My country or my planet? Exploring the influence of multiple place attachments and ideological beliefs upon climate change attitudes and opinions

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ABSTRACT

Research on people-place relations, specifically place attachment and place identity, is beginning to make an important contribution to understanding human responses to climate change. However, to date there has been a dearth of research on how place attachments at multiple scales, particularly the global, and individual level ideological beliefs combine to influence climate change attitudes and opinions. To address these gaps, survey data was collected from a representative sample of Australian citizens ($N = 1147$), capturing attachments at neighbourhood, city/town, state/territory, country and global scales, as well as a range of climate change belief and individual difference measures. Results show the importance of the interplay between national and global place attachments. Individuals expressing stronger global than national attachments were more likely to attribute climate change to anthropogenic causes, to oppose hierarchy-enhancing myths that legitimize climate inaction, and to perceive positive economic impacts arising from climate change responses, in comparison to individuals indicating stronger national over global place attachments. Individuals with stronger global than national attachments were more likely to be female, younger, and self-identify as having no religion, to be more likely to vote Green and to be characterized by significantly lower levels of right wing authoritarian and social dominance beliefs. Right wing authoritarian and social dominance beliefs mediated the effects of place attachments upon climate change skepticism. Explanations for the findings and implications for future research are discussed.

1. Introduction

Understanding public engagement with climate change has become increasingly important, against a backdrop of compelling scientific evidence of changes to the earth's climate arising from human activities (IPCC, 2013). Geographers (e.g. Hulme, 2008) have argued that climate change should be conceived as a situated phenomenon, implicating relationships between people and places, rather than a decontextualized system of abstract knowledge. A prevalent 'localist' discourse presumes that individuals value only what is spatially and temporally immediate, manifest in the literature on sustainable development (e.g. Meadows et al., 1972, cited in Barr, 2008), sustainable communities (e.g. Bridger and Luloff, 1999) and public engagement with climate change (e.g. Lorenzoni et al., 2007; Hulme, 2008; Milfont,

2010). But is the global necessarily 'distanced and un-situated relative to an individuals' mental world' (Hulme, 2008, 8)?

Heise (2008) claimed that to effectively respond to climate change, we need a 'sense of planet' as much as a 'sense of place'. Jasanoff (2010) argued that ideas of belonging and stewardship can develop on a planetary scale. Such critiques of localism, which entwine human responses to climate change with concepts of place, identity and scale, matter because 'the spatial resolutions at which social processes . . . are perceived to take place, have significant implications for understanding our world' (Herod, 2011, xiv).

Two decades ago, Feitelson (1991) proposed that global place attachment is significant for public engagement with climate change and concluded that the interplay between national and global place attachments would be critical in influencing public responses. Despite his conclusion that 'the evidence on this topic is mostly anecdotal, and more systemic work is badly needed' (1991, 405), these issues remain neglected (Devine-Wright, 2013). Many questions are yet to be systematically addressed: can individuals form relations of belonging and stewardship to the whole Earth,

and not just to the neighbourhood or city where they live? Under what situations? With what consequences? Could public engagement with climate change (defined broadly in terms of cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects, Lorenzoni et al., 2007) arise from global as well as local concerns? This study begins to address these gaps.

2. People-place relations and climate change

Agnew (1987) defined place as comprising three elements: a fixed coordinate or location, a social milieu, and sense of place – an emotional bond connecting individuals to that place. Research on sense of place was led by humanist geographers (e.g. Tuan, 1977) and developed by environmental psychologists who proposed concepts of *place identity* (Proshansky et al., 1983) and *place attachment* (Altman and Low, 1992) to describe the identity-related and emotional aspects of people-place relations. Place attachments and identities influence how climate risks are perceived and responded to (Burley et al., 2007; Harries and Penning-Rowsell, 2011). For example, place attachment was negatively associated with willingness to relocate to another area (Marshall et al., 2007), and with capacity to transform practices in order to adapt to climate change (Marshall et al., 2012). Place attachments underpin 'NIMBY' (Not In My Back Yard) objections to renewable energy projects (Devine-Wright, 2009) and case studies of offshore wind energy (Devine-Wright and Howes, 2010), wave and tidal energy (McLachlan, 2009; Devine-Wright, 2011a,b), nuclear power (Venables et al., 2012) and power lines (Devine-Wright, 2013) have indicated that community acceptance is undermined when technologies are perceived to threaten the distinctive character of a place. Finally, place attachments are relevant for the communication of climate risks. Scannell and Gifford (2013) studied the impact of spatial framings ('local' and 'global') and place attachment upon climate change engagement; regression analysis showed that place attachment was the strongest predictor.

