

**Environmental Policy Reframing and Public Participation: The Effect of Artists in the
United Kingdom and Chicago**

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Abstract

Society is moving into an era of collaboration between government and the public in order to form more environmentally sustainable policy. Policy resulting from citizens and government working together is more sustainable because it functions to “(1) empower citizens, increase equity, and advance education by providing information; (2) resolve conflict and gridlock; (3) avoid legal battles; (4) improve overall legitimacy and support for decisions; and, finally, (5) increase the quality of decisions” (Daley 2013). Gathering public support for environmental policy issues is a challenge because climate change is so often seen as an issue of the left, or a problem that is so out of reach of human control that it is largely ignored (Guber & Bosso 2013). This paper explores two methods in which the public might shift towards support for environmental policy and a desire to participate in government decision making: issue framing and public outreach. Specifically, this research finds several ways in which arts and humanities practitioners might contribute to these methods, with specific examples. Examples are especially present in Europe, notably the United Kingdom. There is a clear cultural connection between Europe and the city of Chicago in the United States, in that they both have a deep rooted history of pioneering the industrialization era and nonrenewable energy resources, and both have a significant creative population. Interestingly, this study finds that artists have the ability to play a pivotal role in propelling Europe towards a low-carbon energy transition, because the largest barrier is cultural in nature (Allen et al. 2014). It is then discussed how the same pattern might play out in Chicago.

Environmental Policy Reframing and Public Participation: The Effect of Artists in the United Kingdom and Chicago

Society is arguably at a crossroads in the fight against climate change, wherein change will not happen within the current system, and the only scale of reform that will make a difference in slowing global temperature rise is a major paradigm shift. According to the literature, this shift will involve significant participation from local communities in order to drive government policy which reflects citizen priorities—indeed, this change is already occurring. Likewise, environmental sustainability will need to gain a greater support base among the public. Effective approaches to raising public motivation for environmental policy include a creative reframing of the issue, and outreach from activists and local nongovernmental organizations to help people gain understanding of the issue's importance. Due to a growing societal distrust of government and science, this reframing and outreach needs to be centered in a community's culture—in a way that questions learned and accepted behavioral habits while taking care to preserve respect for them. Artists—whether they be theatre performers, writers, musicians, or visual artists—can play a pivotal role in carefully tackling this cultural narrative rewriting. Artists can be powerful in creating spaces for dialogue, appealing to a wide audience through shared cultural metaphors, and helping individuals reassess what factors have contributed to their specific worldviews—ultimately introducing a new collection of actors to support governmental attention to environmental policy.

Artists are already working to shift the deeply ingrained fossil fuel based cultural narrative in the United Kingdom, and this study looks at those examples for qualitative elements which may be extracted and applied to the city of Chicago. Both places were notable leaders in the era of industrialization, and both have unique advantages for now leading the global transition to low carbon energy. Namely, these places are accustomed to their positions as pioneers of new innovation, and they both foster strong creative populations.

Thus, this paper will explore the question: **How can arts and humanities practitioners' participation in the policymaking process towards a more sustainable, low-carbon energy plan in Europe inform a similar effort in Chicago?** It will first include information about the concept of issue framing and how environmental sustainability is in need of reframing in order to gain support. The paper will then provide a brief history of public participation in order to help the reader understand the status quo of federal retreat from environmental policy and the public's subsequent increased involvement in the governmental decision making process. A review of the literature examines existing thought regarding the connection between the arts and promoting support for environmental policy. A discussion then follows with key takeaways from the research. Standout cases of artists using their work to alter public sentiment on the topic of environmental sustainability in ways that are found most effective in the research are highlighted. This study concludes with suggestions on how Chicago's artists might take note of the cultural shifts happening in the UK and apply them to their own unique cultural narratives, which are perhaps currently unsustainably rooted in the pride of the industrialization era.

Definitions

A standard cited definition for sustainable development in the United States is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”, as defined by the Brundtland Commission's *Our Common Future* (1987). It is meaningful to note that the Welsh government uses a different definition:

Enhancing the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of people and communities, achieving a better quality of life for our own and future generations: In ways which promote social justice and equality of opportunity; and in ways which enhance the natural and cultural environment and respect its limits -using only our fair share of the earth's resources and sustaining our cultural legacy (Allen et al. 2014).

