

Policy, Equity and Relocation

Changing Uses and Values of O‘ahu’s Coastlines Under Sea Level Rise

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Responding and adapting to sea level rise (SLR) requires a place-based understanding of the diverse ways people use and value beaches and coastlines. Inclusive valuation, which seeks to include the instrumental, intrinsic, and relational human-environment connections in valuation efforts, offers a promising approach to guide adaptation efforts. This study utilizes an inclusive valuation framework to assess the suite of benefits of and tradeoffs between values associated with beaches and coastlines on O‘ahu, Hawai‘i; where an estimated 50% of beaches could disappear due to SLR and current development patterns prior to the end of the century (Tavares et al. 2020). Through surveys and semi-structured key informant interviews with ~30 representatives of state and municipal government agencies, non-profit and for-profit entities involved in coastal decision-making, we operationalize views on the multiple uses and values of O‘ahu’s coastlines by comparing responses for three distinct coastal communities: Ka‘a‘awa, Sunset Beach and Kāhala. All three study sites are directly threatened by rising sea levels, but exhibit variation in income types, real estate values, beach and ecological resources, visitor and resident usage patterns, population density and socio-cultural characteristics. Preliminary survey results and narrative analysis suggest there is considerable overlap in views regarding place-based values between study participants (government, NGO and for-profit); however, there is considerable discrepancy between the values that participants view as driving current decision-making (real estate value and tourism) versus what they think should be prioritized in SLR adaptation (ecological, recreational, and cultural values). Overall, the vast majority of participants felt that managed retreat was the most important and urgently needed policy response to SLR for Sunset Beach, though there were diverging perspectives for both Kāhala and Ka‘a‘awa where a different set of opportunities and constraints shape SLR response – from the presence or lack of backshore sand resources to equity considerations for the adjacent community. Results have strong implications for policy and suggest the need for a shift in State and municipal approaches to shoreline management, which currently do not allow for much place-based distinction (other than the presence of a sandy beach). For actors to operationalize a variety of place-appropriate responses to SLR requires substantially tailoring policy approaches based on the diversity of current and desired uses and values of coastlines.

Grounding the “Third Rail”: How to Build Community Buy-in for Managed Retreat

Author: Paul Gallay (Undergraduate Major in Sustainable Development)

Managed retreat, according to Craig Fugate, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency from 2009 to 2016, faces potentially insurmountable challenges because it is enormously complicated and disruptive, can be unjust and damage communities, and routinely causes fear among “citizens in every political stratum”. Yet, as difficult as managed retreat has been to implement effectively, its importance as a climate adaptation strategy will only grow as intensifying precipitation, which caused a 36% increase in flood-damage costs over a recent 29-year period, continues to worsen and sea levels continue to rise. This paper will address ways in which managed retreat -- the so-called

“third rail of resiliency discussions” -- might gain greater public support and community buy-in through more effective program design and improved dialogue between program sponsors, local officials, community leaders and property owners.

Livelihoods and ‘Lifeways’: discourses about land and sense of place in managed retreat policies in coastal Louisiana

Author: Meghan Sullivan (Portland State University)

Labeled as “America’s First Climate Refugees” the residents of Isle de Jean Charles (IDJC) have gained notoriety for their community participation in managed retreat from an island off the coast of Louisiana to a mainland location outside of the 100 year floodplain. The IDJC was once considered a potential successful model for climate-related resettlement in the United States. However due to disagreements between the State of Louisiana and the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe, tribal leadership has renounced its support for the program. To understand the complexities behind this decision, we compared the Louisiana’s State of Adaptation for the Future (LA SAFE) plan and Louisiana’s Office of Community Development IDJC resettlement policies to the Tribe’s resettlement toolkit (Preserving Our Place). Findings revealed that while land and place were frequently discussed in all policy documents the meanings each group ascribed to them were different. The LA SAFE policies described land as a resource for economic, social, and cultural livelihoods that provided material and tacit benefits to the coastal residents. This contrasted with the IDJC Tribe’s intrinsic relationship to the land which fostered ‘lifeways’ and was necessary for the sovereignty, physical reunification, and cultural survival of the group. These results suggest that while stakeholders may use similar terms in managed retreat plans and discourse, their goals may be shaped by irreconcilable worldviews which can influence the implementation and ultimately, the success or failure of relocation plans.

Negotiating risk trade-offs in disaster-induced relocation

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Millions of people are getting displaced by disasters every year and the pace is increasing with the impacts of climate change. Many of them relocate permanently. Out of concern for safety and to mitigate future losses, people are also being relocated preemptively from risk-prone areas, which is the subject of this conference. However, relocation is fraught with problems and almost always entails negative social outcomes, resulting in controversy. Social science researchers have consistently and stridently pointed out to planners and policy makers that they are not addressing the social costs of relocation. Unfortunately, frameworks for hazard risk analysis and mitigation that planners and policy-makers use, have thus far focused on tangible risks that can be quantified and compared. Relocation programs prepared using such frameworks have unintended consequences for the community. This paper presents the findings of qualitative research that analyses the lived experience of risk to inform risk mitigation policy. I carried out case study research in the coastal communities of South Louisiana, a region exposed to both acute and chronic hazards such as hurricanes, flooding, land subsidence and ecological destruction. I interviewed members of vulnerable communities including a Native American tribe and observed life in the coastal communities. I observed planning processes and interviewed

planners, researchers and policy experts. In my study, I use a risk trade-off analysis method developed by economists in a different context, to analyze the spectrum of risks that people face when considering relocation. I sort them into coincident risks that can be mitigated simultaneously and countervailing risks that have to be addressed separately. In this paper I present a conceptual framework that planning practitioners and policy-makers can use, to address risks in a comprehensive and nuanced manner when they develop policies, programs and plans. The research is interdisciplinary, using qualitative, social science research methods to understand lived experiences of affected communities, then using a risk analysis method derived from economics to develop an approach for use by planning practitioners and policy-makers.

