

Taking tips from Vikings can help us adapt to global change

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Climate change, economic turmoil and cultural upheaval may be pressing concerns today – but history can teach us how best to respond, research suggests.

Scientists studying the past environments and archaeological remains of Greenland and Iceland have been able to analyse how well the Norse responded to changes in the economy, trade, politics and technology, against a backdrop of changing climate.

They found that Norse societies fared best by keeping their options open when managing their long-term sustainability, adapting their trade links, turning their backs on some economic options and acquiring food from a variety of wild and farmed sources. Researchers say their findings could help inform decisions on how modern society responds to global challenges.

In the middle ages, people in Iceland embraced economic changes sweeping Europe, developed trading in fish and wool and endured very hard times to build a flourishing modern society. In Greenland, however, medieval communities maintained traditional Viking trade in prestige goods such as Walrus ivory. In adapting to severe weather, the Norse in Greenland became increasingly specialised, and in the 15th century changes in trade, climate and cultural contact with the Inuit led to the society's downfall.

The findings are to be presented as part of a symposium on 'Climate

Change and the long-term sustainability of societies' at the annual conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Vancouver, Canada on Sunday 19 February.

Professor Andrew Dugmore, of the University of Edinburgh, who is presenting the findings, said: "Our future will in part be shaped by [climate change](#), and to prepare for it we can learn valuable lessons from how societies of the past have adapted and even flourished amid a backdrop of difficult conditions. Most importantly we can understand how a combination of climate and non-climate events can lead to a 'perfect storm' and trigger unexpected and dramatic social change."

Provided by University of Edinburgh

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