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Cultural Preservation in the Context of Climate Change

Authors: Emily Dorman, Victoria Camacho, Alicia Bolton
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Introduction

The British Council defines cultural heritage as the legacy of physical artifacts, traditions, and knowledge passed down through generations that helps define the identity of peoples and communities worldwide.¹ This heritage can be tangible, such as historic buildings, monuments, art, manuscripts, and archaeological sites, or intangible, encompassing practices, oral traditions, performing arts, local knowledge, and rituals that are lived and passed down within communities. Both tangible and intangible heritage link the present to the past and serve as the backbone of a community's culture, but the way in which they're preserved is vastly different. Tangible heritage is physical and often visible, while intangible heritage exists in social practice, memory, and expression, so the dangers they face aren't uniform.

Climate change is a major threat to the world's cultural heritage due to rising sea levels, extreme weather events, changes in precipitation patterns, and other related environmental factors. According to an analysis done by UNESCO and its partners, "one in every six cultural heritage sites is endangered by the effects of climate change, and a third of the world's cities with a rich cultural heritage are found in low-lying areas along the coast that could be impacted by the effects of sea-level change." Furthermore, 60% of the World Heritage sites in countries bordering the Mediterranean are at risk due to "the effects of rising sea levels on coastal flooding and erosion."²

Intangible heritage is also affected by climate change, but not in the same way. Specifically, environmental changes affect the practices associated with particular climates or certain rhythms of the seasons, thereby impacting rituals, celebrations, and even traditional ways of harvesting food. Calendars, natural knowledge about particular environments, festivals, and foodways can all be affected if climate conditions change too fast or erratically. In fact, recent studies have shown that while tangible heritage often receives the most attention, intangible cultural expressions are equally at risk and essential for community resilience and climate adaptation.³

Colonial Impact

While climate change threatens cultural heritage globally, its impacts are not evenly distributed. Colonialism has played a significant role in shaping contemporary patterns of environmental vulnerability, land dispossession, and cultural marginalization, particularly among indigenous peoples and communities in formerly colonized regions. These historical processes continue to influence how cultural heritage is exposed to and affected by climate-related threats today.

Imperialist systems often depended on the large-scale extraction of natural resources, the restructuring of local economies, and imposing systems of government that disrupted communities' relationships to their environments. Indigenous land stewardship practices and traditional ecological knowledge, many of which were well adapted to local climatic conditions, were frequently suppressed or excluded from decision making processes in favor of colonial land

¹ "Climate Change Impacts on Cultural Heritage Final Report the British Council Strategic Literature Review: Climate Change Impacts on Cultural Heritage Final Report." n.d.

https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/climate_change_impacts_on_cultural_heritage_report.pdf.

² UNESCO World Heritage Centre. 2015. "Climate Change and World Heritage." Unesco.org. 2015.
<https://whc.unesco.org/en/climatechange/>.

³ Markham, Adam. 2022. "Protecting Intangible Cultural Heritage to Support Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Efforts." IPI Global Observatory. November 10, 2022.
<https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/11/intangible-cultural-heritage-climate-adaptation-and-mitigation/>.

tenure systems and development models.⁴ As a result, many communities were displaced from ancestral territories or confined to environmentally vulnerable regions, including low lying coastal areas, floodplains, and arid zones, increasing their exposure to the impacts of climate change.⁵

These disruptions have had lasting consequences for both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Sacred sites, historic settlements, and culturally significant landscapes face increasing risk from sea level rise, desertification, and extreme weather events. At the same time, intangible heritage (including seasonal rituals, oral traditions, subsistence practices, and ecological knowledge) has been undermined as environmental conditions change and access to culturally significant land is restricted or lost.⁶ In this way, climate change accelerates processes of cultural erosion that were initiated under colonial rule.

In some cases, contemporary climate responses have reflected similar patterns of exclusion. Conservative initiatives, climate migration projects, and land use policies that do not meaningfully include indigenous communities risk reproducing forms of “green colonialism,” in which land is managed or repurposed without free, prior, and informed consent. While such initiatives are often intended to address environmental degradation, they may further restrict communities’ ability to maintain, practice, and transmit their cultural heritage.