For the purposes of this study, due to its focus on cultural narratives and shifts, it is useful to consider the word “sustainable” as derived from the Welsh definition. Perceiving sustainability with special attention to social justice and preserving and enhancing national culture effectively adds new consideration to contemporary environmentalism.

Connecting the United Kingdom and Chicago

Both the UK and Chicago have large creative classes, which could contribute to their ability to enact sustainable policy. Kent E. Portney finds that a large creative class could be a contributing factor to a city having a greater number of sustainable policies and programs (2013). According to Richard Florida who created the Creative Class Index to study what the effects are on the percentage of creative workers in a city, Chicago landed in 45th place among 361 metropolitan areas measured in the United States. Then—in 2012—Chicago boasted 35.1% of members of its workforce belonging to the creative class (Florida 2012). Comparatively, in England and Wales, the creative class was 37.3% of the workforce (Clifton 2008). Therefore, with similar percentages, it is intriguing to compare how the creative classes of these places could contribute to their sustainability initiatives.

There is a contemporary realization happening in places which used to be historically prominent industrial hubs, such as Scotland and Wales, regarding their continued leadership as innovators—particularly regarding renewable energy. Wales, a nation which used to pride itself for being a leading world coal supplier, is now reassessing its energy sources to rely more on wind, tidal wave, and biofuels and become a leader in a cleaner direction (Allen et al. 2014). In Scotland, the North Sea has historically been regarded as “synonymous with oil” and “marine capitalism” because it was a major hub for offshore oil in the 1970s (MacDonald 2015). However currently, Scotland’s European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC) is working on research with 45 renewable energy projects off the coast of the nation, creating an “industry beacon” (Campbell 2019). The most recent ambitious energy plan Scotland has outlined includes a goal of 50 percent total renewable energy by

2030 (Little et al. 2018). It is useful to examine these nations closely, for their extraordinary ability to adapt quickly to society's innovation trends, as well as become pioneers of those trends.

Chicago, likewise, went through a speedy transition to a bustling hub during the industrial revolution. It has been described as becoming “one of the most populous, wealthy, and industrious centers of like area in the United States” (Lewis 2008). While it is not a center of offshore oil drilling such as Scotland or a supplier of coal such as Wales, it stands out as a city in the United States that takes immense pride in its history of growth and production. In fact, from 1860 to 1929, the number of people working in factories in Chicago increased from 7,000 to 500,000 (Lewis 2008). The fact that the city stands out as both a leader of innovation and a place which boasts a large creative population made it a target location to focus the findings of this study for further exploration.

Background and Significance

Issue framing is the context within which a person is able to perceive an issue, in order to understand it in a way which makes sense to them personally. The way an issue is framed can have a major impact on what policy moves forward on the governmental agenda due to public support, and is even capable of growing bipartisan support for a supposed partisan issue, such as climate change (Guber & Bosso 2013). Therefore, it is essential to direct citizen and political actors toward environmental policy within a specific, focused frame of reference in order for it to be effectively noticed and considered.

Indeed, climate change is often considered an issue of the left, which has the potential to conjure the picture of “shaggy-haired liberals, economic sacrifice and complex scientific disputes” (Broder 2009). We can also notice that conservative politicians may exploit the effects of issue framing by citing national security and energy independence as logical reasons for oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, for example (Guber & Bosso 2007). This is a prime example of the power of issue framing. In order to appeal to both liberal and conservative minds, environmental

sustainability must be framed with bipartisan cultural ideals. The way the threat of climate change needs to be framed to the public in order to provoke policy support needs to change in a way that is “revolutionary” (Stone 1989). This paper will qualitatively review how artists are able to balance on the thin bipartisan line, framing environmental sustainability policy no longer as expensive, inaccessible, and a national security issue, but perhaps as innovative and powerful.

