

Capacity to care: Transdisciplinary Education for Ecocultural Heritage

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By acknowledging the inherent links between ecology and culture, ecocultural heritage provides a promising framework for fostering natural and cultural diversity whilst renewing the relevance of the historic environment in an era of rapid environmental and societal change. A key challenge is providing practitioners and decision makers with the skills and knowledge to understand complexity and recognise integrated values whilst also facilitating action. Effective cultural heritage management has always demanded interdisciplinary collaboration. Beyond the disciplines traditionally associated with the historic built environment, ecocultural approaches require collaboration across landscape, environmental, and traditional/Indigenous knowledge disciplines. Building capacity in ecocultural heritage practice and expertise needs to reflect this inherent diversity and provide a suitable transdisciplinary platform.

This keynote presents recent initiatives in educational practice that respond to this need for new skills, knowledge, and forms of engagement in ecocultural heritage management. These include Managing Loss in the Historic Environment: Ecocultural Approaches, a professional training course aimed at a cross-sector, mid-career audience, and the Academy of Conservation and Care for the Environment (ACCE), a transdisciplinary living lab aimed at young professionals. Managing Loss builds upon the emerging concept of 'adaptive release', which frames the management of transformative change as a dynamic ecocultural process with potential co-benefits for natural and cultural heritage. ACCE utilises large heritage sites and cultural landscapes to foster common understanding and expose students to diverse real-world initiatives. Drawing on the broader experience of the Sites at the Intersection of Natural and Cultural Heritage (SXNCH) network from which these training programmes emerged, and related research projects, the keynote argues that new forms of transdisciplinary education are essential to embedding ecocultural approaches within future heritage practice.