Environmental Displacement and the Absence of Legal Recognition

Climate change is also contributing to increased displacement through sea level rise, desertification, extreme weather events and environmental degradation. However, individuals and communities displaced by environmental factors are not formally recognized as refugees under international law. The 1951 Refugee Convention does not include environmental or climate related causes of displacement, resulting in significant legal and protection gaps for those forced to relocate due to climate impacts.

The absence of an internationally recognized definition for environmental or climate refugees limits access to legal protections, resettlement mechanisms, and long term support. This gap is particularly consequential for indigenous and culturally rooted communities whose identities, traditions, and livelihoods are closely tied to specific territories and ecosystems.⁷ Displacement often disrupts cultural continuity by separating communities from sacred sites, ancestral lands, and traditional knowledge. For many indigenous communities, climate induced displacement mirrors historical patterns of forced relocation experienced during colonial periods, compounding existing social and cultural vulnerabilities. Furthermore, regions most affected by climate displacement are often those that contributed least to global greenhouse gas emissions but remain highly exposed due to histories of underdevelopment and extractive economic systems.⁸ This dynamic highlights the intersection between colonial legacies, climate change,

⁴ Human. 2025. “Indigenous Survival in the Face of Environmental Damage.” HRRC. May 13, 2025. <https://www.humanrightsresearch.org/post/indigenous-survival-in-the-face-of-environmental-damage>.

⁵ United Nations. 2026. “Redirecting.” Google.com. 2026. <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/unpffi-mandated-areas-environment&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1769059734973524&usg=AOvVaw2lC3Wf0MYfupiRaOJIn9tN>.

⁶ Ford, James D., Nia King, Eranga K. Galappaththi, Tristan Pearce, Graham McDowell, and Sherilee L. Harper. 2020. “The Resilience of Indigenous Peoples to Environmental Change.” *One Earth* 2 (6): 532–43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2020.05.014>.

⁷ Notess, Laura. 2018. “For Indigenous Peoples, Losing Land Can Mean Losing Lives.” *World Resources Institute*, May. <https://www.wri.org/insights/indigenous-peoples-losing-land-can-mean-losing-lives>.

⁸ “UNPFFI Mandated Areas - Environment | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD).” n.d. Social.desa.un.org. <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/unpffi-mandated-areas-environment>.

and cultural preservation, raising broader questions about equity, responsibility, and the adequacy of existing international legal frameworks.

Existing International and Domestic Frameworks

In recent years, many nations have begun drafting policies that will safeguard cultural heritage against the effects of climate change. Under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, participating states are urged to incorporate climate change adaptation and resilience measures in the management of heritage through the Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage, adopted by consensus in 2023. The Convention guides nations on how to formulate measures that will help them protect cultural sites against flooding and heat stress.⁹ Under the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, over 180 states have agreed to follow a framework to protect intangible heritage by promoting education, creating national inventories, and emphasizing transmission over simple preservation.¹⁰ At the regional level, treaties such as the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe offer legally binding mechanisms for conserving tangible heritage.¹¹ Beyond treaties, international alliances like the Climate Heritage Network unify governments, civil society, and cultural institutions to integrate cultural heritage into climate policy and national adaptation planning. Despite these efforts, only 20 out of 65 countries surveyed include cultural heritage in their national climate adaptation plans, illustrating gaps that remain in policy adoption and implementation.¹²

National governments are also taking direct actions, blending policy and grassroots measures. Many states have incorporated heritage into disaster risk reduction policies, and international reporting indicates at least 82% of states have developed a national disaster plan that considers heritage sites, and 73% have developed measures to lower environmental damage at such sites by structurally reinforcing historic buildings and implementing community education programs. Going forward, global collaboration through the Global Goal for Adaptation (GGA) is actively encouraging member states to integrate cultural heritage targets into national climate adaptation strategies.¹³

A government that has done this particularly well is India through an endeavor known as the Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti Cultural Revival Project in the Indian capital of Delhi. Although it's not specifically a climate change adaptation project, it's a project that has run for a considerable period of time and represents an example of cultural heritage conservation coming into contact with ideas of environmental sustainability. Local partners restored monuments using traditional materials and trained local artisans in conservation techniques. Simultaneously, infrastructure upgrades included improved drainage and green planting to reduce ecological stress, while cultural festivals and craft workshops reinforced intangible heritage practices and community identity. This project has been recognized globally, even receiving a UNESCO Asia-Pacific Award of Excellence for their dedication to managing cultural heritage in an

⁹ UNESCO. 1972. "The World Heritage Convention." UNESCO. 1972. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/>.

