area? What, if anything is missing and needs to be added?

If your museum has preserved plant, animal or fungi specimens, find out what proportion of the specimens/ objects are included in GBIF.

Find out if your museum has an open research policy or commitment, and if not, explore how it can develop one.

Read 'Museum Collections and Biodiversity Conservation' and 'Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Museums'





PHOTO STORY



1. Mount Unzen (background), with the town of Shimabara in the foreground.

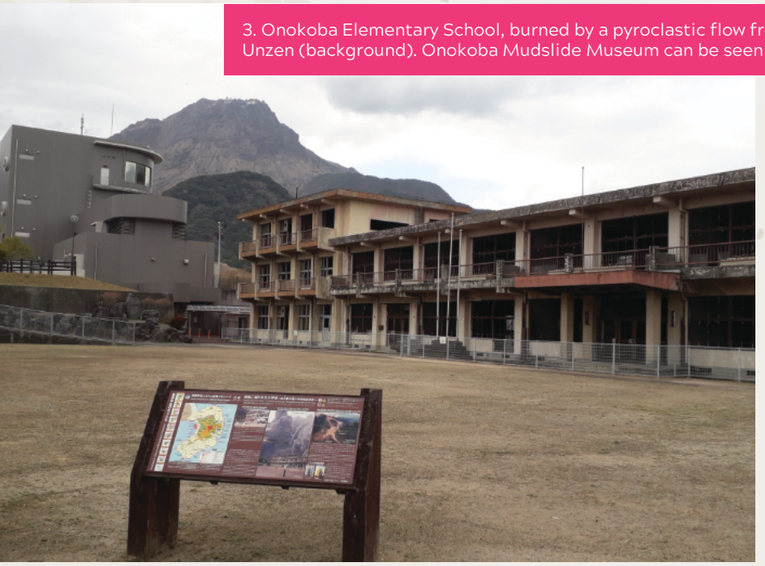
Living with a volcano

Mount Unzen, in Kyushu in southern Japan, is a volcano that has periodically erupted over many thousands of years.

In historic times, earthquakes triggered the collapse of a mountain, causing a gigantic landslide destroying the town. Since then, the town has been rebuilt on top of the landslide debris *(photo 1)*.



2. Buried Houses Museum, Shimabara.



3. Onokoba Elementary School, burned by a pyroclastic flow from Mount Unzen (background). Onokoba Mudslide Museum can be seen on the left.



4. Survivor Ginkgo tree, Onokoba Elementary School.

Houses buried by a mudslide from Mount Unzen are preserved as a memorial and a museum, the Buried Houses Museum, in Shimabara *(photo 2)*.

A school that was burnt by the pyroclastic flow from Mount Unzen is preserved as a monument. Scorch marks can still be seen on the building. A mudslide museum and observation tower has been built alongside the school, to educate people about the impact of the mudslide and pyroclastic flow. The area beyond the museum and school is mostly out of bounds *(photo 3)*.

As at Hiroshima, a survivor tree (a Ginkgo) next to the school is held to be a powerful symbol of recovery *(photo 4)*.

A museum high on the side of the volcano educates people about the process of ecological recovery *(photo 5)*.

At Unzen Onsen, high on the volcano, a spa town is based on the hot water springs. Natural hazards can also be nature's gifts for people to enjoy. Mount Unzen was Japan's first National Park, a place for people and nature *(photo 6)*.



5. Heisei Shinzan Nature Centre, a museum that educates about ecological recovery, Mount Unzen.



6. Hot water springs at Unzen Onsen are a popular tourist attraction.



Renewed multilateralism

within, between and across sectors

From the Pact for the Future

"We also reaffirm that the three pillars of the United Nations - sustainable development, peace and security, and human rights - are equally important, interlinked and mutually reinforcing. We cannot have one without the others.

We recognize that sustainable development in all its three dimensions is a central goal in itself and that its achievement, leaving no one behind, is and always will be a central objective of multilateralism. We reaffirm our enduring commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. We will urgently accelerate progress towards achieving the Goals..."

Actions from the Pact for the Future:

“Action 38. We will transform global governance and reinvigorate the multilateral system to tackle the challenges, and seize the opportunities, of today and tomorrow.

