

# Local Action for Global Sustainability in Museums

**E** [exarc.net/podcast/local-action-global-sustainability-museums](https://exarc.net/podcast/local-action-global-sustainability-museums)



## Recording Date

2020-03-26

## Guests

Caitlin Southwick (US) and Rebecca Thonander (DE)

## Introduction

**The EXARC Show** is pleased to present Caitlin Southwick and Rebecca Thonander's workshop from the digital conference "Documentation Strategies in Archaeological Open-Air Museums" on 26 March 2020. Our guests talk us through some of the ways that museums as well as individual archaeologists can bring sustainability into our everyday professional practices. Tune in for discussion about the UN Sustainable Development Goals, 10 simple actions that museums can take for sustainability, and a wealth of digital resources and planned workshops for the future.

## Transcript

**Caitlin:** Thank you everyone for joining us. This is such a cool platform, so a huge thank you as well of course to Roeland and Josefina and Caroline for all of their diligent work on making this happen despite the current global situation. It's very reassuring and wonderful to know that we can still all get together and participate in these types of activities. So, absolutely thrilled to be here.

I think I would like to start introducing myself and my colleague, Rebecca, and we're gonna take you through a very brief introduction to sustainability for open-air museums and archaeologists. So, maybe Rebecca, if you would like to start introducing yourself and your organisation?

**Rebecca:** Yes, so my name is Rebecca Thonander (<https://de.linkedin.com/in/rebecca-thonander-51352a86> ) and I work with the Communication at the Network of European Museum Organisations (<https://www.ne-mo.org/> ), and the short for Network of European Museum Organisations is simply NEMO and perhaps you have heard about NEMO before, but in case you

haven't then I would just like to briefly tell you a little bit about NEMO. We were founded in 1992 and we are an independent network of national museum organisations, museum networks such as EXARC and EXARC is one of our members. I'm very happy to be part of the conference and I was looking forward to seeing everyone live, in person. But I'm happy that we can at least see each others' messages on Discord. We also have individual museums as our members, and we accept members from the member states of the Council of Europe. All in all, NEMO's members speak for more than 30,000 museums in 43 different countries. And we advocate for museums, we offer capacity-building activities, such as training and networking opportunities. We have an annual conference and we do everything we can for the museum community in Europe. And sustainability is a very important theme for NEMO. It's also one of our key advocacy themes and we want to make sure that museums are recognised and supported by EU policy-makers for the work that they do to contribute to a sustainable future. We actually dedicated our conference in November to sustainability, and we wanted to inspire museums to lead the way and become key players in creating a sustainable and fair future and climate. As we see it's time for museums to also step it up and dare to take action, not only about sustainability but also climate justice and climate action, fair working conditions and you name it. We also had some webinars about sustainability that I will post later, we'll send, upload a document with some further links for further reading. I think I'll cut it short there and I'll let Caitlin introduce herself.

**Caitlin:** Great, thank you so much Rebecca. Well hello everyone and welcome. My name is Caitlin Southwick (<https://nl.linkedin.com/in/caitlin-southwick-765208a> ) and I am the founder and executive director of Ki Culture (<https://www.kiculture.com/> ). We are partners with not only NEMO but EXARC and very thrilled to be working with you guys. Ki Culture is a social impact non-profit. We've just launched in 2019 so we're quite new, so if you haven't heard of us, don't worry, you will. The goals behind Ki Culture is to integrate sustainability into cultural heritage. So we work across the entire spectrum of sustainability which is something we'll talk about today. So I won't give too much away, and we also work across the entire cultural heritage sector, so with archaeologists, with museums, with conservators, built heritage, because we believe that, as a sector, we can unite and really affect change on a global level in terms of sustainability. So we have two main focuses at Ki Culture. First one is actually helping practitioners, cultural heritage practitioners, find answers on how to be sustainable. So we focus very much on action and what kind of steps you can take to integrate sustainability into your professional practice. And then we also focus on advocacy and utilising cultural heritage to educate the public on sustainability. So how can we use our influential positions as trusted institutions of knowledge in order to effectively educate the public, engage communities, also leverage our momentum to influence policy and really create a holistic global movement for sustainability.