¹⁰ UNESCO. 2003. "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage." Unesco.org. UNESCO. 2003. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>.

¹¹ "Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe *." 1985. <https://rm.coe.int/168007a087>.

¹² 2026. Unesco.org. 2026. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000395681>.

¹³ World, UNESCO. 2018. "47th Session of the World Heritage Committee." Unesco.org. 2018. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/47COM/documents>.

inclusive manner.¹⁴ Projects like this demonstrate how integrating heritage preservation with broader social and environmental strategies can build resilience in the face of climate change.

Case Studies

Climate change is one of the greatest threats to World Heritage. Globally, temperatures are rising, weather patterns are becoming more erratic, natural disasters are increasing in frequency, and sea levels are rising by the year. Its devastation has no bounds, and its impact has taken root in almost every aspect of our lives; however, there is one area that is relatively silent amidst the chaos. One that is more susceptible to irreversible damage if the world turns a blind eye to history. Yes, oceans rise, and empires do fall, but even though we've been there through it all, the international community cannot let push come to shove. The international community must remain ahead of the curve to protect the history that has shaped our societies.

Rapa Nui- Easter Island, Chile

In one such place, the preservation of culture is integral to protecting history. For the people of Rapa Nui, the preservation of their island is vital to their history. The island of Rapa Nui, or as the world knows it, Easter Island, sits 2,300 miles off the coast of Chile. Polynesian travelers from modern-day French Polynesia were said to be the first to make contact with the island, settling there between 800 and 900 AD¹⁵. These settlers established a powerful tradition of monumental sculpture and architecture, creating impressive statues called *moai*. These statues are not just archaeological artifacts; they represent deified ancestors and are central to Rapa Nui identity, genealogy, and spirituality. The island is home to an estimated 900 moai statues, more than 300 ceremonial platforms, and thousands of structures related to regular habitation. Among these were houses, settlements for funeral rites, and agriculture¹⁶.

These moai have truly seen it all, withstanding time, civil war, ecological depletion, colonialism, and more. However, external forces are beginning to threaten the island: sea levels are rising, causing seasonal waves to potentially reach Ahu Tongariki, Rapa Nui's most iconic ceremonial platform¹⁷. These waves and coastal flooding cause erosion and could impact 51 other cultural assets that include several moai heads. The erosion also goes beyond just the coastlines; torrential rain also has an impact. While overall, the island has seen a significant reduction of rainfall within the past three decades, the downpour appears to be heavier.¹⁸ Torrential rain has a devastating impact on the moai as they are carved from tuff, a material made of volcanic ash, which is susceptible to damage as it is porous. Thus, many statues have seen some wear. Despite the heavy downpours, it does not prevent drought. In fact, in October 2022,

¹⁴ "Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative." 2023. Nizamuddinrenewal.org. 2023. <https://www.nizamuddinrenewal.org/cultural-revival/>.

¹⁵ Hunt, Terry L. 2017. "Rethinking the Fall of Easter Island." American Scientist. February 6, 2017. <https://www.americanscientist.org/article/rethinking-the-fall-of-easter-island>.

¹⁶Centre, UNESCO World Heritage. n.d. "Rapa Nui National Park." UNESCO World Heritage Centre. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/715/>.

¹⁷ University of Hawaii at Manoa. "Scientists warn ocean could soon reach Rapa Nui's sacred moai." ScienceDaily. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2025/08/250812234532.htm (accessed January 21, 2026).

