

Enabling social innovation for climate adaptation at the local scale

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

- Climate adaptation is a cross-sector agenda
- Insurgence , Informality, Interstitial spaces
- Quiet activism, everyday activism, wilful hope
- Social innovation and linked-up practices
- Beyond bread and circuses

- RMIT University's Centre for Urban Research (CUR) in partnership with Macquarie University, Griffith University and Curtin University
- This ARC project is concerned with responses to climate change and variability at the local scale.
- The research investigates the framings and practices of local governments, community groups and NGO's as they seek to create local adaptation strategies.
- We regard social innovation as 'extra-ordinary measures taken by ordinary people' (Baker and Mehmood, 2015: 321). In particular, it means addressing needs and problems through **novel practices which create better social relationships between people, organisations, institutions and/or governance systems.**

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 and potential for co-management.
- The aim is to:
 - a) direct policy attention to building social innovation and capacity-building practices at the local scale; and
 - b) develop explanations for how various actors operationalize their response to climate variability at the local scale to develop (mal)/adaptive responses

Research questions:

- How is climate adaptation framed at the local scale?
- How do local actors respond to climate challenges across scales?
- What factors influence policy decisions and on-the-ground adaptation actions?
- How do local actors 'go round the back' of 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 - Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth

Phase 3. Analysis and synthesis of interviews and focus groups: local government, NGOs and private sector

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

Climate adaptation strategies: What was the same?

Dominated by risk framing

Climate change is 'rendered manageable' (e.g., mapping/modelling)

Little evidence of public involvement

Community as a naïve public requiring educating

Many adaptation plans are now 5 years old or older

Energy a key issue

Resilient assets and infrastructure

- We are interested in....
- ✓ 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.

Motivation for Action – across sectors

- desire for change
- response to key issues
- concern for the environment +community
- 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

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- 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.
- 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.
- E.g. Local government key adaptation initiative such as the 'Solar Saver Program' which enables pensioners to install solar power to their homes with no upfront cost and instead pay the system off through their Council rates over 10 years, interest free.

Innovations - Government

- ‘Mainstreaming’ climate adaptation into all areas of government; implementation by stealth; building relationships with community
- Sharing knowledge, effective communication, more transparency

Innovations - NGOs

- Innovation need not be for the wealthy, low tech solutions are important too; framing climate change through intrinsic values rather than economic ones
- Finding new ways through obstacles and barriers; sharing between groups, catalysing events.

Innovations – Private Business

- Pushing a different agenda to government and NGOs, integrate sustainability as a top priority; industry champions to drive change, through projects and demonstrations;
- Educating markets and professions; recognizing the cost-benefits of more sustainable practice; innovation in materials and technologies
- Innovation and affordability and not being afraid to test new things’
- If innovation adds value, it is not a risk

Making change

*'it's not **done in a strategic way**, and I think that's where it needs to be done. It needs an overall strategy where you **target the champions** of industry. The people who can make change. The people in local government who have shown a commitment to it. The people in industry, whether it has been in the planning industry, certain planning groups as well as the developers themselves' (WA, Private Industry FG)*

*I think the other glimmer of sunshine thing – I don't think about this often but when I do I think it's the underlying motivation - it's sort of the bureaucratic term for it - but **there are lots of co- benefits for adaptation** and so the idea that you can make the whole world a better place, that you can make society better off and improve the lives of the community through adaptation, there's real **opportunity for transformation**, which means you can look at the issue as making really **positive change as opposed to just managing** and reducing a problem (Vic, Government FG)*

“A common world is not something we come to recognize, as though it had always been here (and we had not until now noticed it). A common world, if there is going to be one, is something we will have to build, tooth and nail, together”.

Bruno Latour (2010, p.455)