

Configuring responsibility in the city: justice and low carbon transitions in Hong Kong & Singapore

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“Climate resilience requires not only efforts in mitigation and adaptation but also in strengthening the social response to climate-related risks and emergencies... Everyone in Hong Kong can make lower-carbon choices”

(Environment Bureau, 2017: 86)

“As a responsible global citizen, Singapore will do our part to reduce emissions, while ensuring that we continue to grow and prosper”

*(National Climate Change Secretariat,
2012: 4)*

Climate Change & Singapore:
Challenges. Opportunities. Partnerships.



1. Key concepts: Climate justice and responsibility
2. Findings: Urban climate responsibility in Hong Kong and Singapore
3. Conclusions: Contested geographies of responsibility
4. Implications and future research directions

Conceptualising climate justice

Predominantly distribution of ‘rights’ and ‘responsibilities’:

- Who has the right to emit greenhouse gases and at what level
- Whose responsibility it is to ameliorate climate change by reducing emissions.

More recently extended to include:

- The right to be protected from (dangerous) climate change
- The responsibility to provide compensation (e.g. climate change adaptation funding) for potential harm
- Consideration of questions of recognition, underpinning those of rights and responsibility

(Bulkeley, Edwards & Fuller, 2014)

Climate justice & responsibility

- Responsibility for fulfilling climate duties is contested; most often occurs at international level with a focus on nation states

Argument that global north should take action first:

- Responsibility for majority of emissions to date
 - Continuing high levels of emissions and
 - Capacity to take action
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- Pre-existing structural conditions (e.g. historical patterns of development) as key determinant of responsibility

(Caney 2010)

Emerging geographies of climate responsibility

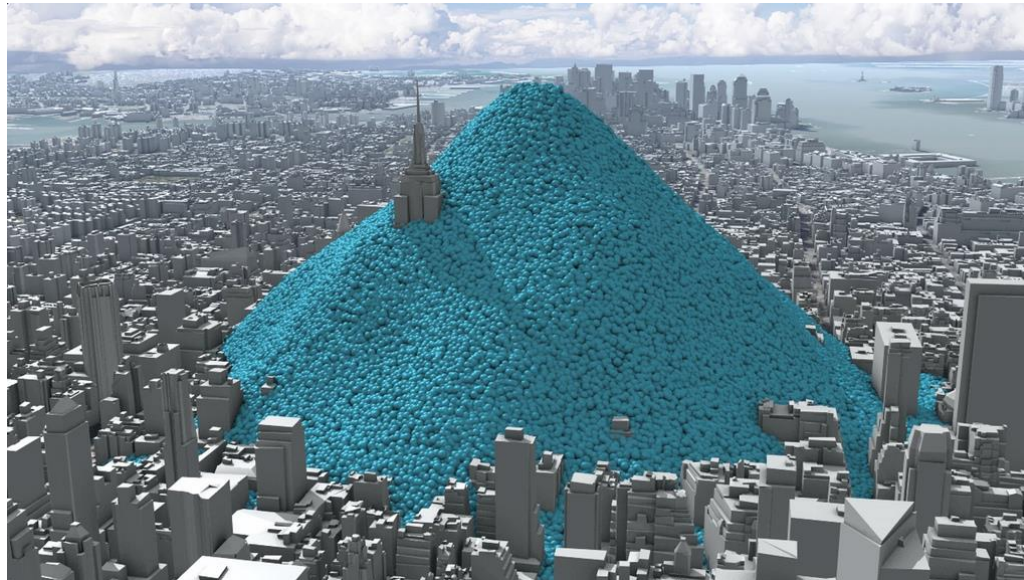
- Multiplicity of actors involved in addressing climate change: cities, local governments, private sector
- Emerging forms of responsibility

*“A fine-grained analysis which traces the contributions of individuals, corporations, states, and international actors and which accordingly attributes responsibilities to each of these”
(Caney 2005: 756)*



Positioning cities as a site of climate responsibility

- Responsibility often related to processes of quantification e.g. GHG emissions, carbon footprints
- Allow emissions to be quantified and connect emissions to behavior; the allocation of responsibility (Fuller, in press)