Action 45. We will strengthen the United Nations system.

Action 55. We will strengthen our partnerships to deliver on existing commitments and address new and emerging challenges.”

What is multilateralism anyway?

The last section of Our Common Agenda is focussed on a revitalised United Nations. What does multilateralism have to do with museums?

The UN says:

“Multilateralism, traditionally, refers to a collective action coordinated between at least three actors. It implies that the actors have a shared realization that it is in their interests to work together to resolve problems that are bigger than their individual efforts could tackle.

Multilateralism helps nations to confront complex global challenges through a universal approach... The spirit of multilateralism is: ‘together, we are stronger.’ Standing at the heart of multilateralism, the United Nations (UN) forms the backbone of the contemporary multilateral system, serving as a platform for dialogue, cooperation, and collective action. Multilateralism is critical for addressing global issues such as peace and security, climate change, the sustainable development, and human rights.”

“Multilateralism and the multilateral system are closely interconnected concepts within the framework of international cooperation.

The multilateral system is the practical implementation of multilateralism, embodied by institutions like the United Nations and its various agencies. It emphasizes the importance of inclusive decision-making processes and shared responsibility in addressing international issues.

Key aspects of the philosophy of multilateralism include:

- **Collective problem-solving:** Multilateralism recognizes that many global challenges cannot be effectively addressed by individual nations acting alone.
- **Equality and inclusivity:** The multilateral approach values the participation of all nations, regardless of their size or power, in international decision-making processes.
- **Shared responsibility:** Multilateralism promotes the idea that all countries have a role to play in addressing global issues.
- **Rule-based international order:** The philosophy emphasizes the importance of adhering to international laws and norms to maintain stability and fairness in global relations.
- **Sustainable development:** Multilateralism is closely tied to the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), recognizing the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental issues.
- **Dialogue and diplomacy:** The multilateral approach prioritizes peaceful resolution of conflicts through dialogue and negotiation rather than unilateral action or force.
- **Leave no-one behind:** This principle, emphasized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, underscores the commitment to inclusive progress and development for all.”

Multilateralism has already produced many great successes that have benefitted humankind: global standards, eradicating smallpox, repairing the ozone layer, to give just a few examples. These require global co-operation.

Yet, multilateralism is under threat:

- **rising nationalism and unilateralism**
- **increasingly complex and interconnected global issues**
- **lack of financial and other resources**
- **and the need to reform governance of institutions to meet modern needs**

TO DO

Consider these four massive challenges to multilateralism. How is your museum negatively impacted by these trends? What can it do to resist them and to promote multilateralism more widely?

Multilateralism means co-operation between three or more parties. Consider some examples of international working that fulfil this definition. What about examples of cross-sector working that form a kind of multilateralism?

The framework for multilateralism outlined earlier could easily be applied to the museum sector, as a sector and not a sum of the parts. How well does the sector work towards these principles already? What is missing?

For more information, see:

UNDP (2024). What is multilateralism in 2024?

UN Geneva (2021). Multi what? A short guide on multilateralism and its role in our daily lives. UN Geneva.

Adams, B. and G. Luchsinger (2012). Reclaiming Multilateralism: for people, rights and sustainable development. United Nations.

Common goals and approaches for multilateralism

Through this guide we have explored many topics and frameworks that enable all of us - whether as individuals or as organisations (such as museums), or in networks - to collaborate more effectively. We have explored many topics that help us understand the challenges and opportunities, to set worthwhile goals, to make use of existing frameworks and tools, to make plans and do the work, and to tell our story in meaningful ways.

What is the point of doing all this? Multilateralism - working together across and between sectors - achieves much, much more than 'going it alone'. Neoliberalism may push museums to behave in selfish, competitive ways, but there are other ways to work. Foregrounding human rights and rights-based approaches, and working towards environmental goals, give us a different set of priorities. Sustainable development is also about working together - to address common challenges, to protect and develop our common resources, and involving people in decision-making, as well as promoting peace locally and globally. Every museum, everywhere, can take part in high-ambition action to address sustainable development challenges, tailored to local contexts. Small and medium-sized museums are especially well-placed to take part in sustainable development as they do not have the same 'baggage' as many of the large museums.

