

Key Relationships in Counteracting Climate Change

Many are talking about 'relationships' being the key to counteracting climate change. So let's look at what kinds of relationships seem important and how.

In Community Wealth Building (CWB) such as in Matthew Brown's Preston, powers of local government are used to boost local economic activity and build public assets. Councillors and officers work together to get results which can win public support. Net Zero and other environmental objectives can enter into CWB where it's understood how they can produce local benefits. Councillors and officers often need to get additional scientific and technical knowledge and find ways for the public to engage with green community wealth building.

Community environmental action groups like Phil Furneaux's Brampton2zero start with the knowledge and commitment of concerned citizens who engage others in local environmental activities with tangible benefits. Building understanding through community action, outside the remit of local government activity, is the key relationship here. Where community activism spawns Community Interested Corporations and/or Community Benefit Trusts it becomes an economic actor, holding assets and entering into contracts. While the focus of these is on shared community relationships, inputs and investment may be sought more widely.

Green CWB and Net Zero community activism involve complementary patterns of local political relationships with economic consequences. A critical factor in each is how scientific and technical knowledge enters into what people think and do. This also emerges as a key issue for innovation in sectoral or regional economic clusters, as studied by specialists such as Professors Egerton (Kings) or Jones (Manchester).

How those making investment decisions can incorporate new understanding depends first on the right contacts with researchers, government and other businesses. Cluster growth depends on openness to new partners. Innovation support programs must help give companies confidence to invest in new directions. Energy and materials saving innovations take place most rapidly when companies see clearly how they can substitute one technique or material for another.

Whether it's businesses, agencies and universities or local government and community organizations, climate change innovation depends on practical confidence building relationships. Of course, there are more abstract relationships which shape our ability to counteract climate change. National legal, taxation and spending policies can powerfully shape the ways that people and firms think and act. Net Zero strategies often work by altering prices via taxes or subsidies. The problem is, such price changes only incentivise change where people can find practical alternatives; they don't foster the relationships which create these alternatives because they treat us only as individuals.

Other national level policies could make a difference to the quality of 'local' relationships which enable people to act together to counteract climate change. The laws relating to stakeholder recognition by companies could make

a huge difference to how they treat environmental responsibilities in relation to communities, employees and customers. Local Government needs more freedom to borrow and invest, and a broader scope they are permitted to invest in, local energy production or transport for example. Finally, changes to the terms of reference and culture of local government could allow them to mobilise people to work together. Community Interest Corporations and Community Benefit Trusts could be empowered to do more.