

Editorial Issue 1/2023: Water and Heritage in Action: Commitments for a Sustainable Future

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Water awareness is inextricably linked to climate change awareness. In 1987, renowned climate scientist William W. Kellogg wrote an article about “the evolution of awareness” of humankind’s impact on the climate. He noted that over 150 years separated the first observations of this impact to the first explicit mention of the greenhouse effect in 1957 (Kellogg 1987). Over 35 years after Kellogg’s article, “awareness” is no longer the greatest challenge: it is “action.” The Water Conference of 1977 in Mar del Plata, Argentina, which aimed at establishing an international water resource management program, proposed an Action Plan to guarantee orderly administration of water resources as a key element for improving socio-economic conditions and quality of life for humankind (United Nations 1983). However, the plan did not result in widespread action and one reason was the broadness with which it was written. The 1977 Action Plan addressed countries generally, without considering specific climates, political structures, economic differences or socio-cultural contexts.

Almost 50 years later and halfway into the Water Action Decade (2018–2028), progress on water-related goals and targets remains alarmingly off-track (United Nations 2023). The Water Action Agenda and the UN 2023 Water Conference promises a different approach and calls for commitments and actions. The president of the General Assembly remarked on the need for game changers: methods, strategies, approaches and programs able to connect multiple disciplines, levels of governance and ways of thinking to enhance cooperation across actors, sectors and scales for sustainable development, beyond a “business as usual” approach (United Nations 2022).

The editors of *Blue Papers* are fostering action and commitment in ways that include developing *Blue Papers* as a global platform for gathering and sharing information and for exchange and collaboration across diverse disciplines, both in academia and in practice. They aim to promote understanding and analysis and to disseminate knowledge that connects water, culture and heritage to sustainable development. They argue that such a platform is needed for capacity building, the collection of knowledge and the development of guiding principles. They aim to:

1. Connect water and heritage by connecting system-based tools such as the UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape approach to system-based tools in water management.

2. Embed heritage sites in everyday practices and larger-scale systems to preserve heritage in a time of climate change.
3. Include disenfranchised groups and Indigenous people and their practices in decision making on water and heritage.
4. Develop new concepts and methodologies for connecting water and heritage through storytelling to bolster water awareness and citizen science.
5. Educate professionals and citizens through open online courses, serious games, open data and apps.
6. Connect tangible objects and structures to related intangible water practices.
7. Redefine the language, methods and frameworks of water, culture and heritage to include human and non-human actors.
8. Retrieve existing practices that respond to seasonal and water change.
9. Diversify water and heritage discourses and practices, bridging the gap between nature and culture, organic and man-made.
10. Explore new practices and rituals for water awareness and engagement.

Volume 2 Number 1 (2023) of *Blue Papers* includes critiques of current approaches and examples of how to change to a more context-based, culturally sensitive, and long-term form of water management that is not anthropocentric.

In Part I, Sandra Pellegrom sets the stage to get from commitments to action by proposing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a comprehensive framework addressing water and heritage management. Carola Hein reflects on the role of history in connecting water and heritage. In their articles, Eddy Moors and Eriberto Eulisse criticize existing capacity-building programs and broader; that is: and broader development paradigms, stressing the importance of rediscovering human coexistence with water and developing long-term perspectives and paths. Carlota Houart changes the perspective using the concept of “hydrosocial territories” to acknowledge the interrelations between humans and other-than-humans and favor more socio-ecologically just and biodiverse water worlds. This idea is also at the heart of Karl M. Wantzen’s contribution, which presents the publication *River Culture*, a multidisciplinary collection of adaptive strategies resulting from human-nature interactions. Sylvia Amann considers another role of culture, analyzing how it can change policy making based on silo-thinking. Charlotte Jarvis, Maria Pena Ermida and Ole Varmer discuss the importance of including underwater cultural heritage in marine spatial planning through integrated ocean and coastal management policies. Expanding on underwater cultural heritage, Gabriel Caballero, Bretony Colville, Elena Perez-Alvaro and Saranya Dharshini examine the current state of protection and advocacy, while also discussing the challenges of this heritage.

Part II opens with an interview with Kunlé Adeyemi, who introduces the African Water Cities project and methodology, at the intersection of rapid urbanization and climate change. Eriberto Eulisse presents the world inventory of water museums and interpretation centers, a attempt to initiate a worldwide census of institutions, practices, and organizations associated with water-related values to promote awareness and education. The case studies focus on the role that the past plays

in current water governance and resources management or that it might play in the future. In her case study of the Dutch Caribbean States and Territories, Suzanne Loen highlights the heritage of colonial water exploitation and its relationship to present-day inequalities and challenges. Sannah Peters, Maarten Ouboter and Jeroen Oomkens focus on water hazards-driven urban planning in Amsterdam, and how past decisions and narratives can drive present-day actions and inform more effective design principles for future city planning. Majid Labbaf Khaneiki and Abdullah Saif Al-Ghafari address how unbalanced local water governance disrupted a symbiotic relationship between upstream and downstream communities in the Abarkooh basin in central Iran. Mariëtte Verhoeven, Fokke Gerritsen and Özgün Özçakır discuss a historic aqueduct that still characterizes the Istanbul cityscape. Andrew Bernard, Christopher Fullerton, Meisha Hunter, Tonja Koob Marking and Priyanka Sheth narrate the history of the Erie Canalway in transporting goods, people and ideas, and they consider how it can be useful even today. Danna Albanyan closes this issue with her interdisciplinary analysis of the port district of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia and how revamping projects can align key pillars such as local economy, water management, sanitation, and social and cultural identity.

The time for creating awareness has passed. These articles no longer call for awareness, nor pose a broad “call to action.” Instead, they present actionable concepts, tools and methods to operationalize the Water Action Agenda in specific cultures, contexts and climates.

References

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