**Cultural Relations
Collection**

Emergencies, Emergences, Engagement: Cultural Relations and Climate Action

**Carla Figueira and
Aimee Fullman**

Part of
**The Climate
Connection**

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Foreword

The rapid changes currently affecting the Earth's environment amount to arguably the biggest story in human history so far – one that will affect every person on the planet.

The way we tell that story, the language we use and the people we engage will determine our success in minimising and mitigating its effects.

There is little dispute that action to avert catastrophic global heating is essential. But action does not take place in a vacuum. It is the consequence of data, calculation, reflection and the way in which concerned humans communicate.

So cultural relations, the art and practice of international communication as expressed through national cultural assets, has a vital (though largely unexamined) role to play.

As one of the contributors to this collection sums it up: 'Climate change is a crisis of culture.'

The study of cultural relations in the context of climate change – and perhaps more importantly, as a spur to action – is a young field, but one that needs to grow up fast.

This volume of essays commissioned by the British Council is an attempt to survey some of the thinking in the field. We've done this in partnership with researchers from a range of academic backgrounds and disciplines. These new and exciting voices had a brief to provoke and challenge as well as to illuminate – and their essays do just that.

The result is an excellent primer to a variety of approaches from a broad spectrum of authors – and subject matter from 'cli-fi' novels to the meaning of the climate strike movement.

The narratives of myth, religion and history fulfil our need to make sense of the world and our place in it. We urgently need to discover new ways to communicate our present predicament, but I believe all the cultural tools we need for the task are at hand.

The climate emergency has made a single interest group of all people on Earth. So, as well as being a moment of crisis and challenge, the period we are living through has the potential to be a time of unity and common purpose. In that fact, I find great hope.

Advancing as one global community to solve a challenge that is simultaneously paralysing in its enormity and impossible to imagine in its ultimate consequences, has never been attempted before. But that shouldn't stop us trying. Nothing else has ever been so important.

Kate Ewart-Biggs OBE
Interim Chief Executive, *British Council*

The Climate Connection Cultural Relations Collection Special Edition

The following essays are part of a special edition of the Cultural Relations Collection and part of the Climate Connection. You can find out more about the Climate Connection at www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection

You can find this special edition and other essays in the Cultural Relations Collection on our website at www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-series/cultural-relations

An obtuse triangle: the nexus between digital skills, soft power and climate change mitigation in Georgia

Jessica Gosling

Emergencies, emergences, engagement: cultural relations and climate action

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Empowering a world without fossil fuels: a crisis of culture

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Rethinking the unthinkable: what can educational engagements with culture offer the climate crisis?

Charlotte Nussey

Introduction to The Climate Connection Cultural Relations Collection Special Edition

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Three years ago, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an international body that brings together the world's leading climate scientists, published what is commonly referred to as the 1.5°C Report, in which for the first time ever the authors set an implicit deadline for decisive climate action. The report recommended reducing global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 45 per cent by the year 2030, or in other words limiting the warming of the atmosphere to 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels (IPCC, 2018). Beyond the 1.5°C threshold, report authors warned, lies a world marked by 'long-lasting and irreversible' risks for our ecosystems and societies alike (IPCC, p. 36). This unprecedented clarion call for action was the IPCC's attempt to underscore the seriousness of the global climate emergency and galvanise support for aggressive GHG emission reductions at the international and national levels.

Some climate activists have found hope, or at least a silver lining, in the global COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting that reduced economic activity would dramatically curtail carbon pollution (Balch, 2020). The year 2020 did see a decrease in that respect, but not by as much as was expected (Tollefson, 2021). And while calls for 'building back better' have grown in recent months, the general sentiment is that once the virus is brought under control, economic activity will rapidly rebound along with GHG emissions. Not only that, the virus is also said to have had negative effects on climate action. Travel restrictions caused by the pandemic have made it difficult for members of the global climate governance community (governments, NGOs, international organisations, business, etc.) and for activists to meet in person and work together towards more ambitious climate goals. The

postponement of COP26 in Glasgow to November 2021 is a case in point. Meanwhile, virtual meetings do not seem to be as effective as in-person gatherings (Evans & Gabbatiss, 2021).

That said, with or without a global pandemic grounding most flights and making face-to-face interactions impossible, the world's leaders have over the last three decades sought – with very mixed results – to build consensus around who should reduce their emissions, by how much, by when and at whose cost. In 2015, the Paris Agreement was hailed by some as a break to this impasse, though critics rushed to point out that the treaty had no punitive mechanisms and relied on voluntary contributions by states (called nationally determined contributions, or NDCs). Indeed, the world is currently on track to limit warming to about 2.4°C above pre-industrial levels, a far cry from the 1.5°C goal advocated by the IPPC and most environmental organisations, and that is based on national governments' pledges and targets rather than tangible progress (CAT, 2021).

It is clear that we need an unprecedented level of international co-operation to tackle the climate emergency. However, this co-operation can and should come in different iterations; effective collaboration of governments at the national level may not be sufficient to avoid the irreversible changes the IPCC warned of in the 1.5°C Report. What is needed is a global ethic of care and responsibility for the planet – a cultural change that would enable climate action in all facets of social life.

That is because climate change knows no borders and affects the world's cultures just as much as it affects our natural environments.

There is no single human or non-human on Earth that will be unaffected by the changing climate in one way or another. There is certainly some awareness that 'we're all in this together' among global leaders. After all, the Paris Agreement did away with categorising nations into those historically responsible for GHG emissions and the rest (Annex-I and non-Annex-I countries). Even the motto of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – 'leave no one behind' – has an unequivocally cosmopolitan ring to it.

That said, even though we may well all be in this together, we certainly are not equal. Different people will experience climate impacts based on where or who they are – seen from this perspective, climate change is a major socio-economic and political disruptor that can exacerbate global and local inequalities, deep as they already are. This is one of the main concerns of climate justice scholars and activists, who argue that, among other things, we need to refocus the climate debate and action towards those on its frontlines – historically marginalised communities and individuals, and countries that are disproportionately exposed or vulnerable to climate impacts despite having done little to cause it.