¹⁸McGowan, Charis. 2024. "'Moai Designs Are Getting Lost': Extreme Weather Chips Away at Easter Island Statues." *The Guardian*, May 21, 2024, sec. Global development. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/article/2024/may/21/easter-island-rapa-nui-statues-moai-erosion-climate-crisis-chile-extreme-weather>.

the island experienced a blaze that burned approximately 247 acres of land, caused by historic drought levels. Therefore, damaging a minimum of 22 statues.

In response to the wildfire, the indigenous community, Mau Henua, in collaboration with UNESCO, the Chilean government initiated actions to diagnose, restore, and prevent further deterioration of the moai and other structures. The diagnosis identified various climatic factors such as fires, water, erosion from wind, and water. This diagnosis also revealed the effects that these factors produced, such as discoloration, the presence of vegetation within the statues, such as moss and lichen, and the recurrent wear on the statues.¹⁹ Rather than relying on modern materials such as concrete, which can accelerate long-term damage, restoration prioritizes the implementation of ancestral methods, reflecting an understanding of stone behavior, moisture flow, and balance developed over centuries. These techniques prioritize cultural integrity and sustainability over short-term fixes. Traditional landscape knowledge also plays a critical role in coastal management. For the Rapa Nui people, the coastline is a cultural and spiritual space, governed historically by practices such as *tapu* or restrictions that regulated resource use and protected vulnerable areas.

Contemporary coastal strategies increasingly reflect this worldview, favoring natural buffers, vegetation restoration, and culturally informed stone placement rather than intrusive seawalls. The utilization of stone in lithic mulching around sites reduces soil erosion and retains moisture, resulting in improved soil quality that helps maintain the land for upright moai and sustains traditional crops like sweetpotato. It's a solution that directly supports food sovereignty for Rapanui while protecting archaeological landscapes from degradation. Protecting the land is also changing the tide at sea, with involvement in conserving the reefs around the island. The reefs play an essential role in the ecosystem, offering shelter for fish to congregate while also acting as a barrier to dull waves and preserving coastlines. Since the wildfire, the Chilean government has nearly quadrupled the budget for world heritage site conservation, dedicating the allocation of these funds to 15 different sites, including Rapa Nui.

Ifugao Rice Terraces, Philippines

Nestled in the Philippine Cordillera Mountains, and what many have called the 'Eighth Wonder of the World', lies the ancient Ifugao Rice Terraces. It is an outstanding example of human advancement and ingenuity, even if the impressive structures date back two millennia. These terraces, built by the Ifugao people, are carved into the sides of mountains with stone and earth walls to construct productive fields. Fields include a self-sustaining irrigation system, where hand-carved, stone-walled steps funnel water from the misty rainforests through a network of bamboo pipes, canals, and earthen levees to flood each level, allowing for rice cultivation on steep slopes by mimicking natural water flow.²⁰ The terraces illustrate a persistence in culture and tradition as archaeological evidence reveals that this technique has been virtually unchanged. They are an engineering feat that is still in use today, sustaining the lives and livelihoods of many who live within the region.

¹⁹UNESCO. 2022. "UNESCO Diagnosis Identifies Conservation State of Rapa Nui Heritage Resources and Proposes Suggestions for Their Preservation." Unesco.org. 2022. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-diagnosis-identifies-conservation-state-rapa-nui-heritage-resources-and-poses-suggestions>.

²⁰ Hizon, Mike Dilger & Rico. 2018. "The Philippines' 2,000-Year-Old Engineering Feat." Www.bbc.com. April 13, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20180412-the-philippines-2000-year-old-engineering-feat>.

The Ifugao Terraces of the Ifugao Province are home to 48 rice clusters, five of which carry the UNESCO World Heritage status.²¹ Most terraces are localized in the central part of the northern island of Luzon: Nagacadan, Hungduan, Mayayao, Batad, and Bangaan.²² The Ifugao Rice Terraces epitomize the absolute blending of the physical, socio-cultural, economic, religious, and political environment, and their significance to the Ifugao people is invaluable. For the past 2,000 years, these terraces have been integral to the survival of its people and communities. However, several factors have arisen that pose a threat to the terraces. Climate change disrupts this balance in ways that threaten both material and intangible heritage. Altered rainfall patterns have made water availability increasingly unpredictable. Extended dry periods reduce irrigation flow, while intensified rainfall places strain on terrace walls not designed for such extremes²³. Landslides and erosion, triggered by heavier storms, can collapse stone walls and irrigation channels, requiring extensive labor to repair. These environmental stresses directly affect rice yields, which in turn disrupt planting and harvesting calendars that structure ritual life.²⁴ When agricultural rhythms falter, ceremonies tied to them weaken, placing cultural continuity at risk.

