

Four ways to advance equity and justice goals in climate action planning

May 31 2023



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Municipal climate action plans often identify equity and justice as goals, but engagement with these concepts is mostly rhetorical. A new study from the University of Waterloo details how planners can bridge the gap

and challenge the current state of climate change and social inequity.

The study asserts that developing participatory approaches to public consultation and [community engagement](#) that actively and intentionally involve vulnerable populations who are most affected by climate change is critical. Expanding the sphere of knowledge we consider when talking about climate change reshapes the questions that are asked and the possible solutions and alternatives that are up for discussion.

"The urban [governance](#) community is not as explicit as it should be about the need to prioritize vulnerable residents during decision-making processes about climate change," said Kayleigh Swanson, Ph.D. candidate in Waterloo's School of Planning. "Consequently, the voices of people experiencing various forms of oppression are largely excluded from so-called participatory climate action planning processes."

In pursuing participatory methods, the study advises practitioners to keep four actions top of mind: consistently modifying strategies, designing collaborative spaces that recognize various ways of knowing, addressing the gap between what is said and what is done, and attending to the underlying social processes that drive vulnerability to climate change.

"Challenging the status quo is not an easy task, but the evidence shows that climate actions are more effective if they are designed and implemented with engagement by local actors," said Dr. Mark Seasons, professor in Waterloo's School of Planning. "Urban governance actors can influence the conditions that determine whether people can participate effectively and help to frame important issues being considered by decision-makers."

Building inclusionary planning processes is a considerable challenge for urban governance actors, but these processes are necessary to realize

equitable distributive outcomes. Exclusion runs the risk of creating a triple injustice whereby those who contribute to [climate change](#) the least are positioned to suffer the most from its effects and are disproportionately affected by [climate](#) action policies that exacerbate the social, economic, and [environmental challenges](#) the groups already face.

The study, "Centering Equity and Justice in Participatory Climate Action Planning: Guidance for Urban Governance Actors," appears in the journal *Planning Theory & Practice*.

More information: Kayleigh Swanson, Centering Equity and Justice in Participatory Climate Action Planning: Guidance for Urban Governance Actors, *Planning Theory & Practice* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/14649357.2023.2189288](#)

Provided by University of Waterloo

Citation: Four ways to advance equity and justice goals in climate action planning (2023, May 31) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-05-ways-advance-equity-justice-goals.html>

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