

Alice Creasy, Environmental Sustainability

Responsibilising Place; setting up the Edinburgh Climate Commission

Abstract

While the traditional view of climate governance is that of local action shaped by national policy-making and international agreements, in recent years 'the city' has been depicted as an autonomous "strategic site" for collaborative climate governance by the international climate community (Brotto 2019). In the UK this devolution of responsibility for climate change has occurred in the context of austerity, an economic regime which has resulted in the splintering of urban governance landscapes as a series of unconventional and unelected actors take on responsibility for climate governance (Bentley et al 2017; Hodson and Marvin 2010; Swyngedouw 2009). It is out of this fractured landscape that the Edinburgh Climate Commission has emerged. Part of the broader ESRC-funded Place-based Climate Action Network (PCAN), this Commission is one of a number of independent groups tasked with catalysing urban cross-sector collaboration on climate change. Framed around the concepts of 'place' and 'responsibility', this dissertation draws on data collected over ten months of ethnographic fieldwork to chart the development of the Edinburgh Climate Commission. The concepts of vertical (whereby responsibility is devolved down to the local state) and horizontal (where responsibility is devolved out to a series of unelected actors) responsabilisation emerged as important tools for analysis and are a key contribution of this research. Together these concepts provide a method of understanding the influence of broader political decision-making on the everyday dynamics of local place and play a key role in unpicking how place is conceptualised and performed by stakeholders involved in the Edinburgh Commission. Ultimately this paper will argue that the conceptualisation of place through these processes of vertical and horizontal responsabilisation goes against Massey's (2004) call for a relational approach to place, instead working to create the nexus for a static and bounded representation of the city which plays into neoliberal tropes of territorialisation and competition. This analysis provides a mandate for a more conscious consideration of place in climate action and an acknowledgment that the horizontal and vertical interact in complex, networked and nuanced ways.