Just as we have seen that there are many common concerns supported by shared goals and existing international agreements (human rights, environmental goals, SDGs), there are already a large number of available common approaches and practical action plans that can help us get to work to address challenges and opportunities. We have met many of them in this guide.

Shared goals, strong partnerships within and between sectors and countries, common approaches, common methodologies of monitoring, evaluating and communication activity: these are the essential elements of stronger multilateralism.

In 2023, Jeffrey Sachs and others undertook a **pilot study** to investigate countries' support for the UN Charter as a measure of support for multilateralism.[35] It was based on five measures:

- Ratification of UN Treaties (meaning a country agrees to be bound by them)
- Contribution to overseas development assistance (ODA) as a % of gross national income (GNI)
- Militarisation and involvement in conflicts
- Unilateral measures against other countries (e.g. sanctions)
- Membership in UN institutions
- (A sixth measure was added in 2024, namely votes in accordance with the majority at the UN General Assembly)

The Multilateralism Index is calculated across these five (now six) measures. It is worth looking at the methodology and the rankings of different countries. The Index is included in the annual SDG Index report.

Overall, the country showing strongest support for multilateralism in 2023 was Barbados.

The country showing weakest support for multilateralism internationally - by far - was the US.

Overall results were slightly different in 2024 compared to 2023, but broadly similar, and the highest - and lowest-ranking countries retained their placings.[36]

TO DO

Look at the Multilateralism Index for your country. How does it rank? Is this higher or lower than you expected?

Museum multilateralism: towards a United Museums

How many museums can you think of that aim to be the biggest, the best, or with 'must see' exhibitions? These are all the language of Neoliberalism, of competition. That kind of language is also the language of unilateralism, of trying to out-do other museums so that visitors will go there rather than elsewhere. Multilateralism - collaboration between three or more parties - gives us a different perspective, that the many, many museums are at the same time unique, and part of a global family. The more museums work as partners, promote and stand up for one another, and don't just try to 'out-do' one another, the better the sector will be. Multilateralism is not just about partnerships between museums, but about connections with other sectors and with more of society.

While we may think of multilateralism as 'only' the work of governments, we will soon find that such an approach is woefully naïve and optimistic. Governments have shown all too often that, after they have signed onto international agreements, when they return home they face the realpolitik of complex domestic challenges. International relations can take a back seat. Populism makes this situation worse.
Let's look at the headings used by Sachs and others to benchmark support for multilateralism, and relate them to the work of museums:

- **Ratification of UN Treaties:** Which international treaties (Conventions), or Declarations has your museum written into its vision, mission, goals and strategies (and which has it left out)? Has your museum made a commitment to human rights and/or environmental agreements? If not, why not?
- **Contribution to overseas development assistance (ODA) as a % of gross national income (GNI):** What has your museum done to promote an understanding of the ways overseas development assistance is spent, or your government's commitment to ODA, its commitment to Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (by signing onto various international agreements), and its actual actions?
- **Militarisation and involvement in conflicts:** What has your museum done to raise awareness of how your country is involved in military conflicts, the history of conflicts, where conflicts are happening now, or to promote public participation in decision-making regarding military conflicts?
- **Unilateral measures against other countries (e.g. sanctions):** What has your museum done to raise awareness of what sanctions are, which countries and who are sanctioned, and how your museum is committed to upholding sanctions?
- **Membership in UN institutions:** What has your museum done to promote the work of UN agencies, such as UNESCO, UNICEF, UNRWA, UNDP, UNEP, or to promote a general understanding of the work of the UN, international law and the Rule of Law?
- **(A sixth measure was added in 2024, namely votes in accordance with the majority at the UN General Assembly):** What has your museum done to raise awareness of your country's actions in the United Nations, or to empower people to understand the Rule of Law and democracy?