This is where the role of cultural relations becomes crucial. While there is no universally supported definition, cultural relations can be said to refer to 'interventions in foreign cultural arenas with the aim of enhancing intercultural dialogue and bringing about mutual benefits connected to security, stability and prosperity' (Gillespie et al., 2018, p. 5). Writing during the height of Cold War tensions, JM Mitchell (1986, p. 1) argued that cultural relations possessed great potential for fostering global stability and that 'alternative forms of international relations' lay beyond traditional diplomacy. Three decades on from the end of the Cold War, the importance of cultural relations in managing and mitigating global issues is more important than ever. It is difficult to imagine developing a global ethic of planetary care without intercultural dialogue and shared environmental and social values among the world's powerful.

However, cultural relations involves a range of actors and institutions beyond just governments, which has always set it apart from cultural diplomacy (Mitchell, 1986, p. 2). Recently, cultural relations has been harnessed in relation to a range of different issues and fields of study. There has been a 'cultural turn' in international development (Singh, 2019), English language assessment has been approached through the lens of cultural relations (O'Sullivan & Patel, 2019), and the continuing global COVID-19 pandemic has raised debate as to the implications of a shift from physical to digital cultural relations (Kerr, 2021). Despite the noted need to consider the role of culture and creative approaches to addressing climate change (Gabrys & Yusoff, 2012), efforts to address the climate emergency have seldom been considered from the vantage of cultural relations.

These emerging perspectives suggest that cultural relations has the potential to foster mutual understanding, trust and co-operation in the field of climate action. Whether rooted in exchanging global citizens' lived experiences of climate change or promoting cross-cultural co-operation in raising climate awareness and ambitions, cultural relations offers many ways to positively contribute to our planet-wide struggle to contain climate change and its impacts. However, precisely because climate change is riddled with international and

sub-national inequalities in terms of who caused it and who will be affected by its impacts, cultural relations must remain an explicitly reciprocal activity between equal partners (Gillespie et al., 2018). Cultural relations is different in this regard from soft power or cultural diplomacy, the pursuit of which can be problematic, and accused of evincing neo-colonial undertones. A cultural relations approach that is guided by principles of trust, reciprocity and equity – an approach embodied by climate justice – can act as a vehicle for sharing knowledge and experiences of climate impacts and injustices.

The six essays to follow exemplify how this can be achieved and reflect on the role cultural relations has had in shaping climate change discourse, activism and praxis. We now turn to these insightful contributions.

Overview of essays

In their essay on cultural relations and climate action, Carla Figueira and Aimee Fullman argue for the need to avoid distant, apocalyptic visions of climate change. Instead, they suggest telling 'better stories' about where we want to go and the sort of world we want to live in. They argue that cultural relations, and cultural relations organisations, can play a vital role in shaping this new framing of climate change. Figueira and Fullman discuss emerging ecosystems of care, bolstered since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how a caring paradigm can be linked to cultural relations, with its focus on expanding shared knowledge, understanding and trust. Further, their essay argues that cultural engagement serves as a useful point of participation in climate action, focusing on the greening of cultural relations organisations, diversifying cultural engagement interventions, elevating programme evaluations and learning by

design. They argue that cultural relations is an underutilised resource in addressing the climate emergency, and cultural relations organisations have an important part to play.

Charlotte Nussey considers the ways in which educational engagement with cultural relations offers lessons for the climate emergency, including new ideas and ways of talking and listening. Like other essays in the collection, Nussey argues that the climate emergency cannot be addressed by technical responses and innovations alone, but requires a socio-cultural response, inclusive of culture and education. The essay suggests three important connections and shifts in knowledge that are needed in (higher) education relating to the climate emergency. These are:

1. the need to break down hierarchies of knowledge and ways of knowing

2. the need to create deeper, transformative and non-extractive relationships between higher education institutions globally

3. new links between higher education institutions and the societies they are part of, ensuring that the former learn from the latter.

To better make these connections, Nussey proposes four interconnected mechanisms, drawing on intercultural engagement: art as anticipatory memory, language matters, protest as pedagogy and just participation. The essay spotlights the work of the Transforming Universities for a Changing Climate (Climate U) project, which shows the important ways that higher education institutions in the Global South contribute to tackling the causes and impacts of climate change. This example highlights the important intersections that are taking place between activism and scholarship, and touch on culture, education and climate justice.

Chloé Germaine Buckley and Benjamin Bowman discuss the School Strike for Climate, the global movement initiated by Greta Thunberg in August 2018. Rather than consider the strikes as a protest movement for a large-scale shift in climate policy, they suggest viewing them as a form of global cultural exchange. They highlight the role of three themes to make this case:

1. the role of young people's positionalities in building relationships and global solidarities

2. young people's repertoire beyond attempting to shift climate policy into wider civic activity such as intergenerational care or mental health support

3. the functioning of the strikes as a polyphonic 'text' that invites dialogue, incorporating a multitude of voices in a variety of forms.

In their essay, Buckley and Bowman interpret the efforts of young people not only as a protest against the world as it is today, but as a process that envisions the world as it could be, with all the struggles that come with bringing this view into being. The authors draw on a range of materials produced by young people, from informal protest signs to songs.

Sam McNeilly argues that climate change cannot be overcome by technological developments or engineering advances alone, because it is in fact a crisis of culture. McNeilly addresses the relative failure of communicating climate change and roots his work in the 'energy humanities' – an emergent field of scholarship concerned with the impact of the dominant forms of energy on a given society. He argues that effectively communicating the climate emergency requires increased attention to what drives it: the culture of fossil fuels. McNeilly argues

against a simple replacement of fossil fuels with renewables, in favour of an ethical energy transition that involves also understanding and transforming existing cultural practices. Cultural relations can serve to ensure justice is central to shifts away from fossil fuels, and in making this point, McNeilly draws on a variety of cultural outputs, including American naturalist novels, the diary of environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, and the photography and documentary work of Edward Burtynsky. As a post-fossil fuel world still exists in the realm of the imaginary, McNeilly posits that cultural and artistic forms offer opportunities to imagine routes to a just transition and a different kind of world.

