



Culture Greening Communities

Outcomes from the COP28 Greening Education Hub

Background

The **UN Climate Change Conference - United Arab Emirates (COP28)**, held in Dubai in December 2023, placed a focus on the essential role of education in addressing the climate emergency.

The **“Greening Education Hub - (Erth), Legacy from the Land of Zayed”**, hosted by the UAE Ministry of Education in partnership with UNESCO, provided a platform to spotlight and advocate for the role of education in combating climate change. This aligns with the **Action for Climate Empowerment** agenda and with **UNESCO’s Greening Education Partnership (GEP)**, a community of over 700 organisations and 80 Member States dedicated to getting every learner climate ready.

The Hub followed the Greening Education Partnership’s four pillars of action: greening schools, greening curriculum, greening capacities, and greening communities. IFLA hosted a side event that highlighted the **role of culture in greening education**, especially following a community-based, lifelong learning approach.

This session brought together speakers from the culture sector and beyond. It explored the critical importance of culture and traditional knowledge in empowering all people to understand the climate emergency and act for climate resilient futures.

We encourage the following key messages to be integrated and considered in GEP and Action for Climate Empowerment initiatives a initiatives.

Setting the Scene

International Agreements on Culture and Climate Education

Aysha Kamali, UAE Permanent Delegation to UNESCO, framed the discussion by providing insight into international policy decisions led by UNESCO that call for cultural approaches to education for sustainable development.

She noted two important initiatives which provide a strong backdrop for integrating culture into climate education:

1. The [Greening Education Partnership](#) was launched as a result of the Transforming Education Process in November 2022 and places greater emphasis on getting all learners engaged in climate action through education.
2. The [2022 Mondiacult Declaration](#) stresses the importance of integrating cultural heritage and creativity into international discussions on climate change. This declaration further underlines the importance of enhancing synergies between culture and education, including informal and non-formal education.

The United Arab Emirates has been leading further development on these topics, through the initiative to revise a framework on culture and arts education, as well as a call to [strengthen the role of education and culture for addressing climate change as a key contribution to climate action](#).

Museums Shaping Narratives for a Better Future

Nicolas Kramar, Director of the Valais Nature Museum, Switzerland anchored the role of museums in greening communities with the International Council on Museums' 2022 [museum definition](#):

*"A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and **inclusive**, museums foster **diversity and sustainability**. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for **education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing**."*



He particularly noted the importance of narrative in helping people feel connected to the changing climate. He stressed that there **must not be a divide placed between culture and nature**, rather, approaches to one inform understanding of the other.

Beyond communicating about the climate emergency, the museum can be a place of **informal learning**, in which a **systems learning approach** is emphasised. This means that the emphasis is taken off achieving a complete mastery of scientific topics, and rather on imparting a deeper understanding of one's place in a larger, interconnected system.

Museums, through their collections, interpretation, and education programmes, can help visitors **address current realities**, engage in the development of soft and cognitive skills according to **clear learning objectives**, and through this, **shape narratives for a desirable future** of which they feel they have a role and responsibility to help create. For the latter, the **participation of communities** is essential.


Libraries Sharing Stories and Changing Minds

Eman Abushulaibi, Sharjah Public Libraries, stressed that libraries have great potential for changing minds and engaging all people in climate and sustainability.

Although libraries can **model sustainable behaviour**, for example, through their recycling practices, she stressed that this alone is not enough. Public libraries are spaces for greening education both in cooperation with formal school systems as well as through engagement with the community. This can include, for example, programmes for early learners, youth leadership, and intergenerational learning opportunities.

This learning does not only happen through books, although much value can be found in traditional resources. Even libraries with relatively small collections can do a great amount of **community engagement and informal learning** within their spaces through community-based events, educational, and interactive programmes.

She noted that libraries engage in a sort of **recycling of knowledge** – creating enabling environments for knowledge exchange, storytelling, and



lifelong learning that localises climate issues and helps people see themselves as having a role to play within their communities.

Ruqiya Hussain Hassan, Public Libraries, Dubai Culture and Arts Authority, spoke further to the important role that a supportive environment has on enabling libraries to fill these functions. In the case of public libraries in Dubai, she noted that the local government recognises and supports libraries in their role as enablers of education on sustainable development, in line with the government of the UAE's focus on sustainability.


She stressed that libraries play an essential role by providing **access to information** and **public access to ICT**, helping people develop the capacity to **effectively use information** and **preserving information** to ensure continued access for future generations.

