

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON CULTURE

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ABSTRACT: *Culture, politics, and climate change are deeply connected topics that intertwine in different ways, influencing the causes and responses to climate change and shaping the causes and responses to this global challenge. Understanding these interconnections is critical to developing effective strategies to address climate change while respecting diverse cultural perspectives and political realities. Understanding the dynamics between politics and culture is critical for developing effective strategies to address the interconnected challenges of climate and cultural change. Studying this topic requires developing a conceptual framework that outlines different dimensions of culture and their potential impacts on climate change perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, and policy responses, to explore specific cultural contexts and climate change issues, identifying patterns, themes, and narratives associated with culture and climate change and the interpretation of findings on the conceptual framework, theoretical perspectives and research goals.*

KEYWORDS: *culture, climate change, culture policy*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, we are witnessing strong climate changes that affect all aspects of our lives, from the food we produce, environmental impact, lifestyle, health, to challenges for global peace and security. The climate crisis is transforming not only our natural ecosystems, but also our social and cultural landscapes, threatening our tangible and intangible heritage and practices, and depriving us of precious sources of resilience, meaning, identity and knowledge. The rapidly advancing climate crisis is developing into a cultural crisis that is changing our lives and the environment, and threatening some of the world's most valuable heritage sites. Numerous historical cultural sites are facing gradual erosion and are in great danger of being lost forever. Furthermore, climate change represents a clear and immediate threat to the current way of life of communities. Traditional knowledge, oral tradition, performing arts, traditional manifestations that were gradually created by numerous generations over a long period of time, are now faced with the possibility of disappearing. At the same time, while climate change is a significant threat to cultural heritage, it is precisely culture that can play a key role in mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change. Cultural diversities could play a key role in mitigating and adapting to climate change, designing innovative strategies, encouraging behavioral change and promoting inclusiveness. Recognizing and appreciating the power of

different cultural values, knowledge, storytelling, design, creativity and heritage (tangible and intangible), we can develop and improve actions needed to solve the climate crisis and preserve biodiversity. This article will consider the different ways in which climate change affects culture, explain why it is necessary to create new cultural policies and how important it is to understand and appreciate this phenomenon.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Studying the relationship between culture and climate change requires a research methodology integrating social science and interdisciplinary approaches. Here's an outline of a research methodology for investigating this complex relationship:

Literature Review:

- Conduct a comprehensive review of existing literature on the intersection of culture and climate change. This should include studies from anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, environmental psychology, political science, and geography.
- Identify key theoretical frameworks, concepts, and debates relevant to understanding the relationship between culture and climate change.

Data Analysis:

- Analyze, and identify patterns, themes, and narratives related to culture and climate change.

Interpretation and Synthesis:

- Interpret findings about the conceptual framework, theoretical perspectives, and research objectives.
- Synthesize results to generate insights, implications, policy, practice, and future research recommendations.

3. CULTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGES ARE COMPLEX AND INTERCONNECTED PHENOMENA

Culture and climate change are a complex and interconnected phenomenon due to several reasons that intertwine on multiple levels. Culture is defined as the symbols that express meaning, including beliefs, customs of communities rituals, art, and stories that create collective outlooks and behaviors, and from which strategies to respond to problems are devised and implemented (Swidler, 1986). It has both non-material and material aspects. Culture, in the way we examine it here, is often closely tied to places (physical spaces that are given meaning by people), even as both have become increasingly transnationalized through processes of globalization (Eskobar, 2001), shaping human activities that directly affect the environment and climate change. For example, industrial practices, resource use, dietary habits, and transportation preferences vary among cultures and have different impacts on greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation. Climate changes can lead to extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, and hurricanes, which threaten living conditions, agriculture, and water availability. These changes force communities to adapt, often involving a change in traditional ways of life and migration, transforming cultural practices and identities.

There is a scientific consensus that the global climate is changing and that it is partly caused by humans. Andrew J. Hoffman looks at this consensus in five ways. First, it begins with reports from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an organization of thousands of scientists that summarizes the vast body of climate science and presents its conclusions in "consensus statements." Second, these IPCC consensus statements have been endorsed by nearly two hundred scientific agencies around the world. Third, these consensus statements have been supported by independent scientific institutions and researchers. Fourth, research shows that this is the shared belief of most "practicing" climatologists and that change is real. Fifth, two leading scientific agencies in the United States—the US National Academy of Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science—used the word "consensus" when characterizing the state of the scientific literature on climate change. In short, the scientific community is united in the assessment presented in the Joint Statement that says that the warming of the Earth in recent decades is primarily caused by human activities that have increased the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (Hoffman, 18). According to public opinion polls in the US conducted by Yale Program on Climate Change Connection at the national level in the fall of 2023, 72% of adults believe that global warming is happening, 58% of them think it is caused mainly by human activity, 63% of respondents think that global warming is caused by weather (Marlon, 2023).

