

Conservation is more than preservation; it is invariably a dynamic compromise focusing on the protection and often the reinterpretation of our heritage. It is essentially about development albeit of a specialised form. It is a well accepted paradox that buildings and places that have been adapted through the ages are the ones that survive today. At no time in the past has conservation been more challenging than it is today. Today's demands to sustainably adapt for climate change and contemporary needs, be it a dwelling, a public building, a commercial structure, or an historic urban environment, calls for an advanced philosophical approach and new skill sets.

The SDGs were ratified by all United Nations countries in 2016, meaning governments are obliged to set up a main government focal point and to develop and implement policies on all 17 goals.

Cultural heritage by its nature is very vulnerable to the effects of climate change from sea level rise, coastal erosion, fluvial and eluvial flooding, extreme weather events, increased precipitation and changing temperatures and there is hard evidence of ongoing loss or damage to important heritage sites around the world. Equally we can learn from cultural heritage in the way certain structures and archaeological sites have survived, how they were constructed, used traditional methods and skills and more importantly using planned maintenance to mitigate against the odds.

Perhaps our biggest challenge is to recognise how our historic built environment can contribute to reducing our CO² emissions and meeting our international commitments. Over 50% of our built environment was built prior to 1960 and 90% of our current built environment will be with us in 2050, so it is essential that we retain, reuse and sympathetically adapt our existing built environment to perform better from an energy use point of view.

A number of current studies are exploring how the regeneration of our existing towns, including reuse of vacant buildings and enhancing public realm can contribute to meeting the sustainability goals and protecting their cultural value. These projects demonstrate how these regenerated town can contribute towards achieving a number of SDGs including SDG 11 Sustainable Cities & Communities, SDG 13 Climate Action, SDG 9 Innovation and Infrastructure, SDG 8 Good Jobs and Economic Growth, and SDG 7 Renewable Energy.

Whilst climate change will affect our cultural heritage, the SDGs give us the tools to focus attention on the challenges ahead, on getting wider appreciation of our built environment and engaging with government departments in managing this change and maintain, protect and promote our cultural heritage.



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She co-hosts the weekly "Down To Earth" slot with Ivan Yates on Newstalk FM and serves as an Expert Evaluator for the European Commission's Horizon 2020 programme. Cara was appointed by Minister Denis Naughten as an advisor to Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency in 2016 and to the first National Dialogue on Climate Action in 2017. She also serves as an advisor to the Cool Planet Experience and was the first person in Ireland to join Al Gore's Climate Reality Programme in 2013. Her blog, The Verdant Yank, was awarded Ireland's best political and current affairs blog in 2016. She is a former hairperson of both Friends of the Earth Europe and Friends of the Earth Ireland.