



Case Study

University of Sydney and City of Sydney: adaptation strategy deliberation case study

Summary

This case study recounts the development, execution and findings from a Citizens' Panel conducted in the City of Sydney in November 2014. The Citizen's Panel was developed by the City of Sydney and a University of Sydney research team. They developed a deliberative process whereby citizens provided feedback to the City on the development of Sydney's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy. The University of Sydney research team also developed a Q-Methodology survey to test participant attitudes towards different facets of adaptation both before and after the deliberative event. This case study recounts the findings from the Panel itself as well as the findings of the survey research, which indicated that participants created new discourses post-deliberation that were less exclusionary and more community-oriented.

Soliciting community views on urban adaptation priorities

The community holds diverse views on climate change and how to respond. To better understand how a community considers climate change adaptation in an urban setting, a deliberative process was conducted by the University of Sydney and the City of Sydney to elicit Sydney residents' views on the City's adaptation planning strategy. Held in November 2014, the process aimed firstly to get residents' ideas and feedback on the set of climate risks and potential

policy responses identified in the City of Sydney adaptation planning strategy. A second aim was to examine the participants' understanding of, and priorities for, adaptation policy.

The process used for the exercise is known as a deliberative public panel. These types of deliberative democracy events can be used to understand community views on a range of complex topics: they engage a cross-section of the community, generally over a period of a weekend, and seek to provide a deep understanding of an issue in a credible, transparent process.

The Citizens' Panel process

The City of Sydney Citizen Engagement Panel on Climate Change Adaptation consisted of 23 randomly selected participants who were recruited by a market research company. A range of demographic attributes were represented, including different ages, income and education levels and house ownership/rent situations; although younger females in particular were under-represented. The final group was made up of nine women and 14 men who came from Sydney communities/villages, including Chippendale, Erskineville, Glebe, Newtown, Pyrmont, Redfern, Rosebery and Surry Hills. Participants filled out an online survey both before and after the event, so that the researchers could identify changes in participants' understanding and/or position as a result of the deliberative engagement.

The Panel process began with an evening introductory session on 13 November 2014, followed by a two full-day sessions the weekend following (15–16 November). At the introductory session, the participants were given a brief presentation on the climate change challenges for Council by Hudson Worsley, the project lead for the City of Sydney's adaptation planning. Panel members then worked in small groups to identify important questions (Figure 1) before shifting to a plenary format to discuss a couple of the questions.

The weekend sessions followed a similar mode of presentations of technical information, small group discussion sessions and plenary discussions with technical experts. A consultant with RPS Australia Asia Pacific, Stella Whittaker, was also involved in technical discussions.

On Saturday, Hudson gave two presentations: 'Impacts of heat and rain/flooding' and 'Impacts of fire/air quality, sea-level rise and combined risks'. After each presentation, the participants discussed the information in small groups and developed one or two questions per group. At the end of the day, participants developed a set of preliminary recommendations for Council about the vulnerabilities they considered were the most important and those that were missing from the list of risks Council had identified.

Sunday morning began with Hudson presenting about Council's planned climate change adaptation actions, followed by small group discussions to develop questions and identify priorities for adaptation actions. In the afternoon, through a plenary session, the participants came to a deliberated consensus and refined the risks and recommended adaptation actions collated from the small groups.



Figure 1: The Citizens' Panel at the introductory session. Photo: © David Schlosberg, 2014.

The process concluded with two representatives from the Citizens' Panel giving their recommendations to the City's Sustainability Manager, Chris Derksema. The representatives outlined the Panel's experience of the process, then gave a general preamble and a set of overarching principles (Box 1). This level of engagement about the desirable type of adaptation policy process was broader than requested by Council, which had two central tasks for the group: to list the risks they wished to add to those already identified by Council and to prioritise actions for the Council Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (Box 2).

Overall assessment of the process

The research group reflected that the process had gone very smoothly. The participants got on well, with a level of respect, attentiveness, dedication and collaboration that was palpable to both participants and observers in the room. One participant failed to return for the second day, and another was asked to leave on the final day after experiencing some personal difficulties; this is not unusual for events like this with randomised selection processes. The citizens seemed to take their role in the process seriously and were dedicated to the healthy adaptation of their neighbourhoods and the city as a whole.