Basically what we're going to do today is go a little bit into: what is sustainability? We're going to talk about the United Nations' framework for a sustainable future, and then we're going to touch on how this relates to archaeology, how it relates to open-air museums, and what we as practitioners can actually do to start engaging and promoting sustainable practice in our field. So we're going to first talk a little bit about this S word as some people tend to call it, sustainability.

So I'd like to, at this point invite our participants to please use the sustainability workshop chat, to write what they think sustainability is. So if you could type: when I say sustainability what is the first thing that comes to mind, what is your initial reaction to that word? I'm going then wait for a couple of responses here, we've got Jenny says "reuse", absolutely, a good one, "the ability to conduct things long term", absolutely, "sustainability in terms of our preservation" "resilience", absolutely, "sustainability is an ethical use of resources that means they can be accessed for a long time or regenerated", "independent interconnection", "minimalism", absolutely. So it's always interesting and inspiring for me to hear how people perceive sustainability and what it means to them and then what it also means to them personally as well as in their practice. So what I'd like to do is introduce

the Sustainable Development Goals (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs> ) which are the United Nations' take on how to frame a sustainable future. The SDGs or Sustainable Development Goals as I said are the United Nations framework for a sustainable future. They cover three main pillars, that is the social sustainability, so justice and equality; that is environmental sustainability, that of course includes climate change as well as materials and waste aspects; and it covers economic sustainability, that kind of touches a little bit on what one of our colleagues said with "being able to last", being able to see a future for our work as well, that's of course very important for cultural heritage professionals. So, the SDGs are a really nice framework for engaging with sustainability. There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals in the SDGs and there are 169 targets. Now, the SDGs, while they were mainly created for policymakers, have a really great way to break down this very overwhelming topic of sustainability and make it something that is relatable.

Usually when I conduct workshops at this point I like to point out a couple of the SDGs and then ask participants how they are engaging with the SDGs. But since we have a very short amount of time I'm going to just simply say that you are all engaging in the SDGs, as the Sustainable Development Goal 11.4 is to safeguard and protect our cultural heritage. So you can all congratulate yourselves for being front runners in fulfilling one of the most important SDGs. But I think that it can be quite difficult sometimes to connect these concepts that were created mostly for policy to our practical everyday experiences. What I want to do today is go through a little bit about how the SDGs relate to archaeology, and to open-air museums, and then how we as practitioners in the cultural heritage sector can actually help achieve these goals.




So as we know cultural heritage professionals inherently care about sustainability. Preservation is linked to preservation of cultural heritage is linked to preservation of humanity and our planet and of course that is our job. And I think that archaeology has a very special role to play in this relationship. So what we're trying to do here is, how can we as archaeologists of course address sustainability? And there are many different ways that we can do this: from site survey, to the excavation, to conservation of artefacts, from the social impact to the environmental. So what we want to do here is basically start thinking creatively and critically about how we, as practitioners, are going about our everyday practice, and see in what ways we might be able to find some room for improvement. So a couple of the different aspects, or sustainability engagement, within archaeology include for example wasted materials. One thing is if we're on site and we're using plastic bags to remove dirt or something like that. Can it be a biodegradable bag as opposed to a plastic bag? It starts with very very small changes and that's the way that we can already start to achieve Sustainable Development Goals is by just being aware of what we're using, how we're using it, if something can be re-used as opposed to recycled. And think about the 4 Rs when you talk about wasted materials: the first one is refuse, so don't use something at all, the second one is reduce, use less of something. The third one is re-use, or use something again, and then the last one is recycle. But don't immediately jump to recycle, go through 4 Rs first. Other aspects of course include water. I'm a trained art conservator and of course I know a lot about desalination of archaeological objects. We use a ton of water in conservation so just being aware of the sources where your water comes from. Being aware of how much water you're using and what you're using. And then also of course the pollution of water. What kind of things are you putting into your water.


There's a lot of different other aspects that are more unique to archaeology and that of course includes things like biodiversity. What is the impact of excavations and on-site work on the local ecosystem and environment? And then of course the materials and products that you use, that are able to be locally sourced versus being flown in. I think that one of the unique and interesting aspects about archaeology, in terms of sustainability, is the social impact and the ability for archaeologists to connect with local communities, to engage local communities and also to educate people about the history of a site and also how the impact for example of climate change has affected that site, but not

only from an archaeological standpoint but from an anthropogenical standpoint as well. So there's a lot of different areas here for engagement on the social aspect as well. I'm sure most of you are already doing a lot of these things. But it's also nice to know that you are already engaging.