While these actions may be looked at in relation to individual museums, or museum networks of organisations, multilateralism also requires co-operation: working together to achieve common results. Museums - which can be rather separate from one another - can act in multilateral ways when they:

- **Connect with external agendas**, with one another and with other partners: the Convention on Biological Diversity, Paris Agreement, SDGs, human rights, Disaster Risk Reduction, are all opportunities waiting for museums to join in.
- **Use shared goals, and shared approaches**, whether they come from within the sector or outside it. Common approaches build a common language, and help create opportunities for partnership for co-ordinated action, and to communicate joint action.
- **Take co-ordinated action**, tailored to local contexts, such as International Days, Years and Decades, the Global Biodiversity Framework and the Glasgow Work Programme on Action for Climate Empowerment.
- **Help one another raise the profile of museums:** rather than applying for awards for your own museum, nominate another museum. If you're lucky enough to have won an award, help others to do the same by not over-applying for awards for the same project/initiative, and avoid unnecessary competition.
- **Communicate joint action** rather than a museum's individual action: multilateralism is strengthened when museums communicate about the value of museums, not just their own museum.
- **Speak up for other the value of other museums that are under threat**. Stand up for other museums that are struggling.

Museum organisations, such as ICOM, can play key roles in this multilateralism. **ICOM has already adopted the SDGs** as a framework for museums everywhere. The **ICOM 2030 Action Plan** gives a common template for museums and networks everywhere to use. Co-ordinated actions such as **International Museum Day** are opportunities to collaborate. The ICOM Award for Sustainable Development Practice in Museums is a platform to communicate the joint value of museums.

One obvious way for museums and museum workers to take part in a museum multilateralism, is to involve themselves more in sustainable development groups. For example, the SDGs and the UN more generally are supported by **21 Major Groups** from civil society. UNEP has a lot of detailed information on how it works with Major Groups **on its website**. Many of these groups are relevant to the work of museums and museum work, yet hardly anyone from the museum sector takes part in them. They are a very good opportunity to network, understand sustainable development processes, and to really input into the shaping of sustainable development agendas.

Similarly, many of the UN Special Rapporteurs run regular consultations for the preparation of annual reports and thematic reports. Anyone with relevant expertise can make a submission towards these policy-shaping developments.

Following the work of IISD or the Sustainable Development Solutions Network is also a good way to get up to speed with sustainable development and keep abreast of recent developments.

Taking part in national and local sustainable development, and reporting actions for inclusion in reporting is an obvious way to contribute directly to sustainable development. For more information on how to do this, see **'Localizing the SDGs'**, which includes sections on the Voluntary National Review and Voluntary Local Review, which are reports for the SDGs.

There are plenty of ways for museums to be part of museum multilateralism.

You can explore some of these in other **Curating Tomorrow guides**.









Museum multilateralism contributes to SDG 17, especially SDGs 17.16 and 17.17







Decolonisation and multilateralism

Actions from the Pact for the Future:

“Action 14. Eliminate all forms of persistent historical and structural inequalities, including by acknowledging, addressing and taking effective measures to remedy past tragedies and their consequences, and eradicate all forms of discrimination.

Action 15. Honour, promote and preserve cultural diversity and cultural heritage, as well as languages, knowledge systems and traditions, and foster intercultural and interreligious dialogue, including through encouraging strengthened international cooperation on the return or restitution of cultural properties of spiritual, ancestral, historical and cultural value to countries of origin, including but not limited to objets d’art, monuments, museum pieces, manuscripts and documents, and strongly encourage relevant private entities to similarly engage, including through bilateral dialogue and with the assistance of multilateral mechanisms, as appropriate.

Action 16. Recognize, respect, promote and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, their territories, lands and ecosystems, while safeguarding their traditions, spiritual beliefs and ancestral knowledge, strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic social and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State; and ensure their right to participation in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, as determined by law and in accordance with international human rights obligations.”

When the United Nations was formed, many millions of people lived under colonial rule. From the start, supporting the self-determination of people and countries was a key aspect of the UN's work. Through the second half of the 20th century, UN membership grew significantly, as more and more formerly colonised countries and territories gained independence from colonial and imperial rule. This is decolonisation in its original sense: the transfer of power out of the hands of colonial settlers and governments, so that people determine their own government. Increasingly, the term 'decolonisation' is used in a different sense, to refer to a greater awareness of the impact of colonial and imperial mindsets on people in the past and today. The difference is important to understand.