These climatic pressures intersect with existing social challenges. Outmigration of younger generations in search of wage labor has reduced the communal workforce needed to maintain the terraces and irrigation systems.²⁵ As fewer families rely on rice cultivation for their survival, traditional knowledge, once learned through daily participation in farming and ritual, is facing erosion. Climate change thus accelerates cultural vulnerability not only by damaging the landscape but by amplifying socioeconomic shifts that distance people from ancestral practices.²⁶

Despite these threats, the Ifugao Rice Terraces also demonstrate how cultural preservation can serve as a form of climate adaptation. Indigenous knowledge systems embedded in terrace construction, water management, and forest stewardship have enabled the Ifugao to cultivate steep mountain environments sustainably for centuries. It is widely recognized as one of the earliest sustainable agriculture techniques. Preservation efforts increasingly recognize that resilience lies not in replacing these systems with purely technical solutions, but in strengthening the cultural practices that sustain them. Community-led restoration of terrace walls, protection of forests, and revival of traditional farming methods help stabilize ecosystems while reinforcing cultural identity.

International and national initiatives, including UNESCO conservation programs, have begun integrating climate risk assessments with cultural preservation strategies. These efforts

²¹Mellor, Annapurna. 2018. “Home of the Ifugao: Discovering Tribal Banaue on the Trek to Batad.” Travelogue from Remote Lands. December 17, 2018.

<https://www.remotelands.com/travelogues/home-of-the-ifugao-discovering-tribal-banaue-and-the-trek-to-batad/>

²²UNESCO World Heritage Centre. 2010. “Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras.” UNESCO. 2010.

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/722/>

²³“New Report: Climate Risk Assessment of the Ifugao Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras.” 2024. Nationalgeographic.org. 2024.

<https://news.nationalgeographic.org/new-report-climate-risk-assessment-of-the-ifugao-rice-terraces-of-the-philippine-cordilleras/>

²⁴ Bulayungan Albano, Janni, and Marlon Matabye Martin. 2023. “Climate Vulnerability Assessment of the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras.” *Preserving Legacies*. 2023 Preserving Legacies.

<https://www.heritageadapts.org/risk-assessments/rice-terraces/>

²⁵ Acabado, Stephen, Adrian Albano, and Marlon Martin. 2025. “Conservation for Whom? Archaeology, Heritage Policy, and Livelihoods in the Ifugao Rice Terraces.” *Land* 14 (9): 1721–21. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land14091721>.

²⁶ “Ifugao People: Banaue Rice Terraces Builders & UNESCO 8th Wonder | Indigenous Peoples Repository.” 2025. Globalfirstnations.com. 2025. <https://www.globalfirstnations.com/peoples/ifugao.html>.

emphasize collaboration with local communities, recognizing that effective adaptation must respect customary governance, ritual life, and Indigenous knowledge.²⁷ Educational programs that involve youth in terrace maintenance, storytelling, and ritual practice are particularly significant, as they ensure that preservation is not limited to documentation but lived through practice. The Ifugao case demonstrates a broader lesson for cultural preservation in the age of climate change: culture cannot be preserved by freezing it in time. Instead, preservation must allow for adaptation, continuity, and transformation rooted in community values. The terraces endure not because they resist change, but because they have historically adapted to environmental conditions through collective knowledge and care. Climate change challenges this adaptability, but it also underscores the importance of protecting cultural systems as sources of resilience.

