

The Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage greatly appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on the revision of the EU Arctic Policy.

Our experience in the area, stems from Norway's management of heritage in Arctic areas under Norway's jurisdiction. We strongly assume that both the challenges and possibilities that we have encountered would be similar in the greater Arctic area.

The European Union's responsibility for cultural heritage is stated in its treaties, among other, [TEFEU](#) 167 (4) stating that The Union *shall take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of the Treaties, in particular in order to respect and to promote the diversity of its cultures.*

Moreover, there is shared interest between the cultural heritage sector and the EU in explicitly recognizing cultural heritage in the new Arctic Policy. The cultural heritage sector and its challenges in the Arctic are multifaceted. Initiatives securing cultural heritage can be leveraged to support other EU goals in the Arctic area.

The current EU Arctic policy focuses on three areas; 1. Climate change mitigation and adaptation and environmental protection, 2. Sustainable and inclusive development and, 3. Enhanced international cooperation. In the public consultation at hand, it is underlined that these themes are still relevant. Our understanding is that cultural heritage can be useful to include in all three focus points.

It is stated in the call for evidence that science, research, technology, connectivity, and innovation, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples are particularly important across all three focus areas – a perspective strongly supported by our directorate. Lastly, the EU Arctic policy needs to be aligned with and reflect the relevant Commission priorities (such as sustainable prosperity, competitiveness, and defence and security).

Climate effects are rapidly increasing, leading to new challenges and a changed landscape. The challenges include higher temperatures in air and sea, retreating sea ice and accelerating thawing of the permafrost. Glaciers are melting at a much faster rate than before, causing erosion and landslides with mass movement of soil.

Preservation conditions for both standing heritage structures and buried cultural artifacts change dramatically. Higher air temperatures cause wooden elements in standing buildings and structures to degrade at a faster pace. This increases the need for maintenance and restoration.

Buried cultural artifacts, e.g., objects of organic material—wood, bone, hide, and various types of textiles have until recently been preserved by the permafrost. Typically, this includes tools and household items linked to past settlements and activities. They reflect a society that over several hundred years engaged in hunting and fishing. When the permafrost melts, the objects are exposed to, among other things, sunlight and

oxygen, which break down organic material. If the objects are not quickly excavated and conserved or frozen, they will disintegrate.

Another major climate-related problem is erosion, which causes objects in the shoreline zone to slide out and disappear into the sea. Arctic heritage also includes washed-ashore cultural artefacts brought in by the sea through the centuries.

Larger rescue operations will often depend on extra resources. One example is the retrieval of coffins with contents from the cemetery at Likneset on Svalbard. Coffins interred more than 400 years ago were about to slide into the sea due to erosion. They were moved to the Svalbard Museum in Longyearbyen for conservation and storage, as a basis for future research and presentation. This project was carried out as a joint effort with participation from various competence fields. The current resource situation requires strict prioritization in the daily cultural heritage management on Svalbard.

Other challenges facing heritage structures include mass tourism, including cruise ships disembarking passengers at previously unexposed destinations, alongside shifts in land use patterns, physical deterioration, and littering.

We would assume other local cultural heritage management in the Arctic are facing similar major challenges, without necessarily being equipped to solve these issues on their own.

The Directorate for Cultural Heritage sees a potential for increased EU involvement to better preserve Arctic cultural heritage and cultural environment resources, in supporting the responsible Arctic nations.

Arctic region heritage constitutes a knowledge bank for future research and outreach activities. This knowledge bank is of immense value, not only nationally or regionally, but also globally.