Specific recipes exist for how to approach reframing effectively. In order for the public to advocate for movement on an issue, they need to see the issue as “caused by human actions and amenable to human intervention” (Stone 1989). Sometimes issues can have a greater weight as part of the environmental agenda by simply being conveyed to the public as such. One example is the problem of pesticides. Guber and Bosso argue that “the most powerful change in the pesticides policy case was its being redefined as an environmental matter” (2013). Sometimes, simply bringing an issue to the public’s attention with scientific support will have the opposite effect than desired when the audience has opposing beliefs. Conversely, the audience can have a reaction of rejection of the new information and gravitation even farther away from it, towards their more comfortable previous understandings. Therefore, because conservative-leaning citizens are more likely to reject a reason to care about climate change rooted in scientific explanation, the alternative route is to frame climate change solutions through geoengineering, which is seen as productive industry innovation. (Perovich 2018).

Additionally, it is important in the context of this study to understand recent trends of public participation, both globally and in the United States. A background will help connect the ways in which artists in the United Kingdom contributing to greater public support for climate change policy may then inspire artists in the city of Chicago. A significant milestone occurred in 1970. Residents experiencing the after effects of the Santa Barbara oil spill were especially instrumental in propelling the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 (NEPA). The public had

voiced concerns against oil drilling for many years before the spill to no avail, but the disaster was a wake up call for the federal government to begin paying attention to citizen voices. NEPA in turn “requires the government to explain its decision-making process and consider the concerns and ideas of the American people” which “has allowed more voices into the process so that the final decisions are more sustainable” (Spezio 2018). Currently, NEPA, the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Clean Water Act all specify public participation as part of their policy enactment processes (Daley 2013). More recently, the era of the Trump administration sparked public participation in the environmental movement as citizens held protests in response to an abandonment of established federal environmental protection policy. The period also saw a reliance on industry and local government to take stricter stances on their own environmental goals, and a further distrust of the federal government (Perovich 2018). Consequently, now is an important time to seize this growing passion in the public to participate in government decisions, and direct it towards more sustainable environmental policy.

Generally, public participation in government decisions is simply more efficient. The involvement of community members in the local policy making process is integral to creating change which prioritizes relevant and urgent needs. Public involvement is a reliable way to “(1) empower citizens, increase equity, and advance education by providing information; (2) resolve conflict and gridlock; (3) avoid legal battles; (4) improve overall legitimacy and support for decisions; and, finally, (5) increase the quality of decisions” (Daley 2013).

Therefore, with an issue as urgent as climate change, there is a call for any change agents possible to gather more support for new policy. The public will not decide to form new opinions and firm political stances without some strategic disrupting factor. Therefore, public outreach and inreach are important in helping the public understand climate change and what implications it might have for their futures. For example, the 2015 Northwest Climate Conference targeted the

community in which the conference took place—Coeur d’Alene, Idaho—by researching what the community valued most and finding a speaker who could appeal to those interests. Because the community is interested in hunting and fishing, the conference organizers prioritized speakers able to speak about both climate change and those activities. In advertising, the leaders framed the event around preserving the well-being of fishery habitat, instead of simply citing the threat of climate change. Triumphant, 52% of conference attendees reported they would be interested in participating in subsequent years, and the event raised awareness of climate change issues among at least 1500 people (Hicke et al. 2017). It is this kind of carefully tailored information sharing that this study will assess in order to notice which qualities are most persuasive at bringing citizen minds onboard and motivated towards environmental sustainability policy.

Methodology

A review of the literature was first conducted to understand the current state of environmental policy momentum in the United States, as well as the ways in which art in the United Kingdom has acted as a change agent to propel climate change issues to the forefront of the public and therefore the government’s agenda. The examination will focus on an ability to accomplish the two previously identified strategies to effectively bring political parties together and raise awareness and concern: issue reframing and increased public participation in government decision making. The research analyzed here is collected from peer reviewed journals, books, and nongovernmental organization reports, as well as portfolios of individual artists describing their environmental sustainability goals. Specific examples of art and action already taking place are from the United Kingdom, while more general information regarding the state of policy also uses sources from the United States.