Ephesus, Türkiye

Under a burning sun sits an ancient city that stands as one of the most significant archaeological and cultural heritage sites of the ancient Mediterranean world. The city of Ephesus is made up of monumental architecture, urban layout, and layered cultural history that reflect millennia of human activity, from Hellenistic foundations to Roman imperial grandeur and a Byzantine center whose physical and cultural layers reflect the complex history of Anatolia. Its monuments, including the Library of Celsus, the Great Theatre, and the Terrace Houses, have made it one of the best-preserved ancient cities in the world. These qualities led UNESCO to inscribe Ephesus on the World Heritage List, where it is recognized for its outstanding testimony to successive civilizations and its historical role as a Mediterranean port city.²⁸

Although Ephesus is no longer a coastal port, its ancient harbour silted up over centuries, the broader Aegean region is experiencing climatic shifts that affect archaeological sites. Beyond the immediate pressures of mass tourism and archaeological degradation, long-term environmental changes, including rising temperatures, increased frequency of extreme weather events, and shifts in precipitation patterns, pose significant risks to both the physical fabric and cultural meanings of heritage sites. Recent studies regarding sea-level rise suggest that many heritage sites along the coasts of Turkey and Greece face a medium to high risk of inundation due to global warming. Under a one-metre (~3 ft) rise scenario, numerous historic cities would be partially submerged; a three-metre (~10 ft) rise would endanger additional sites, including Ephesus' ancient harbour area, indicating how shifting sea levels continue to challenge the region's archaeological record even far from the shoreline.²⁹ More broadly, climate change alters temperature, humidity, and rainfall patterns in ways that accelerate deterioration mechanisms in ancient structures. Ephesus' archaeological sites, composed of stone, marble, and plaster, are vulnerable to weathering, salt crystallization, erosion, and biological growth when moisture regimes change or when extreme heat amplifies chemical breakdown of materials. Additionally,

²⁷Bulayungan Albano, Janni, and Marlon Matabye Martin. 2023. "Climate Vulnerability Assessment of the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras." *Preserving Legacies*. 2023 Preserving Legacies. <https://www.heritageadapts.org/risk-assessments/rice-terraces>.

²⁸Centre, UNESCO World Heritage. n.d. "Ephesus." UNESCO World Heritage Centre. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1018>

²⁹Hughes, Rebecca Ann. 2024. "Climate Change Is Endangering Hundreds of Historic Sites in the Aegean." Euronews. Euronews.com. August 26, 2024. <https://www.euronews.com/green/2024/08/26/over-a-third-of-turkiye-and-greeces-heritage-sites-threatened-by-rising-sea-levels-study-f>.

local meteorological data and risk models applied to Ephesus indicate projected temperature increases of at least 2.5 °C (4.5 °F) in the coming decades. These changes may intensify evaporation rates, modify humidity around exposed ruins, and increase the frequency of erosion-inducing rainfall events or even fires.³⁰

The climate-induced threats posed to Ephesus exceed the physical; unfortunately, the overall destruction of these sites carries profound cultural implications. The archaeological sites embody more than just the stone mosaics: they represent human narratives, collective memory, and modes of social life that have shifted over time. When climate change accelerates the decay of monuments like the Library of Celsus or causes the destabilization of wall paintings and terrace houses, it compromises not only the physical evidence of past lives but also the ability of contemporary communities and visitors to connect with ancient cultural traditions. So, cultural preservation must be reframed to integrate adaptive conservation strategies that account for emerging climatic realities. Conservation frameworks must incorporate climate risk assessments, predictive modelling, and dynamic monitoring systems to anticipate damage pathways and to develop mitigation strategies that are both technically sound and culturally sensitive.

This is what Türkiye is hoping to accomplish with its ambitious ‘Legacy for Future Project’ (2024). It is a project to uncover and preserve its heritage, ensuring these assets are passed on to future generations. This project consolidates excavation, restoration, and landscaping efforts at all archaeological sites, which started gradually after the pandemic.³¹ The Grand Theater, Terrace Houses, Temple of Serapis, and Byzantine walls are among the many historical sites that are included within the restoration efforts. Aside from preservation, this project hopes to reconnect the city to the sea via canal projects. The Ministry of Tourism has also opened up specific sites at night for public viewing to reduce heat exposure and protect both tourists and the site’s fragile marble structures from daytime thermal stress.³² The Turkish government has also collaborated with international research institutions on climate-risk assessment for heritage, including the CRAFT Project, which aims to develop climate-risk assessment tools for Turkish heritage sites.³³ The ancient city of Ephesus serves as a poignant illustration of the complex interplay between climate change and cultural heritage preservation. Its rich archaeological record is indicative of centuries of Mediterranean history, but faces an uncertain future as environmental dynamics evolve rapidly. Preserving Ephesus in this era requires an expanded vision that incorporates climate science, resilient conservation practices, and robust local and global partnerships.

