

Beyond Adaptation: Applying the Principles of the new ICOMOS International Cultural Heritage Tourism to address the longer-term impacts of climate change

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In the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2023, the top three risks over a ten-year period were: 1) Failure to mitigate climate change; 2) Failure of Climate Change Adaptation; and 3) Natural disasters and extreme weather events (WEF, 2023). Urban areas occupy less than 1 per cent of the Earth's land surface but house more than half of its people. Despite their steel and concrete, crowds and traffic, cities and towns are still ecosystems whose condition profoundly determines quality of life. Functioning urban ecosystems help clean our air and water, cool urban heat islands, and support our well-being by shielding us from hazards and providing opportunities for recreation. All of these presumed community benefits can be diminished in some way if the longer-term aspects of climate change are not planned for nor addressed.

This is also the case for cultural heritage sites, where diverse destinations such as Venice, Machu Picchu and the Acropolis have been affected by flooding and fires attributed to climate change. The new ICOMOS International Cultural Heritage Tourism Charter ('the Charter') is the first doctrinal document issued by the World Heritage Committee advisory body, since it declared a climate emergency in 2020 (ICOMOS, 2020). The Charter's underlines this point in Objective 3 - To guide cultural heritage and tourism management in supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Action policy. This is reinforced by Principle 7 - Integrate climate action and sustainability measures in the management of cultural tourism and cultural heritage (ICOMOS ICTC, 2022).

While the Charter can be viewed as a high-level statement of objectives and principles to manage cultural heritage sites at destinations, there is also the provision of key points that should be by government authorities and stakeholders in the planning, development and monitoring of these venues. This is particularly the case for climate change, where management at many cultural heritage sites have not yet linked planning, mitigation and adaptation measures to both support community well being, as well as the sustainability and resiliency of visitor economies.

A recent instruments developed by UNESCO, is the Visitor Management Assessment and Strategy Tool (VMAST), that is based on a World Heritage site's operational achievement against the targets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To determine how destinations are able to formulate plans and initiatives to focus on key sustainability challenges such as climate change, the VMAST and SDGs have been integrated with the Charter's Principles to set the basis for the Cultural Tourism and Visitor Management Framework (CT&VM Framework) that was developed for the Organization of World Heritage Cities by the ICOMOS ICTC. This has been one of the recent instances in 2023, where the Charter has been adapted for a range of practical purposes.

The case study will focus on the Rideau Canal, a 204-kilometre-long piece of infrastructure between Kingston and Ottawa, Ontario in Canada, which was nominated as a World Heritage site in 2007. Incorporating communities along the entire length of the Canal, the tourism industry contributed \$5.5 billion to the corridor's gross domestic product in 2016 (Parks Canada, 2022). Climate-change induced factors, such as high floodwaters on the Ottawa River restricting access to its northern entry in 2017 and 2019, and inconsistent winter weather patterns that led to skating rink operations being prevented from opening throughout the entire season in 2022, have significantly affected the dependent visitor economies and tourism revenues. What is not evident in the recent Rideau Canal and Merrickville Blockhouse Management Plan (2002) issued by Parks Canada is how these and other climate change factors can be mitigated or adapted to preserving this unique cultural heritage artefact and significant tourism revenue generator. Approaches to dealing with these looming issues via the Charter will be presented.