She highlighted a lifelong learning **Schools of Life** programme, an initiative launched by Dubai Culture & Arts Authority. Dubai Public Libraries also offered a **Summer Camp** held under the theme 'Sustainability', in which children discovered ways of recycling, building sustainable cities, conserving water in Dubai, adapting to the climate, and exploring urban green spaces and biodiversity in Dubai.

Importantly, she noted the **importance of cooperating and partnering** with various institutions in society, especially those concerned with education. In the case of Dubai, cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Knowledge and Human Development Authority helped develop a clear strategy aimed at educating the new generation and introducing a comprehensive concept of sustainability and the practices that contributes to preserving the environment and countering climate change.

Head, Hand and Heart: A Curriculum for Indigenous Knowledge

Suwichan (Chi) Phatthanaphraivan, Assistant Professor at Srinakharinwirot University (Thailand) shared a powerful case study on **integrating traditional knowledge into a curriculum** that can be more broadly taught and evaluated alongside the modern Thai curriculum.



This curriculum centres on the knowledge and cultural context of the Pgaz K'Nyau people of Northern Thailand, integrating their belief systems and traditional practices into lessons on sustainable farming, fishing, and land use, centring **personal responsibility** for the environment.

By taking students **outside the classroom, engaging community members and local knowledge-holders** in lesson creation, and linking learning outcomes to traditional beliefs which centre the local environment, this curriculum injects a deep connection to the land into learning concepts of environmentally sustainable practices.

It inspires **conversations** between teachers, villagers, parents, and teachers and centres the importance of preserving **Indigenous knowledge, language, and belief systems** within greening education initiatives.

Key Messages

International Cooperation for Culture-Based Climate Education

At the request of the United Arab Emirates, UNESCO has **called for international cooperation and efforts** to [strengthen the role of education and culture for addressing climate change as a key contribution to climate action.](#)

Following the UAE's initiative, as an outcome of their October 2023 meeting, the UNESCO Executive Board:

- Encourages Member States to join the Greening Education Partnership and **integrate education for climate empowerment** into all relevant sectors
- Invites Member States to **exchange good practice** on culture based climate education
- Recognises the need for **meaningful engagement** of youth, culture professionals and educators, in their role as agents of change

This initiative has responded to the need for specific action on linking culture and education in terms of addressing the climate crisis. It can serve as a basis for further calls to recognise the role that cultural stakeholders play in greening education and empowering climate action at the national and local levels.



What is needed to maintain and grow culture-based initiatives?

For Cultural Stakeholders:

- **Clear learning objectives** set by cultural institutions to optimise their greening education programmes;
- **Continuity in support** for teachers, educators, institutional staff, and knowledge holders to sustainably maintain their work;
- **Capacity-building**, such as training opportunities and access to materials;
- Increased **knowledge exchange and cooperation** between cultural institutions, including between museums, libraries, and other knowledge holders;

For Governments:

- **Greater coordination** within countries to dismantle silos in education for sustainable development, integrating a whole-community approach;
- **Cooperation** between cultural institutions/educators and municipal services and local or national authorities, recognising their role as partners in greening education;
- **Integration of cultural institutions** into greening education plans at the subnational and national levels, including cooperation with ACE Focal Points and UNESCO National Committees;

How can we measure and communicate success?

Setting clear learning objectives can help measure success and communicate impact. Impact is challenging to measure, as participating in an event, exhibition, or lesson does not necessarily translate into behavioural change.

The Indigenous learning example uses the **head, heart, and hand approach** for a holistic way to set learning objectives.

The *head* measures what information learners must acquire. The *heart* measures what learners must be aware of in terms of ethics and responsibilities. The *hand* measures what learners must be able to do.



Every sector and institution works within its own context and has its own ways to measure, so the need to find ways to coordinate is critical.

We can work towards:

- Breaking down silos between cultural institutions
- Exchanging on good practice and finding possibilities to collaborate
- Sharing data on learning objectives and indicators
- Working together with municipal and national climate education partners within ministries, local government, and national UNESCO committees

By working together to support and measure local impact, and sharing it on the national and international stage, we can highlight the crucial role of culture in greening communities and empowering climate action.

About IFLA

IFLA is the global voice of the library and information fields.

Our work is guided by the vision of a strong and united global library field powering literate, informed, and participatory societies. We benefit from a strong member base from around 140 countries in all regions.

Our work amplifies the activities being carried out by libraries of all types, all around the world, to empower their users and communities to take climate action.

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