

Bread and Circuses

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Enabling social innovation for local climate adaptability

- RMIT University's Centre for Urban Research (CUR) in partnership with Macquarie University, Griffith University and Curtin University
- The ARC [project investigates the framings and practices of local governments, community groups and NGO's as they seek to create local adaptation strategies.](#)
- This research is concerned with responses to climate change and variability at the local scale.

Local scale

- The task of adapting to climate variability and change (CVC) is acutely felt at the local scale. Yet local government, often tasked with leading local adaptation, is presently caught in what might be called an 'implementation trap'. *This research seeks to understand why.*
- Central to this research is critical interrogation of tensions and potentialities of local governance and bottom-up innovations by local groups and NGOs.
- The aim is to: a) direct policy attention to building social innovation and capacity-building practices at the local scale; and b) develop conceptual and theoretical explanations for how various actors operationalize their response to climate variability at the local scale to develop (mal)/adaptive responses

Research questions:

- How do citizens, political decision-makers, policy-makers, planning officers, and service and advocacy groups frame climate adaptation at the local scale and do different framings lead to conflict and/or cooperation?
- What institutional and cultural forces shape local actors' understandings, framings and practices and how do local actors respond to these forces, especially across scales?
- What factors determine whether the different framings and practices they engender translate into policy decisions and on-the-ground actions for CVC adaptation
- How do local actors 'go round the back' (Hillier 2000) of local institutions' mainstream approaches in search of socially innovative responses that better meet their needs?

The research involves 4 phases:

Phase 1. National audit of local government, community-based initiatives and identification of case studies

Phase 2. Case study investigation and analysis

Phase 3. Analysis and synthesis

Phase 4. Development of a capacity-building resource for socially innovative adaptive practice

Selection of Community/NGO's

- In the first quarter of 2016, the Project Team completed a desk survey of NGO climate change strategies and initiatives in the four metropolitan areas of Perth, Melbourne, Sydney and South East Queensland.
- Two NGOs from each project State were selected for further in-depth study and were selected against the following criteria:
 - ✓ Responsiveness to local conditions;
 - ✓ Meets genuine needs;
 - ✓ Empowerment of communities;
 - ✓ Potential transformation of social relations;
 - ✓ Community engagement in preparation and delivery of strategy and initiatives;
 - ✓ Inclusion of the vulnerable and non-human.

Case study selection – Victoria

EFLAG (Elwood Floods Action Group)

EFLAG formed after Elwood experienced an extreme weather event in February 2011. As an advocacy and action group, EFLAG works to inform local residents about: how the area experiences flooding; what they can do to prepare for and respond to future floods; and what residents can expect from various government agencies and associated bodies in times of severe weather.

Transition Towns Maroondah Inc

Transition Towns Maroondah Inc is a community group based in Melbourne's and part of the international Transition Towns movement. The group regard 'localisation of the economy and our way of life, and re-skilling as keys to resilience and sustainability'. Key initiatives include: sustainable transport; community engagement; waste management; reskilling; living simply; food; localised economy; and energy.

Case study selection – Western Australia

Environment House

According to their 2015 Annual Report community programs include – Bayswater \$WAP Program 2015 was proposed and developed by Environment House in conjunction with the City of Bayswater. Grass roots initiative to encourage residents to reduce household energy and water use. Over \$11,000 of eco-hardware was given away to local residents, expertise provided to ensure correct appliances were chosen and advice regarding installation delivered. Six workshops were also held on energy and water efficiency.

Ecoburbia

Ecoburbia addresses vulnerability across issues (CVC, Peak Oil, economic change etc) by educating, role modelling and experimenting in sustainable and self-sufficient living. Ecoburbia is set up as a small business, not an NFP, to give the proprietors more flexibility regarding new ideas. The Beaconsfield community is explicitly governed as a benign dictatorship.

