



Climate justice and global cities: Mapping the emerging discourses



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ABSTRACT

Ever since climate change came to be a matter of political concern, questions of justice have been at the forefront of academic and policy debates in the international arena. Curiously, as attention has shifted to other sites and scales of climate change politics matters of justice have tended to be neglected. In this paper, we examine how discourses of justice are emerging within urban responses to climate change. Drawing on a database of initiatives taking place in 100 global cities and qualitative case-study research in Philadelphia, Quito and Toronto, we examine how notions of distributive and procedural justice are articulated in climate change projects and plans in relation to both adaptation and mitigation. We find that there is limited explicit concern with justice at the urban level. However, where discourses of justice are evident there are important differences emerging between urban responses to adaptation and mitigation, and between those in the north and in the south. Adaptation responses tend to stress the distribution of 'rights' to protection, although those in the South also stress the importance of procedural justice. Mitigation responses also stress 'rights' to the benefits of responding to climate change, with limited concern for 'responsibilities' or for procedural justice. Intriguingly, while adaptation responses tend to stress the rights of individuals, we also find discourses of collective rights emerging in relation to mitigation.

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1. Introduction

Ever since climate change came to be a matter of political concern, questions of justice have been at the forefront of debates. Within the international negotiations, significant effort has been expended on negotiating such matters, for example the relative responsibilities of different nation-states for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, how and by whom adaptation finance should be raised, and the extent to which different private and civil society actors should have a seat at the negotiating table. Within different national contexts, questions of justice and climate change have also been raised. For example, recent debates in Australia over the introduction of a 'carbon tax' draw on broader debates about who

might lose and who might gain from such measures (Büchs et al., 2011) while in Germany and Japan questions of the future of nuclear power bring to the fore questions of intergenerational justice (Butler et al., 2011). Different policy responses to climate change have also drawn attention to notions of justice. To give just one example, debates over the Clean Development Mechanism have sought to illuminate the extent to which local communities can both participate in the process of project design and gain from the financial flows that are created as a result of particular interventions (Boyd and Goodman, 2011). While the politics of the forms of justice to which responding to climate change is giving rise may appear hidden within the formalities of the policy processes, procedures and techniques for accounting for carbon, the measurement of adaptation capacity and so on, commentators in the academic community and beyond have been quick to draw attention to the potentially uneven and inequitable nature that such responses may have, showing that "communities vulnerable in the face of climate change can also be vulnerable when confronted with adaptation and mitigation intervention and discourses" (Marino and Ribot, 2012, p. 391).

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Given the relative prominence of questions of justice within the climate change domain, it is perhaps all the more curious that there has been little interrogation of how these play out in the urban context as municipalities and other urban actors seek to respond to climate change. Over the past two decades, cities have increased their efforts to address climate change. Initial efforts made in the 1990s by transnational municipal networks and individual local authorities focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. More recently, this has been complemented by local initiatives and widespread recognition that cities must prepare for climate impacts. Indeed, in 2010 the World Bank described the imperative of addressing the twin challenges of climate change mitigation and adaptation at the urban scale as an 'urgent agenda' (World Bank, 2010). While the global environmental governance community is beginning to build a picture of how and why cities are pursuing climate mitigation and adaptation, the social and environmental justice challenges that such actions raise often remain hidden from view. In this paper, we seek to examine whether and how principles of justice are emerging within urban responses to climate change. Taking as a point of departure discussions within international politics about what constitutes a just response to climate change, together with the difference between 'distributional' and 'procedural' formulations of justice advanced in wider debates on environmental justice (Dobson, 1998; Low and Gleeson, 1998; Schlosberg, 2007), we examine the ways in which concerns about justice are being articulated in the planning and implementation of urban climate change policy and projects, and consider the extent to which the city provides an arena within which questions of climate justice need to be thought anew.