Museums in some countries (notably in the Global North) are increasingly interested in evaluating the ways in which their collections and their interpretation were developed as part of the machinery of empire and colonialism. This work is often referred to as 'decolonisation' (sometimes with or without the inverted commas) or 'decoloniality'. However, this is to use decolonisation in a sense rather different to its original meaning. Such a dual usage has been criticised, as it can evade the return of life, opportunity, land and property that is at the centre of decolonisation in its original sense. There can also be a free movement between different terms and perspectives - colonialism, empire, globalisation, slavery, racism and antiracism, oppression in all forms, capitalism, climate change and climate justice - that packages different topics and projects together, but not always in clear ways.

Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang have emphasised[37] the importance of distinguishing between decolonisation in its original sense and the decolonisation of knowledge (or 'decolonisation'). They are emphatic that "Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools", and that decolonisation "specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life. Decolonization is not a metonym for social justice." They argue that the use of 'decolonisation' as a metaphor may get in the way of 'true' decolonisation. They identify a 'concern' for decolonisation as one of a number of 'settler moves to innocence': actions that settler societies take to absolve themselves of guilt or anxiety for the many ills of colonialism, but that also further their own interests and consequently further colonialist attitudes, and impede true decolonisation.

OXFAM International has stated that "the work of defining a decolonial pathway cannot be done by those who wield power; decoloniality should not be co-opted by those who currently hold power."

Let's look at some examples of the disconnect between decolonisation in its original sense, and its usage in museums:

There have been three previous International Decades for the Eradication of Colonialism, beginning in 1990 on the 30th anniversary of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. These have had very little profile in most countries. The Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism runs from 2021-2030.

The [First] International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-24) was an invitation to people and organisations everywhere to collaborate in partnership and solidarity. It had three main themes: **Recognition, Justice and Development** for Africans and people of African descent, and was an excellent opportunity for organisations, including museums everywhere, to play a part in promoting the diverse ways that people of African descent are part of humanity's past, present and future. The International Decade had very little profile in many countries. Fortunately, the benefits of the First Decade were widely recognised, leading to the launch of a Second International Decade for People of African Descent (2025-34). The three missions remain the same: Recognition, Justice and Development. Having missed the opportunity first time around, let us hope that more museums take up this initiative.

When Barbados officially became a republic in 2021, this was part of a long process to independence from centuries of colonial settlement and exploitation. The move was described as **"the capstone from a much longer process of decolonisation from Britain"**. Yet museums and museums organisations in the UK did not make the connection between their work on 'decolonisation' and this development.

In 2024, moves were made to transfer the Chagos Archipelago - **described by the UN as 'the UK's last African colony'** - to Mauritius, after centuries of UK rule (from the time of the Napoleonic Wars) and the forced eviction of the inhabitants in the 1960s. The matter continued to have a high profile in the media through 2024 and 2025, but museums and other educational institutions did not connect their 'decolonisation' actions with this topical development.

A wide range of complex current geopolitical situations have historic and contemporary links to colonialism and empire, and neocolonialism as countries seek to exert new power and influence for their own benefit. Russia's war to annexe territory of Ukraine; the hellish situation in Palestine; disputes over the Falklands, Gibraltar and other UK overseas territories; widespread civil wars and humanitarian disasters in African countries; heavy state debt of poor countries; internal colonialism and re-education in Xinjiang and Tibet; and many more crises.

Overseas regions and territories tend to get in the news for the wrong reasons: how the UK Overseas Territories are used as tax havens, of the disastrous impact of tropical storm in Mayotte (a French overseas territory), or Donald Trump's interest in the US acquiring Greenland.

All of these have a history linked to colonialism in one form or another. Understanding the background to these challenges helps avoid narrow understandings of what options are available to people and countries moving forwards.

Museums filled with collections from countries around the world could do much more to highlight the connections between countries (in the past and now), give a platform to people and communities to share their realities and challenges, promote greater solidarity between people and countries, and empower people to understand the world that they live in.