In her essay on climate knowledge in the digital age, Nina Schuller invites the reader into the world of the web. As she argues, new communication technologies may be a double-edged sword – stretching outwards and bringing people closer together or being used as a vehicle for promoting certain interpretations and imaginings of the world over others. Schuller explains how digital encyclopaedic knowledge is created and moderated, using Wikipedia as a case study. She notes how our knowledge of climate change is subjected to the politics of translation on the web, with certain interests holding more influence by virtue of digital access and colonial legacies. In this context, Schuller discusses how non-Western knowledges often give way to Eurocentric epistemologies, despite some efforts by media giants like Google and Wikimedia itself to rectify this inequity. The politics of climate knowledge production on the web (and the cultural relations embedded in and shaping this process), Schuller argues, have important implications for global climate action. If generated in a top-down manner, climate knowledges and discourses can contribute to

'disinterest, disengagement and disaffection' at the local level, complicating our prospects for mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

In her essay, Jessica Gosling discusses the 'obtuse triangle' of unusual suspects: climate change mitigation, soft power and digital skills, using the nation of Georgia as a case study. She argues that digital skills, which she sees as 'vital instruments of soft power', are of crucial importance for building a low-carbon economy and prosperity in the south Caucasian country. Gosling argues that given that climate change is a global emergency, the exchange of information and technology between different cultures and regions of the world becomes crucial for climate mitigation. More specifically, she notes that combatting climate change will require solutions and connectivity afforded by digital and entrepreneurial skills which may not be sufficiently funded and developed in some regions of the world. A related concern here is the unequal access to digital education which limits opportunities for some people to effectively participate in the rapidly digitalising economy and benefit from the wealth that it generates, not to mention being able to engage in discussions on desirable climate change mitigation strategies. Gosling discusses these linkages based on interviews conducted with Georgian experts with regard to the creative industry in the country.

Taken together, the authors of the essays in this collection demonstrate how cultural relations can contribute to the goal of more equitable, intercultural climate action. They offer insights into diverse facets of society, economy and culture and how they can be mobilised for our common good. Our contributors represent different career stages – PhD students, postdoctoral researchers, lecturers and professionals – and different academic and professional disciplines, embodying the diversity of perspectives needed to combat the climate emergency, and do so before the deadline set by the scientists at IPCC.

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Emergencies, Emergences, Engagement: Cultural Relations and Climate Action

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Aimee Fullman Meaningful engagement

Introduction: a state of emergency

In 2030, less than a decade from now, the world will meet its critical deadline to make adjustments to combat climate change and avoid a higher than 1.5°C temperature rise (IPCC, 2018) which would lead to catastrophic changes in our natural environment. Hopefully, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen firsthand that previously unimagined changes to societies, interpersonal relationships, work, education and leisure are not only necessary for our human species to survive in the face of an ecological-based emergency but that innovative coping strategies can allow us to thrive in new ways and reconnect us to our communities and natural environment.

As the world waits on vaccines and the anticipation of returning to thriving, public, in-person activities, the UK is preparing to host the 26th meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP26) in November 2021. In the mobilisation towards COP26, the British Council, as the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities, is implementing diverse public activities around climate change. Public engagement is an important part of climate action, as the ecological crisis, being a complex global problem, requires simultaneous leverage point interventions at international, national, local and individual levels. Leverage points are places within a complex system where a small shift in one thing, i.e. interventions, can produce big changes in everything (Meadows, 1999).

To inform and raise awareness of the climate crisis and make people care and empower them, avoiding presenting it as something distant or apocalyptic is an urgent intervention. 'Climate psychologist' Per Espen Stoknes (2017) advocates for climate communication that is more personal, doable and empowering. He highlights how our cultural identity, and our values, can override the facts, but can at the same time be a solution if we tell better stories about ourselves and where we want to go. Cultural relations engagement can be a leverage point to enable this new framing, and cultural relations organisations working with individuals and communities can contribute to climate action, even if that is not their main mission.

This essay reflects on how cultural relations organisations, like the British Council and its fellow national cultural institutes, can be significant actors in identifying and developing leverage point interventions to change systems to tackle the ecological crisis, contribute to climate action and achieve a sustainable cosmopolitan and inclusive human society through their roles, modes of operation and cultural exchange activities. This investigation develops and applies the thinking developed for our 2020 article, 'Rethinking Cultural Relations and Exchange in the Critical Zone', which argued that cultural relations activities and exchange are an underused intervention for the possibilities of positive ecological change (Figueira & Fullman, 2020) and advances the idea that these organisations can have the greatest impact if they themselves follow the practices of learning organisations and adopt a care approach to cultural relations.

Emerging ecosystems of care

In the brief geological time humans have been on Earth, we have created a globally integrated network of cultures of immense power with profound impact on the planet (Lewis & Maslin, 2018). The transformations caused by humanity acting centre stage in this new Anthropocene period are so immense that they are difficult to comprehend and can be experienced as traumatic events. Fifty years ago, public opinion was becoming aware of the emergency of climate change and the ecological crisis and, on 22 April 1970, the first Earth Day was celebrated marking the birth of the modern environmental movement. Donella and Dennis Meadows were building a computer model to track the world's economy and environment, as the Club of Rome commissioned *Limits of Growth*, published in 1972. Twenty years later, in 1990, Earth Day went global and paved the way to the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, where the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was opened for signature and entered into force in 1994. In November 2021, the convention's Conference of the Parties will convene in Glasgow, UK, where countries will take stock of progress in the implementation of the 2015 Paris Agreement and set new plans to cut carbon emissions.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought home the unescapable reality that the future is now as it forced humanity to urgently experience a dimension of the ecological crisis that made physical survival the priority and affected everyday global and local life. Nationalistic responses to this complex ecological crisis – shaped by public health concerns dictating border closings and travel restrictions, export bans on personal protective equipment, physical distancing, quarantines and vaccine protectionism – highlight the inequities within and between societies connected to resources, knowledge and cultural identity, and re-expose the underlying distrust and trauma within national populations triggered by the pandemic, natural disasters, loss of livelihood and systemic racism.

