

Climate Bridge

Challenges of Climate Change for Spatial and Environmental Planning – An International Dialogue

The goal of the conference is finding new approaches for adapting policy, planning and design to climate change through the German American comparison. The three conference themes will allow to discover and acknowledge cultural differences while establishing common ground for the comparative discussion.

Conference Themes

People

From the small village to the mega-city, all peoples are impacted by climate change. Storm surge alters coastlines, while more frequent severe drought and flood events impact land use including agricultural practices, forestry, recreational use. However, the impacts of climate change are not equitably distributed, as impoverished and disadvantaged communities are more vulnerable. The challenge then is to identify and foster adaptation strategies that can be justly implemented.

As humans, we have a unique experience of and relationship with the land due to our capacity for creative and effective problem-solving. We can pose questions about how we contribute to the climate crisis, how we use the Earth, and how we are recipients of abundant gifts. We have the ability to consider scale in a fluid and flexible manner in order to enter into conversation about community, diversity, individuality, and identity – from the global to the local. Furthermore, we have the capacity to put environmental and social justice into practice.

Place

Climate change demands that we understand the physical landscape and interdependent supportive systems if we are to identify and implement preventative and restorative measures that respond to social and economic needs and disparities. Such a sense of place requires that we develop an ecological identity that is finely tuned to the physical character and scale of a place – one that is rooted in understanding of the dynamic and cyclical processes that are inherent in any natural system.

In our current climate crisis, the physical landscape poses myriad challenges to practices of spatial and environmental planning – from sea level rise and torrential rains, to urban heat islands and rural drought. Intimate knowledge of the physical landscape simultaneously presents a world of opportunity for creative and effective planning solutions grounded in systems thinking and design with nature.

Policy

Policy and ensuing regulatory approaches have an inherent lag, yet climate change poses an even more daunting challenge for environmental planning given the range of uncertainty regarding future climate conditions.

New regulatory policies, along with new planning and administrative approaches that are flexible and scalable must be developed and implemented. In addition, particular focus must be given to gaining ecological function rather than simply protecting ecological structure. Maintaining the status quo through a repetitive cycle of triage responses rather than preventative and restorative care has positioned policy makers in a precarious position of “too little, too late.” Therefore, it is essential that a shared language of usable science is spoken between environmental planners, designers, and regulatory personnel such that “resilience” is not stripped of its integrity.