When museums and museum organisations put colonialism in a historical timeframe, they prevent people from understanding that colonialism is happening, right now. For example, the UK Museum Association has produced a Decolonisation Toolkit which states that "Historically the word 'decolonisation' referred to the political processes - including varied forms of anticolonial resistance - that ended direct colonial rule… Today decolonial thinking and practice recognises that, despite the formal end of colonial rule, the legacies of empire remain with us in many current political struggles and everyday experiences…"

While much of this is to be welcomed, it is crucial to point out that colonialism is not a thing of the past, as is suggested by putting it in a historical timeframe. Notwithstanding the UK Museum Association's remarks about the 'formal end of colonial rule', the majority of Non Self-governing Territories are governed by the UK. Of 17 Non Self-governing Territories on the official UN list, no less than ten are still overseen by the UK, three by France; two by the US, and one by New Zealand.

Around the world, there are a **surprisingly large number of places** - mostly islands, and many of which are very poor - administered by Global North countries. **Colonialism is not over.**

Current social, environmental and economic challenges that derive from past and present colonial relations are very widespread, for example neocolonialism for economic reasons in former African colonies and in other places.

Colonialism is not over.

New forms of colonialism are emerging with new challenges: 'carbon colonialism' for offsetting greenhouse gas emissions from the Global North and Global North companies in the Global South is one obvious example. 'Green colonialism' more broadly includes energy and water infrastructure developments in Global South countries that disenfranchise local communities and Indigenous peoples, or within Global North countries that are home to Indigenous peoples (for example Norway and Sweden). 'Waste colonialism' involves shipping waste from Global North to Global South countries, where it causes pollution. Internal colonialism sees large countries send their problems to their more remote areas, causing pollution and other problems in remote, often biodiversity-rich places, often inhabited by Indigenous peoples.

Why is it important to recall that colonialism is not a thing of the past?	
Legal reasons	Countries/territories subject to colonial rule may be in a grey area, subject to some laws from the colonial power, but not others. In many cases, they are used as tax havens that avoid the fair payment of taxes that could support sustainable development.
Economic reasons	Countries/territories subject to colonial rule may reasonably expect financial support from the relevant colonial power, but many are poor and lack basic infrastructure. Tax evasion in former colonies and in overseas territories is a serious barrier to sustainable development.
Biodiversity and other environmental reasons	Countries/territories subject to colonial rule are often home to many rare and endangered species and habitats. Yet, spending on conservation in these territories is typically far below spending by colonial powers in their main territory. Colonial powers often used (and still use) remote parts of their territory for military testing (e.g. atomic testing in Australia, Pacific islands and the USSR), as military bases, or to send toxic waste, or as a source of natural materials, all of which caused, and cause, environmental damage
Social reasons	As a result of poverty and lack of opportunity, human development may be significantly worse in countries/territories subject to colonial rule than in colonial powers' main territories. Yet, forgetting the historical and current relations between colonial powers and countries/territories subject to colonial rule, means that countries do not live up to their responsibilities.
Political reasons	Countries administering other countries/territories by colonial rule should ensure that the Rule of Law applies there equally as it does in their main territory. Yet, there are many situations where the administering countries do not ensure that international agreements are properly adopted and applied in these territories.

To give an example, the UK administers a number of territories around the world. Although the UK is a signatory of a number of environmental agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Paris Agreement, incredibly, these agreements have not been fully applied to the colonially administered territories. While the UK could oblige local politicians to adopt these agreements, **it has not done so**.[38]

Museums are complicit in historical colonialism and its injustices when they underplay the relationship between their own histories and collections, notably benefactors, philanthropists (past and present), finance as well as collections from colonial contexts.

Museums are complicit in contemporary colonialism when they fail to raise awareness of colonialism being a thing of the present, not the past.

Museums today are implicated in neocolonialism when they validate companies involved in neocolonial activities by accepting them as sponsors and partners, and where they are involved in or support research that aims to advance neocolonial objectives (notably the quest for minerals in formerly colonised countries), and where their finances (bank accounts, pension funds) are funded by neocolonial activities.

Tendayi Achiume, UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Intolerance, **reported in 2019** that reparations for slavery and colonialism should address both historic wrongs and contemporary structural inequality built under slavery and colonialism. She recommended that reparations for colonialism and slavery should include educational measures:

"to ensure national and international consciousness of the scale, scope and contemporary legacies of racial discrimination, rooted [in] slavery and colonialism…Ensuring historical and political consciousness, especially among contemporary beneficiaries of slavery and colonialism, is an important step towards building the requisite political will to make reparations a reality. Ahistorical understandings of the present operate as a barrier to achieving reparations."

