IMPACT STORY | 8

Stories worth telling

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DURBAN

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WORKING ACROSS KNOWLEDGE TYPES TO INTEGRATE CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY PLANNING IN DURBAN

Durban is a self-funded FRACTAL city. As a result, the city could tailor the approach to FRACTAL research according to their specific needs and align it to current activities and approaches.

The aim for the embedded researcher (ER) was to look at ways to integrate climate information into biodiversity planning. To achieve this the ER worked with stakeholders from eThekwini's Environmental Planning and Climate Protection Department (EPCPD), academics from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, researchers from FRACTAL, and other stakeholders. The ER found it was important to take time to understand the context, cultures and mandates of a group, and be adaptable with initiatives, programmes and approaches so that products could be tailored better and embedded effectively in the group's processes and activities.

THE CHANGE STORY

The ER aimed to build relationships and facilitate conversations to develop receptivity, so that entry points could be identified for the uptake of climate information into biodiversity planning. Identifying and co-developing climate and biodiversity information with stakeholders was challenging. The ER consulted local and global literature extensively, and spent considerable time with biodiversity planning officials and a broader network of specialists in the city, as well as with the broader FRACTAL team.

She compared three potential avenues of integrating climate information into biodiversity planning that were relevant to Durban:

1. Co-developing biodiversity and climate change narratives;
2. Undertaking bioclimatic niche modelling to evaluate shifts under climate change;
3. Developing spatial vulnerability maps for the city's biodiversity hotspots.

By being embedded in the activities and processes of the department, it was found that vulnerability maps would be the most useful tool for biodiversity planners. These can be easily co-developed and integrated into Durban's Systematic Conservation Plan, which guides EPCPD processes. It has not been fully realised through the FRACTAL project, given time constraints.

As an external researcher sitting within the City, the ER found she could span different work spaces, making connections between different departments. For example, informal discussions with a Branch Manager in another department initiated pilot leadership training on climate change with several other branches and departments within the city, including the Municipal Institute for Learning and the Climate Protection Branch. The training was well received, and a need for similar initiatives was vocalized.

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RELATED IMPACT STORIES (IS) | Co-exploring decision-making processes (IS2); Embedded researcher approach (IS5); The importance of relationships & networks (through transdisciplinary co-production (IS6); Developing receptivity through transdisciplinary co-production (IS7).

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.

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UNPACKING THIS STORY

The process of co-producing information for the biodiversity sector in Durban is ongoing. Building the 'right' base of information and engaging with the 'right' people to develop receptivity and entry points for climate information into planning processes has required much more thought, flexibility and adaptation than was originally envisaged.

Although receptivity has been created and entry points identified, the actual embedding of products into departmental processes and activities needs more effort. Turnover of staff and expertise is always a challenge, and although relationship and trust building is an integrally important phase in the beginning, the final embedding of a product must be within a process or structure in the city and not be reliant on one individual to drive the implementation of the product.

Understanding of and receptivity to climate information for planning purposes is a longer-term process, to which FRACTAL processes contribute. Key to this process is the ongoing strengthening of relationships between climate scientists, researchers, and decision makers in the biodiversity sector.

LEARNINGS

Initial ambitious ideas about the development of a product can be detrimental if not managed properly. The aim of a co-production process should be thought through, and a team should be responsible for driving and guiding the process. Co-production of climate information relevant to biodiversity outcomes for the City should be an ongoing process for continuous learning, rather than a once-off activity to develop an outcome.

However, this way of working introduces challenges that need to be acknowledged. Flexible iterative processes, supported by adaptive people, are key to overcoming these challenges.

Biodiversity fieldwork and co-production processes with stakeholders in Durban

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