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DELIBERATING CLIMATE ACTION @ THE LIBRARY: SUPPORTING SENSE MAKING & MEANING MAKING IN THE MIDST OF UNCERTAINTY AND DIFFERENCE (Panel)

Abstract or Résumé:

Library systems and associations across Canada are initiating climate-oriented programming, services, and advocacy at an astonishing pace. Yet, much of the work is undertaken without the time and resources needed to investigate the influence of these efforts. What do we hope these climate-oriented initiatives are doing? What implicit theories of social change are driving these activities? This panel will create space to deliberate challenges and envision possibilities for libraries navigating roles and responsibilities in response to the ongoing climate crisis. Panelists will reflect on preliminary findings from an interview study with librarians from across British Columbia, and their own experiences with climate action, and open a discussion on future research.

1. Introduction

An overwhelming body of evidence points to the devastating impacts of climate change in the past, present, and future (Bendell, 2022; Tomlinson et al., 2012). Library systems and associations across Canada are engaging with the climate crisis through a growing range of initiatives, such as the British Columbia (BC) Library Association's first Climate Action Week in 2022, hosting climate scholars for keynote events, climate justice book displays, book recycling programs, and disaster response planning (<https://bclaconnect.ca/caw-ideas-and-resources/>) (e.g., American Library Association, 2020; Tanner et al., 2022). Yet, much of the work is being done in the absence of time and resources to guide and assess the influence of these climate-oriented activities.

The goal of this panel is to create space to deliberate, identify challenges, and envision possibilities for **libraries navigating new roles and responsibilities in response to our ongoing climate crisis in diverse communities**. How are librarians supporting their own and their patrons' sense making about the forces and practices that contributed to a rapidly changing climate? What, if any, theories of social change are informing librarians' activities? In a nation-state economically dependent on extractive industries, how are libraries navigating relationships within communities that hold opposing socio-political viewpoints on the climate crisis? These types of questions motivate this nascent research initiative and form the basis of the panel's framing and activities. Panelists will draw on theoretical frameworks of climate justice and sense making, their own experiences in climate action, and findings from a preliminary interview study with librarians interested in climate change from across BC to seed a broader conversation on the possibilities for meaningful, community-grounded scholarship in this area.

2. Theoretical Framing

Sense making (SM) refers to the process of gathering and interpreting information, such as facts, narratives, data, and experiences, to construct frames of meaning. SM is an essential process for individuals and groups as they make decisions and act in situations of uncertainty (Weick, 1995). Meaning making (MM) refers to a more personal process, akin to transformational learning which occurs in situations of disruptive, existential threats and transitions, and involves gathering information, stories, and guidance to find new ways of living and re-contextualizing self-identity (Mezirow, 1990; Pakenham, 2007; Ruthven, 2019). We are interested in exploring the extent to which SM and MM processes are taken into account in the climate activities underway in libraries in BC, and what they might contribute. At a broader level, we hope to explore how librarians' understandings of how social change happens shape climate-oriented planning, services, and programming (Maniates & Princen, 2015). How might libraries, whether public, academic, or special, help their unique communities deliberate and navigate the climate crisis in socially just ways?

Climate Justice

While predictions of approaching societal collapse may seem extreme, acknowledging climate dread, uncertainty, and associated fears may help communities prepare for a radically different tomorrow (Tomlinson et al., 2012). Indeed, ecological catastrophe is neither new nor its consequences evenly distributed, as the dire effects of climate change occur in an already unjust world. The authors of this proposal recognize that Indigenous communities living within and across the borders of what is now known as Canada engaged in social, political, and ecological leadership long before colonization (Whyte, 2017). Indigenous peoples have rejected destructive practices and policies through the courts, legislatures, and other imposed spaces for centuries, and continue to envision transformational changes and futures "rooted in justice and consent" for their communities (e.g., Vowel, 2022; Yellowhead Institute, 2019, p. 65).