Preamble: 'We are a diverse group of citizens who live in many of the villages that make up the City of Sydney. We love where we live and value the vitality of the city and the connection we feel to the people within our communities. We have learned much about the risks the city faces from climate change now and into the future and some of the ways in which the Council plans to address those risks. We recognise that these risks also provide an opportunity to create an even more livable and resilient city. What follows are our recommendations to help achieve this vision.'

Overarching principles:

- A resilient, long-term plan – politically sustainable and economically efficient and socially inclusive
- Plan based on most up-to-date data
- Effective communication strategy for adaptation actions
- A flexible, responsive and dynamic plan to account for unexpected trends and unexpected consequences.

Summary of the process outcomes

One of the key goals of the process was to gauge citizen reaction to the set of climate risks already compiled by the City (Figure 2). The Panel was particularly concerned about food security and about the impact of climate change on the most vulnerable members of the population.

The Panel also identified risks additional to those raised by Council, including risks to pets and pet owners during heatwaves, risks to wildlife in the city (flora and fauna) and risks from wind.

The second goal was for the Citizens' Panel to prioritise adaptation actions by the City. The Panel focused on water-sensitive urban designs, from stormwater infrastructure upgrades to recycled water programs. They were also keen to prioritise the urban forest strategy and locally grown food.

The Panel added some new proposals, including respite spots for active transport users (pedestrians and bicycle riders) and the development of policies to address wind in the city. Further, the Panel wanted the City to appoint a Chief Adaptation Officer, divest from fossil fuels, increase community education and awareness, communicate risk and recommend citizen actions, address possible regulatory restrictions to adaptive actions at private homes (such as awnings, water collection or solar panels) and become a global leader in adaptation, assisting less well-off cities.

Finally, the Panel recommended further, similar deliberative citizen forums.

The Panel also identified further research they would like to see as part of adaptation planning. To address their concern about the risks to the most vulnerable populations, they wanted more thorough research done to identify these populations in the city. The group was also concerned that the sea-level rise information they were presented with was limited and inadequate; they wanted more research done on specific potential sea-level rise impacts on the city, infrastructure and residents. In addition, they suggested more work be done to understand the impact of climate change on food growing and provision in the City, as well as potential adaptive actions to address food security risk.

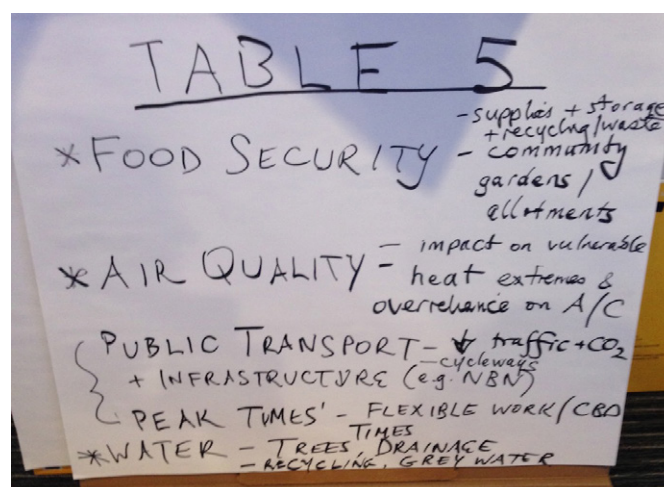


Figure 2: Risks identified by one of the groups of the Citizens' Panel. Photo: © David Schlosberg, 2014.

