

The content is published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 License.

Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

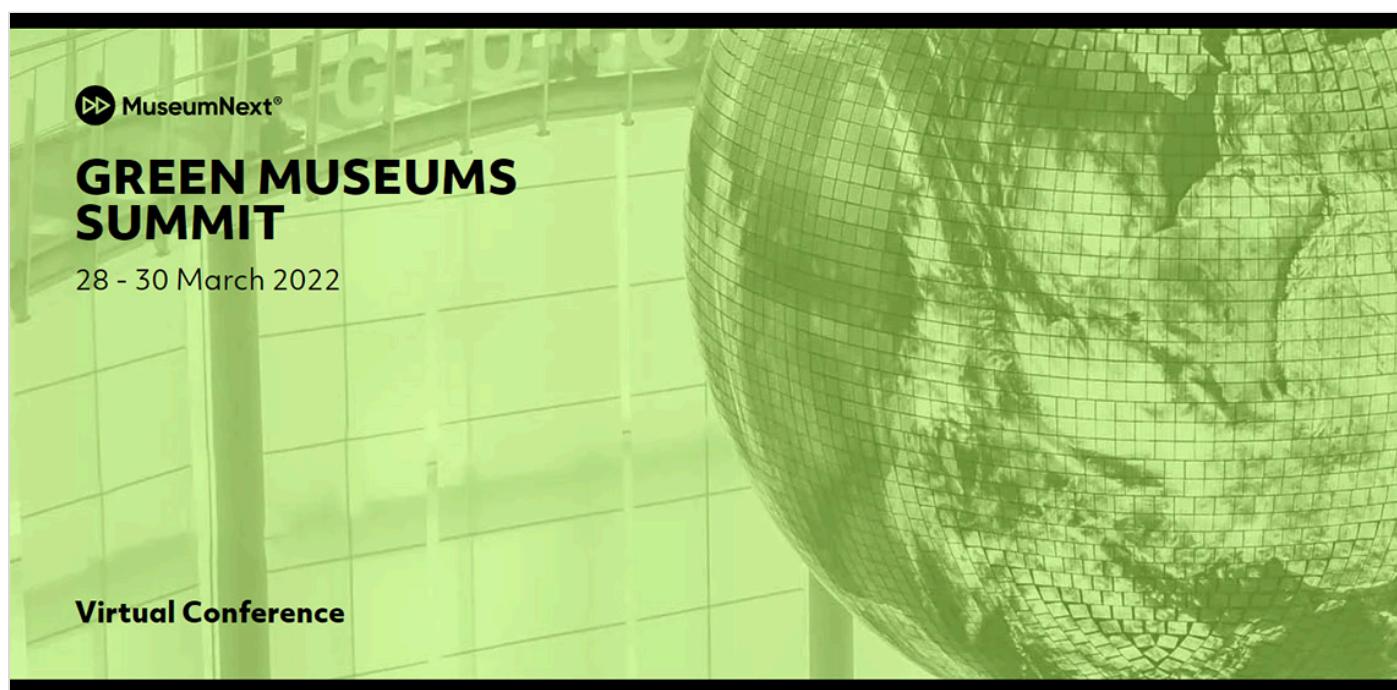
Conference Review: "Green Museum Summit" organised by MuseumNext

Persistent Identifier: <https://exarc.net/ark:/88735/10635>

EXARC Journal Issue 2022/2 | Publication Date: 2022-07-08

Author(s): Julia Heeb ¹ 

¹ Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin, Museumsdorf Düppel, Clauertstr. 11, 14163 Berlin, Germany.



An Inspiring Conference on how Museums can get the Ball Rolling to Save the Earth

A virtual format was a fitting setting for an international conference including the adjective "green" in the title as no flights were necessary to get together for the three days from the 28th to the 30th of March 2022. One might ask how the footprint of a virtual conference compares to that of a "real life" conference and indeed the question came up. A study published in 2021 showed that a one-day, six-hour virtual conference produced about 1,324

kg of carbon dioxide emissions (Faber 2021). The flights alone for the same event would have produced 66 times more emissions than the entire online conference (Faber 2021). So even though the impact of a virtual conference is much less than that of an in-person conference, it does still produce emissions. During the Green Museum Summit this question was posed to Michael Peter Edson, a digital strategist, his answer was “make it count”.



All open-air museums should use their natural, pre-existing habitats and topics to greater effect in the engagement with visitors to find solutions for the climate crisis and the terrible loss of biodiversity.

So, what better way to make it count than sharing lots of inspiring ideas and concepts on how museums can work more sustainably and how they can engage with the public to raise awareness and change minds on these issues!

The conference was organized well, the technical set-up worked without glitches and the Q&A sessions were moderated in a welcoming and friendly manner. The talks were prerecorded, whereas the Q&A session was carried out using a live video feed of the speaker(s) and moderator.

Although most speakers came from museums and galleries across the globe, some were also working in an independent capacity or were speaking on behalf of some thematically

related network or organization. The themes of the talks can be divided broadly into the following categories: Making the building and running of the museum more sustainable, lowering the environmental impact of exhibition making, making exhibitions on environmental topics or putting “an eco-lens” over all exhibitions, and carrying out educational programs on environmental and sustainability issues. Many of the talks and projects touched simultaneously on several of the topics defined above.