During the past year, the notion of caring has emerged as a potential counterpoint paradigm to orient change in our complex, interconnected and interdependent world. Care can, in this broad sense, be defined as 'our individual and common ability to provide the political, social, material and emotional conditions that allow the vast majority of people and living creatures on this planet to thrive – along with the planet itself' (The Care Collective, 2020, p. 6). It is increasingly clear that we need to act to bring together environmental concerns with taking care of our planet, with caring for each other on a local and global level. As we explain in the next section, cultural relations work can be linked to this caring paradigm, as its objective is the fostering of mutual trust, knowledge and understanding. It thus can be a productive leverage point intervention to tackle the ecological crisis and change the system so that we can become a sustainable cosmopolitan and inclusive human society (Figueira & Fullman, 2020).

A cultural relations approach

Cultural relations is viewed as work in the area of culture, broadly understood as including ways of life, arts, heritage, education and creative industries, to support the development of friendly relations between individuals, communities

and peoples, within and across borders, by fostering mutual knowledge and understanding. Organisations developing cultural relations as, a bigger or lesser, part of their mission cover a wide range of fields and organisational models. For the purpose of this essay, we focus on the foreign/national cultural relations institutes (also called national institutes for culture or cultural institutes abroad, such as the British Council, the Goethe-Institute, Confucius Institutes, or the Institut français) and their networks (for example EUNIC Global). However, it is important to stress that the functioning of these, and the accomplishment of their mission, depends on the broader ecosystem of 'cultural relations organisations' which includes different types of public, private and third sector organisations, such as museums or galleries, non-profits, charities and foundations (such as the Aga Khan Trust for Culture), profit-making enterprises (e.g. cultural exchange agencies) or social enterprises, higher education institutions, public private partnerships and initiatives (for example the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas), and a range of government departments or agencies.

Cultural relations encompasses activities nurturing co-operative relationships between individuals, communities and peoples through educational, societal and arts and cultural engagement, exchanges and capacity building. The 1966 UNESCO Declaration of Principles of International Cultural Co-operation remains the primary international normative instrument applicable to cultural relations and defines cultural co-operation as contributing to stable, long-term and free reciprocal relationships for mutual understanding, benefit and enrichment,

developed in a spirit of peace, respect and truth. These principles have endured the test of time and of practice, and EUNIC – the network representing the agencies, cultural institutes, ministries of culture and of foreign affairs of all member states of the EU – defines the principles of cultural relations along similar lines: mutual learning, co-creation, trust and understanding, inclusive and decentralised (EUNIC, 2020).

Cultural relations work implies an approach oriented by caring, learning and sharing. It includes multiple interactions, characterised by deep listening and mutual respect, within which participants are willing to be vulnerable, to be influenced and change in order to create trust, while acknowledging power relations. Interactions take place in a particular context, which ascribes them a special meaning, being part of a long-term commitment. This cultural relations approach can be adopted by any type of organisation. It should be noted that even in the field of cultural relations proper, this approach is not always the rule – at times, focus on visibility, promotion of one party's values or messaging, outputs and unilateral demonstration of impact and value in the short term are given priority.

Inherently, cultural relations work is 'heart-work' (process-based and reflective) and not just 'hard-work' (outcome oriented) (Fullman, 2017). In cultural relations there is a deep commitment to learning and sharing, with foundational ideals of mutuality, building trust and the opportunity for intercultural dialogue (both across and within communities), based on listening, respect and reciprocity. In the best of circumstances, a cultural relations approach goes beyond encouraging care and empathy, 'to know others from the inside, to

see reality through their eyes, to understand the links between life, feeling, and politics' (Hothschild, 2016, p. 5) without the need to change our beliefs, to rather embrace a willingness to be both vulnerable and changed as individuals and as societies and to co-create solutions that can be adapted to various contexts.

Mistrust and distrust are often evoked regarding climate science, shifting the focus away from action and evidence-based interventions. As cultural relations engagement is based on trust – trust 'helps connect us to people who are different from ourselves' and is a condition for building strong relationships (Uslaner, 2018, p. 3) – the work of cultural relations organisations supporting climate action can develop trust in information and in actions at different levels. Exploring the role of trust in global climate governance, Suiseeya, Elkhard and Paul (2021) argue for a relational approach which views expanded participation as a way to enable the trust relationships needed for deep collaboration. This approach also draws attention to how the values, interests, capabilities and worldviews of different actors are made visible. At a more individual level, trust is also in fostering respect, responsibility, reciprocity and resilience to deal with change at the level of intergenerational relationships (Brubaker & Brubaker 1999) – an important action factor when it comes to saving the planet for future generations.

National cultural institutes are privileged actors with agency validated by arm's-length government partnerships and relationships with international, national and local organisations. Their ability to funnel and leverage relatively stable public funds to enable other organisations, networks and individuals to develop arts and cultural, educational and societal initiatives contributes to their roles as producers and holders of knowledge and can be seen to be part of feedback loops across the complex system of policy and practice that affects climate action. As representatives of their governments and peoples, national cultural institutes can play an important role as models, shapers and enablers of change in society and across societies, pursuing activities to raise awareness of climate change, and implementing activism and action within their organisation and in the publics, at home and abroad, with which they engage. These activities generate vast amounts of knowledge that is both generally relevant and locally and contextually situated. It is thus critical that these organisations embrace formative adaptive learning opportunities (Cairney, 2019) to maximise relevance, effectiveness and efficiency in their contribution to both global and local climate action.

Cultural engagement as a leverage point intervention for climate action

As the world needs to accelerate its ability to develop climate-resilient solutions within the next decade, there has never been a greater need for agility and adaptability by organisations working at the intersection of cultural relations, based on human-to-human relationships, and the natural environment. Living through an ecological crisis requires us to rethink and act upon how overall humanity relates within itself and with its environment. The usual, face-to-face way in which cultural relations is traditionally conducted across

borders was disrupted by the ongoing pandemic, and the cultural relations organisations were quick to respond to the emergency, many re-adapting their activities online, supporting humanity through a moment of fast and extreme change. Many of us, unable to engage physically, moved much of our lives online. We fulfilled our emotional needs seeing loved ones near and far away via Zoom, kept physically healthy by working out with coaches via YouTube, nurtured our imagination by virtually visiting museum collections or seeing performances from all over the world coming online, maintained our income streams by working online with colleagues in our countries and abroad, and continued building our knowledge via the digital classrooms which became our home for learning. This demonstrates the importance and the resilience of the different types of organisations that constitute the cultural relations ecosystem, and demonstrates their potential for climate action.