Museums efforts to support decolonisation, in its original sense, will be strengthened when they are related to actions that can be taken to address inequality around the world now: education on historical and contemporary connections between countries; and actions that people, organisations and countries can take to strengthen international solidarity, to ensure that Overseas Development Assistance promises are fulfilled, and to fulfil the many commitments countries have made to honour their Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities.

For countries that were most negatively affected by slavery - countries where people were forcibly taken and enslaved, or where they were forced to work under conditions of bondage - addressing the legacies of slavery is a crucial aspect of decolonisation. Injustices built over centuries continue today by a variety of means. Often, the same countries that benefited most from slavery, are the ones that continue to hold power and hold other countries back by a variety of means. There are louder and louder calls for reparation, to provide some compensation to right the wrongs of the past and the present.



point reparation plan

CARICOM (the co-operation community of Caribbean countries) has stated:
"Ever since slavery was abolished in the Caribbean in the 1830s and in the broader Americas in the 1860s and 1880s, the victims of slavery and their progeny have been struggling for justice to repair the damages wrought by this most horrific of crimes against humanity."

CARICOM has issued a 10-point reparation plan:

1. A Full and Formal Apology
2. Indigenous Peoples Development Programmes
3. Funding for Repatriation to Africa
4. The Establishment of Cultural Institutions and the Return of Cultural Heritage
5. Assistance in Remedying the Public Health Crisis
6. Education Programmes
7. The Enhancement of Historical and Culture Knowledge Exchanges
8. Psychological Rehabilitation as a result of the Transmission of Trauma
9. The Right to Development Through the Use of Technology
10. Debt Cancellation and Monetary Compensation

Further details are provided at the link above.

TO DO

Consider how your country inflicted slavery and colonialism on other countries, and which of those countries are held back by lack of access to economic resources today. What is the government doing to live up to its promises regarding the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities?

Empower people to understand how your country's actions continue the inequality of colonialism and imperialism, through aid for trade, high-interest loans/debt, and neocolonialism.

The UN System-wide Action Plan for Indigenous Peoples developed in consultation with Indigenous Peoples, was launched in 2015. It aims to help achieve the ambitions of the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) from 2007. The Action Plan has six priorities:

1. **Raise awareness of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**
2. **Support the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly at the country level**
3. **Support the realization of indigenous peoples' rights in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**
4. **Map existing standards and guidelines, capacities, training materials and resources… for the effective implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**
5. **Develop the capacities of States, indigenous peoples, civil society and United Nations personnel**
6. **Advance the participation of indigenous peoples in United Nations processes**

While the Action Plan is largely intended for the UN system, there is nothing to stop museums and museum organisations from doing their bit to help advance its goals and related actions. Indeed, museums have abundant opportunities to do so, and will also help advance their aspirations for decolonisation - whether in the original or metaphorical sense.

Take affirmative steps to address colonialism, imperialism and global inequality taking place around the world right now. Empower people to understand the past and present, and to determine desirable futures, for everyone.

If you are in a Global North country or museums, consider which of the 10 points of the reparation plan you can concretely act on.

Promote wide understanding and participation in relevant multilateral programmes, for example the Second International Decade for People of African Descent, Fourth International Decade to End Colonialism, environmental action programmes such as the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration and Global Biodiversity Framework.

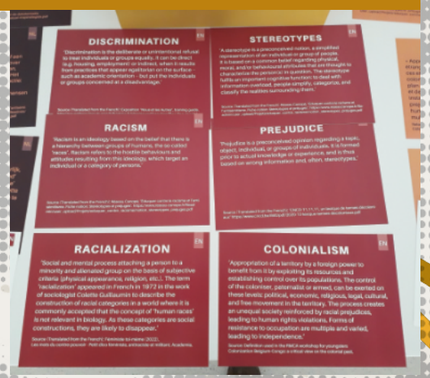
1. Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium.