Summary of the Panel findings

Council-identified adaptation options which the panel prioritised

- Stormwater upgrades
- Use of recycled water
- Community education on efficient gardening
- Urban forest strategy
- Material selection in built environment
- Water-sensitive urban design
- Community awareness about extreme heat days and flooding

New risks identified by the Panel

- Stress on pets and consequences for pet owners
- Impacts on wildlife and the repercussions for the City
- Mental health impacts
- Impacts on vulnerable groups and those not yet identified
- Absence of effective communication to the community about the risks and planned adaptation actions
- Risk of litigation
- Food security
- Sea-level rise – adequately assessed?
- Impact of sea-level rise on water table
- Policies for climate change may conflict with other Council policies
- Changing wind patterns

Panel-identified priority responses

- Dedicated respite spots for active transport users
- More education and availability of face masks for high air pollution days
- Use of native trees and built features as wind breaks
- New design principles to reduce wind tunnels
- Identify which groups are particularly vulnerable to climate change and develop strategies catered to each group
- Chief Adaptation Officer at the executive level to be empowered to coordinate action
- Address inflexible, outdated regulation that impairs capacity of citizens to adapt e.g. solar panels and awnings
- Council divests from all fossil fuel investment and extends ethical investment
- Effective and accessible education about impacts and adaptation planning
- Taking action to address potential litigation actions based on known risks
- Council taking leadership of effective air pollution control from motor vehicles – limiting car use further
- More foliage and planting
- Council needs to review insurance of the most extreme events
- More deliberative community forums
- Warning systems for severe weather events
- Global leadership – assisting less fortunate areas to build capacity eg. developing countries and other councils.

A second part of the Citizen Panel process was to examine the change in participant attitudes across the course of the deliberative event. Results from both the pre- and post-event surveys show broad agreement of the need to work towards a new type of economy that does not pollute the environment.

The post-event survey, however, showed many more areas of agreement across discourses. Citizens were focused on preparing for extreme weather events, increasing community engagement on climate adaptation and preparing health services for both the physical and mental health impacts of climate change. Overall, participants went from a 'pragmatic action' discourse in the pre-event survey to a 'community-oriented' discourse in the post-event survey.

The post-event survey also showed general agreement of the need for strong local disaster response, to boost health services and to deal with the heat island impacts. There was also broad agreement that adaptation is about broader issues of environmental concern, including uniquely Australian species and the Great Barrier Reef, as well as impacts on Australian tourism and the importance of food security. The consensus about the need for a new non-polluting economy indicated that citizens were moving beyond a basic emergency risk-based response towards more 'transformative' language. The two larger discourses also agreed that the City *should* interfere with development to deal with effects from climate change, that food security was an issue, that climate adaptation needs a holistic approach and that it is important to look after communities that will be more affected than others. All but one group of discourses agreed that communities should be involved in discussions about climate adaptation. These areas of agreement suggest that participants moved towards a set of common concerns through the engagement and deliberative process, creating greater consensus in the post-deliberation discourses than was identified in the pre-deliberation discourse.

The data also show evidence of a softening of exclusionary tendencies illustrated by some participants in the pre-deliberation survey. While there was a clear signal that some people held little regard for particular vulnerable groups prior to the deliberation, that exclusionary position was no longer strongly represented in the post-survey discourses. There was an emerging consensus on a concern for vulnerable groups, which aligned with the Panel's call for further research on the issue.

Conclusions

The City of Sydney Citizen Engagement Panel on Climate Change Adaptation produced both a substantive contribution to the specific adaptation planning process being undertaken by the City and a broad consensus on the priorities of adaptation planning more generally. The City welcomed the input of the Citizens' Panel, incorporating the proposed principles at the start of the draft adaptation plan (Figure 3) and using green stars in the plan to illustrate Panel support for initiatives.



Figure 3: City of Sydney's draft Adaptation Plan. Source: City of Sydney 2015.

References

City of Sydney, 2015: Adapting for climate change – Draft: A long term strategy for the City of Sydney. Accessed 15 June 2017. [Available online at www.sydneyoursay.com.au/climate-change-adaptation/documents/25553/download].

Further reading

Schlosberg, D., S. Niemeyer, and L. Collins, 2015: Adaptation deliberation case study: City of Sydney University of Sydney research team findings. University of Sydney. Accessed 15 June 2017. [Available online at www.sydney.edu.au/environment-institute/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Adaptation-Deliberation-Case-Study-City-of-Sydney-.pdf].

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Australian Government

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