This also evidences what we posited in our previous work:

> The practice of cultural exchange, and the dialogue and cooperation inherent in successful cultural relations in the best of conditions, allows the creation of deep working relationships, exposure to other diverse world views, and thus the ability for reflective development and collaborative problem-solving that transcends borders and communities.

Figueira & Fullman (2020, p. 332)

Thus, we reiterate that cultural relations can be a significant leverage point for interventions in societal ecosystems through experiential, shared learning opportunities

for reflection, understanding and sharing knowledge.

Cultural relations organisations provide useful case studies with which to explore the possibilities for new models in developing effective interventions to change hearts, minds and systems both at home and abroad through their current and future climate change work. Elsewhere, as for example in Galafassi et al. (2018), you can find reflections on activities engaging in climate change transformation. Therefore, for our article we chose to embark on a forward analysis of organisational and operational dimensions that we see as supportive of climate action, illustrated with examples of the work of the national cultural institutes. These are developed in the following four areas:

- *greening cultural relations organisations*
- *diversifying cultural engagement interventions*
- *elevating programme evaluations*
- *learning by design.*

Greening cultural relations organisations

Cultural relations organisations could be thought of as intermediary bodies that, although not having climate action as their main mission, can be the translators, brokers and facilitators of knowledge between policymakers, scientists, the public and private sectors, and the public at large (Boaz et al., 2019). The greening of the cultural relations sector has been slowly developing; however, there isn't enough research available to be able to have a clear view of what is happening around the world. For sure,

some regions and particular countries are ahead. An example of these efforts is the work developed internationally by the London-based not-for-profit organisation Julie's Bicycle. The trend for the sector aligns with wider trends, where often mitigating actions are taking place at local/organisational level led by pioneering individuals and not at sector/governmental level where a more impactful change could take place. However, national cultural institutes, exemplified by the British Council, Confucius Institutes, Institut Français and Goethe-Institut, are by their nature institutionalised organisations with a global footprint who have ample opportunities to implement both globally sustainable good practices as well as those locally informed.

Currently, some national cultural institutes already have in place sustainability frameworks for their operations. For example, the Finnish Institutes (of which there are 17 around the world) have adopted Ecological Guidelines (the Finnish Institutes, no date) intended to guide them through making more sustainable decisions and reduce their carbon footprint. The guidelines cover offering food and drinks, travelling, minimising the use of materials as well as an overall prompt to question and reform standards. The Goethe-Institut has adopted similar everyday practices and the issue of sustainability is also a topic discussed within their internal communities of practice. Other national cultural institutes, such as the Italian Cultural Institute, follow guidelines on sustainability that are issued by their sponsoring governmental departments. Cultural relations organisations are encouraged to stress articulation and meaningful evaluation of environmental impacts embedded from the planning stage

both for themselves and when procuring partners or bidding out new contracts (Figueira & Fullman, 2020).

In addition to developing, implementing and evaluating the results of eco-friendly guidelines, cultural relations organisations may develop educational, artistic or general exchange or capacity-building activities that, explicitly or implicitly, raise awareness of the ecological crisis and contribute to mitigation, adaptation and change efforts through cultural relations engagement.

The national cultural institutes and their partners in the arts, culture and creative sectors have over the years developed a wide range of programmes and projects that focus on the environment, climate change and sustainability, seeking to raise public awareness and enabling public engagement. Ongoing research by the authors indicates this is happening since the 1980s, and they have been creative and committed. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, they successfully adapted their programmes online. For example, as we write, the Goethe-Institut offers a residency chain from March to December 2021, The Right To Be Cold, a trans-disciplinary cross-border project focusing on the Artic and Boreal regions around issues concerning indigenous knowledge, ecology, climate justice and culture. An example illustrating sustained engagement is the British Council's strategic involvement in climate change that reaches back well over a 30-year period. At one point, climate change was even one of three priority areas for the global activity of the British Council between 2008 and 2011, along with intercultural dialogue and the UK creative and knowledge economy (British Council, *Corporate Plan 2008–11*). The

objective of the climate change programme was to strengthen the understanding among decision makers, influencers and future leaders of the need to tackle climate change, and it also aimed at building networks and relationships among influencers worldwide to do so. Fundamentally an advocacy programme, it encouraged consensus and prompted action to tackle climate change. From 2011 onwards, the approach changed and, instead of being a priority area in its own right, climate continued providing content for programmes across education and society, English and the arts (British Council, *Corporate Plan 2011–15*).

Diversifying cultural engagement interventions

Cultural relations engagement has traditionally been founded on experiential contexts that expose individuals or groups to culture(s) with the opportunity to be exposed to and understand *other* ways of life, *other* cultural identities and *other* cultural practices. Face-to-face, people-to-people contact and experiential, location-based exchange has historically been seen as the most effective way to enhance trust and understanding between cultures (Davidson in House of Commons, 2010: Ev 6) and are considered to have better 'stickiness', a property necessary to achieve and maintain the transformations in behaviour that the ecological crisis requires from humanity.

Cultural engagement, through the activities of cultural relations organisations and interdisciplinary environmental programmes, can be an entry point for changes in societal ecosystems. However, national cultural institutes are often born out of

the transformation of previous colonial/ imperialist relations, and it is thus fitting that they continue to recalibrate their potential roles as main actors in restorative processes of those relationships, working towards fair, inclusive and diverse cultural relations and co-operation. The British Council's 'cultural trust' model (British Council, 2012) has demonstrated that the multiplicity of diverse types of engagement has a positive connection to building trust; however, nationally based exchanges do not always ensure that 'mutually assured diversity' is sustained (Sardar, 2004).

Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced the world to adapt the usual, face-to-face way in which cultural relations are traditionally conducted. Operational shifts of cultural engagement during and in the aftermath of the pandemic provide an optimal opportunity to consider what elements of cultural relations are best conducted in person versus those facilitated in socially distanced environments using digital tools. In particular, we advocate considering five operational components of diversity within cultural relations regarding the climate crisis: audiences and participants, geography, types of engagement, programme models, and partnering approaches (Fullman, 2012) to harness the value of local knowledge.

Regarding audiences, Western-based climate change programming is often targeted at youth participant engagement and reaching a future generation, as these are perceived as the segment of their audience that will afford the most return on investment in terms of change. However, one needs to consider that the majority of the world's population in 2018 was over the median age of 30, with the expectation of this median maturing each

following decade (UN, 2019). Likewise, many youth-based cultural engagements are based on an individual or cohort of exchange with the expectation that the individual will take on the responsibility and agency of change when they return to their local community. Although we see the strength of this model, as we see the potential of young people in situations of cultural exchange to be translators between communities (Figueira & Fullman, 2020), we want to emphasise the importance of family, community-based and intergenerational learning. Societal transformation to fight climate change requires multilevel/holistic approaches that engage individuals within the diverse identity and support communities that they value, and this should be explored further.

Elevating programme evaluations

The impact of cultural relations has historically been grounded in measuring indicators centred around communications, educational exchanges and models of attraction, influence and trust. In the search to 'measure what matters', national cultural institutes have often relied on metrics derived from *public diplomacy,* which collects information on public perception attitudes and behaviours, foreign investment and policy changes; *soft power,* which tracks immigration, international students, cultural tourism, multinational headquarters, GNP and leadership in international forums; *branding index rankings* (e.g. good country, nation branding, Monocle); and educational outcomes around language learning or education provision to demonstrate the value of their work. However, corresponding programme/project evaluations that consider the effectiveness of specific cultural relations interventions in achieving capacity building

and goals that potentially overlap other relevant disciplines are not widely nor publicly available, even though, in the case of climate change, the ability to share and adapt practice is particularly urgent.

As arm's-length, publicly funded organisations, or bodies directly dependent on and responsible to their domestic publics and government oversight, national cultural institutes will always have the responsibility to demonstrate to government and its other partners its value for money and that targets are being met in function of foreign policy objectives and/or of corporate performance indicators while fulfilling a 'common good' mission. As a result, many of these organisations have made a considerable, long-term investment in developing evaluation and measurement tools to demonstrate their contribution to foreign strategic goals, including social impacts (e.g. see Thomas, 2020).

However, in a context of a global ecological emergency, national cultural institutes should shift to embrace their potential as learning organisations with a cultural relations approach. This paradigm needs to be fully examined and reconsidered with a special emphasis on learning what programme interventions are best conducted on the ground or person-to-person (on-site) in relationship and contrast to online, digital-based exchange and engagements.

The authors' continuing study of climate change programming by national cultural institutes shows that many of the field-based climate programmes were localised in geographic priority countries or regions such as East Asia, Brazil or China, driven by country-level objectives or local partners,

and never brought to scale. These types of 'demonstration projects', while allowing for experimentation to meet local needs, can tend to have only limited impact on the rest of the organisation if they are not accompanied by explicit strategies for transferring learning (Garvin, 1993).

In most cases, locally based climate change programming has been implemented in a decentralised and distributed experimentation pattern without standardised and unifying cultural relations programme management measurements in place that could allow the national cultural institutes to learn from multisite programming through evaluations. The lack of transparent access to the internal learnings of the national cultural institutes prohibits shared organisational learning, and depending on how this is internally organised it may also be detrimental to their own organisational learning from its own previous successes and failures, and undermine their ability to be agile. Furthermore, it has been impossible to consider how to leverage economies of scale by understanding how small and large stakeholders can collaborate on shared interventions that target local needs while contributing to an overarching impact model.

Opportunities for cultural relations programme design, impact and scaling could be greatly accelerated through the use of a publicly available, open-access repository that connects the national cultural institutes' internal communities of practice with fellow international and cultural actors to work cross-sectorally. This could be achieved through the further expansion and development of the International Cultural Relations Research Alliance (ICRRA), a network initiated by ifa, Institut für

Auslandsbeziehungen, in collaboration with the British Council, that will host an open-access digital collection of international cultural relations' grey literature. Operating within open innovation frameworks, cultural relations organisations are in a better position to develop powerful interventions for climate action.

Learning by design

Given that the knowledge economy is the key battleground for influence, the pace of change, the need for evidence-based policy and decision making, effective knowledge sharing, evaluation, organisational learning, and data-driven approaches are inevitable requirements for success. The only question is whether countries are taking the steps they need to transform their cultural relations practice to remain relevant.

British Council (2021, p. 45)

The building blocks of a successful learning organisation rely on:

- systematic problem-solving experimentation with new approaches

- learning from self and others' experiences

- efficient dissemination of knowledge throughout the organisation and networks (Garvin, 1993).

More recent literature on emerging models around organisational learning for the common good stresses that a 'particularly close relationship exists between agility, which is an organisational-level capability, and co-creation, which is a system-level capability' (Ricciardi et al., 2020, p. 10). These authors further highlight 'three

key target capabilities' for organisational learning – system's co-creation capabilities, awareness of sustainability dynamics, and system transparency – and then propose that the operationalisation of the common good allows the ability to 'measure performance variables of resources and social-ecological capabilities separately from organisational capabilities' (Ricciardi et al., 2020, p. 10). This would require that clear impacts be established, captured, shared and disseminated both internally and externally, and the resource and willingness to adapt a certain measure of calculated risk.

The existential emergency of climate change is too great to rely on only safe and proven interventions, but reinventing the wheel is an unjustifiable waste of past, current and future resource. The way forward is to advance the national cultural institutes' capacity to act as learning organisations; to intentionally design, build capacity for, and reward the creation, acquisition and transfer of knowledge, and then integrate into an organisation's practices and behaviours while valuing the resulting insights (Garvin, 1993). Thus, capacity through training, job requirements, performance evaluation and reward are necessary, but often overlooked, operational human resource components.