Literature Review

Contemporary environmental policy has been described as slow, stale, and retreating. Society is at a crossroads in the fight against climate change, wherein change will not happen within the

current system, and the only scale of reform that will make a difference in slowing global temperature rise is a major paradigm shift. A policy shift which places the government more in touch with local residents' values could be successful in promoting environmental policy. Some research finds that in analyzing the evolution of environmental policy, society has followed a path which started with optimistic views of government and trust in it, then moved to distrust of government and science, and now is in a new stage. This new stage is defined by "inevitable cooperation between government, market and society" with "no monopoly of knowledge, problem-solving, or steering capacity" (Arts et al. 2006). A cultural transition is also needed because the perhaps easiest to achieve energy transitions, such as where electricity is sourced, are already underway in places such as Scotland. The next step of the energy transition involves a deeper cultural shift, to change the way Scotland uses heat and transportation—which will also require a deeper understanding of behavioral motivations in order to catalyze that shift (Little et al. 2018).

Narratives—written and spoken—are ways of delivering a focused message. It is often the way in which citizens perceive natural resources that drives how they then treat these resources. Often, stories which are ingrained in a nation or community's culture for hundreds if not thousands of years may have a negative impact on the human relationship with nature. One specific example is Scotland's North Sea. Through literature, the North Sea used to be portrayed as a formidable mass of darkness and mystery, but has since the 1970s the narrative has changed to one that describes the sea as a "final frontier for privatised extractivism". The culture's portrayal of the ocean as an item for capitalistic use allows people to feel no guilt, concern, or need to care for the ecosystem, and instead gives them a kind of permission to pollute it. Even though theatrical productions well known in Scottish culture attempt to convey the massive impact that oil drilling has had on coastal communities, the resulting lasting narrative is a bit different: the performance instead has the effect of disenchanting a once "romantic and sublime" body (Campbell 2019). It is imperative to note that

the theatre productions did not intend to take away the mystery from the sea, and actually may have intended to draw attention to its power. However, when a narrative connects the sea's disastrous power to the presence of offshore oil drilling, it essentially portrays the oil as even more almighty than the sea. If a country's culture takes an exploitative stance on the land through deep rooted narratives and visuals, then as narrative and visual creators, it is up to artists to change this stance and therefore the public's perception towards one of sustainability.

Narratives have the ability to reach a wide audience because they contain references to familiar patterns of life. Therefore, stories within an individual culture are even more relatable to people within that culture, because the references can move to a more specific level of familiarity. For example, the imagery of oceans conjures a wealth of storytelling opportunities when striving to reach a large audience, because so many people can relate to the way it functions. One artist notes that it is especially unsettling to draw attention to the way in which beaches are a space where nations become connected via items the oceans "throw up and cast back to us," such as toxic wastes (Little et al. 2018). If instead the narrative is able to be reversed to one which feels hopeful about the positive items the oceans may exchange between lands, such as strength and a diverse ecosystem, then members of ocean communities could reframe their view on the body of water. They could adopt a stance of environmental sustainability, which might make them more inclined to advocate for toxic waste regulations internationally.

The mindset shift may seem like a challenge, but certain qualities of art help humans to look introspectively at why they might feel strongly or not regarding aspects of environmental sustainability. Indeed, people already involved in politics who may not give attention to the environment are more inclined to reflect on their stance if they are presented with climate-change related artwork (Klößner & Sommer 2021). This conclusion was gathered from questionnaire results regarding the reactions of patrons to art presented at the ArtCOP21 held in conjunction with

the 21st UN Paris climate summit. Art is able to reach people in a way that is accessible, introspective, and affects the emotions, which is invaluable in a world where science and the media may be too confusing or distant, characterized by facts, figures, and biases (Allen et al. 2014). One form of performance—improvisation—is specifically meant to foster a move away from everyday habits, making it especially useful when people typically cannot “step into a new awareness” until they realize what their habits were (Bohm 1996). One of the most productive forms of art can simply be fostering “spaces for dialogue” (Allen et al. 2014). The central focus of art which fosters new public opinion is an acknowledgement of what personal sentiments exist and a reassessment of whether or not they should be upheld.

