IMPACT STORY | 7

Stories worth telling

OCTOBER 2019
CROSS-CITY

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ENHANCING RECEPTIVITY TO CO-PRODUCE URBAN CLIMATE KNOWLEDGE

The development and application of the concept of receptivity among stakeholders offers an alternative framing to that of seeking 'entry points' for climate information.

Receptivity entails critically reflecting on one's own knowledge and that offered by others (i.e. recognizing assumptions and framings). By creating an environment that fosters receptivity (e.g. the learning labs), FRACTAL enhanced opportunities to make less partial, narrow judgements and showed how the practices and actions of researchers and decision makers can be based on a broader view of the 'system' (e.g. the city-region).

Receptivity to other frames of reference, knowledge and knowledge-making practices is in no way passive. It is a way of engaging with others that is open, considered and reflexive.

THE CHANGE STORY

FRACTAL's combined city learning lab and embedded researcher approach for knowledge co-production helped build the receptivity of city decision makers, scientists and other knowledge-holders to being involved in generating knowledge and acting collaboratively to build climate resilience. Learning labs were held in Maputo, Windhoek, Lusaka, Blantyre and Harare. Embedded researchers worked as intermediaries between researchers and city decision makers.

Initially, the FRACTAL project aimed to find 'entry points' for integrating climate information into development decision-making assuming a one-way, causal process from the expert knowledge holders to the city officials. However, as city learning labs were implemented and embedded researcher engagements unfolded, the idea of receptivity emerged as a process-based and actor-oriented alternative to that of 'entry points', which is a dominant notion in the climate services literature. The impact of the concept of receptivity is that it critiques existing ways of conceptualising the transfer of climate information into cities. However, the concept also has practical application in the sense that it gives people a term that they can use to describe what they are experiencing in the collaborative process..

The FRACTAL process underlines how when researchers and decision makers incorporate alternative frames of reference, values, interests and knowledge that others bring (i.e. across disciplines and between various societal stakeholders), they become more receptive to the inclusion of climate considerations into political and technical decision-making, and the inclusion of contextual factors into the production of climate information. This shift in framing highlights the importance of individual agency, alongside the more structural view of finding 'entry points' in organizations and decision-making procedures.

FRACTAL
FUTURE RESILIENCE FOR AFRICAN CITIES AND LANDS

RELATED IMPACT STORIES (IS) | FRACTAL city learning lab approach (IS1); Embedded researcher approach (IS5).

The Future Resilience for African Cities and Lands (FRACTAL) project aims to address the challenge of providing accessible, timely, applicable and defensible climate information that is needed by decision-makers operating at the city-region scale in southern Africa. FRACTAL impact stories have been collaboratively developed by various research teams. They highlight key methods, engagments and research findings from the FRACTAL project.

WWW.FRACTAL.ORG.ZA

UNPACKING THIS STORY

The important point about the concept of receptivity is that it applies to all stakeholders involved in the process of the learning labs and engaging with the embedded researchers. Researchers and city decision makers are both part of the process.

The concept thus breaks the binary of science-society, as knowledge is not assumed to be transferred from scientists to social stakeholders (as in the knowledge deficit model). Instead all stakeholders, working together, become more (or less) receptive and contribute in various ways to knowledge (co)production.

The significance of all stakeholders becoming more receptive to being involved in the processes of making climate sensitive decisions for urban development, means that the climate knowledge-action or science-policy gap is being reduced from both sides and a more transformative understanding of the future becomes possible.

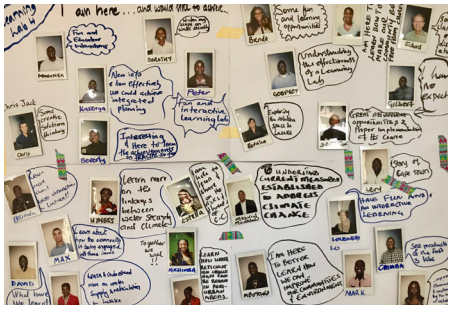
The potential long-term implications of enhancing receptivity to climate-sensitive decision-making are that: decision makers will increasingly be involved in generating the information needed to make decisions that are climate-sensitive; and researchers will increasingly undertake their research in a way that is locally situated and embedded in the local political, social, economic and material context.

In seeking to understand what we were experiencing in FRACTAL, we found a body of writing on receptivity in political philosophy and ethics relating to deepening democracy that supported and enriched the learning. See the full working paper 'Receptivity and judgement' available at www.fractal.org.za/working-papers/ for references.

LEARNINGS

The key learning from the development of the receptivity concept is that it is more useful to think about creating entry points of climate information in decision-making through people and processes than to find pre-existing 'entry points' in structures and routines. It brings into sharp relief the importance of individual agency and collective action in shaping the research and policy agenda relating to urban climate resilience.

Building urban climate resilience cannot be achieved through either a technological or knowledge fix, but is ultimately an intensely social process. It is important to focus and invest as much on the quality of relationships and engagements as the knowledge content, as these two are both essential to achieving impact.


FRACTAL learning lab participants share ideas in Maputo, Lusaka and Windhoek

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