

## Climate Change Museums: The Klimahuset

By Audrey Quicke

Museums are key sites for climate change education, action and research. Oslo's Klimahuset museum is a world-leading institution dedicated to communicating climate change.

Museums provide a unique forum for climate change communication thanks to their status as independent institutions, their diverse audiences, vast collections, and research capacity. Their use of interactive media provides an alternative approach to the dominant models of science communication, while their public credibility allows them to deliver trusted climate change information. Additionally, museums can lead by example by reducing their carbon footprints and showcasing carbon neutral design and architecture.

Oslo's Klimahuset is a leading climate change museum. The pioneering institution is one of four climate-dedicated museums in the world.<sup>1</sup> Opened by the Crown Prince of Norway and the Norwegian Minister of Higher Education in June 2020, the museum provides science-based climate change information aimed at young adults.<sup>2</sup> It takes a solutions-based approach to climate change communication. Visitors take a 'Find the Solutions Card' with a QR code and are invited to reflect on how they can contribute to climate solutions.<sup>3</sup> Importantly, the museum explains the causes of anthropogenic climate change through an interactive display on the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation and fracking.<sup>4</sup>

The Klimahuset is located on the grounds of Oslo's botanic gardens and complies with Oslo's zero emissions building standards.<sup>5</sup> Built on a fossil-free construction site, the building uses natural ventilation, short-haul materials, rain beds for surface water, low-carbon concrete and a solar farm, and is located near public transport. The museum space is divided into zones that present climate facts, challenges, consequences, and solutions – and houses an amphitheatre for public lectures and meetings.<sup>6</sup> Exhibits are built to be easily updated in step with the latest climate science and theory.

The role of the museum sector in tackling climate change is recognised by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC),<sup>7</sup> and echoed in Article 12 of the Paris Agreement that affirms the importance of 'climate change education, training, public awareness, public participation and public access to information'.<sup>8</sup>

The International Council of Museums' Working Group on Sustainability was established in 2018 to strengthen

cooperation between international institutions with a sustainability focus.<sup>9</sup> Chaired by Morien Rees (Varanger Museum, Oslo, Norway), the working group supports its member museums to contribute towards climate change education and solutions.<sup>10</sup> Dedicated climate museums have been established internationally, as well as climate-themed exhibits in pre-existing institutions.<sup>11</sup> A list of climate change exhibits and museums is available on the Museums and Climates Change Network [website](#).<sup>12</sup>

Some Australian museums are realising their role in climate action and education. In 2020, Australia's natural history museums issued a joint statement on the 2019/20 bushfires, supporting increased funding and national action to address climate change.<sup>13</sup> Also in 2020, the Australian Museum opened a permanent interactive display, Changing Climate. Dr Jenny Newell is the Climate Change Projects Manager at the Australian Museum and a member of the International Council of Museums Working Group on Sustainability. She says:

*"More climate museums dedicated to the 'wicked problem' of climate change are needed, alongside more visible content, programming and discussion in existing museums."*

Museums around the world are evolving to help society understand the impacts of climate change and act as catalysts for climate action. As Australian museums are reimagined as sites of climate change communication, existing institutions like the Norwegian Klimahuset can serve as inspiration.



Above: The Klimahuset in Oslo, Norway<sup>14</sup>

The International Council of Museums' Working Group on Sustainability was established in 2018 to strengthen

<sup>1</sup> Newell (2020) *Climate museums: power action*, Museum Management and Curatorship.  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09647775.2020.1842236?needAccess=true>

<sup>2</sup> Norway Today (2020) "*Climate House*" opens its doors in Oslo. <https://norwaytoday.info/culture/climate-house-opens-its-doors-in-oslo/>

<sup>3</sup> Newell (2020).

<sup>4</sup> Stereoscopica (2020) *Klimahuset Interactive Table 2020*. <http://stereoscopica.com/portfolio/klimahuset-interactive-table/>

<sup>5</sup> Bollinger and Grohmann (2020) *Projects*. <https://www.bollinger-grohmann.com/en.projects.klimahuset.html>

<sup>6</sup> Natural History Museum (2020) *The climate house is ready – take a look*. <https://www.nhm.uio.no/klimahuset/nyheter/klimahuset-star-klart.html>

<sup>7</sup> United Nations (1992) *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, Article 6.  
[https://unfccc.int/files/essential\\_background/background\\_publications\\_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf](https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> United Nations (2016) *Paris Agreement*, Article 12. [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english\\_paris\\_agreement.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> International Council of Museums (2020) *Working Group on Sustainability Mandate 2020-21*.  
<https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/WGS-Mandate-2020-2022.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> International Council of Museums (2018) *ICOM established new working group on sustainability*.  
<https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-establishes-new-working-group-on-sustainability/>

<sup>11</sup> Newell (2020)

<sup>12</sup> Museums and Climate Change Network (2021) *Climate Change Exhibitions*. <https://mccnetwork.org/exhibitions>

<sup>13</sup> Government of Western Australia (2020) *Statement from Australia's Natural history Museum Directors*.  
<http://museum.wa.gov.au/explore/articles/statement-australias-natural-history-museum-directors>

<sup>14</sup> Open House Oslo (2020) *Klimahuset*. <https://www.openhouseoslo.org/?portfolio=klimahuset>

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