YET: Complex spatial and scalar interconnections

- Questions about where the burden of responsibility for addressing climate change should lie within cities
 - Cities with differential responsibilities to those of the nation-states/regions within which they are located
 - Spatially embedded:
“Without finely tuned contextualisations, discussions of responsibility become generalised and fail to anchor in specific political projects” (Raghuram et al. 2009: 8)
- ➡ Any consideration of urban climate responsibility reliant on complex interconnections within and between cities

The research project

- Pilot project in Hong Kong and Singapore- sites of high consumption/high carbon emissions thus potentially take on climate responsibilities
- Interviews with activist and advocacy organisations
- Focus: motivations for NGO action on climate change, how organisations understand the issue of climate responsibility and how this is articulated across the Asia-Pacific region



Urban climate responsibility (I)

- Contestation about whether cities did have responsibility
- Status as ‘developed’ and associated capacity to act

“Hong Kong does support a huge amount of emissions, definitely it's developed and should be accountable for climate mitigation”

'Three Earths needed' if the world lived like Hong Kong, WWF warns

WWF study reveals that the city's 'ecological deficit' is now the worst in Asia and the third biggest in the world as consumption increases

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Urban climate responsibility (II)

- BUT also ‘small’ with a lack of historical emissions

“That entire period with a lot of carbon dioxide emissions, Singapore wasn't developed at that point... all of that happened in the last 50 years”



- Overall: service economies, import driven, high consumption

Roles and responsibilities within the city: Hong Kong

- Government climate policy response limited to date
- NGO role to “push” government but also act independently

“We look upon the government to take the lead, but we know that by waiting for them to react, then it's too late. So... we will take our own stance”



Roles and responsibilities within the city: Singapore

- Government seen as prepared
- Limited role for civil society
- Collaboration not confrontation

“People think the government will take care of everything... so there's hardly any scope for them to be worried about anything beyond their immediate needs”



Responsibility beyond the city: Hong Kong

- Relationships with Southern China because of geographical proximity and “emotional connections”

“People always think that Hong Kong should be a gateway for China... All the ideologies, all the social movements. Hong Kong should set a good example”



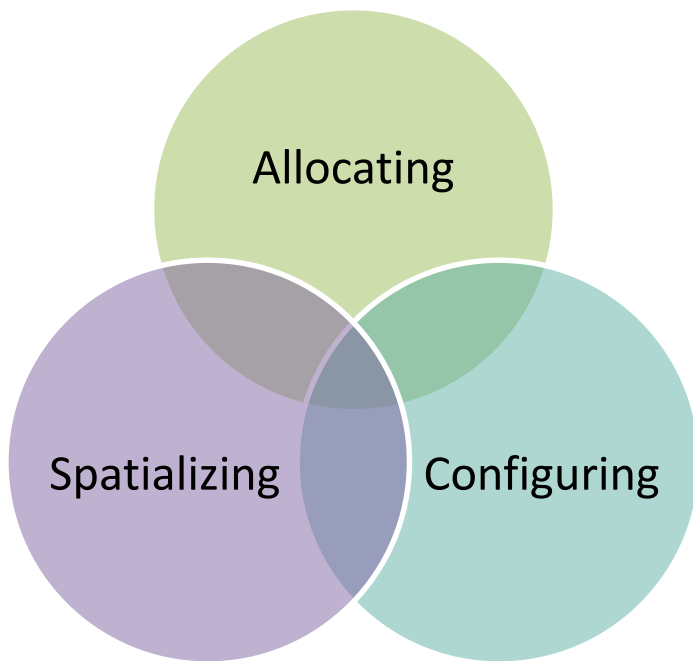
Responsibility beyond the city: Singapore

- Greater opportunities but also challenges for NGOs due to “economic pragmatism”

“Singapore is a massive soft power over the region. But at the same time they are economically paralysed by it... too stringent, the industries are going to leave... it's this balance that they're trying to strike”



Contested geographies of climate responsibility



- Allocation: the role of quantitative measures
- Configuration: NGOs enabled/challenged by government policy responses
- Spatialization: regional dynamics and inward/outward responsibility

Conclusions: implications for (just) low carbon transitions

- The existence of multi-layered responsibility: urban, intra-urban, regional
- Urban climate responsibility is contingent and contested
- Space and place matter in multiple ways: to both enable but also constrain (just) low carbon transitions

Future research questions:

- The appropriateness of understanding cities as sites of climate responsibility
- How to understand the dynamics, configuration and contestation of climate responsibility

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Thank you! Questions...

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