A couple of other quick things and then we're going to tell you a little bit more about some actions that you can take. Of course education and outreach. And this is something that Rebecca will talk more about in our next section. So how can we as open-air museums and as archaeologists relate our work to the current global situation with sustainability? It is very easy, I think, for us to understand how sustainability is reflected in archaeology, but I think that it's really important - our roles in this transition to a sustainable future is to harness that and educate the public and educate our visitors on how climate change has affected our particular practice and what knowledge we can share that will inspire people to understand what these impacts are, even on the short terms but also of course on the longer terms.

So what I'd like to do is, as I said we're going to talk a little bit more about some concrete actions, I'm going to ask Rebecca to introduce to us the Museums for Future platform and collectively between EXARC, NEMO and Ki Culture we have created 10 points for archaeologists to engage with sustainability. Rebecca, I'd like to turn it over to you to go over the ten points list.

Let me tell you a little bit about Museums for Future which is an initiative that's quite young. We started it in, well basically in November 2019 we launched Museums for Future (<https://museumsforfuture.org/> ) and it kind of just happened naturally when between different museum professionals and museums where we realised that, actually, we wanted to do something more than just, you know, post the link about sustainability and climate action, and then that's it. We also want to encourage change from within and kind of make this climate action the will to be part of creating a better future, something that spreads through the world. Museums for Future was launched in November and it's a global movement of museum workers, cultural heritage professionals and many others, who support the Fridays for Future movement. We are all about positive actions and showing that it is possible to change your work, it might take time, but it's possible to change the way you're working, in order to be more climate neutral and encourage people around you to also take their part for the climate. Maybe you've seen some of our Twitter campaigns already. Then of course there is the #MuseumsforFuture (<https://twitter.com/hashtag/museumsforfuture> ) , and we also had a #ObjectsofLove (<https://twitter.com/hashtag/objectsoflove> ) recently, where we just wanted to showcase that all of these great objects that we have in museums are memories of the past that are also we can see how their role has changed by just looking at this object and we want it to last for a long time and I know that that's something you know all about as well.

Around the Global Climate March we released a 10 simple actions museums can take in support for the Fridays for Future movement. This was kind of the original list of 10 actions and this list is translated into 20 different languages (<https://museumsforfuture.org/2020/03/10-simple-action-ideas-to-call-for...> ) . So today we are actually very thrilled to introduce a new kind of 10 actions list and that's the one for archaeologists and open-air museums. What museum professionals can do and how they can support the Fridays for Future movement. And you already have the list, but I can just quickly go through it. You can see some of the action points and suggestions require more work than others. I can start from the beginning, it's more straightforward in a way, more simpler ways to contribute to climate action and a more positive and sustainable future. And as we go on it might be a bit more tricky and that's where you need to reorganise with your colleagues and think about new ways of doing things and I think just the fact that we're having this workshop and this conference in a completely digital way - and as far as I can see it's actually kind of working - shows that you can do very little in very little time. This is the result of some very drastic measures being taken but in just two or three weeks EXARC was able to turn this whole conference from the traditional way of

meeting and networking and learning that we have. I hope we can still go conferences in the future but it shows that if you just put your mind to it you can really change. That's kind of a straightforward example of how easy, or like how it is possible to create change. Yes so we have the list and then, exactly, let's go to point 9 already: "Promote use of open access to stream lectures and to meet digitally to reduce the carbon footprint on the planet" cause the more we travel obviously the more of an effect we give on the planet. But to start from the beginning: we have to "use sustainable solutions for excavation, refrain from your own..." and then 2. "At your excavation and in the museum, use as much as possible local resources..." I could read all of these but I am not sure if I really need to read them. As Caitlin already said, consider the 4Rs, refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle, and see what you can swap and change to make it more biodegradable. And you don't have to make the change immediately from one day to the next, I mean it could be enough to just first really think about what you can do differently, and then start one by one, with one of the items and take it from there. And just keep it local. I think through list is that you have to keep it local, that's what is taken up in point 2., that you stay in local accommodation and you organise that you can have food from the people living locally in this area, and as Caitlin also already said, that to use archaeology to highlight the connection between humans and nature and how the society has changed, maybe you can even find some parallels between the period you're working with and today. I remember hearing about an exhibition for instance where they were showcasing ways of take-out food, you know, the plastic take-away cups that we see today that's actually not a new phenomenon. They used to have another kind of take-away cup in the past. At this exhibition they would have different versions of this cup that people would carry around. Of course there's a more sustainable way of having your coffee to go, but it's also an interesting way to show that actually we could learn from the past here because people always wanted to carry their cup around but they don't need to do it in a plastic cup like we do today, but rather we can learn from the past and you get a nice sustainable cup that you can keep with you, wash and then reuse. And it's interesting to find these parallels to the past.