Conclusion

The issue of climate change is something that the international community cannot just swat at and ignore like a pesky fly. It is a pervasive issue that will affect everyone should it be

³⁰ The Cyprus Institute. n.d. “Cultural Heritage Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East Climate Change Initiative.” Accessed January 22, 2026. https://emme-cci.org/wp-content/uploads/13-Cultural_Heritage-Web-r1.pdf.

³¹ Xinhua. 2024. “Türkiye Launches Ambitious Archaeological Project.” News.cn. 2024. <https://english.news.cn/20240710/2c17fe4e7d664dfe92b7cff0c4ac9754/c.html>.

³² Yackley, Ayla Jean. 2024. “Turkey Keeps Ruins Open after Dark to Combat Heatwaves.” The Art Newspaper - International Art News and Events. September 16, 2024. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2024/09/16/turkey-keeps-ruins-open-after-dark-to-combat-heatwaves>.

³³ METU. 2017. “New International Project on Climate Change and Cultural Heritage | DEPARTMENT of CIVIL ENGINEERING.” Metu.edu.tr. 2017. <https://ce.metu.edu.tr/en/announcement/new-international-project-climate-change-and-cultural-heritage>.

uncontrolled, and the loss of any part of history and culture is alarming. While in committee, delegates should be focusing on addressing climate change, the preservation of history and culture, and the impact that climate change will have globally. Collaboration is key, and the need for a creative solution that protects not just history but the fabric of our societies as a whole is paramount. Effective cultural preservation in the context of climate change requires a holistic and forward-looking approach. Traditional conservation methods, while essential, must be complemented by climate-adaptive strategies that integrate scientific research, local and Indigenous knowledge, and community participation. Cultural heritage cannot be preserved by isolating it from change; rather, it must be supported as a dynamic and evolving system capable of adaptation while maintaining continuity with the past.

Ultimately, safeguarding cultural heritage amid a changing climate is not solely a technical or environmental concern; it is a matter of social equity, cultural rights, and collective memory. Protecting these irreplaceable cultural resources strengthens community resilience, reinforces cultural identity, and ensures that future generations inherit not only the physical traces of human history but also the values, stories, and relationships that give them meaning. Addressing climate change and cultural preservation together is therefore essential to building a more inclusive, resilient, and culturally sustainable future.

Guiding Questions and Suggestions

1. How has climate change affected your country? What have been the impacts of these effects: economically, culturally, politically, etc?
 - a. Identify specific cultural, historical, or spiritual sites that have been affected.
 - b. How has climate change affected those specific sites? If your assigned state has indigenous peoples attached to a specific site, what does that mean for them? How will they be affected?
2. Which communities are disproportionately affected by climate-related cultural loss: Indigenous peoples, island nations, rural communities, urban poor, etc?
3. If erratic weather events and natural disasters have impacted your country and have left citizens internally displaced, how has your state received those who have been internally displaced and labeled 'climate refugees'?
 - a. Research specific case studies.
 - b. If your state has had indigenous communities negatively affected by climate-related disasters, how has your state supported them? How do you support them while also acknowledging their cultural practices and individual sovereignty? If your state has not, why is that?
 - c. How does climate-induced displacement affect language, traditions, and social structures?
4. How have the impacts of climate change exacerbated existing issues resulting from colonialism?
5. What existing frameworks does your state have in place to protect historical, cultural, and spiritual sites?
 - a. Look into laws passed and UN resolutions, treaties, or agreements your state has (or has not) signed.
 - b. What roles do international organizations play in cultural preservation within your state? Is your state friendly to their contributions?