The national cultural institutes are, individual and collectively, developing steps and practices to develop as learning organisations. We have already mentioned their individual investment in planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) activities, which include mechanisms to collect lessons learned, either via knowledge management systems or communities of practice. However, much of the time these PME activities work within regimes to satisfy audit, inspection and

performance management, with far less value on learning and knowledge-sharing initiatives. Collectively, the already mentioned ICRRA or EUNIC network are developing processes with their members to circulate information, share experiences and co-produce knowledge. Our hope would be that in the not-so-distant future the systems are expanded to further value learning and incorporate exchanges of information and expertise with the broad spectrum of similar organisations, specifically beyond Europe (e.g. China, India), so that the joint learning could enable the continual improvement of cultural relations work globally, particularly important to tackle a global issue such as climate change.

We encourage cultural relations organisations to further 'learn in' by supporting staff (both at strategic and operational level) to engage with their own knowledge and other government departments and networks. Specifically, in regard to climate action, national cultural institutes should look for opportunities to:

- partner with other government bodies and networks

- create secondments in collaboration with relevant civil society organisations

- allow sending/hosting of staff in both directions, encourage rotation of staff and set up formal mentoring schemes (beyond induction level)

- create structured and scalable ways to capture lessons learned from project interventions, including the establishment of a post-project appraisal unit to provide case studies of specific programme interventions

- commit to contributing to the sharing of

learning by making available project documentation regarding planning, monitoring and evaluation in open-access, publicly available knowledge repositories

- further enhance the development of a community of practice across the organisation with regular oral, recorded presentations, or other easily accessible means made possible by technological developments.

Conclusion: cultural relations and climate action

Climate change, as a global issue, obliges us to imagine a new future for humankind in relation to the broader ecosystem in which it lives through collaborative actions. Cultural relations, with its theoretical emphasis on building mutual trust through long-term relationships and its operational potential to address change simultaneously on a global scale within local contexts, is an underused resource in addressing the uncertainty and urgency that characterises the ecological crisis as a complex global problem.

As (Sardar, 2004, p.36) notes '[t]he future is not the realm of a single civilisation or worldview but a domain of multiple potentials' , and national cultural institutes have a wealth of experience contributing to climate action. Their shared knowledge has the ability to influence the outcome of the next critical decade through cultural relations interventions. As we live through an ever-increasing critical countdown to act, it is imperative that cultural relations organisations are able to remain agile, and activate their institutional learning by sharing and disseminating the lessons within and externally, and then applying collaborative

learnings to improve their activities while supporting others to do the same.

Cultural relations evaluations and metrics have shown the effectiveness of performance against targets, but not so much of the use of evidence to inform policy and action. However, interventions informed by evidence of what works (or address failings that have been identified) are more likely to be successful than those which are not (Boaz et al., 2019). Thus, the importance of institutional and cross-sectoral learning *vis-à-vis* the climate challenge has the potential to reinforce the capacity of the cultural relations sector to provide successful interventions conducive to mitigation, adaptation and behavioural change to tackle our shared ecological crisis.

In conclusion, this essay provides specific recommendations for national cultural institutes and other organisations consciously adopting a cultural relations approach to consider around greening their practices and encouraging those of their partners, diversifying cultural engagement audiences, regions of interaction, and cross-sectoral partnerships, elevating programme evaluations, and learning by design supported by recognition and reward. It advocates that by adopting a cultural relations approach, by first internal and then shared reflection on the impact of specific cultural relations interventions that seek to embrace local knowledge, the national cultural institutes can continue to act as leverage points in their roles as societal intermediaries to inspire and effect change.

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Concluding remarks to The Climate Connection Cultural Relations Collection Special Edition

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The 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) will take place in Glasgow, the 'second city' of the British Empire, and be hosted by the UK, the birthplace of the modern fossil economy. This moment therefore provides pause for looking back at the historical roots of the current global climate emergency. Since 1995, with the notable exception of 2020, the COP has provided a vital opportunity for global leaders and decision makers to meet and deliberate on how to jointly govern our common atmosphere. Yet the COP is much more than just a gathering of high-profile figures. The deliberations and decisions made at the COP are a result of and testament to the commitment of thousands of people – scientists, public servants, administrators and others – who are hard at work behind the scenes in between the annual COP meeting. After all, there is only so much progress that can be achieved during the two weeks that the COP tends to last. The biannual Subsidiary Bodies meetings and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) process are perhaps the clearest examples of these crucial interactions constantly taking place in the background. These backroom meetings, conversations and exchanges of information between state delegations, international organisations and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat all depend on mutual trust, understanding and observance of certain rules. In essence, they are cultural relations.

Similarly, it is not only public officials and diplomats that gather at the COP. The global climate is too important to be left to state governments and international bodies alone. That is why each COP invariably spurs a blossoming of civil society activity both in the run-up to and during the conference itself. Marches, workshops, meetings, sit-ins and 'die-ins', speeches and many other forms of civic engagement (and sometimes disobedience) are offered during various side events and alternative summits organised by the likes of the Climate Action Network, 350. org, the Indigenous Climate Network, the Climate Justice Alliance and Extinction Rebellion. These bring together activists, academics, policymakers, business leaders and other members of the public, often with the explicit goal to further the principles of climate justice and human rights. These, too, are cultural relations.

What this means is that global climate governance is actually underpinned by cultural relations. If we want to address the planetary emergency of our atmosphere, we will need to rely on cross-cultural exchanges to foster mutual trust and understanding – not just during COP meetings, but throughout the next decade or so, which according to the IPCC will be absolutely crucial in determining the extent of irreversible changes to the Earth's climate system. In other words, we argue that the climate emergency is, in many ways, also a cultural emergency. It is a common misconception that the deployment of technology, funding and science will do the trick to solve the climate conundrum. In reality, these are just tools at our disposal – cultural relations can help us use them both more effectively and equitably.

Indeed, the sticking points of global climate negotiations – beyond the usual and more technical bickering over access to funding and technology – have long been about the historical responsibility of certain countries for emitting the bulk of greenhouse gases. These countries, like the UK, are

predominantly in the Global North, meaning that international debates often descend into arguments over the compensatory or corrective measures these countries should take given the disproportionate effects of climate change impacts on countries in the Global South. The right to development of many countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific is seen as a *sine qua non* for their governments, while leaders from the Global North insist that this development must be rooted in sustainability rather than focused on economic growth alone (which is not to say they do not often pursue this latter strategy, themselves). From this complicated dynamic emerges a picture of global inequality, not simply as part of a North–South divide, but also within regions and countries. With these inequalities, climate justice emerges as an important goal for making international climate governance more legitimate and effective.

