

Social learning in the context of adaptation to climate change

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Whilst efforts to mitigate climate change continue, increasing focus has been thrown on adaptation. This presentation will examine the contribution of social structure and dynamics to adaptive capacity. Drawing on a framework of ideas about social learning and adaptation developed in research on potential responses rapid climate change in the UK, the structure and dynamic nature of social institutions is examined. In particular a distinction between shadow and canonical forms of organisation reveal that social relationships matter – both formal and informal, and that an investigation of them is rewarding in terms of lessons for both performance and policy.

Synthesising work across the social sciences, the interplay between two essential types of informal relationship is revealed as a key site of adaptive capacity. These two, which are characterised as community and network are discoverable both in theoretical review and empirical investigation and differ in the nature of the social relationships they comprise and the opportunities for learning and knowledge transfer they enable.

This leads to an examination of social learning in terms of institutional dynamics and strategies. Finally the presentation will consider the consequences of social learning for current and potential adaptive challenges, including climate change. It will conclude with an argument for a research and policy agenda which emphasises soft investment – investment of state and civil resources in social ties – as well as further investigation of the relationship between social relationships and adaptive capacity.