Changing the way in which members of any group view a subject is a gentle process though, because “Frames falter when they fail to resonate with existing beliefs and cultural values” (Chong & Druckman 2007). It is a precarious predicament that the world people call home and therefore cherish is often so deeply characterized by the culture of fossil fuels. Therefore, the task of rewriting what the public interacts with as reality needs to treat that cherished narrative with respect. This prudence might even mean the need to examine diction and “what, exactly, ‘transition’ signifies and whether it is a helpful term” (Little et al. 2018). People inherently have to face some sort of catalyst of change in order to break out of the “hypnosis” they have accepted to be reality in their local culture, when really there is an ability to “awaken” from this mold (Gablik 1991). What is perhaps surprising about the era of industrialization that has so deeply worked itself into society’s conceptions of pride, and its relationship to today’s era of a low carbon transition, is that it means people are more comfortable understanding energy progress through a lens of industrialization’s perceived success. People may even feel “nostalgia” for a framing of a renewables transition which is presented as “reindustrialization” (Little et al. 2018).

The process towards widespread support for sustainable environmental policy is thus a game of claiming most reasonable priorities. Those involved in politics have a tendency to create images of harm in order to justify action from the government to protect against the harm (Stone 1989). Therefore, artists may play the role of helping determine what threats are worthy of validation. Because “our decisions are made as emotionally as rationally,” art is essential in addition to technical reasoning in the process of creating new habits (Allen et al. 2014). It is perhaps easiest to begin with stories which combine reality and a fictitious though believable image of what a sustainable future could be. Not only do narratives grounded in reality need to dare to imagine a low carbon future that is attainable, but they need to clarify that those positive images are only possible through a societal detachment from fossil fuels (Little et al. 2018). The list of criteria is lengthy, but art is the only change agent available to fill the gap between reason and emotion. This connection is also explored by the genre of science fiction (Little et al. 2018). Both have in common that they push humans to imagine a direction for our future, in a way that makes that future seem within reach. The challenge is to craft these science fiction narratives in a way that involves cleaner energy and a greater respect for the natural environment in those futures.

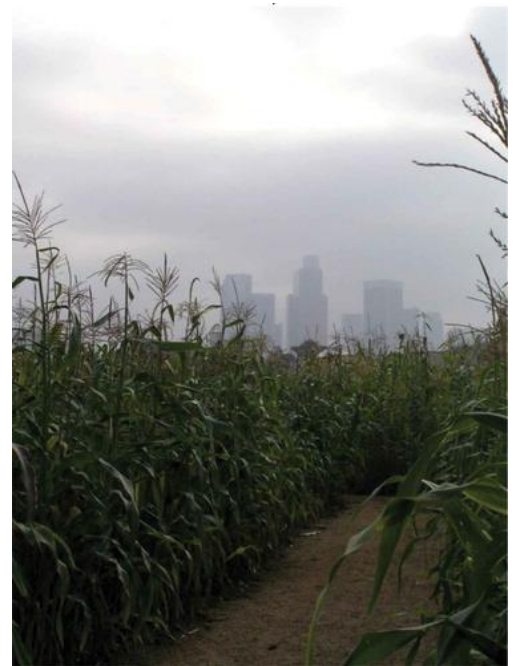
There are instances to note wherein the arts were able to make a measurable impact on federal policy. For instance, die-in protests, which were inspired by theatre performance, were able to gather public support for federal help for the AIDS epidemic during the Reagan presidency. Because Reagan perceived national backing on the issue, he was propelled to send federal relief to the cause. Also, President Joe Biden has recognized that the television show *Will and Grace* was able to reframe the public’s feelings regarding gay marriage. (Perovich 2018).

Specific Artwork and Impacts

- Fern Thomas is a researcher who runs an institute entitled Imagined Futures and Unknown Lands. The interactive research base is a versatile environment which fosters exploration of

topics in “anthropology, ecology, art, archaeology, philosophy, social sculpture and phenomenology.” The institute aims to give participants an opportunity to imagine a sustainable future, with a goal of making such a future feel even more attainable (Thomas 2011). By combining technical facts with imagination, Thomas is effectively providing the tools for a sustainable future to manifest in the minds of institute attendees.