2.1. Place, scale and climate change: from local to global

Although these studies provide strong evidence for the relevance of people-place relations for climate adaptation, mitigation and risk communication, they are limited by a 'localist' focus upon the places nearby to where participants live, with the presumption that these are the only places that people value and form relations of belonging with. However, individuals may feel alienated from local places (Lewicka, 2011a,b) and form relations of belonging to places at more distal scales, including the planet itself: 'At one extreme a favourite armchair is a place, at the other extreme the whole earth' (Tuan, 1977, 149). That global scale people-place relations may inform understanding of climate change was first suggested by Feitelson (1991), who proposed that climate responses would be fostered by strengthened place attachments at the global level and attenuated attachments at the national level. Yet we know surprisingly little about the extent to which individuals form relations of belonging to the whole Earth, not just to the neighbourhood or city where they live; nor is it clear to what extent multiple forms of belonging are complementary or contradictory (Devine-Wright, 2013).

There is some evidence that global identities are relevant to public engagement with climate change. Qualitative analysis of the Copenhagen climate change negotiations concluded that the emergence of a superordinate international identity would foster coordination amongst nation states (Batalha and Reynolds, 2012). At the individual level, Katzarska-Miller et al. (2012) drew on survey data from three countries to find positive, significant correlations between global identity and concern for global warming (US = .20; Bulgaria = .40; India = .36). Qualitative analysis of data from an open-ended question revealed a range of meanings associated with global identity, including tolerance, connection to others, travel, freedom and rejection of the nation state. With the exception of tolerance, the prevalence of each theme varied significantly across the countries, and rejection of the nation state was most commonly expressed by US participants. This is supported by quantitative analyses from the same survey, which found a significant, negative correlation between national and global identities for US respondents, but significant, positive correlations for Bulgarian and Indian respondents.

Running (2013) investigated four forms of self-identification (as 'global citizen', 'national citizen', 'local community member' and 'autonomous individual') and their relation to the perceived seriousness of climate change, using data from the World Values survey with respondents from fifty seven countries (n = 40,330). 80% of respondents ascribed the label 'global citizen' to themselves. Logistic regression analysis indicated that only a combined global citizen/autonomous individual variable was significant in predicting the perceived seriousness of climate change, controlling for personal characteristics; identification with each level in isolation was non-significant.

These disparate studies provide some evidence that relationships with places at multiple scales are relevant for understanding climate change opinions. Whether global and national identities are complementary or contradictory seems to be context specific, and likely to be influenced by the ways in which globalization and the nation state are socially represented in different milieux. This conclusion is supported by qualitative studies investigating the politics of climate change. Hovden and Lindseth (2004) investigated how different framings of climate change were mobilized, contested and evolved over time in Norwegian policy making during the 1990s. They identified two prevalent discourses – 'national interest' and 'thinking global' – reflecting different positions taken on the relationship between actions within and without national borders to reduce carbon emissions. Kurz et al.'s (2010) analysis of political speeches during the 2007 Australian election campaign revealed discourses of the 'national interest' and 'preserving our lifestyle'. In both these studies, climate change responses were emplaced at multiple scales, predominantly the national, and what was argued over was whether the continued exploitation of indigenous fossil-fuels for economic benefit could be considered compatible with a responsible position on climate change. They indicate how discourses of the global – regardless of whether explicitly related to climate change – are often framed in terms of negative impacts upon national interests (see also Snider et al., 2013), in particular reducing economic growth, employment and standards of living.

Several tentative conclusions may be drawn: (1) that individuals can form attachments at the global level; (2) that attachment and identification at both national and global scales are influential in shaping individual opinions and collective responses to climate change; (3) whether climate change responses, typically framed in terms of national (typically economic) interests, are argued to be complementary or contradictory with supra-national (i.e. global) or sub-national (i.e. community or individual) levels varies by context. Yet a number of weaknesses in these studies can be identified.

First, the potential relevance of place attachments and identities at local and regional as well as national and global scales for climate change beliefs and opinions has yet to be investigated in a single study. Second, climate change opinions have been narrowly researched in these studies in terms of perceived seriousness or concern, neglecting issues such as attributions of causality (anthropogenic vs. natural), perceived risks and impacts. Third, survey research has relied upon