3. Research Grounding and Community Engagement

This work is based on the understanding that community-based resilience and adaptation requires robust information, communication systems, and mechanisms for open civic deliberation to support learning, enable informed decisions, build trust, and contribute to social cohesion and

equity (Granderson, 2014; Norris et al., 2008; Schuler et al., 2015). In addition to efforts to curb the crisis through environmental policies and carbon emission reductions, there is an urgent need to focus energies on locally grounded coping, resilience, and adaptation processes (Agrawal, 2008; Tschakert & Dietrich, 2010).

In order to better understand the current needs, activities and experiences of libraries and information professionals in response to the climate crisis, members of the panel conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with a diverse group of 16 self-identified, climate-concerned librarians in communities across BC. Respondents were recruited via postings in the BC Library Association climate-action listserv and through direct email invitations. Efforts were made to include participants across different types of institutions, communities, and regions of the province. In one-hour interviews conducted via Zoom, we asked respondents to share their perspectives on the climate impacts their communities are facing, local informational and other needs arising from the climate crisis, and their experiences of, and reflections on, actions taken in response. Preliminary results from these interviews reflect the situated and varied levels of engagement and timelines in individual and institutional responses to the climate crisis in the library sector, as well as a number of broad themes. Insights from this study, in conjunction with the ongoing work of the BCLA Climate Action Committee, will be shared by the panel presenters.

4. Panel Structure

The panelists are part of a collaborative research project that is developing between a team from UBC's School of Information and libraries and information professionals across BC. Together, we are investigating how to build capacity in support of community-based climate sense making and meaning making, as critical components to support action in response to the climate crisis.

The panelists will draw on this motivation to ground the discussion, however they will move quickly to review research to date, conduct a few audience polls, and open the floor to attendees able and willing to share their insights, questions, and concerns related to ways scholarship might learn from, and contribute to, climate initiatives in libraries across Canada. The panelists will also share climate literature and resources from within and beyond the library and information studies domain.

Panelists

Luanne Sinnamon is an Associate Professor and former Director of the UBC iSchool (2015-2020). She does research on LIS education and information access and teaches courses in management and human information interaction. Luanne is Primary Investigator for the *Libraries and Climate Change* Project and will speak to scholarship on meaning making, sense making and civic deliberation.

McKelle Hansen is a recent MLIS graduate from the UBC iSchool. She is the student representative for BCLA's Climate Action Committee. She is interested in community-led librarianship and how public libraries are responding to the climate crisis. McKelle brings a strong background in community development through her work in the area of digital justice and literacy in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. McKelle will speak to the concept of climate justice as a lens and connect it to libraries and information work.

Saguna Shankar is an Assistant Professor at the University at Buffalo. She is assisting with the *Libraries and Climate Change* project. She aims to learn from and participate in groups taking action on climate justice, migrant justice, and care. Her interests include creative methods and resources which may support groups understanding and coordinating on shared societal issues through diverse practices with data, information, and technologies. Saguna will report on informational interviews the team recently conducted.

Diana Marshall is co-chair of BCLA's Climate Action Committee, and committed to learning about and promoting the many ways libraries are responding to the climate crisis. She is the Customer Services Specialist with the Fraser Valley Regional Library system, where she enjoys systems thinking, evidence-based evaluation, and mashing together big ideas. Off duty, Diana leads her local neighbourhood association, experimenting with the basic community building blocks of trust, engagement and joy. Diana will report on climate action in BC from her perspective as a member of BCLA's Climate Action group.

Lisa P. Nathan (Panel Moderator) is a settler and uninvited guest on x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam) occupied territory, Steering Committee member for *Computing within Limits*, Associate Professor @UBC's School of Information, Chair of UBC's Informatics Minor, and Recording Secretary for BCLA's Climate Action Committee. Lisa is Co-PI for the *Libraries and Climate Change* Project. In addition to moderating the panel, Lisa will pose questions to those in attendance.

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