- The poet Laura Watts considers herself an “ecopoet.” She wrote a poem entitled *Liminal Futures* in which she changes the existing narrative of Scotland’s North Sea from one which paints it as a resource to be exploited, to one which describes the sea as dangerous, full of energy, immovable, and unpredictable (Campbell 2019). If the public respects the ocean as a result of these new narratives, they will be more inclined to advocate for protection and conservation efforts, instead of prolonging a reliance on fossil fuels.
- The artist Lauren Bon created a piece of art entitled *Not a Cornfield*, in which she converted abandoned green space in downtown Los Angeles into a cornfield ecosystem, expanding the biodiversity of the area and creating a space to foster community, “hosting over 120 events in a year including bike tours, gardening classes, and open-mic performances (Perovich 2018). Not only did Bon actively create green space in an urban area, but she created art in a way that was accessible to all citizens, and promoted active dialogue and education. See **Image 1 (right)** (Perovich 2018).



Discussion

A key takeaway from the literature is that the way in which art interacts with the public with an intention to change mindsets and alter cultural narratives needs to be carefully curated. Studies from the UK have shown that members of those cultures have a pride for their narratives deeply interwoven into their psyches. The best way to approach an active paradigm shift is therefore by using language which still describes innovation and progress, but actually discusses more sustainable societal growth—that which respects land, water, and air, and looks to new cleaner technology and renewable energy for change.

It was also found that the public needs to be able to specifically imagine the details of what a more sustainable future might look like in order to believe in a policy agenda devoted to climate change mitigation. Narratives that begin in reality but combine research and imagination to create a hopeful view of a future that has moved away from a reliance on fossil fuels are most persuasive. They reframe environmental sustainability in a way that can be understood as attainable with existing human innovation, and therefore a cause worth devoting energy.

In viewing art as a policy action tool, the definition of “art” must be expanded past simply visuals, performances, films, or other conventional ways of conceiving art. It is clear that forms of art that are successful in creating spaces for citizen collaboration and sharing of ideas safely are most productive in reframing issues, because they are able to provoke the public to assess their existing understanding of the issue and to possibly reconsider why it may or may not remain true.

Recommendations

For the city of Chicago, it is recommended that artists who care about the issue of environmental sustainability approach the goal of creating government environmental policy agenda in the ways that were most effective in the UK, because these areas are so comparable. However, it is important to note that the ways in which artists are able to shift public mindsets most effectively are

through issue reframing and public outreach to new populations which may have not been already most likely to partake in the art experience.

The ways in which artists in the UK reached a wider audience, therefore successfully engaging in public outreach, were through creating public spaces for gathering and dialogue and by creating metaphors that were relatable through a shared cultural understanding. The research highlighted metaphors which concerned oceans and beaches, but because Chicago is not near an ocean, it is possible for artists to address the common understanding of Lake Michigan, which can still have an element of power and mystery as a large body of water. The process of creating areas of dialogue still applies to Chicago.

The ways in which the UK artists were able to reframe the issue of climate change into one that is essential to address via government policy involved creating specific visuals for the future, and connecting environmental sustainability to their national history of industrialization. These visuals specifically were grounded in realism, but then utilized technical reasoning and scientific research in order to imagine futures that felt more within reach to citizens. They also used language which felt close to the diction surrounding the boom of the industrial revolution, because that memory in the UK's history evokes pride. This research found that when approaching issue reframing, it is best to still appeal to language that is familiar and comfortable, but with new terminology with new meaning, such as "geoengineering." Both of these reframing concepts can be applied to Chicago, because Chicago also has a proud history as a leader of production during the industrial revolution, and the concept of conceiving an attainable future applies to humans generally.

Limitations

When comparing the UK and Chicago, there may be a discrepancy when discussing party politics due to the difference of political climates in both places. This should be taken into

consideration when looking at the aforementioned history of public participation in the United States and how it has changed since the Trump presidency.

Conclusion

This study was successful in analyzing ways in which policy regarding environmental sustainability can use the help of artists to rise to the top of local and federal government agenda. In a time where globally communities may be finding themselves in an era of environmental sustainability retreat, there is hope. The retreat could be due to the association of climate change as more of a partisan issue, or as an issue that is not fixable through an intervention by humans. Issue reframing to bring hope associated with a future nation which has detached itself from a reliance on fossil fuels and has allocated time and research to renewable energy is rewarding. Art can help to find those narratives so deeply ingrained in local culture, and rewrite them in a way that is accessible to all and therefore introduces new support to the agenda.

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