Then we also have "Explain in exhibitions and research papers the impact that climate change has had on our planet". And then show the impact that climate change has and that also goes a bit back to what I was talking about earlier to take from the past to show in the present and in the future where we are at now and where we're going and how we're seeing the change and it's time to step it up and be part of creating a better future. And yes, we have the ancient solutions again, the ceramic cups, exactly. And "Work with the biodiversity of your site! Grow the ancient and local crops of the land and showcase the oldest species of animals available." which is very interesting since we all know that some species are actually dying out and some crops that used to be native to our land are not available anymore and there's a lot of interesting examples of how people are bringing these crops back and it could be very cool to integrate this at your sites. As Pascale just writes/wrote here: in the UK there is a seed bank at Kew Gardens that can provide a 'limited' number of grains for growing ancient crops, such as einkorn or emmer" (<https://www.kew.org/wakehurst/whats-at-wakehurst/millennium-seed-bank> ). Which is very, very cool.

And Museums for Future is all about, is grown from Fridays for Future (<https://fridaysforfuture.org/> ). We all know it's a lot of young people that started it because somehow the younger generation and even children are the ones that care the most about the future. So do ask your young colleagues or even the local Fridays for Future kind of groups that you will find in your home town where your museum is located. And create an exhibition or event with them and take advantage or make the most of each other's knowledge and expertise and perhaps you have a specific expertise that you can work with together with another colleague that might be new to the field and has another way of thinking, maybe already has this sustainability-way-of-thinking and doing things, maybe they even studied sustainability and then you can really make sure to make use of each other's knowledge.

And of course make sustainable collaborations. This is very important. Have a look around, what's

close to you, what's close to the museum, maybe you don't have to go so far to find a great collaboration or a great organisation to collaborate with. And together you can find different projects because, the same as with collaborating with other colleagues and such, sometimes the best ideas are just around the corner. You just need to have a conversation. And of course share your work, publish research in open access journals, and stream as we already said. And be part of these modern conferences and don't be afraid to reach out like you are already talking so much with each other during this whole day. I'm not sure how much you would network usually at a conference like this, but you really have a lot going here already so be sure to exchange e-mail addresses or another way of communicating that you would prefer because you can also create a private chat I believe with everyone, so if there's someone you want to connect with, do that and then exchange your contacts, share your work with these people.

And of course we have to think further than collecting, and it's time to create strategies for sustainable preservation of data and artefacts, and online catalogues are a great place to start. It's as important to make sure that your online archive is kept up to date as your physical archive, to make sure to not also put too much pressure on online servers and such. I would say that this list of 10 actions for archaeologists is really a lot about collaborating, take a look around you, what's close to you, how can you make use of that, and how can you collaborate with organisations and people close to the museum and community. Make use of each other.

I hope that this was not too messy of an explanation. It kind of gives a little bit of an introduction to this list and the list you can download it and please download it and print it, put it up. Only print one copy! Put it up in the office somewhere where everyone can see it. We hope with this list that you will find some inspiration of making a small change for a better tomorrow, because we really don't imagine or expect anyone to do the full steps by themselves, live up to the SDGs or this list even, but take one thing at a time and it's ok if it takes a bit longer I would say.

**Caitlin:** Absolutely, thank you so much Rebecca for that very thoughtful overview. So as Rebecca mentioned the list is available online and it will be published through EXARC, through Ki Culture, through NEMO and through MFF. You can follow us at Museums for Future <https://museumsforfuture.org/about/> and of course all of the various partners who helped create it will be providing resources and tools for everyone to help get involved and implement these 10 action points. And of course this is just the beginning, just a place to start and Rebecca has put together a document with a list of references and links for everyone, to find out more information about the SDGs, about how they relate to cultural heritage and also about the various partner organisations that were involved getting this information together.