It can be noted that public opinion is at odds with that of the scientific community and that there is a disconnect between the consensus of the scientific community and the differing views of the general public on the issue of climate change. Many other issues of societal importance face similar challenges in gaining understanding and acceptance within a skeptical, polarized, and often uninformed public. While it is not possible to reach a social consensus on any of the issues, it is necessary to find ways to establish grounded solutions, which means motivating political processes. It is clear that there is a gap between public opinion and that of the scientific community on the issue of climate change. In a democracy, this means educating the voting public (Hoffman, 23).

Additionally, the way different cultures perceive and respond to climate change also varies. For example, some communities may have long-standing traditions involving the sustainable management of natural resources, while others may favor intensive industrial activities that increase emissions. This perception and response to climate challenges is often rooted in cultural norms, knowledge, and social structures.

4. CLIMATE CHANGE CAN HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON CULTURES IN VARIOUS WAYS

3.1. Agriculture and food security - Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns can affect agricultural practices, crop yields, and food availability. How exactly climate change will affect agricultural production cannot be known, because it depends on the complexity of climate change and the understanding of these impacts on agricultural production. However, there seems to be a growing consensus on two main implications. First, extreme weather conditions such as droughts, floods, and storms are predicted to become more frequent, so the variability of agricultural production at a given location will increase. Second, the impact of climate

change on agricultural production is likely to be marked by spatial differentiation. In many countries, there will be political temptations to resist such changes in agricultural production in response to climate change (Tangermann, 2016).

3.2. Natural disasters - Increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events leading to loss of traditional knowledge and practices. More frequent and extreme climate-induced natural disasters might cause further stress to already vulnerable livelihoods by affecting tangible and intangible cultural heritage (ICH) assets like historical buildings, monuments, archaeological sites, oral traditions, performances, and food systems. These assets are important because they give local populations a sense of identity and well-being. The ICH within food systems is also at an increased risk of being disrupted through the frequent occurrences of climate-induced natural disasters. These disruptions might occur through decreased availability of local foods, decreased occurrence of festivals centered around certain food items and altered local food preparation and storage practices (Dembedza, 2022).

3.3. Migration and displacement - The loss of cultural identities as they integrate into new environments. Multidisciplinary research involving connectivity between climate change, migration, and displacement is limited. The mobility of people driven by climate change and hazards is a complex and interconnected process, which limits the analysis. Estimates of migration as a result of climate change must be seen as a component of social, political, cultural, and economic factors, but also other environmental factors, such as poor management of natural resources. However, there is strong agreement that displacement is likely to increase in low-income developing countries whose people are exposed to increasing climate variability (Opitz Stapleton, 2017).

3.4. Health impacts - Climate change can exacerbate health issues, affecting cultural practices related to healing, wellness, and traditional medicine. Most climate and health research has focused on the direct pathways through which climate change impacts physical health endpoints grounded in a biomedical perspective. The indirect impacts, mediated by interconnected social and ecological systems, and focusing on the multiple and cumulative impacts on physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health, are growing. The importance and value of explicitly rooting climate change and health research and action in an understanding that we are all connected, and seeking to re-connect and promote relationships in efforts to both understand and address climate change (Galway, 2022).

3.5. Loss of biodiversity - This loss can erode cultural identities and spiritual connections to the environment. The impact of biodiversity loss on humans is far-reaching, affecting food security, human health, economy, and cultural heritage. Recognizing the importance of protecting and conserving biodiversity is crucial for maintaining a sustainable and harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world (Makridou, 2023).

3.6. Cultural practices and traditions - Traditional knowledge about weather patterns and natural resources could become less reliable. It offers valuable insights and potential solutions. Indigenous peoples have often developed sustainable land and resource management practices that promote ecosystem resilience and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Their knowledge includes various adaptation and mitigation strategies, such as agroforestry, water management

techniques and biodiversity conservation methods. Traditional knowledge emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans and nature, encouraging a holistic approach to environmental care. It recognizes the importance of maintaining ecological balance, preserving biological diversity and respecting the Earth's cycles and rhythms, and therefore it is necessary to preserve it.

3.7. Social and economic disparities - Vulnerable communities may bear the brunt of climate change impacts due to limited resources and political power, further exacerbating social inequalities and threatening cultural survival. Climate change, driven by anthropogenic emissions, disproportionately affects the poorest, increasing the risk of natural disasters, health problems, and loss of agricultural production. Social inequality is exacerbated by climate change, with vulnerable groups particularly affected due to their dependence on climate-sensitive resources and unequal access to opportunities.

