

PIBC Student Internship Program

Evaluating Equity and Justice in Vancouver's Sea2City Design Challenge

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Like many coastal cities, the City of Vancouver has brought greater focus to coastal adaptation planning in the last decade. In 2021, the City of Vancouver launched the Sea2City Design Challenge, a sea level rise design challenge in False Creek, a narrow inlet bordering downtown Vancouver on the unceded, traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səliłwətaʔ Nations.

The challenge brought together City staff, international design teams, Indigenous cultural advisors, youth, community representatives, and technical advisors to develop design concepts for adapting to a rising False Creek. Now complete, Sea2City presents unique lessons learned for shaping future coastal adaptation across Vancouver and beyond.

Research Aim

As a case study, this research applies the JustAdapt framework to the Sea2City Design Challenge to better understand how the challenge incorporated equity and justice into its process and outcomes. This research sees equity (fair distribution of climate adaptation actions and supports) as distinctly different from justice (dismantling extractive systems to lessen climate impacts).

Developed by the researchers of this case study, the JustAdapt framework is a new evaluative framework for planning professionals and academics alike to bring greater accountability to their equitable adaptation work. The JustAdapt framework presents five forms of justice – **procedural** (process), **distributive** (outcomes), **recognitional** (acknowledgement), **intergenerational** (generational thinking), and **epistemic** (diverse worldviews valued) – as integral for realizing just urban coastal adaptation.

Methods

Methods included two rounds of semi-structured interviews with nine Sea2City participants, surveys, participant observation, and document analysis. NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis software, was used to code examples of the five forms of justice across the data.

Results

Three findings stood out from applying the JustAdapt framework. First, procedural justice (192) was coded the most, and intergenerational (41) and epistemic (40) were coded the least. Second, there were more examples of equity being actioned rather than justice. Third, valuable insights were shared on lack of actions around each form of justice.

Sea2City's **successes** included (1) prioritizing Indigenous knowledge and decolonizing coastal adaptation approaches; (2) a culture of learning; and (3) flexibility concerning budget and time.

Key learnings included: (A) the pivotal role of the Indigenous cultural advisors in the process; (B) transformational experiences for some Sea2City participants in (un)learning

dominant design and adaptation practices; (C) youth calling for a stronger seat at the coastal adaptation planning table; and (D) a lack of focus on engaging specific equity-denied populations.

Three main **recommendations** for the City of Vancouver emerged: (1) Make equity a priority in future coastal adaptation in False Creek in addition to decolonization; (2) Conduct an equity audit in False Creek; and (3) Consider opportunities to increase the decision-making power of youth and community representatives.

Conclusion

Coastal adaptation planners have identified equity and justice as important guiding principles in their plans, yet tangible outcomes and clear evaluation are lacking. Through this case study, this research hopes to inspire future projects in their efforts towards evaluating equitable and just coastal adaptation.

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Rural Challenges in Agricultural Policies in the Cariboo Region

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Matt Henderson
Credit: Quesnel Observer

During the summer of 2023, I was fortunate enough to undertake a student-led research project of my choosing and direction. With such an amazing opportunity to explore a passionate interest, I decided to undertake research that would benefit an underrepresented community group in the region of Northern British Columbia. The often-overlooked group I chose was rural agriculture growers and producers in the Cariboo Region.

The research was grounded in community-based participatory research (CBPR). The type of research and associated ethics formed the bedrock for how communications with community partners and feedback sharing would be conducted. CBPR centers on the voices and viewpoints of the community members. This was an important choice due to reservations held by several community members in the study region because of historically poor experiences with university-based work. Paying attention to these concerns also enabled a focus on what previously received a very negative reaction from community members – the lack of reporting back. This required me, as a researcher, to differentiate my intentions in undertaking this research work from the many disciplines and projects conducted in years past. This included building relationships across many “burned bridges” and regaining the trust of various agricultural community groups in the Cariboo region. It is worth noting, as this project seeks to begin its next phase of work, that the mending of relationships is still, and should always be, ongoing.

Another advantage in utilizing CBPR is the fluidity of pivoting from an initial topic

or concept to adapt to a changing reality that would change the research trajectory. A community’s viewpoints and needs should be the guiding star of the work. This work is a prime example of this factor at play.

Two weeks into the research, my community partners and I discussed the validity of the topic, Housing Challenges for Multi-generational Farmers, which was the original focus. However, the community partners felt there were other policies that needed to be analyzed prior to a “deep-dive” into a specific topic. The outcome of this discussion broadened the scope of the project policy review while gaining insight from farmers and ranchers on what agricultural policies from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and/or the Agricultural Land Commission needed to be improved upon to meet regional challenges in agriculture production. Through Dotmocracy, a facilitation process that would present the best ideas to date generated from research and the community partners while still privileging input from community members, five initial ideas of policy changes were generated in concert with the community partners. The process gains feedback from participants using a few initial ideas as a baseline. The participants then can place a “dot sticker” – a vote – beside an idea they agree with. Additionally, they can share ideas outside of those listed. This process is highly visual and engaging and gathers anonymous feedback from communities that is high quality and informally verified. The dotmocracy exercises were held at farmers’ markets and rodeos in Alexandria, Quesnel, and Williams Lake from June to August 2023.

The ideas and the resulting votes cast by participants can be viewed in the table below.

Initial Ideas	Vote Totals
Allow non-farming businesses to support farmers wishing to supplement their farming income?	82 Votes
Allow complimentary zoning for non-farming purposes that would still benefit the farming community?	44 Votes
Go back to the two-zone system?	48 Votes
Increase legacy protections for generational farmers?	76 Votes
Have a more flexible application process with the ALC? More considerations are made.	40 Votes
Leave everything as is?	0 Votes
Total	290 Votes Cast

In addition to the 290 votes cast concerning the six ideas, there were an additional 83 unique ideas noted by engagement participants. Participants could also vote on those unique ideas and the resulting top five were:

Additional Participant Ideas	Total Votes
Let farmers farm. It is currently too costly to run any scale of operation.	10 votes
More supports and guidance through red tape are needed for farmers.	6 votes
No more subdividing agricultural land for non-farm related housing.	5 votes
Costs are too high for young farmers today. How can we/provincial government support the next generation? This is a growing/significant issue in general, not just agriculture.	5 votes
Total Votes	26 Votes

The results gathered from these engagements presented a firm foundation for how to enact meaningful changes to our rural agricultural policies. As of the date of writing this article, the outcome of this work is still ongoing with the intention of recurring research work in the form of the previously mentioned “deep-dives” into specific topics. These topics