Case study selection – NSW

Nature Conservation Trust NSW

The Nature Conservation Trust key mission is to facilitate the conservation of natural heritage on private land in which biodiversity can thrive. It achieves this by facilitating voluntary covenant agreements with private landholders committing to in-perpetuity conservation reserves; by maintaining a revolving fund to acquire lands of high biodiversity value, establishing covenants on those lands and returning them to the private market; and communicating to the broader community the importance of natural heritage on private lands in NSW. It partners with other natural resource management agencies and conservation initiatives to develop its broader strategic approaches

CANWin

CANWin – Climate Action Now! Wingecarribee – is a non-partisan community group based in the Southern Highlands of NSW. It works to foster community-based initiatives that respond to the impacts of climate change and develop community resilience in the face of peak oil. A central driver is the recognition that none of us can do this alone, but that together we “must be the change we want to see in the world” (Mahatma Gandhi). CANWin runs regular public events, such as speaker nights, film nights, and the recent Clean Energy Future workshop. It researches and prepares information sheets for members and the public on scientific and technical matters that affect the sustainability of life on the Highlands.

Case study selection – South East Queensland

GECKO (Gold Coast & Hinterland Environment Council)

Gecko is the Gold Coast's peak non-government not-for-profit environment group that networks with a wide range of volunteers and organisations who work together to protect and enhance the natural and environmental assets of our region. Gecko's goal is to ensure the Gold Coast and surrounds become sustainable by way of anticipating and assessing impacts prior to projects being approved to ensure development is undertaken without risks to biodiversity, the ecological system and the livability of the region. Gecko is committed to action on climate change at a local level. The Campaigns Sub-Committee meets each fortnight to discuss the issue and ways that the organisation can make a difference.

Green Cross Australia

Green Cross Australia is not an advocacy group – rather it works with respected business, research, community and government partners to deliver 'world-class' digital projects that foster a global values shift towards a secure and sustainable future. The mantra, Think + Act + Share = Change, is key to the organisation's projects. The organisation believes the power of its projects is empowering Australians to take practical, informed action. It encourages people to take action, and then gives them the tools via social and digital media to share their actions with their friends. It uses mapping technologies to visualise participation in its projects and to measure engagement.

Motivation for Action

- desire for change
- response to key issues
- concern for the environment
- wanting to drive leadership in adaptation
- frustrated by a lack of leadership from government
- ways to take action on mitigation and adaptation
- find avenues to act hopefully, and in connection to others, in the face of impending environmental and economic crisis

Types of activities

- Local community activities – “Well we go to fetes and we have stalls and we’ve had film nights and we had a forum on solar and we’ve had food swaps and clothes swaps and we had a gardening group”
- Skills audit – “We’re asking people – if this is your passion, what you’re really interested in would you be willing to work on it?”
- Education - “education in this area is so important I feel and we do, Transition Towns does. This community is not aware of what’s going on”
- Good relationship with council – “We had an input that was certainly highly regarded by the Council and it was out into the structure plans and we work well with”
- Lobby group role – “charter is to lobby local, state and federal governments and all instrumentalities” / “ We monitor Council meetings for the and go along and make submissions to the budget for increased spending on programs. If an issue comes up and it’s not on their agenda we go and ask questions just to put them on the record with Council Officers and Councillors”

- Social innovations based on '*agility*', media and defined projects linked to specific outcomes.
- An innovative model based on partnering with business and government and using digital communications to enhance and build social networks to enable climate action.
- E.g. business action network enables business leaders from organisations such as Australia Post, ANZ, Optus, Suncorp etc. to exchange ideas about adaptation and innovation.
- They specifically stated that they were not about 'lobbying or advocacy'.

- NGO ability to adapt and respond to opportunities as a major asset – this meant they saw themselves not so much as innovative in themselves, but as enabling (their own word)
- NGO integration of social justice, ecological and environmental aims meant that their energy was put into actions that helped poor and/or marginalised communities to adapt (reduce costs, grow food, share resources, build social capital, understand nature)
- E.g an experiment with an alternative form of 'subdivision' to build a resilient, eco-friendly community and focusing their efforts on their particular scale of influence (starting with their own land, extending to their neighbours and associates ...), as well as its choices to remain independent rely on private resources.

How might we re-imagine our experience of, and responses to, the climate-changed city?

- Insurgence , Informality, Interstitial
- Quiet activism, everyday activism, wilful hope
- Social innovation and bottom-linked practices
- Beyond bread and circuses