5. NEW IMPERATIVE FOR CULTURAL POLICIES - RESPONDING TO THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

For Julie's Bicycle research and report as part of The Climate Connection program in partnership with the British Council, round tables on culture and the environment were held in 2021, which brought together selected participants among policymakers, institutions, municipalities, financiers, civil society organizations and cultural workers to investigate how culture, and especially cultural policy, reacts to the climate crisis. Despite the very different cultural contexts and locations, many themes and insights are similar. Here we will highlight the most important ones mentioned in the report. First, governments could better recognize that culture is finding solutions to the climate crisis and that the sector needs resources dedicated to this work. There is already expertise in the sector that could support the creation of national policy. Second, the creation of cultural policy should be collaborative, participatory, and created together with people on the ground. Third, effective policy is created where top-down approaches meet bottom-up approaches. This implies the following: there is often a discrepancy between national plans and what is happening on the ground; development policy is iterative to ensure that national targets (such as net zero carbon) set direction and targets, support the evidence base, and are ready to direct resources; policymakers may struggle to work effectively with informal, commercial and grassroots actors; providing open, transparent and inclusive spaces for dialogue is essential, bringing government and community together and building understanding and trust that respects different perspectives without fear of consequences. Fourth, climate change is a matter of cultural relations - although a global response to the climate crisis is needed, solutions often appear in ways that are sector-specific, place-based, and adaptable to cultural contexts (Bicycle, 2021).

Local and regional authorities are in a unique position to lead the Culture for Climate Agenda¹ together with civil society. As the window of opportunity closes to keep temperatures below 1.5C, there is an urgent need, but also a growing opportunity, to make a place for culture at the tables of climate policy, action, and science. This new Culture for Climate Agenda should be

¹ The Culture for Climate Agenda Unleashing the Power of Culture as a Pillar of Climate Action is a Policy Paper Prepared for the UCLG (World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders) World Congress and Summit of World Leaders Daejeon, Korea October 10-14, 2022

locally based and run from local places and spaces. Local and regional authorities, in partnership with civil society, are in a unique position to launch this program, using the power of their own culture and people's heritage.

To build on this understanding — that cities, towns, and regions are essential actors for achieving national climate goals — global climate efforts are increasingly focusing on climate action at multiple levels. This trend recognizes the unique abilities of local and regional governments to drive climate action and be hubs of innovation. Local and regional authorities are often cultural actors themselves, as operators and financiers of schools, the arts, libraries, museums, and heritage sites. Local authorities are on the front line of defense and promotion of cultural rights as fundamental human rights. They are also very accustomed to working with civil society and private actors in cultural matters, including artists, creative industries, design companies, cultural organizations, and universities and research organizations (The Culture for Climate Agenda, 2022:19,20).

6. CONCLUSION - UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECTING THE PHENOMENA

Understanding climate change is not just a matter of scientific data and environmental policies; culture plays a key role in how people perceive, respond to, and act on climate change. Culture shapes our values, beliefs, behaviors, and priorities, thereby influencing our ability to face the challenges of climate change. Culture is the way communities interpret the world around them, including natural phenomena such as weather and climate change. The traditional knowledge of indigenous communities often includes a deep understanding of ecosystems and seasonal changes, which can provide valuable insights into sustainable practices. These communities have culturally embedded methods of adaptation and preservation of natural resources, which can be crucial for modern approaches to solving climate challenges. Culture also influences the way societies communicate about climate change. The way climate change is presented in the media, education, and public discourses can encourage or discourage collective action. For example, a culture of fear can lead to paralysis and feelings of powerlessness, while a culture of hope and solutions can motivate people to concrete actions. On the other hand, climate change affects cultural practices and social structures.

Throughout history, cultural development and climate change have always shaped each other. Civilizations prospered or declined according to climatic conditions; a favorable climate enabled the development of agriculture and settlements, while unfavorable climate changes could lead to migrations and conflicts. Today, globalization further complicates this dynamic, as cultural influences and climate effects cross national borders, creating global challenges that require international cooperation and culturally sensitive approaches to problem-solving.

All of this points to the deep and complex interconnection of culture and climate change, where changes in one aspect have far-reaching consequences on the other, making an integrated approach that takes both phenomena into account necessary. Finally, culture is key because climate change requires global cooperation, and cultural differences can be a barrier or a bridge to common solutions. Understanding and appreciating different cultural perspectives can help build cooperation between nations, communities, and organizations, enabling more effective and inclusive approaches to combating climate change.

Thus, culture is key to understanding climate change because it shapes our relationship with the environment, influences our perception of risks and solutions, and can be a catalyst for collective action and global cooperation.

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