

City Health and Liveability stream

Climate Justice in Practice: Addressing social inequity and climate resilience through place-based capacity building with community service organisations and local governments

Authors: Moloney, S. Dunn, K. Gooder, H. and Piper J. (Centre for Just Places, Jesuit Social Services)

Introduction

This paper outlines a place-based approach to enabling climate adaptation and resilience across community service organisations (CSOs) and local governments in Melbourne particularly in areas experiencing socio-ecological disadvantage. We present lessons from research with CSOs conducted throughout 2020, reinforced by findings from a series of workshops with CSOs and local governments in 2021, led by Jesuit Social Services (Centre for Just Places). The process of engaging CSOs together with local governments creates opportunities for relationship building, learning and collaboration and bridges siloed policy and practice domains around health, social services, emergency management and climate adaptation planning. This we argue, opens up the 'interstitial' spaces required to enact climate justice in practice, through focusing attention on both the contextual and systemic drivers of vulnerability in place.

Intersecting climate justice and social justice

Engaging with issues of climate justice in place begins in the recognition that we live and work on Aboriginal Country where sovereignty was never ceded. We are guided by First Nations' practices of caring for Country. This holistic understanding of place and people is fundamental to climate justice (First Nations Climate Justice Panel 2021).

Climate justice and climate adaptation scholarship is commonly framed around two central and intersecting issues (Glover & Granberg 2020). The first addresses

the inequitable impacts of climate change whereby climatic changes work to maintain, exacerbate, and create new forms of social, economic, and ecological inequity (IPCC 2014). For example, in 2019 when the town of Katherine in the Northern Territory experienced 54 days of 40°C+ temperatures, two thirds of emergency department presentations identified as homeless (Quilty & Wood 2019). The second central issue is raised when considering climate adaptation responses and actions and highlights the perennial challenge of addressing unequal access to political power and decision-making. Those most vulnerable, in terms of sensitivity to the impacts of climate change, with limited capacity to cope and adapt, are also those excluded from designing solutions and policies to minimise risk and vulnerability. Moreover, solutions and policies can entrench marginalisation and shore up existing forms of structural violence and inequities (Anguelovski & Pellow 2020; Porter et al. 2020; Edwards 2021; First Nations Climate Justice Panel 2021).

Towards place-based approaches

Jesuit Social Services (JSS), a social change organisation, has worked for over 40 years in Australia with the most marginalised. JSS recognises that environmental challenges like climate change pose disproportionate and inequitable risks to these communities and is working to embed an ecological, climate justice focused approach across its work (Jesuit Social Services 2021). Through the *Dropping Off the Edge* series, JSS has gathered considerable understanding of the many ways vulnerability manifests, with this longitudinal research highlighting high levels of persistent disadvantage experienced across Australia. The JSS Centre for Just Places (CJP), established 2021, seeks to support place-based approaches nationally through research, collaboration, engagement and knowledge exchange, in order to enable resilient, inclusive and regenerative communities. Place-based approaches can be constituted in many ways, but the following definition offers insights into their 'best practice' characteristics:

A collaborative, long-term approach to build thriving communities delivered in a defined geographic location. This approach is ideally characterised by

partnering and shared design, shared stewardship, and shared accountability for outcomes and impacts (Dart 2018: 7).

While place-based approaches are often adopted to tackle complex social challenges, spanning organisational boundaries and sectors, such as health equity (i.e. Southern Initiative, Auckland NZ), it is clear these approaches, informed by principles of self-determination and community-led empowerment, must be integrated with climate change adaptation. Conversely, enacting climate justice in practice requires place-based, evidence informed, people centred practice to address social inequities and enable resilience (Gooder et al 2020; Bowen and Friel 2015). Listening to First Nations perspectives on the climate crisis and 'walking the walk' with indigenous communities in the fight for justice must be central to this work (First Nations Climate Justice Panel 2021).

While in Victoria, place-based models and frameworks (i.e. the Victorian Government's Framework for Place-Based Approaches (2020) and Place-Based Adaptation Planning Guidance (DELWP 2020)) represent a way of working in place particularly for government, there is limited guidance or support to enable resource-constrained organisations and communities seeking to establish their own resilience in the context of climate change.

Place-based capacity building with community service organisations and local governments

To facilitate effective place-based approaches for climate change adaptation, local actors need to be invited in to inclusive, multi-stakeholder processes. Stakeholders such as CSOs and local governments often lack the capacity or capabilities themselves to convene, plan for, and adapt with climate change. For example, in the Victorian context, a 2019 survey of 139 CSOs found that while many were aware of, and already experiencing, climate change impacts, two thirds had not taken action and were underprepared to manage and respond to climate risks (VCOSS 2019). This finding was further reinforced by research carried out in 2020 across a suite of projects engaging with CSOs through

interviews and workshops (Rubenstein et al. 2020). While the risks to, and role of, social infrastructure and community and health services in the context of climate change is clear (Cutter et al 2008; Bajayo 2012; Walker et al 2015; Klinenberg 2018), there is much work to be done to build resilience across the sector and with communities. CSOs are key to enabling resilient communities as “building individual and community resilience has been the core focus of the community sector for decades”...as they are “embedded in their local communities, build and maintain social connections and networks, and develop the strengths of people and families, all of which contribute to day to day resilience” (VCOSS 2017). Moreover, CSOs have relationships and trust with those most at-risk from climate change who are often marginalised from decision-making processes (Bosomworth 2020).

The CJP have been convening and facilitating workshops, which in 2021 brought together 80 CSOs across local government areas in Melbourne, to build climate literacy, understand how climate change is impacting organisations and communities and identify needs, strengths, and potential responses. These workshops bring into conversation those working in housing, mental health, settlement, community development, urban planning, emergency management, and other areas of climate resilience to co-create local and context specific knowledge about the intersectional aspects of social inequities, vulnerabilities and climate change. This place-based approach helps reveal the underlying drivers of risk and vulnerability, highlighting roles and responsibilities, and opens up space for shared advocacy and collaboration through a climate justice lens.

Conclusion: climate justice in practice

Creating space for more inclusive adaptation processes that attends to both contextual and systemic drivers of risk and vulnerability in place, helps mobilise efforts to reduce the disproportionate burdens of climate change impacts on those experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation. By facilitating the resilience building processes of CSOs, local governments and communities

some progress is being made in understanding and enabling climate justice in practice. This ongoing relational work is necessary for ensuring a deliberative, inclusive and proactive approach as we adapt together with climate change.

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