Observations of the Akiak Home Relocation and Managed Retreat Project

Author: Joel Neimeyer (Neimeyer Consulting)

Akiak is a small Yupik village located 40 miles upriver from Bethel, Alaska - the regional hub for over 50 villages in Western Alaska. The community is remote and can only be reached by boat or plane. On May 18, 2019 the Kuskokwim River rose during the annual spring melt of snow and ice. By May 19, 2019 up to 50 feet of riverbank along 1200 feet of riverfront had been claimed by the river. Historically, no elders could ever recall a spring erosion event. Lacking a State of Alaska or Federal agency responsible for leading a disaster resilience project from cradle to grave, the Akiak Native Community (tribe) has taken lead for responding to this new natural hazard. This presentation will present the tribe's efforts on organizing the community, gaining support from funders and participation from willing stakeholders. The tribe's disaster resilience journey has been made more complicated by the addition of COVID-19 as a twin threat to the community. Lessons learned will be discussed along with observations on the obvious, and at times, not so obvious barriers the tribe must overcome to develop a viable managed retreat project. The perspective is that of a community always reacting and responding to the threat. Observations will be provided on how time is the most critical resource for a managed retreat effort and how other communities may be able to prepare in advance and stand in the better position to manage their own retreat from a natural hazard, when their time comes. Topics to be covered include: Hazard mitigation plans: can they be more than a study on a shelf. Organizing community entities as a willing group. Identifying priority managed retreat projects and having frank community discussions on adopting the projects. The science behind the river claiming so much land in such a short time. House relocations, elevations, and acquisitions. Funders: navigating the many agencies and their individual grant processes; the lack of common goals and perspectives of disaster funders and funders of conventional infrastructure development (i.e. housing, utilities, roads, public buildings, etc.). National Environmental Policy Act: how does a tribe engage agencies for one environmental assessment process. Bundled contracting: can it be achieved and will it save time and money. Site control. Obtaining construction waiver for a new solid waste site less than 5000 feet from the airport - despite FAA regulations requiring the minimum setback. COVID-19: impact to the village, quarantine projects, and disruption to construction efforts. Disinterest with most agencies in discussing, let alone, funding mitigation measures for four documented contaminated sites within 600 feet of the river; and how petroleum based wastes may one day erode into the Kuskokwim River. Media coverage: does it help or hurt.

The role of policymakers and practitioners in equitable relocation practices

Author: Rachel Isacoff (The Rockefeller Foundation)

As relocation is a multi-scalar process, it requires acknowledgement, cooperation, and investment from multiple levels of government and a variety of individuals and stakeholders. However, government agencies and local communities frequently have competing values, contingent on perceptions and attitudes to risk (e.g., when to relocate) as well as cultural preferences (e.g., who decides, who moves, and where to), which shape relocation discourse, decisions, plans, and implementation. While governments and planners prioritize strategies that give precedence to rational, financial analyses, frontline communities are aligned with group identity – integrating local knowledge and prioritizing established livelihoods, equity, and self-determination. This clash of views between and within governments and frontline communities imposes a critical impediment to fostering just relocation solutions. Government agencies and practitioners then should question: how do our biases, worldviews, and values shape our influence in decision-making processes? In this presentation, I question the role of policymakers and practitioners in determining outcomes for relocation processes and call on them to examine their own privilege and worldviews. I offer three recommendations centering the need for equity in relocation processes and practices. The presentation is informed by my pending chapter in a book on global voices in climate relocation, edited by A.R. Siders and Jola Ajibade, published by Routledge in 2021. In the chapter, I draw on my experience as a practitioner in examining two relocation cases, one in a rural and one in an urban area in the US. I explore the role of cultural values and power dynamics in relocation processes and outcomes at the community levels, while paying attention to the priorities and actions of policy makers and adaptation practitioners. For example, I was part of the State of Louisiana’s consultant team for the Isle de Jean Charles resettlement process. I witnessed a technocratic approach to planning for the new site that did not mirror the economic characteristics of the existing community. It was devoid of consideration for how the proposed uses may or may not have responded to the needs of or support the workforce training and livelihoods of the IDJC tribe. The top-down approach reinforced existing inequalities and power structures – valuing the State’s ethnocentric notions of market value and efficiency over tribal continuity and livelihoods. It added challenges to the tribe’s ability to organize and relocate, even when they were willing to do so voluntarily. Additionally, in Staten Island after Hurricane Sandy, the homeowners who participated in the State buyout program held relative positions of power with greater political access and influence due to their race and social status. Some of the other residential neighborhoods petitioning the State to be included in the buyout program were focusing on advancing equity for marginalized populations and getting equal buyout offers for communities of color. But after months of meetings and petitions, the State only extended the buyout program to two additional white middle-class communities, preventing lower-income communities of color from participating. The State program covertly perpetuated systems of white supremacy – evading consideration of vulnerability, power disparities, justice, and redistribution of resources to other communities in need. The chapter concludes by calling for a need to center equity, justice, and the intangible costs to cultures in relocation processes. Separately, I serve on the Climigration Network’s strategic planning committee and interim council. Over the next six months, we intend to develop antiracism trainings and best practices for practitioners. Depending on the roll-out of that program, this presentation can include key takeaways from the Network.