

Sustainable Adaptation: Social Equity and Local-Level Climate Adaptation Planning in U.S. Cities

Authors : Duran Fiack, Jeremy Cumberbatch, Michael Sutherland, Nadine Zerphey

Abstract : Civic leaders have increasingly relied upon local climate adaptation plans to identify vulnerabilities, prioritize goals, and implement actions in order to prepare cities for the present and projected effects of global climate change. The concept of sustainability is central to these efforts, as climate adaptation discussions are often framed within the context of economic resilience, environmental protection, and the distribution of climate change impacts across various socioeconomic groups. For urban centers, the climate change issue presents unique challenges for each of these dimensions; however, its potential impacts on marginalized populations are extensive. This study draws from the 'just sustainabilities' framework to perform a qualitative analysis of climate adaptation plans prepared by 22 of the 100 largest U.S. cities and examine whether, and to what extent, such initiatives prioritize social equity improvements. Past research has found that the integration of sustainability in urban policy and planning often produces outcomes that favor environmental and economic objectives over social equity improvements. We find that social equity is a particularly prominent theme in local-level climate adaptation efforts, relative to environmental quality and economic development. The findings contribute to the literature on climate adaptation and sustainability within the urban context and offer practical insight for local-level stakeholders concerning potential obstacles and opportunities for the integration of social equity initiatives into climate adaptation planning. Given the likelihood that climate changes will continue to impose unique challenges for marginalized communities in urban areas, advancing our understanding of how social equity concerns are integrated into adaptation efforts is likely to become an increasingly critical area of inquiry.

Keywords : climate adaptation plan, climate change, social equity, sustainability

Conference Title : ICSCS 2021 : International Conference on Sustainable Cities and Society

Conference Location : Singapore, Singapore

Conference Dates : January 11-12, 2021