The question this collection of essays has tried to answer is: how could cultural relations contribute to solving the seemingly unsolvable impasse when it comes to addressing the climate emergency? If, as we argue here, the success of the UNFCCC at least partially depends on the extent to which cultural relations can foster a climate [sic] of trust and mutual understanding, thus helping to resolve the issues of global climate injustice, then the arguments found in this collection's six essays can point us in the right direction towards resolving the thorny question of climate inequity and injustice. Below, we tease out how each of them does so.

Carla Figueira and Aimee Fullman's contribution approaches issues of justice in at least two different ways. First, they argue for cultural relations and co-operation that are 'fair, inclusive and diverse', recognising that national cultural institutes often carry colonial or imperialist baggage that needs to be openly recognised and addressed. This does not only refer to issues of climate change. The authors invoke the global COVID-19 response as an example that lays bare the long-standing inequities between wealthy and poorer nations when it comes to access to financial, technological and cultural resources. Seen in this way, the pandemic offers a lesson on how not to address a planetary crisis. Second, Figueira and Fullman touch on the issues of intergenerational (climate) justice, observing that much of the climate change programming in the West is aimed predominantly at young people, whose lives are bound to be most impacted by climate change in the long term. However, they caution against a limited, unidimensional strategy of this kind and instead argue for a holistic approach reflected in diverse audiences, geographies, types of engagement, and programme and partnering models (Fullman, 2012).

Nina Schuller stresses both the importance and the potential of digital technologies for promoting equal participation in creating our 'shared imaginings' of a sustainable world. More specifically, she places emphasis on the issue of knowledge making and translation as it relates to climate discourse, trust, knowledge and action. Similar to the insights by Figueira and Fullman, Schuller recognises the importance of building trust upon which, as suggested by a number of studies, the acceptance and use of climate knowledge is predicated. Yet, the author also points to the unequal politics of translation and knowledge production, with corporations based in the Global North, like Wikimedia, as well as some national governments holding disproportionate control over what kind of

climate knowledge is accessible on the web, and how it is translated. This kind of digital or data colonialism reduces epistemic diversity and undermines the intercultural trust necessary for effective global climate action.

Closely related to these insights, Jessica Gosling underscores the value of digital skills in mitigating climate change. It is hard to imagine a global co-operative effort to address the climate crisis without different parties being able to use communication technologies in an equitable manner. However, Gosling observes that digital competencies and access to new technologies are far from evenly distributed among nations. This is particularly problematic for developing or rapidly industrialising countries, where these skills and resources are not only vital for enabling their meaningful participation in global climate governance, but also act as one of the foundations for building economic and social prosperity. Gosling also notes that a climate-just future requires all citizens to be able to 'have more of a voice to articulate their wants and needs' – an ability for which, in this day and age, digital skills are of crucial importance. Thus, she concludes by emphasising the vitality of education, including digital education, entrepreneurship and soft skill development, for realising the commitments enshrined in the Paris Agreement in an equitable manner.

Charlotte Nussey highlights the important connections between climate justice, culture and education. 'Culture' can be used to exclude or oppress when not understood in terms of multiple forms of knowledge, while cultural expressions of climate change that centre historically excluded and marginalised voices can serve to increase our collective knowledge, flatten hierarchies and challenge taken-for-granted categories. Nussey highlights the way in which cultural and artists' acts of protest, from the work of artist-poet

Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner to the Kenyan Green Belt Movement, help embed climate change within communities and highlight often-intersecting forms of inequality and exclusion. This echoes the work on intersectional climate justice and argues that climate justice is also a matter of racial justice, gender justice and others.

The essay by Chloé Germaine Buckley and Benjamin Bowman speaks directly to issues of climate justice given its focus on the Youth Strikes for Climate. As others' essays have highlighted, climate justice as presented here and by young people is intersectional, drawing links between the climate emergency and racism, colonialism and patriarchy. For Buckley and Bowman, the climate strikes are a global conversation, and this conversation is concerned with dissent, solidarity and justice. The climate strikes, read as cultural exchange, allow young people to listen to one another, share experiences and uphold each other's voices. As for what is next, Buckley and Bowman argue that people, including adults in power, should engage in dialogue with youth, who will ensure that justice is at the centre of efforts to address the climate emergency.

In his essay on the emergent energy humanities, Sam McNeilly convincingly argues that cultural relations can help ensure that individuals, communities and institutions place justice at the centre of global efforts to transition away from fossil fuels. Much of the work that McNeilly draws on, such as the writing of Ken Saro-Wiwa, speaks to, or actively calls for, environmental or climate justice. In the essay McNeilly suggests possible ways to move towards a future free of fossil fuels, but cautions that the shift to renewable energy is itself not inherently just, rather it must be won. Like other essays in the collection, McNeilly stresses the importance of education, in this case in the democratic, and just, energy transition.

As we have shown above, questions of equity and justice in cultural relations are interwoven into all the essays in this collection. Authors have pointed to issues of intergenerational justice, the intersection of culture, politics, education and technology, different levels of access to education and other resources among and within nations, and the unequal nature of climate knowledge production itself. What emerges from these contributions is an extremely complex picture of what we know, how we think about and how we co-operate to solve the climate emergency. There may be many challenges ahead, but the authors and editors of this collection share the hope that cultural relations, if done the right way, can help foster a global ethics of care for the planet and all its people.

While the G7 Summit held in the UK in June 2021 saw reaffirming goals of reducing global warming, it also failed to reach climate finance targets needed by countries in the Global South, those at the sharp end of climate change's impacts. COP26 will be an occasion to do better than that. Regardless of what happens behind the closed doors of COP negotiation rooms, we can be certain that the vibrant cultural exchanges between different people and cultures held in Glasgow this November will continue to foster the inclusive and diverse cultural relations we need to address the global climate emergency.

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