2. Statues portraying racist stereotypes were gathered together and reinterpreted.



3. Educational materials for exploring racism and colonialism.





4. Statues portraying racist sterotypes in the central gallery are screened off.

PHOTO STORY

Museums and decolonisation

Museums are increasingly interested in 'decolonisation', but the term means different things to different people.

The Royal Museum for Central Africa - originally called the Museum of the Belgian Congo - is a museum on the outskirts of Brussels in Tervuren. The Museum was developed as propaganda for King Leopold II, who owned the Belgian Congo, and for Belgian colonial activities *(photo 1)*.

The Museum featured many statues that showed Congolese people in negative ways: as weak, aggressive and in need of protection and 'civilisation'. These statues have been removed from their original positions and gathered in one gallery, where their racist representations are interpreted *(photo 2)*.

The Museum also runs educational programmes on racism and colonialism, although it has been criticised for not going far enough in drawing attention to Belgian crimes against Congolese people during the colonial period *(photo 3)*.

In the central gallery, a number of statues with racist messaging are left in situ. They have been covered by semitransparent banners, as an artistic intervention that hides the statues and creates new images in front of them *(photo 4)*.

Galleries explore natural history and ethnographic themes. Such a museum may never be fully 'decolonised', but it may usefully contribute to decolonisation in its original sense, by raising awareness of historic colonialism and its legacies, promoting international solidarity today, and promoting common appreciation of shared cultural and natural heritage *(photo 5)*.



5. Natural history exhibits on the nature of Central Africa, featuring the rare Okapi.



1. A small collection of 20th and 21st Century coins from India, Australia, New Zealand, 'British Honduras', Solomon Islands, Canada, Jamaica, British Antarctic Territory, Fiji, Guernsey and St. Helena, all feature the heads of British monarchs.

2. A set of stamps issued by the British Indian Ocean Territory in 2021 that caused international dispute.





3. A small, colourful coin issued by the British Indian Ocean Territory. Such small, innocuous items can reveal much deeper narratives of state power when properly understood.

PHOTO STORY

Using collections to explore historic and contemporary colonialism

Colonialism is often mistakenly referred to as a 'thing of the past'. While it is true that many places that were colonised are not independent, many places are still subject to colonial rule. As the United Nations notes, the process of decolonisation is not over. New colonialist intentions and new forms of colonialism are also taking root. How can museum collections explore the past, present and future of colonialism?

Coins and stamps are among the most common and obvious manifestations of colonialism. Any small coin collection can be used to explore colonialism. Which monarch is featured on the coins of different places? Where did the metal for the coin come from? What is the intention of the imagery or any motto?

Twentieth-century coins of many places round the world featured the heads of British monarchs *(photo 1)*.

Minting coins and stamps, and running post offices, are common expressions of sovereignty rights and sovereignty claims.

The UK has been in dispute with Mauritius over the 'ownership' of the Chagos Islands, a group of islands near Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. They and Mauritius were once part of the British Empire, but Mauritius has been independent since 1968. Britain forcibly evicted thousands of people from the Chagos Islands in the 1960s and 70s to make way for a US air base. The Chagos Islands are also called the British Indian Ocean Territory or BIOT. The UK has been told by the international community, including the International Court of Justice and the UN General Assembly, to hand over the Territory to Mauritius.

The BIOT issued two sets of stamps in 2021, showing attractive, colourful sea slugs and tropical fish, and the head of Queen Elizabeth II and issued in pounds sterling. The international agency for postal unions pushed to make these stamps illegal to use, and that any post from the Chagos Islands should use stamps issued by Mauritius *(photo 2)*.

Also in 2021, a set of coins were issued by the BIOT. These coins are colourful, featuring tropical fish including the Clown-fish (familiar from the film 'Finding Nemo'). The coins are legal tender on the Chagos Islands/BIOT, using pounds sterling as the currency. Mauritius has moved to block the use of these coins on the Islands *(photo 3)*.

The choice of subject of the stamps and coins is also relevant. The UK and US had previously made moves to have the Chagos Islands declared as a marine nature reserve; a leaked document stated that this was intended to prevent Chagossian people from returning to the Islands.

The transfer of the Chagos Islands was hotly debated in 2024 and 2025, with radical right-wing politicians claiming that the transfer was a 'threat to British sovereignty'.

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