Making the building and running of the museum more sustainable

At Miraikan, the National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation in Tokyo, Japan, the motto is: “start changing yourself, and show these changes to the visitors”. This is what they did in many areas of their museum as Yasushi Ikebe, Principal Investigator for Science Communication, explained in his talk. Looking at their CO₂ emissions and changing to renewable sources for their electricity, offering soy-based meat alternatives at their restaurant and starting to use circular materials where possible. One fun example of how Miraikan is trying to change consumer habits is the museum vending machine. Vending machines are everywhere in Japan, filled with one-way packaged materials. The vending machine at the museum is covered in illustrated statistics on plastic waste. Next to the vending machine is a drinking water fountain, which can be used to refill personal drinking bottles.

Lowering the environmental impact of exhibition making

Daniel Vega Pérez de Arlucea, Deputy Director for Exhibitions and Conservation at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, talked about the little changes museums can start making straight away, without first consulting specialists and drawing up long action plans. Dealing predominantly with art exhibitions, the emphasis was on how to make the transport and exchange of art pieces more sustainable. Huge amounts of energy go into the making of boxes for transport. Instead of using new boxes each time, the Guggenheim at Bilbao is trying to use rental boxes where available, although the availability is still restricted. Due to Covid, they started virtual couriering, so instead of members of staff flying to different museums to see that their pieces of art are handled with care, the process is done via a webcam.

Making exhibitions on environmental topics or putting “an eco-lens” over all exhibitions

Ryan Jefferies, Director and Tilly Boleyn, Head of Curatorial at the Science Gallery in Melbourne, Australia, inspired with their participative approach to exhibition making, reaching and working with young people. The exhibition Disposable: Re-Imagining your Waste, was made up of several installations, including “Walrus of Peace” and “Eel Trap”. Writing from a European open air museum perspective, these two examples were particularly fascinating, as they used very old, first nations traditions to educate on more sustainable alternatives for modern day practices which are detrimental to the environment. Both were created by first nations artists. “Walrus of peace” offered alternatives to the harsh paints and acetates used for modern street art. Instead, ochre and other natural pigments were used as non-toxic alternatives for temporary street art. The “Eel Trap” was a giant eel trap made entirely from organic materials, drawing attention to the fact, that 60% of plastic waste in our oceans comes from fishing nets.

Carrying out educational programs on environmental and sustainability issues

In her talk “Staying with the Trouble” Hannah-Lee Chalk, learning manager at Manchester Museum, UK, took participants on a journey of discovery with a group of young people. The main idea was that museums have to help re-calibrate human-nature relations. Instead of a formal education towards sustainability, museums should show how one can live well, and live together, with a focus on caring for everyone and everything. The very participatory project allowed the pupils to question everything in a museum, letting the topics for small self-curated exhibitions develop naturally. Museums appeared as places “full of trouble”, be it the ethics of collecting the objects themselves, to the impact of the everyday workings of a museum. Is bubble wrap there to protect? It does not protect the environment. These often-contradictory topics were used to explore what it means to live in the Anthropocene and how to maybe live better.

Lessons for open air museums

There were many other great examples, like the “Green Handprint”, a positive grassroots approach to “greenify” museums developed at the Finnish National Gallery, or the work of the Louisiana Children’s Museum, who have been using reclaimed and ecological materials for making their fun and beautiful exhibitions for decades! A few general themes echoed throughout the talks – when approached with a positive attitude, it is a lot easier to engage with the public on green topics and they are a lot more willing to implement necessary change. Most of the examples used art to start a dialogue. Working with diverse artists in diverse materials. Through art it seemed people could relate easier with these difficult topics, especially when the processes of the making of the art was made transparent. Perhaps a further lesson to take away for open air museums? During the conference it became apparent that many installations re-created natural habitats and scenarios to engage with visitors on green topics. In open-air museums we have a diverse range of natural habitat in real life, without having to build them using resources and energy in the process. Most of the time, they are however not used to the same effect.

All in all, it was a valuable experience, being able to explore the many actions taking place already and taking away many ideas for the immediate future. All open-air museums should use their natural, pre-existing habitats and topics to greater effect in the engagement with visitors to find solutions for the climate crisis and the terrible loss of biodiversity.

🔖 Keywords [review](#)
[conference](#)
[environment](#)

Bibliography

Faber, G. 2021. A framework to estimate emissions from virtual conferences, in *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 78/4, 608-623. < <https://www.tandfonline.com/genv20> >

Louisiana Children’s Museum - [Home](#) - [LCM](#)

Disposable, Science Gallery Melbourne - [Disposable](#) — [Science Gallery Melbourne](#)

The green Handprint at the Finnish National Gallery - [The environmental programme of the Finnish National Gallery](#) | [Ateneum Art Museum](#)

[Museums for Future](#)

[Green exhibits](#) – Resource for green exhibition making

Climate Museum New York - [Climate Museum](#)

 Share This Page



| Corresponding Author

Julia Heeb

Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin

Museumsdorf Düppel

Clauertstr. 11

14163 Berlin

Germany

[E-mail Contact](#)