

Bridging the gap: Policymakers turn to humanities to advance sustainability goals

ASU, UNESCO BRIDGES and the Club of Rome launch a manifesto to advance global sustainability research and policy

By Emma Glassman-Hughes, ASU News
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It's one thing to know the climate is changing. It's another thing to be moved to action.

Though scientists have been sounding alarm bells about climate change for decades, key institutions worldwide — governments, think tanks, nongovernmental organizations — have failed to reach their stated sustainability goals time and again. Globally, this has slowed action to curb climate change and damaged public trust.

But the [Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory](#) at Arizona State University, [BRIDGES](#) and the [Club of Rome](#) are producing new tools to mobilize global climate efforts.

Ahead of the 2026 MOST Forum in Paris this week, the partner groups are releasing "[A Time of Great Consequence: A Manifesto for Bridging Knowledge and Action.](#)"

Informed by research conducted with interdisciplinary stakeholders around the world, the document offers a framework for inviting viewpoints that are often marginalized in scientific, academic and research spaces — whether that's artists, social scientists or Indigenous knowledge-keepers.

According to Steven Hartman, founding executive director of BRIDGES Sustainability Science Coalition, the manifesto was written to provide member states of UNESCO with the tools they need to "make a difference" on the ground in a variety of different communities.

"The manifesto prioritizes new intellectual resources that have not previously been a strong part of the science-policy process," Hartman said. "That's where the humanities, arts and social sciences come in. It's also where traditional knowledge, Indigenous knowledge and local knowledge play an important role as well."

With its flagship hub based in the ASU Global Futures Laboratory, BRIDGES was launched in 2021 as a science coalition with a twist.

Nestled within UNESCO's Management of Social Transformations program and aimed at advancing progress toward the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, BRIDGES goes beyond conventional environmental science and research circles, engaging experts with wide-ranging transdisciplinary backgrounds.

It's that diversity of perspectives Hartman believes will "help policymakers design more effective policies that meet the needs and the realities of the 21st century."

At the [UNESCO MOST forum](#), leading policymakers, researchers and practitioners will come together to weave principles from the manifesto into an actionable tool kit that will eventually be distributed to policymakers and sustainability stakeholders across UNESCO's member states.

The manifesto will be accompanied by a policy framework that was also submitted to the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO's Management of Social Transformations program.

Through these efforts, the coalition aims to scale up its expansive structure, make it more accessible on a global level and offer guidelines for the best uses of the humanities and social sciences in achieving sustainability goals.

"Human ingenuity has transformed our world, creating extraordinary progress alongside unprecedented challenges," said [Peter Schlosser](#), university vice president and director general of the ASU Global Futures Laboratory. "Now we must summon that same ingenuity to confront the consequences of our actions. We must accept our collective responsibility and change course while we can — working toward a better future for people and the planet."

Together, the manifesto's authors assert that knowledge about the drivers, threats and mitigation of climate change has never been so broadly available, and yet, "our collective response remains profoundly out of step with what we know," per the manifesto.

Core to the manifesto is a set of commitments that include honoring diverse knowledge systems; supporting intercultural deliberation, learning and collaboration; and restructuring institutions "so that they learn with the communities they serve."

"The wisdom required to navigate our crises already exists everywhere, in the lived experiences of those on the frontlines," said Carlos Álvarez Pereira, secretary general of the Club of Rome. "This manifesto is the choice, made in solidarity, to transform decision-making with that wisdom, as generations to come deserve."

It has been endorsed by numerous other researchers, civil scientists and policymakers from around the world, including economics professors in Massachusetts; public governance professors in Cape Town, South Africa; one of the world's leading science fiction writers; and the co-chair of the UNEP International Resource Panel.

Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, France's former minister of education and an endorser of the manifesto, said: "The barriers to knowledge are political, cultural and gendered, and for too long, that knowledge has been produced by a narrow circle and directed at everyone else. This manifesto names those barriers and commits us to placing the social sciences and humanities at the heart of

how we govern, for the benefit of all.”

The manifesto continues that thought: “No single knowledge system can meet the challenges of our time alone. Humanity’s response depends on bringing together the full spectrum of knowledge — scientific, humanistic, cultural, Indigenous, professional and lived — to match the scale, speed and complexity of the transformations now underway.”

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Main image



In partnership with ASU and the Club of Rome, UNESCO's BRIDGES coalition is unveiling a manifesto and tool kit dedicated to bringing a more diverse set of perspectives into sustainability research and policy.

Text image(s)



Steven Hartman



Peter Schlosser



