

## ICOM-DEM HIST Conference 2020

### Historic House Museums for a Sustainable World: Challenges and Opportunities

Amersfoort, The Netherlands, October 5-7; (post-conference tour 8-9), 2020

[icom-demhist2020.com](http://icom-demhist2020.com)

Museums are increasingly aware of the need to become more sustainable. To this end, many museums are already doing some green work and green thinking, thus contributing to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) and to creating a sustainable future. Government and funding bodies are increasingly demanding environmental assessment. As *agents of social responsibility* we are expected more and more to deal with the results of environmental change such as flooding and drought, and to fulfil our role as a forum for public debate.

In the Workplan for the Paris Climate Change Agreement, 2018 museums are recognised as key sites for climate change education. That means that as museums, we are considered to have great potential to create awareness among visitors, other sectors and our immediate environment. In practice however, the activities that museums develop to become more sustainable are mainly in the field of waste and electricity consumption. The activities to raise awareness are relatively rare. Many museums do not have structural policy regarding sustainability, nor do they monitor their progress. In other words: environmental sustainability is not yet mainstream or systemic within the museum sector. A lack of resources and expertise are obvious obstacles that stand in the way.

The ambitions and challenges are great: less energy, less waste, less water consumption, smarter use of resources and raw materials, more quality in the management and use of the collection, and more and better public participation. It affects every part of our work; it is about our building, collection management, operations, and the relationship with our public. How can we as historic house museums translate these ambitions into practice? How can we deal with the challenges, starting with our historic buildings, which are often far from sustainable to begin with? How can we protect our valuable historic houses from climate change? However, at the same time we must ask ourselves: how can we make use of our great potential as vectors for social and sustainable change?

These and other questions will be posed at our DEMHIST 2020 conference in Amersfoort, organized in conjunction with the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE). During the conference, we will hear experts on sustainability address these issues; we will examine the challenges; we will visit inspiring examples; and we will see that a lot is possible.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

In addition to keynote speeches, expert sessions and site visits, there will be two presentation sessions, each with 6 papers selected from proposals received through this invitation. We are also inviting proposals for posters exploring visually effective examples of the conference themes. We invite you to submit papers and posters addressing the conference theme. Within this broader theme, we welcome proposals focusing on the following two sub-themes.

### 1. Awareness

This session invites contributions that examine the opportunities to make climate and sustainability subject of museum programmes and communication with visitors. Research from 2018 (Broek et al., 2018, 103) showed that 89 percent of Dutch people aged 6 or over visited a cultural organisation or event at least once, and often more than once. The researchers postulated: "It is likely that many of those visitors – given the nature of a cultural visit – will be open to learn and discover new things. So if cultural organizations in the Netherlands radiate to their visitors that they think sustainability is important, that message reaches a large part of the Dutch at a time when they may be more receptive to it than usual". How do other countries feel about this? How can we use creativity to put these topics on the agenda and to create awareness? How can we include environmental issues within public programmes that are not directly about these issues? How can we design public programmes (exhibitions, educational programs, and events) that directly address environmental issues? How can we make use of our media (website, newsletter or social media) to inform our visitors about sustainability? How can we demonstrate how we, as museums, operate sustainably ourselves, if indeed, we do? How can we ensure that sustainable practices are embedded within the visitor experience – for example recycling bins, energy or water saving technology, and stocking green products in shops and cafes? How can the museum's mission, the trustees, the staff, and the expectation of the visitors work together?

#### Focus points:

- Contextual relevance to historical houses and historical house museums
- Practicality or feasibility of sustainable practices for historical houses

### 2. How to make our own activities more sustainable?

This session invites contributions which examine the challenges and the opportunities we are facing when it comes to become more sustainable ourselves. And if we do so, what is the driving motive/factor? Economics and cost saving? Morals or ethics? Peer pressure? Big picture best practices? What could be quick wins (like: choose sustainable partners / suppliers, recycle, print and copy less, turning off computers at the end of the work day)? How can we tackle bigger challenges such as sustainable housing, energy transition projects?

How do we go from mitigation of climate change to adaptation? How can we utilize collections, craftsmanship, our stories, our memories to build sustainable relationships with our visitors and our community? How to value our collection when it comes to sustainability? How can we work together with other cultural, heritage or social institutions? What do we need from our management if we are not the managers ourselves? What good practices we can share? Where do we start?

Focus points:

- New solutions for integrating modern technologies/ management within the context of historical preservation.
- The reconsideration or rediscover of historical procedures that can be implemented or adapted for sustainable maintenance of historic houses.
- Critical evaluation of costs/benefits for historical houses versus a potential for wider applications.

**3. Poster Session**

In order to encourage discussion among conference attendees, it will be required that the person submitting to the poster session (or someone representing the institution submitting to the poster session) attend the conference, and be present for the scheduled "poster session." (Time and place of poster session to be announced.)

The selection panel reserves the right to suggest alternate formats or sessions for proposals. The selection panel's decision is final.

**We kindly ask you use the submission form available here to submit your proposal to:**

**Remko Jansonius, [secretary@demhist.icom.museum](mailto:secretary@demhist.icom.museum).**

**Deadline for submission is March 31, 2020.**

**Acceptance of proposed papers will be confirmed by 30 April, 2020.**