Ki Culture, we're very proud to be working with EXARC. At Ki Culture we provide resources and tools and programming, which we'll be rolling out throughout the course of this year and next year, including case studies, publications and a digital resource centre, housing best practices and then an ambassador programme which will help get more action on the ground. So EXARC will be keeping everyone posted on those developments. But we'd also of course like to, as Rebecca said, invite more dialogue and hear more about what your questions are regarding sustainability and what types of things you think would be important for archaeologists and for open-air museums, not only to know about but to engage in. And we very much encourage this just to be the beginning of our conversations and helping each other and supporting each other.

So I would like to ....oh Nathan, thank you. "What does Ki stand for?" Is K-i, yes. Ki is the Sumerian Earth Goddess and you'll actually notice that our logo is the Cuneiform symbol for Ki. So thank you for asking that question. So we very much look forward to continuing to work together. If you guys

have any questions or would like more information do not hesitate to reach out to any of us. I am available for some more time and I know that Rebecca I think can hang out for a little bit as well. So we're here to answer questions I think we'd like to open up the floor.

“Can anything be said about which countries are most progressive in the SDGs?” That is a very good question. There is no one country that is “doing it best”. It is very interesting when you talk about sustainability of course in the more western cultures and especially in Europe and North America. We tend to view sustainability from more of an environmental perspective, especially in terms of climate change and in terms of mitigating our carbon footprint. And when you discuss sustainability in the Southern hemisphere, especially in South America and Africa, it has much more of a social aspect. So social justice and equal rights. So it is also very interesting because you can't qualify who's doing it best because there's also different priorities in different parts of the world. The United Nations does have different tracking systems to kind of map out a little bit of what's going on, what countries are doing what, giving examples. Once again, it is quite a difficult thing to analyse and collect data on these types of initiatives and there are a lot of research projects going on to evaluate how sustainability is being implemented and what is working, and where we can find best practices and resources. So I think it is important to, you know, you can check out the United Nations website, that's something that we can put a link to here that will give you more information regarding how they're tracking the different targets and what is actually most successful and where is that.

I have another question here: “How can an organisation measure sustainability without putting more resource into high visibility sustainability over more structural changes that have effects over the long term?” I think that's a really good question. I think that measuring sustainability can be a little bit tricky in terms of what are you trying to measure. When people talk to me about how they can qualify or quantify even their impact, it also has to do a little bit with what you're aiming to do. So I always encourage organisations or institutions to pick a particular project, so for example as a conservator we use a lot of disposable nitrile gloves. And it's quite easy to actually see your impact if you start collecting the gloves that you use and counting them because there are recycling programmes and biodegradable nitrile gloves that are available. And conservators can often sometimes think that their impact is small or that they don't use that many gloves, but if you collect a box of gloves over the course of the year, then you can actually see your impact, whereas you know if... so with small initiatives like that, it's easy to look at your impact, you'll be able to visualize it and collect data on it.

There are of course other options such as carbon tracking systems where you can actually input for example, if you're an open-air museum, and you're interested in your CO2 emissions, you can input the data for your energy bill and for your energy consumption and how many lights you have. Things like that. And then you can actually track what your carbon emissions are. And then as you make improvements you can see how it goes down. So there are some software systems that can help with quantifying and qualifying the data. And those things are available, will be available in the Ki Culture digital research centre which will be set to launch this summer.

But indeed it can be, it can feel overwhelming so my recommendation for actually measuring your sustainability impact, is to pick a specific aspect of sustainability or specific action and do an assessment before and an assessment after, see what your impact is and then celebrate that. It's so important for us to be sharing our successes to not only to each other, and within our community, but also to the public. So showcase what action you've decided to take and talk about how much improvement. I think that that's one way as well to be able to focus on the successes and the smaller impact items rather than, as you said, have something that's overarching.

Thank you so much everybody for listening. Once again all of our resources and information is available online and we are continuing to work together to make the world a more sustainable place.

**Rebecca:** Thank you so much for joining, it was a pleasure to be part of it.