

History and Theory of Climate Justice

Block 2. Preparatory Session 25.03.2025 | Public Panel Discussion 01.04.2025

A SUMMARY BY REGINA BOSCHUNG

Drawing on the historical development of climate justice and critically engaging with how climate justice is framed and theorized was at the centre of the second block of the colloquium "Climate Justice: Basel in the World". To introduce this topic of the history and theory of climate justice, Critical Urbanism Professor Dr. Jon Schubert drew attention to the need to develop new understandings of vulnerability, resilience and communities. He encouraged thinking across scales by presenting the case of Mozambique, a coastal country that suffered under a major damaging flood, and placing this in the larger context of extractive colonial infrastructures, political processes and sustainable urban development.

The readings reflect critical perspectives on climate justice by analyzing the development of climate justice discourses and different frameworks. In her article, Sultana (2022) highlights the need to consider climate justice from an intersectional and feminist perspective by proposing a climate justice framework that addresses issues of colonial and racial harm and considers how climate change impacts people differently and disproportionately. It concludes that for this to happen, climate justice must be a practice of solidarity and collective action. In reviewing different spheres of climate justice literature, Newell et al. (2021) find tensions and discrepancies between different academic approaches. To address this, the authors propose a transformative approach to climate justice that focuses on power dynamics and social and institutional inequalities and how these (re) produce both climate change and the actions to mitigate it. In their article, Schlosberg and Collins (2014) examine how the environmental justice movement and its principles have significantly shaped recent climate justice discourses and conceptualizations. Ranganathan & Bratman (2021) seek to decolonize climate

change practice by exploring how abolitionist ideas can be applied to the environment and climate justice, using black neighborhoods in Washington DC as an example. Finally, the article by Baker et al. (2020) aims to highlight an alternative way of learning by drawing on the accumulation of planetary dangers through structural violence and inequality, and by honoring indigenous philosophies of respectful cooperation and dialogue for all races, ethnicities and genders.

The panel discussion took up the literature and broadened it by bringing together different perspectives. Payal Parekh, an international climate justice strategy consultant, introduced the students to the origins of environmental justice, that was strongly influenced by the academic Robert Bullard, and its evolution towards climate justice. For her, the key is to talk to people, to their realities, in order to develop new approaches and tactics. She encouraged academics, activists and institutions to work together to develop a shared vision of climate justice. Roberto, a climate justice activist from the collective climate justice, presented various mass actions and protests he has organized in Switzerland over the years, and addressed the need to put the demands of the global South at the centre of campaigns. Roberto sees the need for a systemic change that socializes the financial industry and confronts the super rich. Finally, Martha Zamorska, a Ph.D student at the University of Lausanne, is interested in how corporations can be held accountable for climate justice in private law and proposes to internalize climate justice as a social value through private law. Martha also argues that, given the current political backlash, political accountability on climate justice has weakened or even failed, and that legal responsibility needs to take its place, with courts standing up for climate justice.

All speakers emphasized the need to look at climate justice through an intersectional lens and always in relation to power dynamics and inequalities, while addressing the threat of international corporations, the financial sector and the ongoing political right-wing slide. While the speakers seemed to be rather despondent about the success of mass movement protests or systemic change, all speakers still see hope for change and progress and encouraged

us to think outside the box and be creative in finding new ways to advance climate justice. To conclude on a note of hope and optimism, Roberto encouraged the use of Switzerland's direct democracy instruments, Payal advocated reaching out to people and talking to them and Martha emphasized how even small actions can have an impact and lead to have the engagement of other people.

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