In the first section, we consider how notions of justice have been articulated in relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation. We distinguish between 'distributive' and 'procedural' notions of justice and explore the extent to which existing formulations of climate justice are applicable to the urban scale (Schlosberg, 2007). We find that there are some interesting differences across the mitigation and adaptation domains in the ways in which principles of climate justice have been articulated, and some critical challenges in translating these principles into the urban arena. In the second part of the paper, we use these concepts to analyse the discursive representation of climate justice in urban climate governance. Drawing on an analysis of projects and interventions taking place in one hundred global cities in response to climate change, we find explicit articulations of distributive and procedural justice across the adaptation and mitigation domains in only a small number of cities. We focus our analysis on this 'purposive' sample, exploring the ways in which discursive representations of climate justice differ between cities in the global north and global south, and across the mitigation and adaptation arenas (Castán Broto and Bulkeley, 2013).

Alongside the examination of these particular initiatives, we supplement our analysis by considering discursive representations of justice in the climate mitigation and adaptation plans of three cities in which some of these projects were located – Quito, Toronto and Philadelphia. We find that there is a common focus on issues of distributive justice across these different arenas, and that in relation to adaptation, matters of distributive justice are more often framed in terms of benefits to individuals, while in the mitigation arena, collective rights are more often articulated. The focus on collective rights is also more often articulated in initiatives in the cities in our sample that are part of the global south, where discourses of procedural justice are also more prevalent. Our analysis of the planning processes in Quito, Toronto and Philadelphia demonstrates that climate governance is being articulated as a process through which to provide benefit to marginalised communities and to include them in processes of decision-making, suggesting that where principles of justice are

being articulated at the urban level this is taking place both within formal planning processes and in discrete project-based initiatives. In conclusion, we suggest that the principles of climate justice that have been developed in the international sphere provide a productive starting point for analysing how these issues are being framed and addressed in the urban arena. However, we argue that in order to take account of the different forms of climate justice being articulated at the urban level, we need to move beyond such accounts and consider the ways in which processes of urbanisation serve to shape responsibilities, rights and the ability to participate in making climate change decisions.

2. Climate change, justice and the city

Issues of justice, equity and legitimacy have been central to both policy and academic debates about the politics of climate change (Bulkeley and Newell, 2010; Giddens, 2009; Grubb, 1995; Marino and Ribot, 2012). For the most part, the conceptualisation of justice as it pertains to climate change has drawn from principles of political philosophy which seek to establish what might provide a fair basis for the division of responsibilities for responding to a common resource problem and where obligations, to current and future generations, might lie (Caney, 2010; Grubb, 1995). Such principles do of course have something to say about how decisions should be reached, but the focus is on the outcomes and consequences of (in)action. In a parallel debate, concerns have been raised about the accountability and transparency of climate policy, and discussion has taken place about the ways in which decision-making over the use and protection of global commons can be made more legitimate or democratic (Gupta, 2010). In both debates, there has for the most part been an assumption that the appropriate scale at which these issues need to be resolved is the international – as a global problem, climate justice is assumed to be a matter of determining the appropriate division of burdens and benefits either between nation-states or individuals as members of a global community, and likewise matters of enhancing legitimacy in decision-making also turn on how states and individuals are involved in global politics.

More recent scholarship on climate justice has also sought to draw on the wider literature concerning environmental justice. First coined by the US social movement that sought redress from the exposure of poor and minority ethnic communities to environmental harm, the concept of environmental justice has since given rise to other forms of social movement, a policy vocabulary, and a research field (Agyeman et al., 2003; Walker and Bulkeley, 2006). Within environmental justice scholarship (for example Schlosberg, 2007; Shrader-Frechette, 2002), conceptualisations of climate justice – that is, the mobilisation of justice with respect to climate policy – have been characterised by a distinction between *distributive* and *procedural* justice (O'Brien and Leichenko, 2010). This engagement has therefore provided a means through which to bring concerns for the outcomes and processes of climate policy into the same frame of analysis. Yet despite the origins of the environmental justice movement in local struggles over risk, for the most part the debate on climate justice remains framed at the international level. In this section, we explore these debates in more detail. We examine the concepts of distributive and procedural justice in turn, examining the ways in which principles of justice have been applied to climate mitigation and adaptation, and considering the implications for questions of climate justice at the urban scale.

2.1. Distributive justice: rights and responsibilities

Rights and responsibilities in the context of climate justice can be conceptualised as two sides of the same coin. Debate about

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